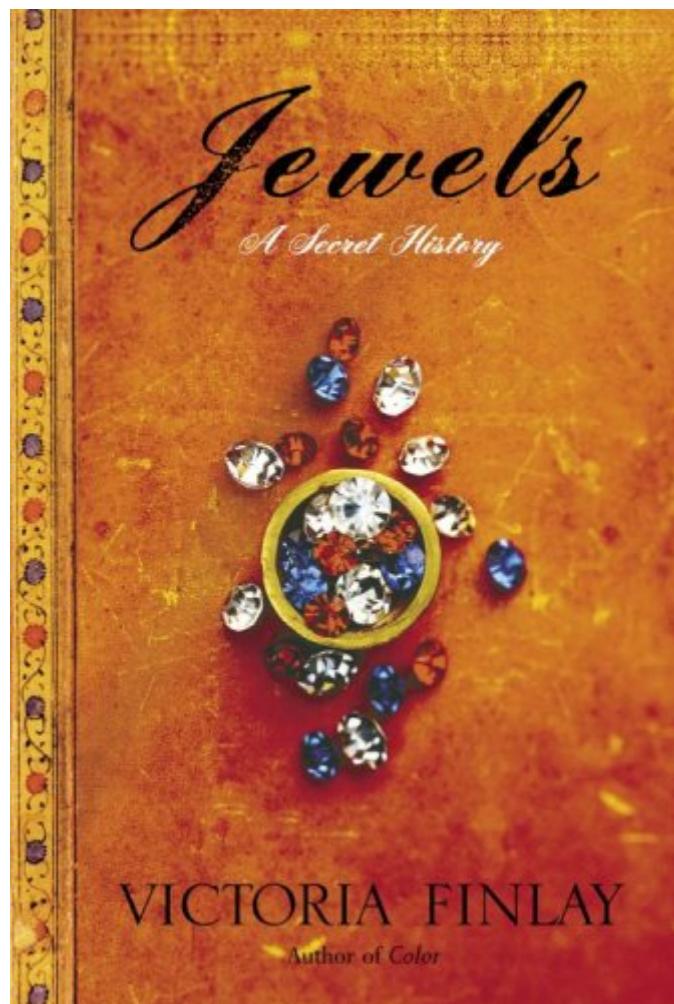


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Jewels: A Secret History



Synopsis

Throughout history, precious stones have inspired passions and poetry, quests and curses, sacred writings and unsacred actions. In this scintillating book, journalist Victoria Finlay embarks on her own globe-circling search for the real stories behind some of the gems we prize most. Blending adventure travel, geology, exciting new research, and her own irresistible charm, Finlay has fashioned a treasure hunt for some of the most valuable, glamorous, and mysterious substances on earth. With the same intense curiosity and narrative flair she displayed in her widely-praised book *Color*, Finlay journeys from the underground opal churches of outback Australia to the once pearl-rich rivers of Scotland; from the peridot mines on an Apache reservation in Arizona to the remote ruby mines in the mountains of northern Burma. She risks confronting scorpions to crawl through Cleopatra's long-deserted emerald mines, tries her hand at gem cutting in the dusty Sri Lankan city where Marco Polo bartered for sapphires, and investigates a rumor that fifty years ago most of the world's amber was mined by prisoners in a Soviet gulag. *Jewels* is a unique and often exhilarating voyage through history, across cultures, deep into the earth's mantle, and up to the glittering heights of fame, power, and wealth. From the fabled curse of the Hope Diamond, to the disturbing truths about how pearls are cultured, to the peasants who were once executed for carrying amber to the centuries-old quest by magicians and scientists to make a perfect diamond, *Jewels* tells dazzling stories with a wonderment and brilliance truly worthy of its subjects. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I'm not quite done yet, but I'm like halfway through the book, and it's certainly enough to give my opinion. If you liked 'Colour: Journeys through the Paintbox', you'll love this. If you haven't read that, give this a try. I absolutely adore Finlay's style; she has a keen eye for the unusual and intriguing about her subjects. I love this book and can tell I'll be reading it more than once in the years to come. Frankly, I try to provide some sort of constructive criticism or devil's advocate segment in all my reviews, to keep them balanced, but I don't really have that for this book. I mean, maybe the organization and order of the gems as they appear is a bit arbitrary, but that's about it. It goes into all sorts of fascinating details that even an avid fan of gemology probably wouldn't know about!

A well researched and written book on jewels--interesting to read how the gems are mined or found; lots of stories behind the jewels we treasure and the people who hunt for them. Good fun for the armchair adventurer to read about the authors exploits in the world's various mining operations--did she really want to go down into all those deep dark mines? Was it safe to go off with strangers to find those remote mines off in the jungle? Glad she did, because her tales, interviews, and observations were well worth the journey. Even though I still love jewelry, after reading about the often exploitative and dangerous means of extracting the various jewels from the earth or ocean, I'll never look at gems, (especially diamonds), the same again.

I have learned so very much about gemstones, the jewel trade (both old and new) and the people involved all along the way. If you own a "pretty", you can be certain the person who pulled it out of the ground was very poor and gained very little compensation. It's enough to make you want to limit yourself to man-made stones. The downside would be that the miner might then have NO income. Thank you for your fine work, Ms Finlay. I intend to read The Perfect Red next.

I enjoyed Finlay's "Color" and was looking forward to this book. It did not disappoint. In fact, I think it was better than "Color." The author works her way up the Moh's scale, from amber to diamonds,

with the history, lore, legend, and science of gems. She also raises some interesting questions about manufactured gems and ethics without getting preachy or posturing. I can't imagine what this woman's passport must look like. She travels the globe talking to the powerful and not-so-powerful, managing to get them to tell her their stories and share their knowledge. She manages to talk people into letting her do the most insane things in the name of storytelling. I learned things I did not before know, and I was thoroughly entertained...and always glad that she was the one getting muddy, sweaty, vertigo, whatever. I can't wait to see what topic she'll take on next.

Just as great as "Colors"....highly recommend for those who want to know the origins of their "bling".

A great sequel to Colors by Victoria Finlay! The anecdotes interspersed with the history of jewels and Ms. Finlay's personal experiences make this book fascinating and entertaining reading. It is at once a very personal story and an engaging history of jewels. Like Colors, it takes awhile to read -- but every minute is enjoyable.

Boring, superficial and much too wordy. It could have perhaps taken up 250 pages as opposed to the 434 in my paperback edition. I struggled to finish the book. Would not recommend to others. :-(

Fascinating and very readable...it provides the interesting history of many common jewels. I will certainly never view diamonds or pearls in the same way again!

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