

The Quest for the Ark of the Covenant – The True History of the Tablets of Moses
by Stuart Munro-Hay. I.B.Tauris 2005.

There is a church in Ethiopia, Mary of Zion, in the ancient city of Aksum, in whose depths, according to legend and popular belief, resides the Ark of the Covenant containing the two tablets of stone that Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai. Though originally residing in the Temple in Jerusalem built by King Solomon it was brought to Ethiopia, according to the Ethiopian national legend, the Kebra Nagast, by the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Menelik.

Stuart Munro-Hay, who died just before this book was published, seeks to divorce the facts from the many sensational myths that surround this story. He analyses in minute detail not only the legend itself but also the discernible facts surrounding the Church in Ethiopia, its arks and tablets, and particularly the Mary of Zion church itself.

This is an intricate story told with exhaustive attention to detail, so much so that it is at times hard to follow. Munro-Hay, who clearly cared passionately about his subject, also considers the theories modern and pre-modern of other scholars with regard to the legend of the Ark of the Covenant before finally reaching the predictable if disappointing conclusion, after 208 pages, that the Ark of the Covenant was never at Aksum.

Nevertheless, for those with an interest in Ethiopia, or with the wilder legends surrounding the Ark itself, this is an interesting book.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh