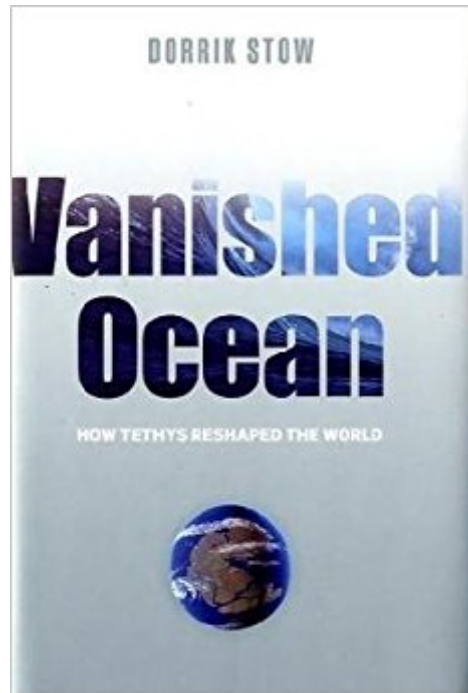


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Vanished Ocean: How Tethys Reshaped The World



Synopsis

Six million years ago, a vast ocean--which scientists have named Tethys--vanished from the face of the earth. How could such a huge body of water simply disappear? More interesting, how is it possible for scientists to know with certainty that Tethys existed for a quarter of a billion years, a period that includes the entire "Age of Dinosaurs" and almost all of the "Age of Mammals," right up to the point when our distant ancestors began to walk upright. Vanished Ocean tells the fascinating story of Tethys, offering an illuminating account of the scientific evidence for the ocean's existence. Renowned geologist Dorrik Stow describes the powerful forces that shaped the ocean; the marine life it once held and the rich deposits of oil that life left behind; and the impact of its currents on environment and climate. The story of Tethys is also a story of extinctions, floods, and extraordinary episodes such as the virtual drying up of the Mediterranean, before being filled again by a dramatic cascade of water over the straits of Gibraltar. In telling this story, Stow reveals how geologists and oceanographers have spent years proving the former existence of Tethys, from a remarkable series of clues locked away in rocks now exposed high up in mountain ranges and buried in sediments deep beneath today's oceans. Indeed, these myriad clues are now scattered from Morocco to China and from the depths of the Caspian Sea to the highest Himalayan peaks. Here then is the gripping story of the merging and splintering of continents, the rise and fall of mountain ranges, and an ancient, vast ocean that simply vanished from sight. It is a story that reminds us of the profound impact of oceans and their currents on the environment, climate, and life of our planet.

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Customer Reviews

I assume some scientists, once reached (or well past) the apex of their careers, feel the need to gush out part of their excitement, insight and lifetime drive to a big public of layreaders who'd otherwise remain totally oblivious of the wonders they could find out in their professional lives... And that's exactly how this book feels like, once you've read it! It's your good old geologist uncle sitting right next to you on that gently cracking rocking chair in some dimly lit porch, recounting ancient stories of this world and some past ones too. (With a notable British accent, I presume...) After dealing with some of Dorrik Stow's papers on fine-grained turbidites and deep-water massive sandstones, was fun to discover he wrote this little, pleasant book in an attempt to popularize the philosophical bliss a geologist experiences in looking at the world in ways no one else truly can... In a terse (if occasionally somewhat too dreamy and self-referential!) prose, the author slowly and systematically unwinds the whole history of an ancient oceanic realm whose legacy stands out today in the mountainous landscapes of four continents, in the fossil collections of many great musea, and in the rush and sounds of our everyday lives, fuelled as they are by oil and gas mainly originated in that ancient seaway.... The book's structure follows a chronological progression, from old times, when the Tethys Sea can first be identified in the rock record, to more recent ages, when it's slow demise left place to the world's geography as we know it. The simple but informative elegance of original paleogeographic maps opens every chapter, and helps to find one's way to all the ideas and corners of the world touched by the historical narrative.

Dorrik Stow is a geologist who specializes in mud. Not just any mud, mind you, but the muds created in a long vanished ocean called Tethys. And what an ocean it was, girdling the Earth for about 255 million - yes, million - years and playing an important role in the near-extinction of all life on the planet, scattering its debris on four fossils and instrumental in the formation of the vast pools of oil under the Earth's surface and so much more. Stow talks to the lay reader in a conversational tone that assumes the reader is of higher than average intelligence and has at least a very minimal understanding of the history of the planet. Stow's broad knowledge is both impressive and fascinating as he explores the world for evidence of the scope, breadth and remains of Tethys. His description of the innumerable forms of life that originated or evolved in Tethys and their contribution to the world's development is masterly. He takes what we have accepted as commonplace, such as the white chalk cliffs of Dover (England) and explains how the walls hundreds of feet high are the remains of once living creatures. A grain of sand in his hands is demonstrated to be an artifact 500 million years old. Read this book and you'll never feel the same as you walk a beach or a mountain

path: you'll realize that you are in the midst of living history, often hundreds of millions of years old. Stow is really great at bringing geology and its lessons to life for the lay reader. Unfortunately, he preens a lot. I quickly grew tired of his proclaiming his favorite wines here, there and everywhere.

When I first saw this book advertised on in my suggestions section, I quickly added it to my shopping list because it seemed like a very interesting topic. Who wouldn't want to know more about supercontinents and a long-vanished ocean that had a big impact on the world? In actuality, this book ends up being more of a geological and biological history of the areas related to the ancient ocean known as Tethys. There are some very interesting and relatively little-known (to lay readers) facts about Pangea and Tethys and some very fresh perspectives on things like mass extinction events and how they relate to previous tectonic arrangements of the planet, but overall, the book reads more like a standard history of the geology of a particular section of the planet. To me that is an interesting enough topic to keep me reading, but I should point out that in places, the author lists so many types of rocks or organisms in such a short space that some readers might become exasperated and give up before getting to the end of the book, which in my opinion, is one of the strongest parts. Like many books of this type, there are a number of interesting anecdotes derived from the author's extensive trips and research junkets to places as disparate as an ocean drilling expedition and rock collecting trips to Tibet. He gives numerous examples of how evidence of the history of Tethys can be seen in different places around the globe. Included in the book also are a number of maps showing the general layout of the continents and oceans for the corresponding chapter.

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