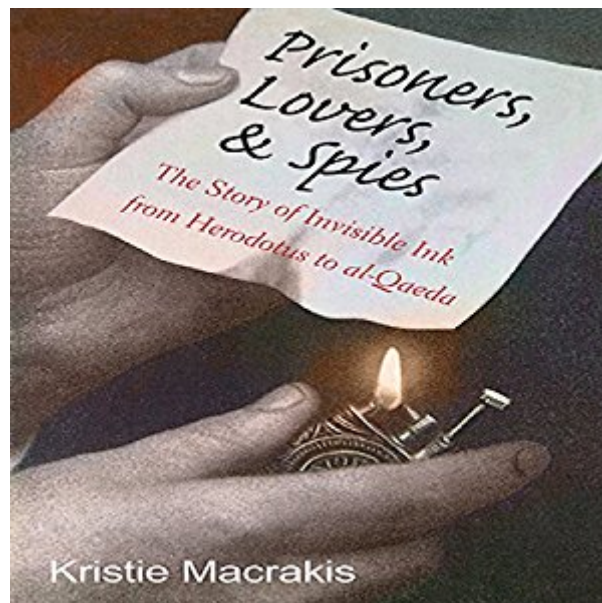




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# Prisoners, Lovers, And Spies: The Story Of Invisible Ink From Herodotus To Al-Qaeda



## Synopsis

Prisoners, Lovers, and Spies is the first history of invisible ink and secret communications revealed through thrilling stories about scoundrels and heroes and their ingenious methods for concealing messages. Spies were imprisoned or murdered, adultery unmasked, and battles lost because of faulty or intercepted secret communications. Yet, successfully hidden writing helped save lives, win battles, and ensure privacy; occasionally it even changed the course of history. Kristie Macrakis combines a storyteller's sense of drama with a historian's respect for evidence in this pause-resisting history of intrigue and espionage, love and war, magic and secrecy. From the piazzas of ancient Rome to the spy capitals of the Cold War, Macrakis' global history reveals the drama and importance of invisible ink. From Ovid's advice to use milk for illicit love notes, to John Gerard's dramatic escape from the tower of London aided by orange juice ink messages, to al-Qaeda's hidden instructions in pornographic movies, this book presents spellbinding stories of secret messaging that chart its evolution in sophistication and its impact on history. The book includes fun kitchen chemistry recipes for listeners to try out at home.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours 30 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Kristie Macrakis

Audible.com Release Date: June 22, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B0107OPBKM

Best Sellers Rank: #430 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Politics & Current Events >

Freedom & Security #493 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Espionage

#549 in Books > Business & Money > Skills > Business Writing

## Customer Reviews

Interesting stories - a bit more of the "past" and less of more modern techniques than I expected.  
Glad I read it.

Very interesting book, especially if you are interested in espionage tradecraft.

Still reading it. Enjoying it immensely.

Fascinating!

Good Read

Kristie Macrakis is a friend of mine. She kindly sent me a free copy of her book because my writing group, of which she was a member while working on it, offered her support, encouragement and critiques as she worked through the manuscript. Having done full disclosure, let me assure you that her book is a wonderfully evocative and entertaining story of how secret writing enabled communications between lovers, spies, scientists and even terrorists from ancient to modern times. Grounded in her rigorous scholarship, the book also provides many fascinating stories about people and relationships that make it read like a page-turning thriller! I recommend it highly.

You can find hundreds of volumes on the history of cryptography, the encoding and decoding of messages, and the cracking of secret codes. Comparatively little has been written about its sister discipline, hidden or covered writing and the use of invisible ink. Kristie Macrakis, a professor of history, technology, and society, thus had a problem when she wanted to include hidden writing in her lectures on the history of espionage. She wound up writing the book she wished she could have consulted. *Prisoners, Lovers, & Spies: The Story of Invisible Ink from Herodotus to al-Qaeda* (Yale University Press) is not (as the subtitle suggests) a history of merely invisible ink, but also different ways of hiding messages not involving writing, like microdots and embedded codes within pornographic photographs. It's a fascinating account, with plenty of anecdotes over the centuries. If you ever fooled around as a kid writing with lemon juice and developing the invisible messages by heat, you know that such tricks are fun, but many of the spies and others here found the use of such inks a serious, even deadly, business. The history starts more playfully, however, with the first mention of invisible ink going to the Roman poet Ovid in *The Art of Love*. He explained that a lover could write a letter with fresh milk. The recipient could then dust the letter with coal dust, and the words would appear. You'd think that with lemons all over the Mediterranean, and how well even kids know about using lemon juice for secret messages, writing with such ink would have been discovered early, but Macrakis was surprised to find this was not so. The juice was used as an invisible ink in Italy by the sixteenth century. Macrakis

frequently returns to the classic lemon juice secret ink, but this is because lovers and spies keep returning to it, even in modern times. It is surprising to read that German spies were using lemon juice in World War I; Germany had a strong chemicals industry and could have been using something more sophisticated. Some of the German lemon juice users wound up being shot at the Tower of London. It wasn't just the bad guys that used secret inks. Our own George Washington was an enthusiast for "a new mode of correspondence" an ink developed by Dr. James Jay, brother of the more famous Founding Father John Jay. It is interesting that the method was so secret, no one after the war was over knew what it had been; Washington himself did not know what it was. It was only in the 1930s that some of the letters using the sympathetic stain were analyzed with infrared and ultraviolet tests; Jay's formula was found to be the old standby, gallnut ink developed with ferrous sulfate. It isn't all secret ink; Macrakis has chapters on microdots and on the hiding of information as codes within photographs. She includes anecdotes about how the CIA used dead rats as a hiding place for message drops (it kept a supply of such rats in the freezer) or the pleasures of using semen as a natural invisible ink supply. Plus she and Jason Lye, a color chemist, have written an appendix about kitchen experiments you can do at home with more than just lemon juice. (It is interesting that for centuries there has been folklore that writing with vinegar and alum on an egg is a good way to get secret messages in to prisoners who can also use the eggs. Boiling the egg is supposed to bring out the message; but she and Mr. Lye say this never works.) There are many amusing and dark stories here to illuminate centuries of cleverness and innovation that we were never supposed to learn about.

slow start, redundant

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