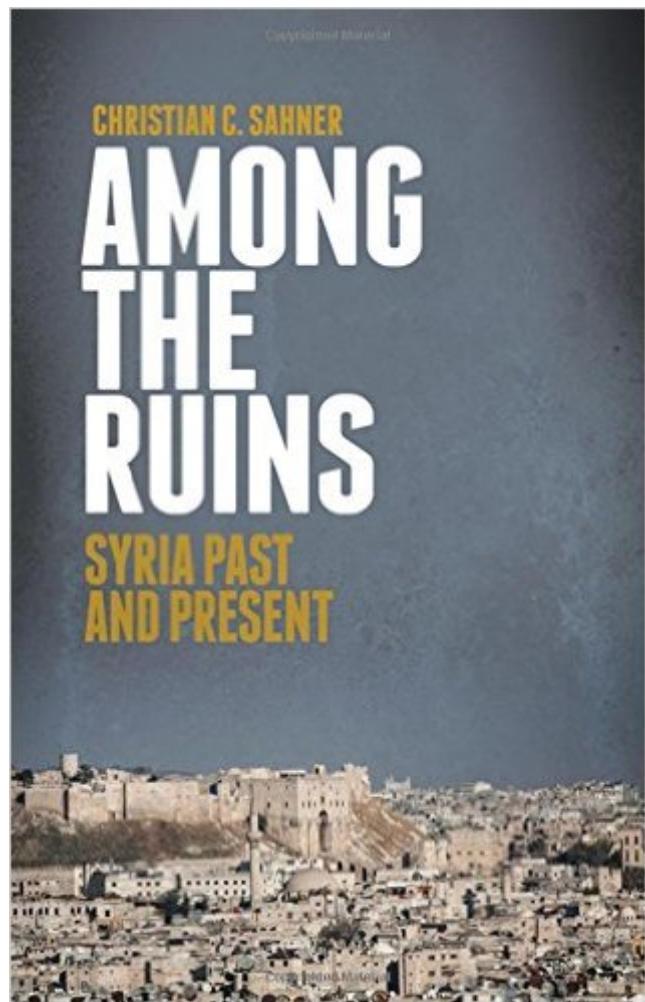


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Among The Ruins: Syria Past And Present



Synopsis

As a civil war shatters a country and consumes its people, historian Christian C. Sahner offers a poignant account of Syria, where the past profoundly shapes its dreadful present. Among the Ruins blends history, memoir and reportage, drawing on the author's extensive knowledge of Syria in ancient, medieval, and modern times, as well as his experiences living in the Levant on the eve of the war and in the midst of the "Arab Spring". These plotlines converge in a rich narrative of a country in constant flux - a place renewed by the very shifts that, in the near term, are proving so destructive. Sahner focuses on five themes of interest to anyone intrigued and dismayed by Syria's fragmentation since 2011: the role of Christianity in society; the arrival of Islam; the rise of sectarianism and competing minorities; the emergence of the Ba'ath Party; and the current pitiless civil war. Among the Ruins is a brisk and illuminating read, an accessible introduction to a country with an enormously rich past and a tragic present. For anyone seeking to understand Syria, this book should be their starting point.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As the conflagration that is Syriaâ "or was Syriaâ "seems to grow, extend itself, and throw flames in a wider arc through the Middle East, Christian Sahnerâ ™s short book Among the Ruins: Syria Past and Present is a necessary corrective to the horrors of the immediate moment. Working on a doctorate in history, Sahner lived in Syria off and on in 2008 and 2009 and neighboring Beirut in the several years following; his book is part travelogue, part history and part meditation on the inevitable

nature of change. In Syria, he says, "the deep past exerts a powerful influence on the present" true in most places, but even more so in such a crossroads of history. Syria is in some respects a modern invention. As the Ottoman Empire lay dying in the early 1900s, the French and British split the region into mandates "neocolonial arrangements, with Iraq sheaved off for the British oil interests, and Syria and the newly created Lebanon for the French. What is now Lebanon was long part of Greater Syria; the French created the Lebanese state in part for their clients, the Christian Maronites living there. Syria itself was an amalgam, like all the countries in the region, dominated by Sunni Arabs, but with significant minority populations "various Shia and Christian sects" and Sahner spells out the historical relations between the many and various groups. Is the war in Syria today only about sectarianism? No, certainly not. But Sahner details the roots of the power relations between the groups over many centuries, with telling details from his travels around the country, back when that was possible. Visiting the historic Umayyad mosque in Damascus, he is surprised by the tomb of St. John the Baptist inside the mosque "it had been a church before conversion in the 700s.

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