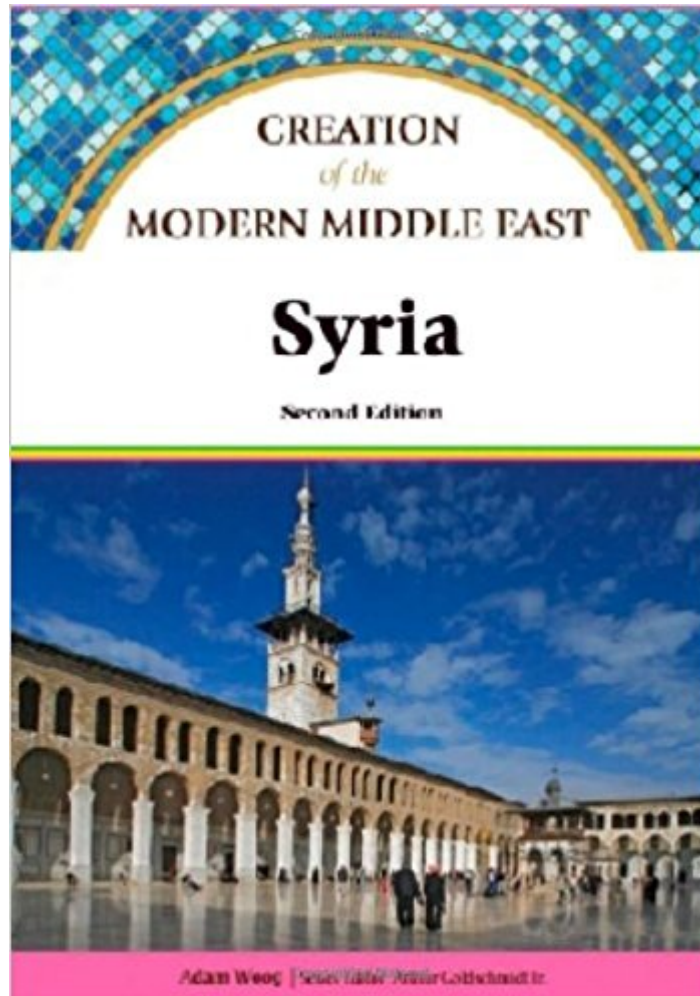




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Syria (Creation Of The Modern Middle East)



Synopsis

For over 4000 years, the land known as Syria was marched over, sacked, and occupied by soldiers of many empires of the world. After the Ottomans' defeat in World War I, it came under the authority of France. This secondary education text includes a chronology and web sites.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

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Customer Reviews

This book is part of a Young Adult (YA) series called "Creation of the Modern Middle East." All of the books contain an introduction by Dr. Akbar S. Ahmed, the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and Professor of International Relations, School of International Service, American University, in which he congratulates "Chelsea House Publishers for taking the initiative in helping us to understand the Middle East through this series." "Syria" begins with a look at the current ruler, Bashar Assad, who trained as an ophthalmologist, assuming that his older brother would take control of his country when their father, Hafez Assad died. Then the presumptive heir died in an automobile accident, and Bashar Assad inherited a nation "generally viewed as a 'backwater' of the Middle East. In a 'New York Times' article, Thomas L. Friedman described Syria at the time of Hafez's death as 'the last country in the Middle East to introduce fax machines and the Internet, a country with a crumbling industrial base, a corrupt, 19th-century banking system, an utterly backward educational system, and not a single world-class export of any product or service.'" "Why is Syria even a country? Now

that I've read five books in this series, a common theme begins to emerge: interference in the formation of Middle Eastern states by Great Britain and France at the end of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire expired: "Britain and France had carved up the Middle East without regard to the needs and desires of the Arab population." For a brief period after World War I, Syria was independent. Then "in response to the Sykes-Picot agreement and the League of Nations mandate, French troops marched from Beirut to Damascus to take over Syria." The French ruled with an iron fist until their final pullout after World War II. The author then takes us through the modern history of Syria, a large part of which has to do with the partitioning of Palestine into two independent states, one Jewish and one Arab. Syria, along with Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan invaded Israel in 1948 as soon as it declared itself a nation. After Israel defeated its invaders, Syria suffered through a series of coups and counter coups, including a brief stint when it united with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic (UAR). Yet another military coup took Syria out of the UAR. Anarchy prevailed until Syrians again united to war against Israel in 1967 (the so-called Six Day War in which Israel launched a pre-emptive strike against Egypt). It was during this war that Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria. President Barack Obama's administration has declared the restarting of talks between Israel and Syria to be one of its main foreign policy goals, but the Golan Heights, now occupied by an equal number of Israeli settlers and Syrians is a huge sticking point. Much of Israel's fresh water supply comes from the Golan Heights and it is reluctant to give Syria control of this vital resource. This book seems like a fair and interesting summary of recent Syrian history. The only obvious mistake I discovered was the author's reference to a "third and final Crusade." There were actually seven or eight Crusades (depending on the source)--nine if the ill-fated Children's Crusade is included in the total.

A short and not-so-sweet history of one of the world's oldest nations (part of the Creation of the Modern Middle East series). Veteran newspaperman John Morrison wisely uses Hafez al-Assad as his bookends in "Syria." Chapter 1 ("After The Lion") and the final Chapter 10 ("The Strongman") accurately positions modern Syria. It's all about Assad and his legacy. Assad despised the French for their mandate over Syria (1920-1946) so much that he threw in his country's lot with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. When French President Charles de Gaulle stopped being chief weapons supplier to the Israeli Zionist Army in 1967, Assad should have tacked a middle course between the superpowers à la de Gaulle. Alas, for many reasons, it was not to be. G-d's cosmic hint of Assad's ascension to the Syrian presidency occurring the same year as de Gaulle's death - 1970 - went lost. Morrison opens windows to the future of Syria and Assad's successor, son Bashar. A

decade into his presidency, Bashar Assad is still contending with vicious cross currents of Syrian nationalism, pan-Arab nationalism, pan-Muslim feelings, encroaching modernity, economics, and international diplomacy. Can Bashar manage to retrieve face through an arrangement on the Golan Heights that doesn't threaten Israel's access to water? One studies such vexing questions and it's no wonder that G-d gave Jews and Muslims so many daily prayer opportunities (services). Bravo to Akbar Ahmed for his introductory essay appealing to the Abrahamic religious traditions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam for a way out of the labyrinth. "Syria" the book (Chapter 2 is called "Land of Abraham") touches on places in Judaism's Torah (Aram, Damascus, Charan, Bosra), clearly marking Syria as Fatherland for all of Abraham's descendants. That's a glorious beginning all can rejoice in, giving us power and patience to work through the difficulties that arbitrary European-drawn state boundaries and statist Zionism have foisted upon Abraham's tribes. We'll need the wisdom of Solomon and the forbearance of Saladin to pull it off. The striking photographs of Gertrude Bell and others in Morrison's "Syria" inspire us on the journey. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 2010 proposal to post an ambassador to Damascus is a hopeful thawing in the Cold War mindset that has governed U.S.-Syrian relations for too long. While being harnessed to humility and realism, let those engaging and representing Syria take spiritual nourishment from T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia," see Chapter 3), liberator of the pearl that is Damascus - "I drew these tides of men into my hands and wrote my will across the sky in stars..."

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