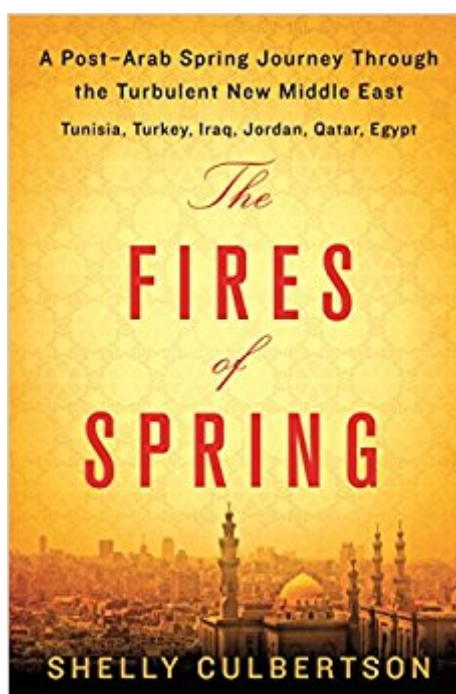


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The Fires Of Spring: A Post-Arab Spring Journey Through The Turbulent New Middle East - Turkey, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, And Tunisia



Synopsis

Turkey, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, and TunisiaThe “Arab Spring” all started when a young Tunisian fruit seller set himself on fire in protest of a government official confiscating his apples and slapping his face. The aftermath of that one personal protest grew to become the Middle East movement known as the Arab Spring—a wave of disparate events that included protests, revolutions, hopeful reform movements, and bloody civil wars. *The Fires of Spring* is the first book to bring the post-Arab Spring world to light in a holistic context. A narrative of author Shelly Culbertson’s journey through six countries of the Middle East, *The Fires of Spring* tells the story by weaving together a sense of place, insight about issues of our time, interviews with leaders, history, and personal stories. Culbertson navigates the nuances of street life and peers into ministries, mosques, and women’s worlds. She delves into what Arab Spring optimism was about, and at the same time sheds light on the pain and dysfunction that continues to plague parts of the region. *The Fires of Spring* blends reportage, travel memoir, and analysis in this complex and multifaceted portrait.

Book Information

Hardcover: 384 pages

Publisher: St. Martin’s Press (April 19, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1250067049

ISBN-13: 978-1250067043

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.2 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,116,577 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in Books > History > Middle East > Qatar #30 in Books > History > Middle East > Jordan #336 in Books > Travel > Middle East > General

Customer Reviews

"A well-documented, brave, and useful overview." - Kirkus STARRED review "[A] comprehensive and probing analysis of the Arab Spring’s impact... A book rich in invaluable information about both current conditions and possible future trends in Middle Eastern life and politics." - Booklist

"Culbertson walks through the citadels of Amman and Carthage and the pyramids of Egypt, vividly illustrating the omnipresence of the ancient in the modern; her treatment of the Ottoman

Empire's demise is particularly illuminating." *Publishers Weekly* "An engaging meander that weaves history, culture, politics, and economics into a cohesive narrative....the reader comes away with a sense not only of what went wrong, but also what has gone right, along with an appreciation for the diversity of the region and its people." *The Christian Science Monitor* (Best Books of April) "Shelly Culbertson takes her readers on a post-Arab Spring political tour of six of the countries touched by the 2011 uprisings. Her interviews and observations are careful and shrewd; she knows the region and understands how systemic inertia slows the processes of political change." *Dallas Morning News* "This recommended overview of a complex set of upheavals in the Middle East explains both the causes and outcomes of the widespread unrest with clarity and a tone of affection and concern for the region." *Library Journal* "A glorious tapestry of people, history and sometimes unspoken analysis that provides the reader the raw material to draw his or her own conclusions... truly an excellent book." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* "Highly readable... This first-person account... matches the professional rigor of RAND with her open eyes and heart." *Pittsburgh Quarterly* "The Fires of Spring is exceptionally well written, balanced, judicious, and insightful. It is an impressive blend of travelogue, history, and analysis that shows that the changes initiated by the Arab Spring are still working themselves out in ways that are not fully predictable, but perhaps more positive than the current scene might lead one to believe." *James Dobbins, Senior Fellow with the RAND Corporation and former Assistant Secretary of State* "Shelly Culbertson is a sensitive observer with a deep knowledge of the developments in the Middle East since the Arab Spring. Travelling through six very different countries, she unravels the similarities and differences of their predicaments, and shows that long term optimism is still possible despite the huge challenges they face. Her book is an example of what travel writing should really be, and shows that no one should despair despite the dreadful conflicts that are raging in parts of the region." *John McHugo, author of A Concise History of the Arabs and Syria: A History of the last Hundred Years* "The Fires of Spring is a wonderful, penetrating, and sympathetic look at six Middle Eastern societies rent by the turmoil of the Arab spring and deep-rooted conflict. Through interviews with a multitude of characters and travelogue of the highest order, Culbertson opens a window into the cultural dilemmas, daily hardships and political dramas playing out from Ankara to Cairo." *Linda Robinson, New York Times bestselling author of Masters of Chaos, Tell Me How This Ends and One Hundred Victories* "The Arab Spring set in motion processes of change in the Middle East that will last for decades. We can try to understand its significance through statistics and expert reports. Or we can follow the stories of individuals, trying to understand the region in the round. The Fires of Spring

tells those stories across six countries. It is a compelling and enlightening

read. — Anne-Marie Slaughter, President and CEO, New America "This book has captured the essence of this historic transformation the Arab world is going through. The complexities, frustrations and hopes of the period which was at first romantically called 'the Arab Spring' are vividly brought to the reader through a journey across countries with different experiences and people with varied outlooks. Shelly Culbertson has masterfully painted a picture of the current challenges facing the region, and more importantly of the promise the future might bring." — Marwan Muasher, Vice-President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former Deputy Prime Minister of Jordan

Shelly Culbertson has lived, worked, and traveled extensively in the Middle East. She is a Middle East analyst at the RAND Corporation and formerly worked at the U.S. Department of State. Her commentaries about the Middle East have appeared in Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, on CNN.com, and elsewhere.

I travel for work in the Middle East on a semi-regular basis, and I've wanted a book that explores the different countries and cultures in a useful way. This is a 101 to the region for smart people who don't have enough time to read long, complicated treatises. Culbertson's role as an analyst and expert on education and innovation, plus her broad experience in Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Turkey, and Kurdistan, make her the perfect companion for an intelligent tour. The Arab Spring has long been a fuzzy concept for me that only grew more confusing the more I studied it. The Syrian conflict remains a mysterious web of what seem to be lost opportunities. Culbertson's book is passionate, intelligent, and warm, but she also cuts to the chase and tells you what you need to know. My favorite chapter analytically is on Turkey, because I recently returned from a first visit there. Her discussion of Topkapi Palace helped me make sense of it as a relic of the Ottoman Empire. When I visited it seemed such an odd artifact on the Bosphorus: so sprawling and once-powerful, yet now a museum. Following Culbertson on a walk through the palace showed me how essential Turkey is to Middle East stability, and how important it is that Istanbul rebounds.

What a delight! Very few books on this topic combine current events, political history and travelogue better than Ms Culbertson's "The Fires of Spring." It is so easy to imagine yourself traversing the countryside, navigating the city streets and moving between border checkpoints. Ms. Culbertson's command of the English language is unrivaled, her scrutiny of the eyewitnesses to the recent history

she chronicles is thorough and complete, and her passion for the issues and people is genuine. Regardless of your level of interest of the topic you will walk away captivated by her narrative. A very important work that will figure prominently in this genre for years to come.

I picked up this book up to get a broader perspective on the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The author's choice of interview partners with people from all walks of life--camel racers, poets, business entrepreneurs, scholars, refugees-- transformed historical and political reflections to resemble more a page-turning novel. If you're interested in understanding the diverse people and culture in the Middle East--a must read.

This is a collection of notes from interviews with many people in different countries. Some are insightful, some not very interesting. Overall, a patchy picture emerges that is deeper and more informative for some countries and less so for others. She covers a very big canvas with a very thin coat of content.

Too slow moving and some information too detailed! Looking for more highlights than great depth

A very well presented and supported account of a seminal moment in the future of the middle east. This book perfectly blends an anecdotal narrative with concrete history and context resulting in a great read. Great for anyone with an interest in understanding the conflict of a part of the world shrouded in misinformation.

I just put down Shelly's excellent, insightful, and thoroughly engaging work. Bravo, Shelly -- you have outdone yourself and can now take a seat on the podium with the most illuminating and justifiably respected analysts of this most complex and fascinating region. Full disclosure is in order: I've known and admired Shelly for many years, having worked with her in a prior incarnation when she was a mere mortal. Reading "The Fires of Spring" was like a conversation with an old friend -- a very intelligent, highly intuitive and observant friend. Trust me on this: Shelly Culbertson will fascinate and enchant you. You couldn't ask for a more erudite, engaging traveling companion.

Islam is a mystery to most of us. Americans walk about with the muddled impression that it's a religion; or no, it's a political system; or no, it's a nation somewhere out in the middle of a desert. The depth of our ignorance

has been plumbed by Donald Trump who won wide approval for promising to keep Muslims out of the country. Ours is a democratic republic, however. We owe it to ourselves to become better informed. An excellent place to start is *The Fires of Spring* by Shelly Culbertson released in April, 2016 by St. Martin's Press. Ms. Culbertson, a policy analyst for the Rand Corporation, has focused her career on studying and writing about the Middle East. She has advised the U. S. State Department and other governments. *The Fires of Spring* is at once a travelogue and a commentary of her findings in the post-Arab Spring, a period of protest and violence that resulted in the deaths of thousands, toppled governments, vicious civil wars and one of the largest mass immigrations in modern times. Culbertson's writing style is unpretentious and straightforward – a joy to read. Her reporting is objective, all the more laudable given the complexity of the issues and the political cross-currents of the region. Her presentation builds one country at a time, beginning with Tunisia and moving through Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Qatar and Egypt in that order. Each country, all with Muslim majority, emerges with challenges in common and with problems that are unique to each. Tunisia, for example, is proud that it moved through the turbulence of the Arab Spring without bloodshed. Iraq, by contrast, was torn by wholesale slaughter of its people under Saddam Hussein. Culbertson's narrative builds on the interviews with leaders and intellectuals of the countries she visits. The extensively quoted texts create immediate credibility. Commentators reflect on their own experience as witnesses to the upheaval. Their accounts are often moving and poignant. To her credit, Culbertson, does not attempt in-depth explanations of the political and religious differences that drive protest and resistance alike. She seeks, instead, the common ground in what many still see as an East-meets-West confrontation. History is key to understanding. For generations, the peoples of the region lived peaceably and tolerant of their diversity as Arabs of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman rule was autocratic. It set the model of the dictatorships that came to power after World War I. This critical event – the collapse of the Ottoman Empire – brought with it a profound loss that followed Turkey's defeat. No longer Ottoman Arabs, the people of the region lost their identity, a loss deeply spiritual and psychological in scope. Inhabitants fell back on what was left to them; namely, tribal, religious, and ethnic identities to set themselves apart from the masses. (See Edward O. Wilson's *The Social Conquest of Earth* which argues the sense of belonging and identity is DNA deep in humans.) As one expert suggests, "Identity under the Ottomans was cultural and religious, but never political." With the political structure crushed, a vacuum was created and cultural identity was all that remained. Emergence of ethnic, tribal and religious differences caused conflict.

Western leaders arbitrarily redrew the map for the people whose roots extended back for centuries. Colonial rule replaced the Ottoman governance. Colonial powers saw the Arab population as inferior and finally ceded to pressures to grant independence. The new countries, boundaries drawn without regard for social, economic, cultural, or ethnic differences, were held together by dictatorships, the only form of government known to the citizens. Under dictatorship countries stagnated. Surging interest in oil from the West served to make matters worse for the most part. The Muslim world today is divided between those who insist that nothing new can be introduced into the faith of Islam and those who insist that answers lie not in the past. Arabs experienced government as religious. God governs. To believe in law is to believe in God. To obey the law is to obey God. There is no separation of church and state. While liberal thinking is slowly breaking down these beliefs, polarization is taking place. The extremes of the crisis show up in the barbarism of ISIS and others. Violence is how these groups present their challenge to contemporary liberal thinkers. Middle ground is hard to find. The most recent constitution adopted by Egypt, for example, recognizes only Islam in creating a state that excludes non-Arabs. Missing entirely is the humanist base of most Western constitutions. *The Fires of Spring* is a huge first step toward creating better understanding in the world. Culbertson's reporting on the status of women in Arab countries is also a plus and adds depth to her book. Not to be overlooked are the author's moving impressions as she strolls the streets of the ancient cities of antiquity, seeks out the poor in the slums, and describes the timeless beauty of the vistas of these legendary lands. *The First of Spring* is contemporary non-fiction at its best. Mission accomplished, Shelly Culbertson

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