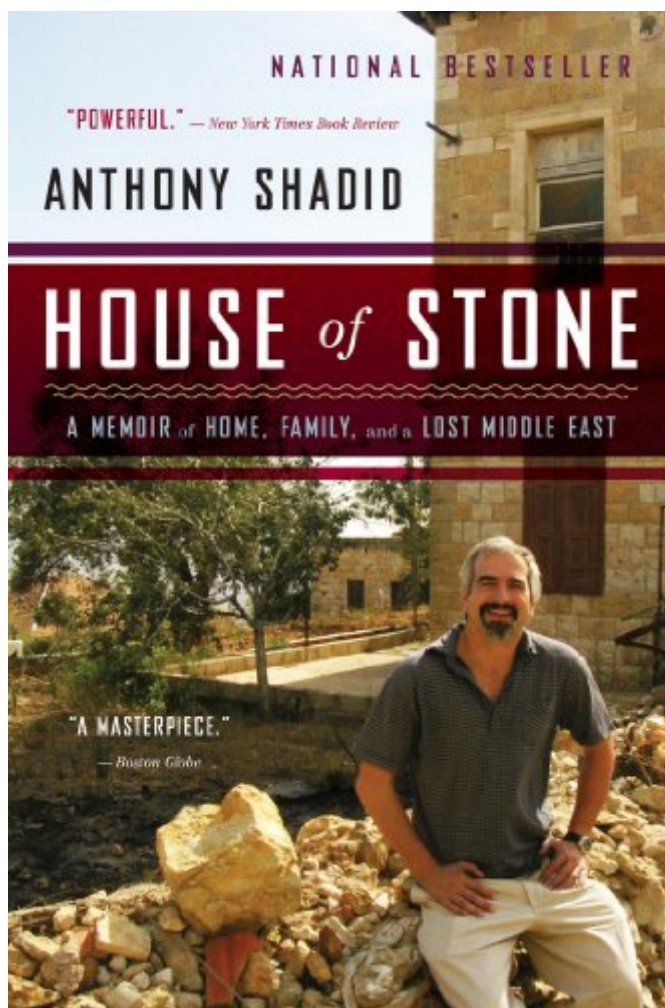


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House Of Stone: A Memoir Of Home, Family, And A Lost Middle East



Synopsis

“Wonderful . . . One of the finest memoirs I’ve read.” • Philip Caputo, Washington Post
In the summer of 2006, racing through Lebanon to report on the Israeli invasion, Anthony Shadid found himself in his family’s ancestral hometown of Marjayoun. There, he discovered his great-grandfather’s once magnificent estate in near ruins, devastated by war. One year later, Shadid returned to Marjayoun, not to chronicle the violence, but to rebuild in its wake. So begins the story of a battle-scarred home and a journalist’s wounded spirit, and of how reconstructing the one came to fortify the other. In this bittersweet and resonant memoir, Shadid creates a mosaic of past and present, tracing the house’s renewal alongside the history of his family’s flight from Lebanon and resettlement in America around the turn of the twentieth century. In the process, he memorializes a lost world and provides profound insights into a shifting Middle East. This paperback edition includes an afterword by the journalist Nada Bakri, Anthony Shadid’s wife, reflecting on his legacy. “A poignant dedication to family, to home, and to history . . . Breathtaking.” • San Francisco Chronicle
“Entertaining, informative, and deeply moving . . . House of Stone will stand a long time, for those fortunate enough to read it.” • Telegraph (London)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

America celebrates immigration. Over the past few centuries, almost everyone who has moved here has found it welcoming, has had little trouble integrating, and - over a fairly short period of time - has found it inviting to call the country home. But not for the late New York Times reporter Anthony Shadid. Born and raised in Oklahoma to second-generation Lebanese-American parents, Shadid was attracted to a different world, one that is not only thousands of miles away, but one hundred years back. In his *House of Stone*, Shadid described a "project" that he had undertaken. He moved back to his ancestral homeland in Marjayoun, south of Lebanon, and started renovating the long-vacant house of Isber Samara, his great grandfather. "My family wasn't here," he wrote. "They had shown little interest in my project." Shadid said that on those occasions when he spoke to his daughter, Leila, she asked him what he was doing so far away, to which he answered: "Rebuilding our home." Shadid dreamt "of the day [he] would bring her... to a house she could call hers." But why was Shadid exactly looking for a "house/home." What was wrong with Oklahoma where he grew up, or Maryland, where Leila lived with her mother, his ex-wife? Shadid was not the first Arab-American to search for a place to call home. Before him, the late Edward Said, a Palestinian-American professor at the University of Columbia, published his memoirs in a book called "Out of Place." And like Said, Shadid mainly blamed the West for his lost home. Both men used their remarkably beautiful prose, ironically not in their native Arabic but in English, to describe the presumably harmonious Arab world that once existed before World War I, and before the colonials - first Britain and France and later the United States - wiped it out. "Artificial and forced, instruments themselves of repression, the borders were their obstacle, having wiped away what was best about the Arab world," Shadid wrote. "They hewed to no certain logic; a glimpse at any map suggests as much. The lines are too straight, too precise to embrace the ambiguities of geography and history. They are frontiers without frontiers, ignorant of trajectories shaped by centuries, even millennia." However, unlike Said who wrote about his displacement from the luxury of his Manhattan Apartment in New York, Shadid decided to do something about it. He immigrated back to Lebanon and was set to restore his ancestor's House of Stone to its past glory. "[I]magine I can bring back something that was lost," he argued. That something was "Isber's world, which, while simpler, was no less tumultuous than my own." This begs the question: If Isber's world was disorderly, why blame the colonial borders for wiping "away what was best about the Arab world." And if Isber's world was already chaotic, why bring it back and insist on calling it home? *House of Stone* is the story of Shadid's renovation project in southern Lebanon, interjected with his reconstruction of the history of his family in Marjayoun, and their emigration to the United States. Along the way, Shadid narrated,

mainly to a Western audience, the daily routine of his project, which included recruiting masons, haggling with suppliers and talking to friends. His narration, however, has a number of mistakes that gives away Shadid being a non-native. Despite his best effort to learn the Arabic language and culture during college days, Shadid still fell short of grasping all of the intricacies of Arab life. For instance, when describing a fruit street vendor, Shadid wrote: "Bateekh, bateekh, bateekh, ala al sikeen ya bateekh," and translated it into: "Watermelon, watermelon, watermelon... a watermelon ready for the knife." While the translation might pass, Shadid missed the cultural nuance. When a Lebanese customer goes to buy a watermelon, he usually asks for assurances from the vendor about its "redness" and "sweetness." The vendor usually replies confidently that his watermelons are the best and takes out a knife offering to cut a small piece as a tasting sample to prove his claim. When vendors push their carts down the streets of Lebanon and shout "al sikeen ya batteekh," they don't mean "ready for the knife," like Shadid thought. Their "knife" call is an invitation to customers to challenge their claim. In another paragraph, Shadid wrote: "In the Middle East, the tiles came to be known as sajjadeh, one of the Arabic words for carpet." In Arabic, at least in Lebanon, tiles mean blat. It is customary - especially in old houses - for tiles to be arranged in patterns to display nice geometric shapes, in which case they would be called "sajjadeh," or carpet. Shadid died a few months ago because of his allergy to horses while being smuggled out of Syria where he had finished covering the ongoing revolution there. His book had not been published yet. The book, his understanding of the heritage of his ancestors and their culture, summarizes his attempt to recreate what he thought was their better world, and live in it. That world, which perhaps never existed, he wanted to call home. Shadid was cremated and his ashes thrown over the House of Stone and over the world that never existed, the world that he never barely got a chance to live in.

A multi-generational story about Shadid's rebuilding his great-grandfather's house, he creates a mosaic of histories of his family, and the families of his friends and the builders. He weaves the home's history and his families and friends histories with that of Lebanon and the nation's history before, during and after independence. His writing also an overview of Lebanon's civil war. While a glossary with some of Arabic words might have been helpful, the book was obviously a passion for the writer and hopefully most of the readers will learn and understand those words through the context of the book. I'm traveling to Lebanon in sixty days to stay with a Lebanese friend and her family. Thank you Mr. Shadid for sharing part of your country with me. Rest in peace.

Simply brilliant, authoritative, inspiring, historically factual. To understand the dynamics of the Arab World, culture, family and blood relationships, tribal and badoo temperaments, the unbroken human chain of the Hawarna(emanating from the planes of Houran in today's Syria near the Jordanian border, before that they immigrated from Maarrib Yemen. They are today's families (the Farhas, Rashids, Shadids, Barakats, Rahalls, Samaras and many others) the beiyout singular Beit)and Dars'(houses of stones) they left in Judida (MarjOyoun) in the wake of their migration 1890- 1930, mainly to America and Brazil. Anthony vividly recalled in the appropriate nostalgic overtones their story, that only a Hourani, the Hawarna, the badoo can tell. These heart breaking events, a badoo leaving the land of their tribal youth, breaking a holy bond between them and their land, it must be said that Anthony masterfully set the tone and captured the feeling of those history and events forced them to abandon their Diar (homestead) with such warmth and special sense of humor. Rarely a writer stay the whole course of his or her journey with his/her readers. Anthony did exactly that. Anthony with you in every page building the walls of his house of stone, stone by stone, with his readers and generously sharing his and the emotion of his family's odyssey to the promiseland, America.I must admit, that Anthony and his House of Stone next to The Prophet of Gibran are on my night table. Reading Anthony's House of Stone brings back sweet memories of my childhood and rekindle my pride of being a HouraniFred L. FarhaOttawa Canada

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