



The 21: A Journey Into the Land of Coptic Martyrs

Martin Mosebach

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Behind a gruesome ISIS beheading video lies the untold story of the men in orange and the faith community that formed these unlikely modern-day saints and heroes.

In a carefully choreographed propaganda video released in February 2015, ISIS militants behead twenty-one orange-clad Christian men on a Libyan beach.

In the West, daily reports of new atrocities may have displaced the memory of this particularly vile event. But not in the world from which the murdered came. All but one were young Coptic Christian migrant workers from Egypt. Acclaimed literary writer Martin Mosebach traveled to the Egyptian village of El-Aour to meet their families and better understand the faith and culture that shaped such conviction.

He finds himself welcomed into simple concrete homes through which swallows dart. Portraits of Jesus and Mary hang on the walls along with roughhewn shrines to now-famous loved ones. Mosebach is amazed time and again as, surrounded by children and goats, the bereaved replay the cruel propaganda video on an iPad. There is never any talk of revenge, but only the pride of having a martyr in the family, a saint in heaven. "The 21" appear on icons crowned like kings, celebrated even as their community grieves. A skeptical Westerner, Mosebach finds himself a stranger in this world in which everything is the reflection or fulfillment of biblical events, and facing persecution with courage is part of daily life.

In twenty-one symbolic chapters, each preceded by a picture, Mosebach offers a travelogue of his encounter with a foreign culture and a church that has preserved the faith and liturgy of early Christianity - the "Church of the Martyrs." As a religious minority in Muslim Egypt, the Copts find themselves caught in a clash of civilizations. This book, then, is also an account of the spiritual life of an Arab country stretched between extremism and pluralism, between a rich biblical past and the shopping centers of New Cairo.

The 21: A Journey Into the Land of Coptic Martyrs Details

Date : Expected publication: February 15th 2019 by Plough Publishing House

ISBN : 9780874868395

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Format : Hardcover 272 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History

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Shelley says

These 21 Christian's did not wake up that day and plan to be martyred, and be with Jesus within a hairsbreadth afterwards.

They died with humility and grace.

All in all Jesus was glorified, which is the ultimate goal.

Rachel Stansel says

An interesting look at the Coptic Church in Egypt from its beginnings to recent times. Including information of the 21 martyrs, this is a religious group and place I was only slightly familiar with and I found the author's descriptions and conclusions interesting and thoughtprovoking. The novella is a quick read but a worth while one.

Full disclosure- I received a copy of the book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Evalina says

Standing up for what one believes has many consequences—including, at times, death. This book looks at the 21 Coptic Christians who were executed in February of 2015 and examines various aspects of martyrdom. I found this book interesting but disturbing. There comes a time when a person must make decisions or will have decisions made for them that will test the depths of their beliefs. The question is whether a person will face the consequences, whatever they may be, in a valiant way.

I voluntarily provided my own opinion on an Advanced Readers Copy that was supplied by the publisher and NetGalley.
