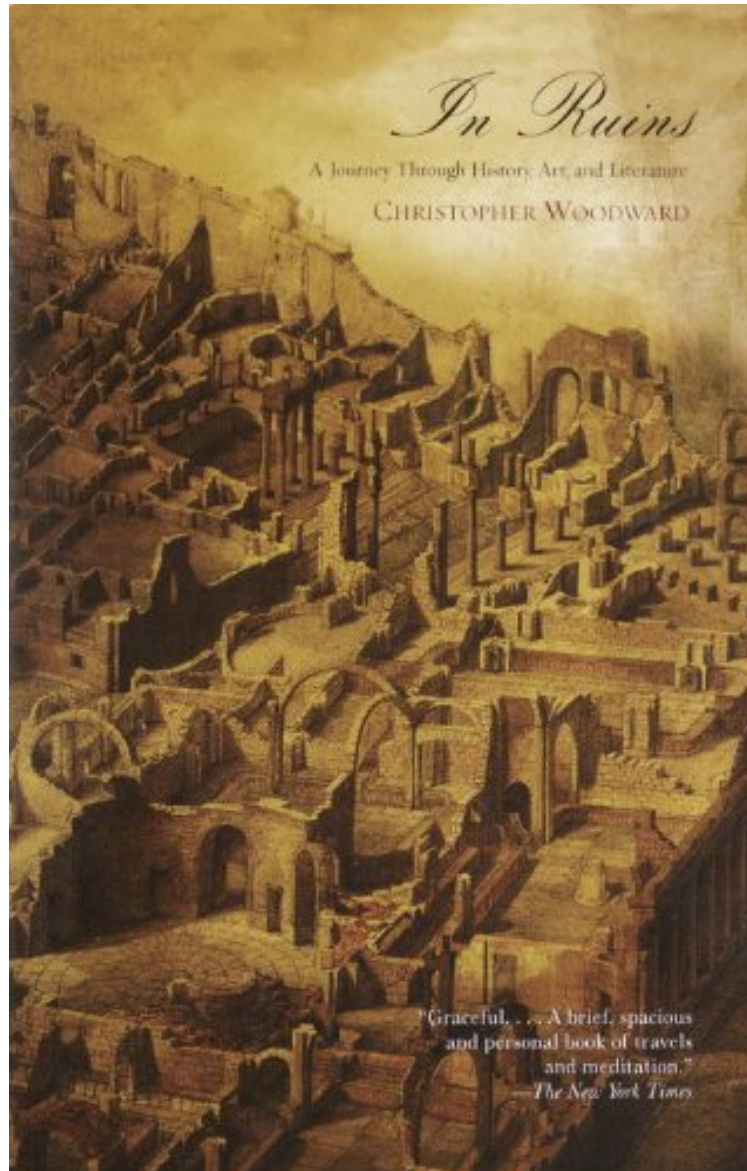


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## In Ruins: A Journey Through History, Art, and Literature

*Christopher Woodward*

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**Christopher Woodward : In Ruins: A Journey Through History, Art, and Literature** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In Ruins: A Journey Through History, Art, and Literature:

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A Walk Through Paradise Garden By Grady Harp IN RUINS by Christopher Woodward is one of the most genteel, warmly evocative, yet scholarly extended essays about beauty that has appeared in a while. Only a true artist could 1) come up with the idea of meditating on ruins of past civilizations

and 2) recreate historical places not only through his own perceptive eyes but also through the eyes and writings and drawings and paintings of artists for the past two hundred years. Woodward finds beauty in the "neglected" ruins, the old sites where nature has nudged the surfaces with wild flowers, mosses, crawling vines, and ground swells, preferring this respect for times past to the wild flurry of the preservationists who seek to 'restore' these treasures to their 'original glory' but often invite tourism with its adjunctive sales, stands, and souvenirs. He has visited the ruins of Rome, of Sicily, Cuba, England, etc and is distraught when he finds these various havens for poets sequestered with guardrails and other implements of distraction. ".the artist is inevitably at odds with the archeologist. In the latter discipline the scattered fragments of stone are parts of a jigsaw, or clues to a puzzle to which there is only one answer, as in a science laboratory; to the artist, by contrast, any answer which is imaginative is correct." "What [poet] Shelley's experience shows is that the vegetation which grows on ruins appeals to the depths of our consciousness, for it represents the hand of Time, and the contest between the individual and the universe." Of the 'Picturesque Movement' in England, Woodward writes referring to the latter day artist John Piper "I know perfectly well I would rather paint a ruined abbey half-covered with ivy and standing in long grass than I would paint it after it has been taken over by the Office of Works, when they've taken of all the ivy and mown all the grass." Woodward talks about even the transporting of ruins from, say, Libya to England (as per King George IV in 1827 importing the Roman ruins of Leptis Magna to his Gardens at Virginia Water). "A ruin is a dialogue between an incomplete reality and the imagination of the spectator." And finally in his thoughts on war monuments and memorials he writes "Is it ever possible to preserve the 'strange beauty' of war, to capture the moment of 'dust in the air suspended'?" Each of these eloquently written thoughts and musings is unlike anything else you will find in books on art history, architectural history, or even philosophy. Christopher Woodward has graced our libraries with a little volume that holds dear the intangible, the corporeal transience, the lasting loveliness of man's time on this planet as protected by nature. This is truly a beautiful book that begs for moments of your indulgence, away from the madding crowd. 4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Before you Travel anywhere, read this book. By ReviewerIts' difficult to describe this book, or even what its about...but I couldn't put it down for two days (The time it took to read it). I suppose the best way to describe reading it is that it was like sitting down at a nice pub by the fire and listening to a very, very interesting person speak. Woodward has that all too rare combination of being extraordinarily intelligent, thinking and feeling, and able to express it. Have you ever looked at a ruin, and found your imagination running away? Have ever wondered why ruins seem to evoke more thought from people -from poets like Shelly (covered in the book) and artists of the Romantic period? Short of going there and contemplating yourself, this book is the next best thing, in fact, i would recommend it before anyone goes to see 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The magic of forgotten civilizations. By mooncalf A truly wonderful book, which haunts you like beautiful music, after you finish it . I bought this copy for a friend, who found it as mystical as I did. I would recommend this book to anyone who feels the need to slow down and investigate those neglected mystical mind portals.

In this enchanting meditation on ruins, Christopher Woodward takes us on a thousand-year journey from the plains of Troy to the monuments of ancient Rome, from the crumbling palaces of Sicily, Cuba, and Zanzibar to the rubble of the London Blitz. With an exquisite sense of romantic melancholy, we encounter the teenage Byron in the moldering Newstead Abbey, Flaubert watching the buzzards on the pyramids, Henry James in the Colosseum, and Freud at Pompeii. We travel the Appian Way with Dickens and behold the Baths of Caracalla with Shelley. An exhilarating tour, at once elegant and stimulating, *In Ruins* casts an exalting spell as it explores the bewitching power of architectural remains and their persistent hold on the imagination. From the Trade Paperback edition.