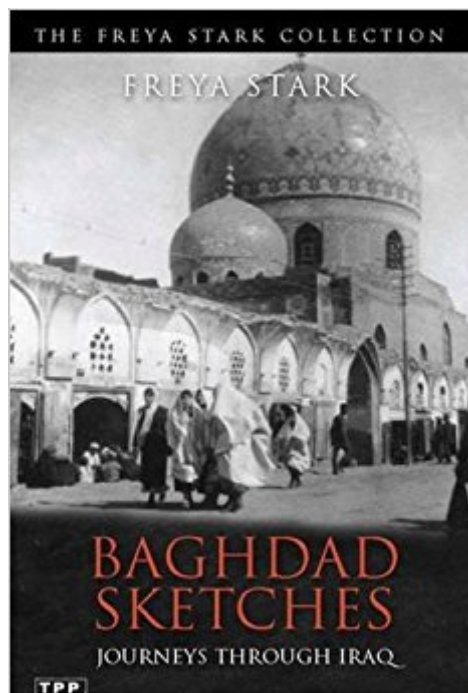




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Baghdad Sketches: Journeys Through Iraq (Tauris Parke Paperbacks)



Synopsis

Freya Stark first journeyed to Iraq in 1927. Seven years after the establishment of the British Mandate, the modern state was in its infancy and worlds apart from the country it has since become. During her many years in Iraq, Stark was witness to the rise and fall of the British involvement in the country as well as the early years of independence. Typically—and controversially—she chose to live outside the close-knit western expatriate scene and immersed herself in the way of life of ordinary Iraqis—living in the “native” quarter of the city and spending time with its tribal sheikhs and leaders. Venturing out of Baghdad, she traveled to Mosul, Nineveh, Tikrit and Najaf, where she perceptively describes the millennia-old tensions between Sunni and Shi’a. In the 1940s she returned again, this time traveling south, to the Marsh Arabs, whose way of life has now all but disappeared; north into Kurdistan and later, Kuwait, in the days before the oil boom.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Readers of Stark’s reissued works...will find a writer who endows everyone in her field of vision with the heightened interest that she felt herself.” -- The New Yorker
“She was a vivid describer of scenes and landscapes. More, she was a connoisseur of people: she knew how to draw them out and listened closely when they spoke” -- Claudia Roth Pierpont, The New Yorker
“It’s impossible not to enjoy a book by Freya Stark—[they] are immediately satisfying. They put you at ease and then transport you to worlds now gone and yet

familiar. Thanks to Stark's literary output, and these fine new editions by Tauris Parke, her world is far from forgotten. Go and buy this book and read it as soon as you are able.*

-- Eamonn Gearon, *Geographical*

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As a foreigner who came long ago to live in Mexico I can sympathize with Stark's observations. I have written many that are parallel and wish I still had that freshness and sense of wonder, but if you stay long enough you blend in, you become yourself a subject for a sketch. Her sketches tell tales, draw pictures, highlight scenes, that a native is never aware of. It's his daily life, he never stops to think about it, sees nothing odd, certainly nothing "exotic" in what transpires around him. Freya, furthermore, has a gift for words and her descriptions are often breathtaking. Magic is always there, you just have to have a privileged eye, in order to single it out.

This is a short little book, of Stark's travels through modern-day Iraq, but interesting now because many of the places she traveled to freely in the 30's are in the news today. Stark was one of the many "Arabists" who traveled the Middle East freely and actually lived in a Baghdad slum for many months just to get closer to the natives. It is more of a travelogue than a political treatise, but her observations and conversations with the old order of the Bedouins and others are interesting. She notes the graveyards of English soldiers who were killed during the days when the newly formed Iraq was a British protectorate after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire after WWI and concludes that these were lives wasted on a very backward country, without understanding the reason this country was important was not for its medieval culture but its oil. Her observations would be considered substantially "politically incorrect" today, but her access to some of the tribal leaders resulted in very interesting conversations, not the least of which was her meeting with Shaikh 'Abdu'l-Husain and his warnings about the developing events in Palestine, before the creation of Israel, but after the Balfour declaration. Her description of the intensity of the hatred between the Shiia and the Sunni, the beheading of Ali 1250 years before her visit to Kerbela and Najaf where it is remembered as if it occurred the day before is most insightful. Her declaration of these towns living on their memory of hate where time stopped, is really very good writing. Her observations of the slaves in Kuwait as if it was nothing out of the ordinary, which it wasn't considering the slavery was not officially abolished in Saudi Arabia until the 1960's is also very good history in itself. Of course such a book could not be written today for many reasons, but if you want to get a better flavor for

today's issues in the Middle East, you could do worse than invest a couple hours in this book, since nothing has really changed, only the reporting has become remote and detached and politically correct, which gives those of us living today a very unbalanced picture of the forces still at work in Iraq 70 years after she wrote about them.

this was a great read - witty & fun. really enjoyed reading it. will buy other freya stark collection books. recommend to anyone - especially travelers or people looking for 1st hand accounts of the Middle East by westerners.

Great book to take on holidays while traveling. A few great message by a woman who was interesting and lived her life as a trailblazer. She would have been a rare role model in her day.

These are great short stories from a daring female explorer and writer, Freya Stark, who traveled throughout old world Arabia and Persia - an anomaly of her time. However this particular title is of short stories from her stay in Baghdad - a world away from today's issues. I did not like the introduction and found the writer sarcastic in tone, and did not understand what her goal was. I would highly recommend this book for it's very pleasant read - the romantic and concise details of days gone by make for an enjoying reading session. But do skip the introduction!

The book offers a unique portrayal of Baghdad in the 1930s through the eyes of a young British woman who lived amongst its slum dwellers on less than £1 a day. Freya Stark's day-to-day encounters with people in the slums juxtaposed with Iraqi intelligentsia and the detached British elite who ruled Iraq through the mandate, offers a valuable insight into how short-sighted and flawed was the British imperial outlook on nation-building in Mesopotamia.

A very worthwhile glimpse into mid-20th Century Baghdad - this series of essays paints intriguing pictures of the streets, the culture and the decline of Colonialism in a country that used to be our Middle-Eastern ally. Much better than her later books.

An excellent book with timeless insight into humanity across cultures. Gives context to attitudes still prevalent today, demonstrated by long historic traditions. The writing has gems of phrases interspersed with diary like accounts of travels. Ms. Stark was definitely a woman ahead of her time.

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