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## The Southern Gates of Arabia: A Journey in the Hadhramaut (Transaction Large Print Books)

*Freya Stark*

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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Southern Gates of Arabia: A Journey in the Hadhramaut (Transaction Large Print Books):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. One of the Greatest Travel Stories Ever Written By Robert Szeles One of the greatest travel stories ever written. One of my favorite books of all time. Better than most fiction of this type. Poignant, fascinating, absorbing. I was sad that it ended. I look forward to reading it again in a couple of years. 18 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating Tale of a Time of Adventure, Lost Forever By Sir Charles Panther I found this book absolutely fascinating as it described a time, only 70-odd years ago, when there truly were unexplored reaches, where legend and history still co-existed, and where a culturally sensitive and aware, and properly respectful traveler could find peaceful and fulfilling adventure. This book is even more interesting now, given the changes in the Middle East in the past ten years. Can one imagine making the same kind of journey in Yemen now? Of course not; it would almost be suicide. That time has long since been destroyed, everything about this book but its pure physical setting gone, so this memoir is even more poignant and compelling. Stark has an eye for detail, as jaundiced as it is with the unavoidable Orientalism of her time and socio-cultural context. This can be forgiven/overlooked, and she's a lot more fair and obliging when describing those she encounters than the majority of

her contemporaries. She's at her best when describing the landscapes she is encountering, the stark desert and wadis, the unexpected lushness of the oases and tucked-away mountain crevices where all the shades of green burst forth. More than anything, what comes through in this book is Stark's grace and abiding respect for the people she meets. She has taken the time to learn their language, and is familiar with their culture, and takes pains to encounter them in terms that will make them comfortable. She does not attempt to bend anyone to a Western European point of view. This is not to say she is subservient or fawning; she most certainly stands up for herself when it is required. But throughout the book and on this journey, her continued success comes from her honesty tinged with her respect for the region and the people with whom she is interacting. This engenders respect for her in return. I found the three maps in the beginning of the book at first absolutely invaluable as references to Stark's locations and progress. I then found the maps to be absolutely infuriating, due to their black/white printing, the too-small script, the confusing order of the maps, the contradictory scales and place-name differences, etc. I ended up abandoning the book's maps and opening my unabridged atlas to Yemen and tracking her movement there. Editors: if you're going to offer maps in a book like this, make sure the maps are actually worthwhile and readable. Two scholarly additions to the book are good. Stark's appendix on the "Southern Incense Route of Arabia" is a fascinating account of exactly what she was looking for, and what brought her to the Hadramaut in the first place. It's her indirect formal scholarly statement of motivation. This appendix would have been well-placed as a foreword to this book, serving to establish her motivation and objective. Stark lists her sources, and they're offered as a listed bibliography immediately after the appendix. There is also an index, but for whatever reason, many of the persons and places in the text are not included, and there is no cross-referencing. For example, the names of individual wadis are placed in the index as "Sidun, Wadi," and are not cross-referenced with a "Wadi Sidun" entry. Bottom line: If you're one of the many readers newly interested in Islam, Arabs and the Middle East, and are looking for some context beyond the latest book on extremism or terrorism, something to add depth to what you think you understand, then this book will do you well. If you're looking for some insight into the cultures and traditions of Islam, this also will move you in that direction. If you're looking for a glimpse into a time when the West and Islam actually got along on a basis of mutual respect, this enjoyable book will tell you about it. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful story about a little known area of the world By Keiko This was so interesting. A wonderful story about a little known area of the world. The fact that this was a personal journey made it even more interesting.

In 1934 Freya Stark travelled alone to the Hadramaut in what is now Yemen. Then it was a little known country, torn apart by tribal warfare, but it had once been the centre of the rich incense trade. An Arabic speaker, Freya travelled with tribesmen, accepted hospitality from sultans and saw harems.

'It's hard to think of a writer in the travel game who most closely demonstrates the merits of Flaubert's three rules for good writing: clarity, clarity and finally clarity. Re-reading her now, her restrained powers of description shine as brightly as they ever did, and they will continue to shine until the next Ice Age... Her books are more relevant than ever. Besides sheer enjoyment, one should read her for a fresh perspective on the intractable issues dogging Christian-Muslim relations. She was able to see both sides and what she found was similarity, not difference. The greatest woman traveller of the 20th century? I think so.' - Sara Wheeler, *The Times*; 'This book recaptures all the romance, beauty and primitive atmosphere of that still unspoilt Arabia of spices ... and the high-walled cities and little-known desert stretches.' - *Irish Times*; 'Extraordinarily rich and authoritative ... a book to treasure' - *New York Times*; 'There aren't many writers who rise so clearly above the teeming marketplace of travellers as Freya Stark' - *The Spectator*; 'Freya Stark unites in one mind the traveller, the historian, the philosopher and the poet' - *TLS*; 'The Hadramaut is still unfamiliar ... No outsider has caught its spirit as gently and wonderingly as did Freya' - Tim Mackintosh-Smith; 'It was rare to leave her company without feeling that the world was somehow larger and more promising. Her life was something of a work of art - The books in which she recorded her journeys were seductively individual - Nomad and social lioness, public servant and private essayist, emotional victim and mythmaker.' - Colin Thubron, *NY Times*; 'Few writers have the capacity to do with words what Faberge could do with gems--to fashion them, without violating their quality. It is this extraordinary talent which sets Freya Stark apart from her fellow craftsman in the construction of books on travel.' - *The Daily Telegraph*; 'Freya Stark remains unexcelled as an interpreter of brief encounters in wild regions against the backdrop of history.' - *The Observer*; 'It is... as the writer of beautiful, measured prose rather than as a traveller or as an exotic 'character' who wore Dior in the wilder reaches of Asia and Arabian dress in London, that Freya Stark will ultimately be remembered.' - *The Independent*; 'One of the finest travel writers of our century.' - *The New Yorker*; '[Freya Stark] writes angelically in the great tradition of Charles Doughty and T. E. Lawrence. The pulse quickens as you read, because she can bring the sights and sounds of incredible countries before you in the twinkling of an eye.' - *The New York Times Book*; 'A Middle East traveler, an explorer and, above all, a writer, Freya Stark has, with an incomparably clear eye, looked toward the horizon of the past without ever losing sight of the present. Her books are route plans of a perceptive intelligence, traversing time and space with ease.' - *Saudi Aramco World* About the Author Freya Stark (1893-1993), 'the poet of travel', was the doyenne of middle East travel writers.

Her travels earned her the title of dame and huge public acclaim. Her many, now classic, books include Traveller's Prelude, Ionia, The Southern Gates of Arabia, Alexander's Path, Dust in the Lion's Paw, East is West and Valleys of the Assassins.