

Topic Page: [Stark, Dame Freya \(1893 – 1993\)](#)

Summary Article: **Stark, Freya Madeline**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

English traveller, mountaineer, and writer. Often travelling alone in dangerous territories, she described her explorations in the Middle East in many books, including *The Valley of the Assassins* (1934), *The Southern Gates of Arabia* (1936), and *A Winter in Arabia* (1940).

Stark was born in Paris but brought up in Dartmoor in the west of England, and in Asolo in Italy, some 40 mi/64 km northwest of Venice, which later became her home. She learnt Italian, French, German, and Arabic, and studied for a time at London University. Towards the end of 1927 Stark went to the Middle East for the first time. She stayed in Lebanon and journeyed through the Hebel Druze country before visiting Damascus, Jerusalem, and Cairo. Two years later, based in Baghdad, Iraq, she undertook difficult solo expeditions to Luristan in Iran and to the Mazanderan mountains beyond the Caspian Sea, where she nearly died of malaria and dysentery. In 1935 and 1936 she ventured into Arabia, became almost fatally ill again and was rescued by the Royal Air Force. A second Arabian expedition followed soon after her recovery.

In World War II she initially served as a nurse on the Italian front, and then became engaged in propaganda and publicity work in the Middle East, returning to Italy in 1943 to work for the British embassy. Her health suffered, and for three years after the war she was bedridden. Becoming interested in the history and archaeology of Asia Minor, Stark learned the language and explored distant regions of Turkey, which she wrote about in *Ionia: a Quest* (1954) and *The Lycian Shore* (1956). In her 70s and 80s she travelled to Afghanistan, Nepal, and again to Iraq for a journey on a raft down the River Euphrates.

The first volume of her autobiography, *The Traveller's Prelude*, which she began soon after World War II, was published in 1950, followed by *Beyond Euphrates* (1951), *The Coast of Incense* (1953), and *Dust in the Lion's Paw* (1961). Her last book, *Rivers in Time*, appeared in 1982.

quotations

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