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**From Modern Library Inc : *Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark (Modern Library)* by Geniesse, Jane Fletcher New Edition (2001)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark (Modern Library)* by Geniesse, Jane Fletcher New Edition (2001):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. "There is a certain madness comes over one at the mere sight of a good map."By R. M. PetersonFreya Stark had a much longer and far more adventuresome life than most. Born in 1893, she died a few months past her one-hundredth birthday. From a rather undistinguished background, with minimal formal education, and after suffering a horrific and disfiguring accident as a thirteen-year-old girl, Stark made a name for herself as one of the great British explorers and travel writers of the twentieth century. She was honored by the Royal Geographic Society and feted by all of Great Britain. Eventually she was knighted, becoming Dame Freya Stark. *PASSIONATE NOMAD* is an interesting biography of this remarkable woman. Broadly speaking, there are two aspects to Stark's career. The first was as an intrepid traveller, going places in the Middle East where few or no Europeans had gone before. Then she wrote about those places and her adventures in a series of books that belong in the top rank of British travel literature. Among her expeditions, Stark visited the mysterious Druze and explored the castle hideouts of the ancient Assassins in Syria; she explored remote areas of Iraq and Persia; and she traversed the southern Arabian Peninsula, even venturing into North Yemen. She suffered dengue fever, sandfly fever, malaria, and dysentery, and she had several close calls with death. She was aided by her ability to speak Arabic in any number of

dialects, her knowledge of the Koran, her ability to improvise, her disregard for the comforts of European civilization, and sheer obstinacy. The other major area of accomplishment involved her work for the Ministry of Information during and after World War II. As an expert on the Arabs and the Middle East, she was recruited by the government to help keep the Arabs neutral and foster British political interests however she could. She was one of three hundred Europeans holed up in the British embassy during the month-long siege of Baghdad in May 1941. As the war wound down, Great Britain tabbed her to go to the United States as a representative and defender of what was then Britain's "fence-sitting" policy towards Palestine. Part of her message, which she truly believed, was that "it hardly made sense \* \* \* to make the Palestinians pay with their homes and lands for injuries done to Jews by European Christians." The Americans were not persuaded and shortly thereafter the British too changed their policy. Author Geniesse does a good job of covering Stark's numerous achievements, and she does a better job of giving the reader a sympathetic sense of Freya Stark, who turns out to be a very complicated and sometimes even contradictory woman. Inwardly, she was insecure and craved affection; outwardly, she could be extremely charming, but also imperious, manipulative, and at times just plain bitchy. By middle age, she had become a British eccentric through and through. From the "How Things Have Changed" Department: "She discovered how safe it was for a woman to wander alone in an Islamic land, for despite what the missionary ladies told her, she had learned that Islamic tradition treats women with exquisite respect." One of the rare occasions on which she felt threatened was when, in Damascus, she was photographing ruins and an elderly man approached her, salaamed, and suggested that she follow him to see something even more interesting; he led her down dark and twisting streets to a public bath and ushered her into its dim interior where she was suddenly surrounded by nearly naked men in towels; "she thrust her camera before her face as if to take their picture, thanked them profusely, backed to the heavy door, and fled." My problem with the book is the author's style. It is too wordy, with too many rhetorical flourishes for my taste. Geniesse relies heavily on one device that particularly grates on me -- what I will call "no-one-could-have-foreseen foreshadowing". For example: "She could have no idea how squalid her circumstances would turn out to be, nor especially could she know that her visit to Damascus would be the first step on the way to an astonishing career." Or: "Two young members during the war were Lieutenants Gamal Nasser and Anwar Sadat, but neither Freya nor anyone else could suspect the future roles they would play." (And there are other such instances.) Geniesse quotes liberally from letters and books of Stark. (For what it's worth, Stark was a distinctly better writer.) There are nine pages of useful maps, although I wish that when cities or places were named in the text there were a cross-reference to the appropriate map on which the reader could locate them. There also are about sixty photographs, most of them intrinsically interesting but nearly all printed with exasperatingly inadequate resolution or clarity. (Several are so small and fuzzy as to be worthless.) P.S. The sentence with which I have entitled this review is from Stark's "Letters from Syria". What it describes has been true for me my entire life. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Life and what influences us and what is a limitation, really. By ronemtz An interesting life adventure. An independent thinking person and in this case a woman. What would any of us do if we were constrained by the mom's boyfriend, the mom, the gender barrier of the time. I will consider her a hero of my gypsy wanderlust. It will cause me to pause and ponder any limitations to see how many really are self-imposed that I can just walk right past. Where did she find that pilot light and keep it burning to reach as far as she did? Unending motivation. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Biography par excellence. By Larry N. Stout "Passionate Nomad" is not only exceptionally cogent biography, it is also a splendid exemplar of prose: elegant, mellifluous, yet unselfconscious and unpretentious. This is a thoroughgoing study, evincing impressive research and keen insights, with a wealth of apposite anecdotes and quotations; yet the reading is effortless pleasure, owing to the author's surpassing fluency. As others have noted, a very real and believable Freya Stark is revealed in this book: the author portrays with equal candor her subject's remarkable talents and strengths, her outstanding weaknesses and foibles. Nothing here that smacks either of hagiography or of iconoclasm aforethought. Recommended without reservation. A book that should be used in teaching language and literature!