

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 28–40**, which are based on the text below.

Read the text below and answer **Questions 28–40**.

Freya Stark

Freya Stark was a British explorer and writer who had several works published about her travels in the Middle East and Afghanistan, as well as autobiographies and essays.

Born in Paris in 1893, Freya Stark was raised in Italy and England. As a child, she spoke several languages and her upbringing included many outdoor pursuits, like horse riding and mountaineering. With her mother and grandmother as role models, she developed into an unconventional woman who was as at home in elegant salons as she was able to handle hardship and physical exertion.

In 1912, Stark started studying history in London but left for Bologna, Italy, at the beginning of the First World War, to work as a nurse. In 1918, her father gave her a small estate in Mortola on the Riviera in northern Italy, where she grew grapes, vegetables and flowers. But she often travelled to England to take Arabic language courses at the School of Oriental and African Studies. She was nearly thirty by this time. A professor had suggested that she try a non-European language: he recommended Icelandic. Stark, who had been struggling to make a living on the farm in Italy, chose Arabic in the hope that it might provide an opportunity to get away. She had developed a desire to travel to the Middle East and, to this end, applied for the role of governess for the Iraqi princesses at the court of Baghdad, Iraq, but was not successful.

In 1927, she travelled to Lebanon and then on to Damascus, Syria. Travel in the area was restricted at the time, so Stark set off from Damascus in secret on a donkey with a local guide and an English female friend, who had come to join the trip. Stark took pride in travelling without servants or extra belongings, comparing herself favourably in this regard to writer and explorer Gertrude Bell, an Oxford-educated aristocrat who had completed a similar trip with three baggage mules, two tents and three servants. Stark considered herself a more intrepid traveller.

After this, Stark returned to London and went to the Royal Geographical Society to take drawing courses so that she would be able to make her own maps on



future trips. In 1929, she set off again for the Middle East and in 1930, Stark reached Persia (now known as Iran). She visited the Valleys of the Assassins, at the time still unexplored by Europeans, and carried out geographical and archaeological studies. On the back of a mule, with a camp bed and a mosquito net, and accompanied by a local guide, Freya Stark rode to the valleys near Alamut to see ruins of a mountain fortress castle which had not yet been recorded on her map. Despite malaria, dengue fever and dysentery, she carried on with her trip and her studies.

Stark's books present a combination of adventure and harsh reality. In *The Southern Gates of Arabia* she tells of following the ancient trade route for the perfumed substance frankincense in the area that is present-day Yemen. Unfortunately, she had to turn back without realising the goal she had set of finding the legendary lost city of Shabwa.

In 1944, Stark spent time in New Delhi, India at the court of the British viceroy. During political discussions there she met renowned politicians, Gandhi and Nehru. She was a regular guest at parties and official functions, where she became known for her extravagant clothes as well as her life of adventure.

While she did not make any huge new discoveries as an explorer, Freya Stark gained a high degree of respect for her sharp observations and compelling tales of her travels. She was able to accurately record unmarked villages and mountains, using compass points and photographs, but people read her books for the descriptions of the journey.

Often Stark would be the only European woman to have visited the places she travelled to, and often she discovered that the only people available to speak with her were the women. Stark might have approached women as a way of gaining trust and reaching powerful men, but over time she got specialised knowledge of the domestic arrangements, costumes and children's lives in these places thanks to her contact with women.

Stark was not especially interested in politics, beyond a desire to remedy the injustices she saw first-hand on her travels. Her main interest was archaeology. However, her later books such as *Rome on the Euphrates*, which came out in 1966, was criticised at the time for being overloaded with history and less in the genre of travel book, which is what readers seemed to want from her. Her last significant trip was to Afghanistan, in 1968, when she was 75. She went to see a 12th-century minaret that had only shortly beforehand been discovered by archaeologists.

Stark kept writing throughout her 80s and early 90s (four volumes of autobiography and eight volumes of letters), the last of which was published in 1985 when she was 93. She travelled until she was 92 and lived to be 100 years of age. Towards her final years, she took many of her godchildren on trips to inspire and educate them, telling them what she had learned from those she met along the way. Freya Stark produced 22 books in her lifetime and serves as an inspiration to travel writers to this day.

Action plan for Summary completion

- 1 What does the summary heading tell you about where to look in the text?
- 2 What kinds of words will you need to put in the space (e.g. noun, verb, adjective)?
- 3 Look at the text, what will you do first?
- 4 Look at the questions. What will you do before you look for answers?
- 5 What is the maximum number of words that you can write in each space?



Key words such as place names and names of books in the summary can help you find where to look in the text.

Advice

- 37** Look for the name of the book 'Rome on the Euphrates'. What did people say about the book at the time?
- 38** Find information about Stark's trip to Afghanistan late in her life? What was her reason for going there?
- 39** What did Stark publish besides books?
- 40** Who did Stark take on trips when she was older?

Questions 37–40

Complete the summary below.

Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 37–40 on your answer sheet.

Freya Stark's later years

Stark's book *Rome on the Euphrates* was said to focus too heavily on **37** rather than what her audience had come to expect. Stark's motivation for going to Afghanistan when she was 75 was to visit an ancient **38** In her old age, she continued to publish collections of **39** along with books about her life. She was often accompanied by her **40** when she travelled.