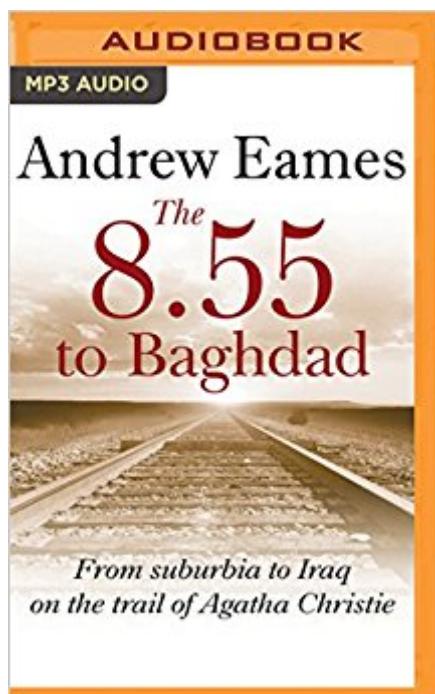


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# The 8.55 To Baghdad: From Suburbia To Iraq On The Trail Of Agatha Christie



## Synopsis

In 1928, Agatha Christie, the world's most widely read author, was a thirty-something single mother. With her marriage to her first husband, Archie Christie, over, she decided to take a much needed holiday; the Caribbean had been her intended destination, but a conversation at a dinner party with a couple who had just returned from Iraq changed her mind. Five days later she was off on a completely different trajectory. Merging literary biography with travel adventure, and ancient history with contemporary world events, Andrew Eames tells a riveting tale and reveals fascinating and little-known details en route in this exotic chapter in the life of Agatha Christie. His own trip from London to Baghdad "a journey much more difficult to make in 2002 with the political unrest in the Middle East and the war in Iraq, than it was in 1928" becomes ineluctably intertwined with Agatha's, and the people he meets could have stepped out of a mystery novel. Fans of Agatha Christie will delight in Eames' description of the places and events that appeared in and influenced her fiction "and armchair travelers will thrill in the exotica of the journey itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Agatha Christie fans, as well as connoisseurs of fine travel writing, will relish British journalist Eames's gripping, humorous and eye-opening account of his train and bus trip across Europe and the Middle East on the eve of the second Gulf War. A chance stay in a Syrian hotel where Christie once stayed prompts Eames to attempt to follow in the bestselling author's footsteps. Despite the awkward timing, Eames (Crossing the Shadow Lines: Travels in South-East Asia) finds many friendly faces, even in Iraq, where a close call with a mysterious explosion curtails his journey.

Admirers of the creator of Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot will learn more about her relationship with the peoples of the region (Kurds, Armenians and Palestinians), as well as the real-life inspiration for her classic 1934 novel, *Murder on the Orient Express*: a blizzard that stranded the historic train for nine days in 1929. Especially engaging is the way Eames describes his traveling companions on the last leg of his odyssey as if they were the cast of characters in a typical Christie mystery. (May 31) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

In 1938, when she was 38, Agatha Christie took a 3,000-mile train ride on the Orient Express from London to Baghdad. Eames retraces her journey, describing many of the places and events that influenced Christie's fiction. Along the way, he offers some background on her early life: her father died when she was 11, she later married Max Mallowan, an archaeologist. Eames relates a brief history of the Orient Express and recounts his visits to Baghdad, Damascus, Trieste, Zagreb, Belgrade, Sofia, Istanbul, and other cities. Throughout, he writes about the people he met--fellow passengers, taxi drivers, hotel managers, guides, and military escorts--and the hotel rooms he stayed in. Armchair travelers will enjoy the journey. George CohenCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

To quote from *GEOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE*, "Eames laces the book with Christie trivia and a certain sly wit. His descriptions of the people he meets and the places he visited are both vivid and perceptive... *THE 8:55 TO BAGHDAD* is a thoroughly enjoyable read that combines an Agatha-centric travelogue with a thought-provoking journey through a benighted land." Treading lightly throughout this work is Eames' own spiritual quest. Some have noted the book's weak ending and it is rather like the last gasp of an arriving steam locomotive. Since the inspiration for the book occurred during an earlier trip that included Aleppo, perhaps Eames, an atheist, could have ended the book with the advice--really a parting blessing--that he received in Konya from Alp Aslan, a Muslim. "Go," he said, "write a travel book in search of the miracle of creation. Go looking for God." (P. 211) However, such an ending would have required that Eames double-back at the conclusion of his present journey--an arduous and awkward maneuver he was not prepared to make at present--either in writing or in life.

For all lovers of train travel in the grand style and admirers of Agatha Christie. A most satisfying journey.

I bought this book for my Mum because she loves Christie and ended up reading it myself. I was especially taken by the sections in Eastern Europe and Iraq. This book introduced me to places in geography and history that I had not been to before and was a pleasant and thought-provoking read.

A wonderful book and it arrived on time and very well packed. I would highly recommend the book as it was recommended to me! Thank you also for the excellent service!

Could not gt into this story...boring

The cover says it is about 'on the trail of Agatha Christie' and I found it had very little that one doesn't all ready know from her own autobiography. Few and far accounts on Agatha - it took pages and pages before it said anything about her. It is mostly a political and personal historical views on Iraq, Turkey and their towns. It is all over the place w/archaeological tidbits, political and cultural views, personal anecdotes, etc - anything but Agatha facts and stories. It took me forever to read this and even purchased it in Kindle form so I could do searches for the word "Agatha". Don't bother w/this this one - as you can get more information from her own books. I don't feel I wasted my money but it did waste my time.

Love travel books that include history and literature, and this book has it in spades. And therein lies the problem/ Its title says 'following Agatha Christie'. Im not a huge fan of mysteries but I did love her memoir Come Tell Me How You Live, but assumed Id find a lot of her in the book. Well, if you are too, you'll be disappointed I think. Oh there is some and its all very interesting (and has actually lead to me wanting to read Murder on the Orient Express), but there is also the history of the OE, description of the coaches, history of the Balkan conflict, ancient history in the middle east, archaeology and who has ownership of artifacts, as well as too many descriptions of his bus travel from Damascus to Baghdad. This last frustrated me - I so didn't care about these companions of his, his descriptions of their petty spats, his eye rolls. He could have taken them out and added more about Christie (like did she ever meet up with Gertrude Bell, the woman who worked closely with Lawrence of Arabia?) This is why Im giving this well written book only four stars. But if you are like me, and know how to scroll passed the fluff, you are in for a treat.

Up front and immediately - this is a great find! From the enticing title (although I have never read her popular novels) to the book jacket blurb that the author evidences a "sly wit" in his account of a journey through tense times, to a targeted Iraq, straight into a quote: If you cannot find Osama, Bomb Iraq If the markets are a drama, Bomb Iraq If the terrorists are frisky Pakistan is looking shifty North Korea is too risky, Bomb Iraq. Or from a fellow train traveler in rural Turkey about President Bush: "You have traveled. I have traveled. We understand each other. But President Bush? Has he traveled? What is that expression--travel broadens the mind?" Eames' humour and the selections he chooses to write of, are far from sly! Eames a British journalist recounts his travels by train, ferry and bus from London to Baghdad and onto Ur as replicates the journey that Agatha Christie took back in 1928, but with far more difficulty as this is in the age of Desert Storm and the Axis of Evil. Never mind, he only gets bombed once, and that by his "own side", at the conclusion of his quest in the area of the (claimed) original site of the "Garden of Eden". He travels partly on the famed Orient Express with a cast of characters he suspects of being invented for his book's purpose by Agatha Christy herself. He notes that the "Swiss train track-men who walk the length of the 'consist', tapping wheels, keep their eyes firmly on their task. To raise the gaze to window level," he says, "would have risked invading the privacy of a camp hairdresser touching up his highlights or a bouffant old goat touching up his African princess." He becomes far more serious about the openness and genuine hospitality of the Iraq people at the conclusion of his adventure, noting the warmth and friendliness, mixed with caution and fear of Saddam's constant presence. This however is no "soft adventure" as the author calls those travel narratives of crossing the Atlantic in a barrel or seeking a punch-up in a bar, it contains some hard-core history, acute observations of people and politics and is a great - too rapidly finished- read. The author hopes, as do many of the peoples of biblical Babylon he meets that the seemingly, now unstoppable war will cleanse away the isolation and mistrust of the region, the original "cradle of civilization" as the floods of the rainy season in Mesopotamia "purge the streets of the accumulated rubbish in a free-flowing enema."

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