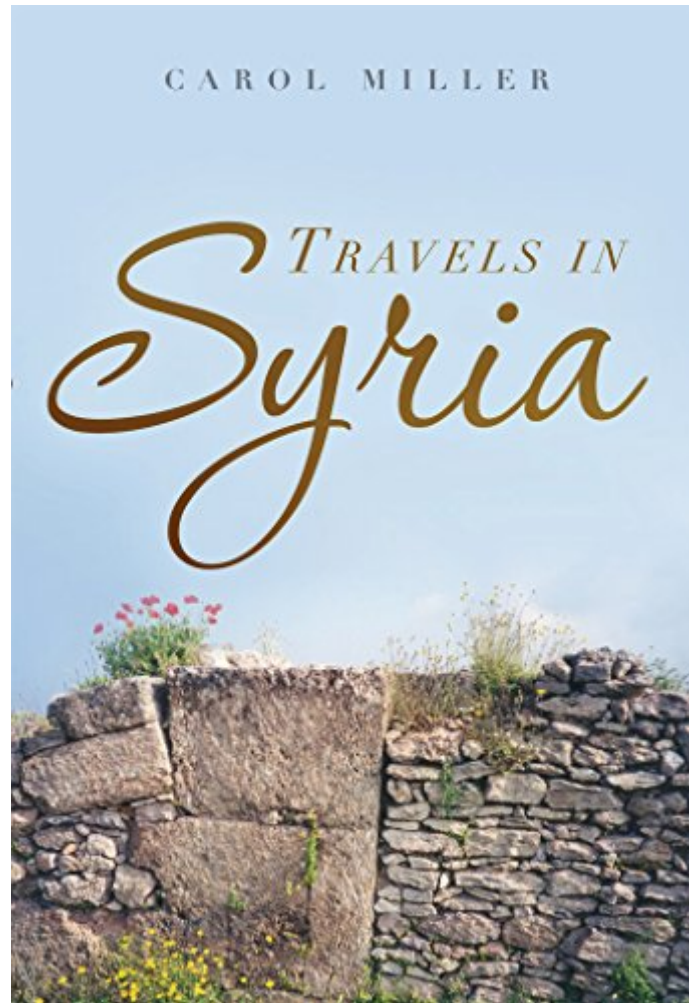




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# Travels In Syria: A Love Story



## Synopsis

A historical hotspot if there ever was one, Syria has been loved and hated for millennia. What is so significant about Syria? Location, location, location. Home to sacred ground and relics, the land of Syria has given birth and sustenance to the world's three major religions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—and has soaked up its fair share of blood on their behalf. As a strategic meeting point between East and West, Syria ranks high as a historical crossroads for ancient world powers as well as for more modern adventurers like T. E. Lawrence. Although one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites on earth, Syria has not remained stagnant. Always disputed, never submissive, and ever changing, this country is best approached through the lens of an admirer. Carol Miller, a journalist, photographer, and sculptor nearly as multifaceted as Syria herself, spent ten years of research and travel to create *Travels in Syria, a Love Story*, her scholarly travelogue that offers readers a glimpse into the complex history of Syria. Organized by city, the book takes readers on an enlightening journey, highlighting art, architecture, and history along with Miller's own personal experiences.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This paperback is a fab tool for the history newbie learning how wide valuable this part of the ME is, in spite of recent news headlines and warring factors. Others at the office want to read it~

Syria is a miracle, always has been. For at least ten to twelve thousand years people have come, left evidence of their presence, perhaps taken up residence, often left again, possibly in a hurry, as far back as the Cro-Magnon, thirty thousand years ago, if it comes to that, but the anthropological remains refer more frequently to the Paleolithic, the Neolithic, the Chalcolithic, the Bronze and Iron Ages. Each saw a parade of societies; many of them grew into giants, often they were cruel. The Sumerians and the Sea People came, the Amorites, the Aramaeans. The Assyrians, Persians and Medes, and the Egyptians, and the Phoenicians. Alexander the Great and the Hellenists or Seleucids who followed after his death. The Romans, the Celts, the Franks and Greeks. Deranged ascetics, devout Christians, heretics, fanatics. The Byzantine Age, the Islamic conversion, warring Bedouins, Sarmatians, Scythians, many groups of Turks, nomads from Central Asia. They brought new kinds of weapons and new kinds of armor, new kinds of war. They all loved Syria. Everyone loves Syria. They say so in prayers and poems, in songs tossed to the wind, in swords forged and castles raised and horses scuffing the dust off the desert floor. They still come. Syria is the prize and everyone wants a piece of it. What is so valuable in these river valleys, these orchards, these rocky hills, the volcanoes, oases, and the desert encroaching on the horizon? Something more valuable than oil, which is lacking, and more highly appraised than the merchandise that lumbered by camel train from China to the Mediterranean. More of a Paradise than cults and converts could promise, something richer than the waters of the Orontes or the Barada or the Euphrates, something priceless and intangible. A crossroads! Syria is the junction, the meeting point, the encounter, the confrontation, more than the Crusades which accomplished so little, more than the Mongol rampage or the Mamluke defense. More than metals or silk or spices or grain. More than carpets and honey and timber and salt. This is the strategic meeting point of East and West, the ground that saw the birth of the three great monotheistic, and rival, religions, the earth that soaked up so much blood as each spread The Truth and each alone claimed the ear and the voice and the blessing of God. And God's prophets and apostles and angels. God by any name, by every name, God of darkness, God of light. Syria was the magic, their validation. Syria made them legitimate. They spread like wildfire across Greater Syria, a land whose elastic borders, encompassing today Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, parts of Anatolia, parts of Mesopotamia, a much later Israel, adapted to the reigning powers: Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Achaemenids, Hellenists, Republican Romans, Imperial Romans, Eastern Romans, the first Muslim

dynasty--which settled in Damascus, the second Muslim dynasty settled in Baghdad, the Seljuks, the Ottomans, the relentless British, the abusive French, Al-Assad. Faisal wanted it; Gertrude Bell created Iraq instead, and made him an unwilling king. Lawrence wanted it; they lied to him, he got fed up and went home and after surviving the brutal Revolt in the Desert became inconvenient: he knew too much. He died in a presumed accident on a country road in Dorset, riding his Brough Superior SS100 motorcycle. Jane Digby lived in Damascus and married a Bedouin monarch. She survived uprising and massacre and spent summers with the tribes in the Palmyra desert. Richard Francis Burton lived in Damascus, after Isabel connived a consulate from the Foreign Ministry. Agatha Christie researched stories in Syria, William Dalrymple perused early Christian monasteries, archaeological teams dug through the past, epigraphers deciphered clay tablets, Lawrence visited the tomb of Saladin before he did anything else. There is sacred ground everywhere, whatever your persuasions. A shrine, a hermit's cave, a sanctuary, an arbitrary monument, a sect--one of dozens, most of them declared heretic, no matter what the faith--devotion of someone, desecration of another, perhaps a consecration, more likely a genocide, at the very least a judgment. How can Syria be so desirable if everyone hates everyone else? The Nestorians, the Manichaeans, the Shi'ite, the Sunni, San Simeon and the Sufis, what does it matter? Obsession, madness, genuflection, extermination. There were the Elchasiates, a group of Gnostics who observed the ancient Jewish Mosaic laws yet were opposed to the innovations of the New Testament, including the copious correspondence of St. Paul. There was Marcionism, that is, an early Christian dualist belief system originated in the teachings of Marcion of Sinope at Rome around the year 144 A.D., who built some of the oldest and the earliest churches, often raised over prior sun temples, that according to William Dalrymple, "sang the praises of Cain, the Sodomites, Nebuchadnezzar and especially the serpent of the Garden of Eden". What would Freud have said? There were the Messalians, their bitter enemies, ascetics who practiced voluntary and compulsive poverty, celibacy and fasting. Defined by church authorities as a heresy, they originated in Mesopotamia about the year 360 A.D. The Messalians denied the grace of the Sacraments, refused baptism and declared that spiritual power could only be obtained through constant prayer, which could, in theory, permit possession by the Holy Spirit. "They refused to respect the cross [an arbitrary emblem proclaimed as the symbol of Christianity at the First Council of Nicaea] or the Virgin Mary," says Dalrymple, "while they resorted to the exorcism of demons which they insisted were lurking everywhere, with a power easily transmitted through nasal mucous or scattered saliva." There were the Carpocratians, named for Carpocrates

of Alexandria, the founder of an early Gnostic sect from the first half of the second century, who disclaimed the distinction between good and evil. Their asseveration: “We are all a blend of good people who give happiness, bad people who provide experience, worst people who define a lesson to be learned and best people who enrich us with memories. We are all that and more. And such is Syria, all that and more, as we shall see in the chapters to follow, a kaleidoscope, forever changing, always disputed, never submitting. One of the oldest continuously inhabited sites on earth, Syria is mutating and is today brand new.

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