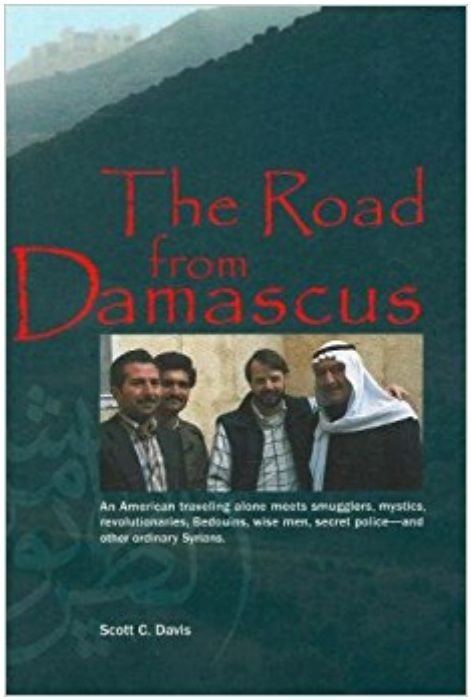
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The Road From Damascus: A Journey Through Syria (Bridge Between The Cultures Series)



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Synopsis

The Road from Damascus provides a street-level view of a so-called terrorist nation a view that gives the lie to accepted wisdom in the United States. Syrians, the author discovers, are intelligent, gracious, fair-minded, and utterly in love with American culture even as they decry what they see as the excesses of US foreign policy. The Road from Damascus introduces some of the finest Syrian artists and writers (Fateh Moudarres, Walid Ikhlassy, Zouhair Dabbagh, Youssef Abdelke, and Mamoun Sakkal) who are creating a vibrant modern culture a next step that surpasses the Islamic radicalism of 9-11 and builds a bridge between East and West. It was a rough few years in the Middle East: suicide attacks, hostage-taking, hijackings. In 1985 the terror spread to Europe, and Americans were among the victims. The following year the United States responded by attacking Libya. Commentators said that Syria was next.In Seattle, Scott C. Davis was curious. Did Middle Eastern people hate us? How true were media stereotypes which condemned Muslims, Arabs, and Syrians? Davis flew to Damascus. Two hours after arriving, he took a hotel room with a Muslim fundamentalist and found himself using his mountaineer s compass to answer technical questions: Exactly how many degrees to Mecca? Two weeks later in the shadow of a great Crusader castle, Davis and a local teenager ran from the mukhabarat and took shelter in a stone house on the cliff side. After dark they ate a meal with sisters and friends. Then the teenager played disco on a Korean boom box, and Davis gave bump dance lessons to six Muslims including two women. While the dancers shook, the cows in the room below shuffled and moaned. A few weeks later in a dry town at the edge of the Euphrates, Davis was invited to play chess by a Kurdish soldier on leave. The night was cold, and the soldier pulled a sheepskin cape over his shoulders for warmth. As the game progressed, the soldier taunted the 241 US Marines killed in Beirut four years earlier. At checkmate Davis learned that the taunts concealed respect, sorrow, and an inescapable comradeship.On his first night in Syria, traveling on a rickety transit bus into Damascus, Davis had been overcome with apprehension. Weeks later, returning to Damascus from hard travel on the eastern steppe, Davis welcomed this city as a safe moorage, a quiet resting place, an enduring home.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In a historical moment when the Western world's antennae are zeroed in on all things Middle Eastern, books about that part of the world, such as Scott C. Davis's The Road from Damascus: A Journey through Syria, take on heightened significance. In 1987, five years after the Hama massacre, and with Syria seemingly on the brink of war with Israel, a na‹ve Davis made his first visit. Fourteen years later he returned to find the country radically different: less militarized, less uneasy, less frightening. Refreshingly candid about his pre-1987 ignorance about the Arab world and about his sometimes overblown but very real fears, Davis chronicles his meetings with Christian, Muslim and Jewish members of all stations of Syrian society, painting a cultural portrait that is vivid, moving and wise in its humble, wide-eyed approach. Photos and maps. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Over a decade ago, Davis, a sometimes carpenter/writer (The World of Patience Gromes), decided to leave family, friends, and job behind in Seattle and travel to Syria for a few months. Concerned friends warned him not to go as he was not an experienced traveler and knew only a few words of Arabic and no French. But he went anyway, first in 1987 and then again in 2001. He visited Roman ruins and Islamic and Christian sites and met artists, intellectuals, smugglers, and mystics, as well as many ordinary Syrians, experiencing their openness and hospitality. At the end of his first visit, Davis met with the patriarch of Antioch, who reminded him that according to the Bible, St. Paul experienced his conversion via a vision of God on the road to Damascus. But, as Davis learned during his second visit to Syria, it is not the vision of God that a seeker receives on the road to Damascus that is important but rather how the seeker puts it into practice in life (i.e., how he or she walks the road from Damascus). While the premise of this travelog is interesting (a novice in Syria), Davis's writing is sometimes plodding, and the text falters. Overall, however, this is a worthwhile

addition to most libraries. Lee Arnold, Historical Soc. of Pennsylvania, PhiladelphiaCopyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Davis' travelogue of his two visits to Syria would have been much more appropriate as an amateur travel blog than a +200 page book. Davis tends to sensationalize the stories of his first visit to Syria in order to create suspense and excitement. Most of his "captivating" encounters stem from his inherent and unfounded suspicions of the Syrian police and the fact he does not know a lick of Arabic. Perhaps this review is overly critical, but, in my opinion the genre of privileged Westerners heading off to some "intimidating" and "unknown" foreign land for a few months and then writing about their experiences has been overdone.

Just wasted my time and money on this one. Nothing really to add.

It is an interesting read, but much historical information is given without references. Literature citations would be a vast improvement. Also, it was a little hard to believe that the author had so many difficulties with police, secret police, highway bandits and so on. In a way I felt that he embellished the circumstances in order to provide an exciting read. A lot of the book is about him getting from place to place so he could write a book, which I thought was a bit odd. A follow-up trip some day would be interesting because I know a lot has changed in Syria since Mr. Davis's travels there, but this would not be a good time.

Scott Davis' wonderful The Road from Damascus is a treat.I have found it difficult to put a face on this area of the world, to actually get a sense of how citizens of the Middle East live, work and think. Davis gives the reader a ground-floor vantage. Introducing the reader to the Syrians, young and old, male and female, who sat next to him on rickety busses. Met with him at monastaries. And introduced him to their families, their art, their culture. The Syrian secret police are never very far from the author and rarely out of his thoughts. Which adds to tension that drives this journey through Syria and kept me turning pages.Not a big fan of "travel" books, I found this one to be seasoned with the author's integrity, humor and affection for the Syrian people. Which made it most enjoyable.

In 1987, the author boarded a flight to Damascus to spend three months pursuing a dream as a travel writer. No hotels-and-sightseeing dilettante, he kept extensive notes as he traveled the streets and visited homes and offices in a country that in that year was far more security-conscious than the

one he found when he returned in early 2001. He writes candidly, sometimes quoting at too much length, but quickly shows himself to be good company for a reader. His intrepid honesty and sincere desire to illuminate grassroots realities of a nation too often branded with stereotypes are admirable. DD

"Why would a Stanford graduate turned mountain climber/carpenter drop everything and, on a shoestring-budget, wander through the deserts of Syria? An attraction to adventure -- a quest. Davis takes the reader along as he visits the homes of Syrians, converses about spirituality, and visits sacred locations, all under the insidious scrutiny of the local police. Davis’s narrative captures the ambiguities, fear, and exhilaration instilled by unfamiliar situations in remote places, while keeping a lighthearted perspective now that the trial is behind him."

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This book proves why a person needs to check out local bookstores when traveling - small presses often do not have the distribution network that good writers deserves. I live near Ft. Worth but found this book at the Pike Street Market in Seattle. I started reading it on the airplane going home and found it hard to put down. The paperback version is so attractively packaged that I did not realize when I purchased it that it was written and published locally in Seattle. Everything the other reviewers have said about the book is true. It is a very worthwhile and entertaining read. There is fuel for plenty of great arguments about "what it all means." Buy it!

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