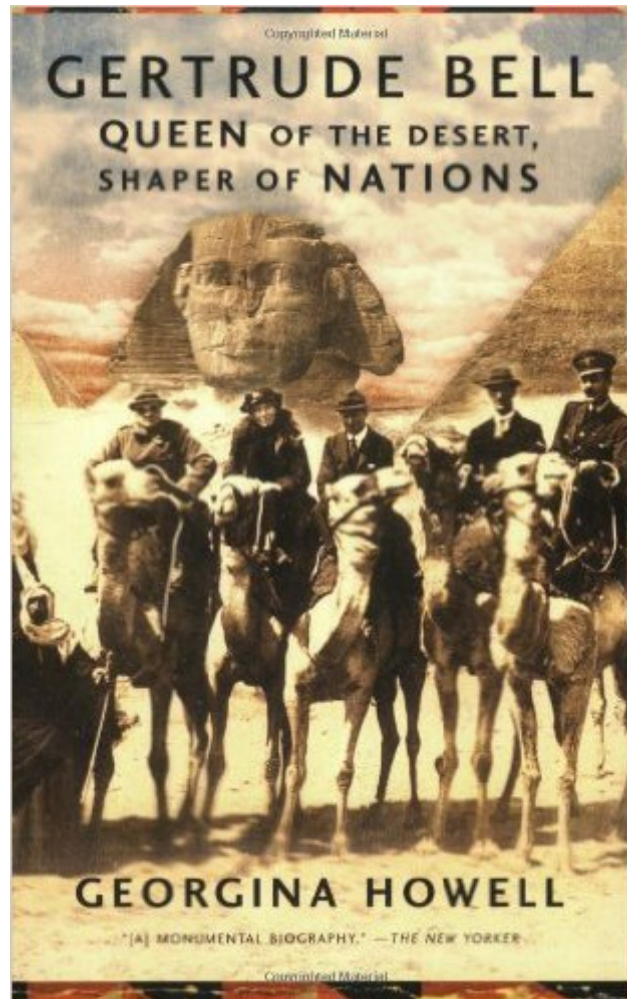


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Gertrude Bell: Queen Of The Desert, Shaper Of Nations



Synopsis

A marvelous tale of an adventurous life of great historical import. She has been called the female Lawrence of Arabia, which, while not inaccurate, fails to give Gertrude Bell her due. She was at one time the most powerful woman in the British Empire: a nation builder, the driving force behind the creation of modern-day Iraq. Born in 1868 into a world of privilege, Bell turned her back on Victorian society, choosing to read history at Oxford and going on to become an archaeologist, spy, Arabist, linguist, author (of *Persian Pictures*, *The Desert and the Sown*, and many other collections), poet, photographer, and legendary mountaineer (she took off her skirt and climbed the Alps in her underclothes). She traveled the globe several times, but her passion was the desert, where she traveled with only her guns and her servants. Her vast knowledge of the region made her indispensable to the Cairo Intelligence Office of the British government during World War I. She advised the Viceroy of India; then, as an army major, she traveled to the front lines in Mesopotamia. There, she supported the creation of an autonomous Arab nation for Iraq, promoting and manipulating the election of King Faisal to the throne and helping to draw the borders of the fledgling state. Gertrude Bell, vividly told and impeccably researched by Georgina Howell, is a richly compelling portrait of a woman who transcended the restrictions of her class and times, and in so doing, created a remarkable and enduring legacy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Current events in star crossed Iraq have brought out a renewed interest in Gertrude Bell (GLB).

Much of it seems political, concerned with pointing fingers at "causes" for the current situation as arising out of the World War One aftermath. As is typical of today's shallow, axe-grinding treatment of history, most of what I see being described as Miss Bell's role at that time is overly generalized, if not downright misleading. Many absorbing biographies on GLB have been published. This one, esp. in the "Government By Gertrude" chapter," does a very nice job of showing the devil in the details of how King Faisal, his small staff, and English advisors pulled off something (i.e., guiding Iraq from a leadership mish mash to becoming an independent state) that moderns are still in a quandry as to how it may be done ... again. Keeping the cradle of civilization peaceful and prosperous, in spite of pressures from war lords and religious gangsters fighting over hegemony, and other nations wanting to plunder its resources, may always be a problem, and that is visible in this presentation as you see financial depression and ill health cutting drastically short the time Faisal, and Gertrude (herself the last of the British advisors to care that the Iraqi's got a fair deal out of the breakup of the Ottoman Empire) have to stabilize the milieu resulting from the 1919 WW I Peace Treaty settlements. Also, a vivid description of GLB's climbing adventures is given in this book so that what seems unbelievable for its time becomes undeniably substantiated. In spite of there being great volumes of data available as source material for Gertrude Bell stories, there is still much that has not been explicated, and much that will always remain mysterious from the time when she was a "spy" associated with the Arab Bureau.

Georgina Howell brings to life Gertrude Bell, a woman whose accomplishments deserve to be better known than they have been. Born into the sixth-richest family in Britain in 1868, Bell got an education equal to that of a man. Young Bell was a "social hand grenade" due to her extraordinary self-confidence and intellectual brilliance. Bell did not get along well with the less developed personalities and intellects around her. Despite her efforts to get married and have a family of her own, Bell never managed to find true happiness. As Howell clearly demonstrates through her book, Bell never fully recovered from the premature death of Henry Cadogan, with whom she fell in love in 1892. Bell fluctuated all her life between looking for personal fulfillment and devoting herself to the well-being of the community for no reward. Despite these repeated setbacks in her private life, Bell would emerge as one of the most important architects of the modern Middle East. Bell first discovered the region when she traveled to Persia (modern Iran) in 1892. Bell's obsession with archeology became the driver behind her desert expeditions before WWI. Bell published different books about her archeological findings and learned to speak Arabic on top of five other languages during that period. The knowledge that Bell got about the Middle East and its people proved

invaluable when Britain fought the Turks in the region during the Great War. The same knowledge played a decisive roll in leading the Arabs to nationhood in the aftermath of WWI. Unsurprisingly, Bell has been compared to T.E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, who launched the Arab Revolt.

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