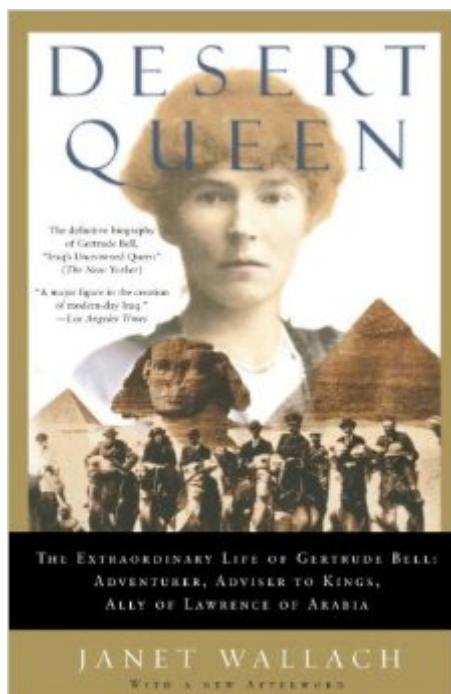


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Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life Of Gertrude Bell: Adventurer, Adviser To Kings, Ally Of Lawrence Of Arabia



Synopsis

Turning away from the privileged world of the "eminent Victorians," Gertrude Bell (1868â "1926) explored, mapped, and excavated the world of the Arabs. Recruited by British intelligence during World War I, she played a crucial role in obtaining the loyalty of Arab leaders, and her connections and information provided the brains to match T. E. Lawrence's brawn. After the war, she played a major role in creating the modern Middle East and was, at the time, considered the most powerful woman in the British Empire.Â In this masterful biography, Janet Wallach shows us the woman behind these achievementsâ "a woman whose passion and defiant independence were at odds with the confined and custom-bound England she left behind. Too long eclipsed by Lawrence, Gertrude Bell emerges at last in her own right as a vital player on the stage of modern history, and as a woman whose life was both a heartbreakingly tragic story and a grand adventure.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gertrude Bell was, by all accounts, a woman who relished a challenge. She broke through the barriers of her era and environment, defying social norms and codes in order to achieve what even today is a remarkable list of accomplishments. It is therefore disheartening that a woman who overcame considerable barriers in life should be defeated posthumously by the obstacle of Ms Wallach's truly awful prose style. The opening pages of "Desert Queen" seem to be written as a parody of early twentieth century pulp romantic fiction. As the reader struggles bravely on through the overuse of saccharine adjectives, the sickening realisation comes that this is not a parody - this

is what Ms Wallach thinks appropriate for a biography of a woman of Gertrude Bell's character. The opening lines of the chapter on Baghdad cause the reader to recoil in horror. There is an earlier phrase about conversations bouncing around silk lined drawing rooms that leaves one gasping in disbelief. The prose is quite bad enough to be going on with, but in addition there is more than a suspicion that historical accuracy has been dispensed with. The flowery descriptions of meetings and events leave the reader asking "how do we know that?" Was Gertrude Bell really meeting a local sheik with "eyes flashing like jewels" - and if from where do we get this fascinating insight? If from Gertrude Bell's own diary or letters, it would offer a fascinating glimpse into her self-perception and character. Ms Wallach does not want to burden the reader with sources or footnotes, and one is left with the distinct impression that this sort of comment is little more than an insight into Ms Wallach's own imagination.

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