

# **“They Made Maps and Kings”**

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## **Introduction**

A famous photograph was taken in 1921 on the last day of a conference in Cairo that re-fashioned the map of the post-World War I Middle East. It frames six figures astride camels in front of the great Sphinx. On the far left is Sir Winston Churchill, who had ingloriously fallen off his camel just before the picture was taken. Next to him was a woman wearing a feathered hat, and next to her was T.E. Lawrence, later to become known as Lawrence of Arabia. But who was that woman, and why was she in the photo?

“That woman” was Gertrude Bell. She and Lawrence were the most influential figures at the Cairo conference and the decisions they made there shaped modern-day Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Gertrude Bell has been lionized as the “Queen of the Desert,” “Iraq’s Uncrowned Queen” and the “Female Lawrence of Arabia.” Nineteen years older than Lawrence, she would have found that latter sobriquet a bit insulting, as she was more celebrated in her time than Lawrence, but it does invite a comparison of the hero and the heroine, who were so different from each other but who had many shared passions and experiences and were great friends.

What did they have in common, apart from being English and Oxford-educated? They shared a passion for archaeology and cartography, and she was a pioneer photographer. Their maps and knowledge—and her photos--of the Middle East terrain were crucial to World War I British intelligence. They each authored books that were widely read. They were fearless explorers who displayed astonishing physical and psychological endurance. Each repeatedly risked life and sanity in pursuit of

adventure or a cause. They both loved the desert and its Arab inhabitants. They both fomented and, in Lawrence's case, led the Arab revolt against Turkish rule during the Great War. Together, they put in place a post-war monarchy in Iraq that was to last 37 years. Neither ever married. Both died tragically. Each was the subject of a film. David Lean's 1962 epic "Lawrence of Arabia" made Peter O'Toole's acting career. On the other hand, Werner Herzog's 2016 clunker "Queen of the Desert" did nothing for Nicole Kidman's career.

In what ways did they differ, apart from gender? At five foot 5 ½ inches, Gertrude Bell was two inches taller than Lawrence. She was born into a family that was wealthy but not aristocratic. He was the illegitimate son of an aristocrat who was practically destitute. She was forthright, gracious, respectful of authority and always fashionably attired—even in the desert. He was devious, insolent, a renegade and slovenly and rather famously went Arab native in his dress. She worshiped the British Empire. He was disdainful of its military hierarchy. She was a diplomat and a spy. He was a warrior.

Here are their stories.

### **Part 1. Miss Bell's Early Adventures**

Gertrude Bell was born in 1868 in Yorkshire, England. Her father was the son a steel magnate who was one of the wealthiest men in Great Britain. During childhood, Gertrude was strong-willed, a brilliant student, and an expert horsewoman. At age 18, Gertrude enrolled at a women's college at Oxford University, where she completed finals in two years rather than the usual three and became the first woman to achieve a First in Modern History at Oxford.

Two years later, Miss Bell went to Bucharest to visit her aunt, whose husband was in the British Foreign Service. There, she met counts, princes and ambassadors and acquired social skills that she would later put to good use to charm and cajole anyone she wanted to persuade.

In 1892, that same aunt invited her to Teheran. There she met Henry Cadogan, then 33 to her age 24. Together, they read the Sufi poet, Hafiz, and explored the Persian countryside. Henry proposed and she accepted, but her father ordered her home. He had heard that Henry was a gambler and forbade the marriage. Gertrude was broken-hearted. Cadogan remained in Persia and died a year later of pneumonia. Back in London, Gertrude authored an English translation of Hafiz's poems. Undoubtedly a tribute to her deceased lover, it received wide acclaim.

To cope with her grief, she travelled. In 1897, at age 29 Gertrude set off on the first of several round-the-world trips.

More significantly, from 1899 to 1904 she threw herself into mountaineering. In the larger context, it was a brief obsession but one that earned her a reputation as one of the most prominent climbers—man or woman—in the Swiss and French Alps. Back then, there were no clothes for women mountaineers. In her early ascents, Gertrude would remove her skirt at the point where she and her guides roped up and continue in her underclothes. She conquered Mount Blanc, the Engelhorn, the Matterhorn and seven virgin peaks, including one later christened Gertrudspitze, or Gertrude's Peak. During her most famous expedition—a face that had never been climbed—she and her guides encountered heavy snow, fog and wind. Forced to abandon the summit a few hundred feet short, she somehow managed to return to the base village after surviving 57 harrowing hours on the mountain that included spinning over an abyss while suspended at the end of rope, a Hail Mary jump over a crevasse, a torn pectoral muscle and frostbite.

She was now ready for the desert.

## **Part 2. Mr. Lawrence's Early Adventures**

Thomas Edward Lawrence was born in 1888. His father, originally named Thomas Chapman, had been a prominent member of the Irish-Anglo landed aristocracy. He settled in Ireland and married a woman from another wealthy family, who bore him four daughters. The trouble began when Thomas started an affair with his daughters' Scottish governess, 24-year old Sarah Junner. By the time Chapman's wife learned of the affair, Sarah had already had one child with Thomas and another was on the way. Instead of discreetly hustling Sarah back to Scotland with an allowance for her and her children, Thomas chose to stay with Sarah, renounce his family fortune and leave Ireland in disgrace for a small village in Wales. There, he assumed an alias name, Lawrence, and their second son was born—whom they named Thomas Edward Lawrence—later simply called T. E. Lawrence.

The Lawrence family moved to Oxford when T.E. was eight. Growing up, T.E. was a bright but quiet student and an avid reader. He loved cycling and constantly tested his endurance. In 1907, Lawrence entered Oxford University, where he studied military history and the Middle Ages. The following year, he undertook a 2,400 mile summer bicycle trek through France.

He too was now ready for the desert.

## **Part 3. Miss Bell Goes To the Desert**

The term Middle East was coined in 1902. The modern countries of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Iraq were at that time undifferentiated areas of the Ottoman Empire. Over several hundred years, the Turks had taken over administration of the cities and towns of the Middle East and made Turkish the language of government and education. However, Ottoman power did not extend to the desert wildernesses, where Bedouin sheiks operated as they pleased.

Gertrude first took to the desert in 1900—at age 31. She had accepted an invitation to visit Jerusalem, where she spent most of her time riding and learning Arabic. She already spoke French, Italian, German, Persian and Turkish. She explored the surrounding hills, valleys and ruins, taking her camera everywhere. But this was not enough for this wealthy woman who had conquered the Matterhorn. She decided to make a caravan journey into the Moab Hills along the banks of the Dead Sea. In addition to heat, sun, lack of water and difficult terrain, she would risk encounters with bandits and nomads. And yet her crew would be just one cook and two mule drivers who spoke only Arabic and a Turkish soldier she would pick up along the way as a guide and escort. The journey would be too long for riding side-saddle, so she invented a divided skirt that allowed her to ride astride on a “man’s” saddle.

For Gertrude, the journey was transformative. She loved everything—the ever-changing and unforgiving terrain, the Bedouin denizens, the timeless ruins. She also learned the first rule of the desert—that upon encampment one must immediately pay a courtesy visit to the local sheik in his tent. Failure to observe this rule almost ended in tragedy. Several Arabs on horse popped up out of nowhere to surround and threaten to shoot her. They backed off only when her trailing Turkish soldier arrived. In all, she covered 135 miles in 18 days.

Later that year, Miss Bell organized a second trip. By now, she was fluent enough in Arabic to discuss desert politics with the sheiks she met along the way. She took her turns with the bubble-pipe they passed around, smoking tobacco, marijuana and opium. She learned the hard way that one never leaves a sheik’s tent without offering a gift. Her first gaffe cost her an expensive pistol, which was far more extravagant than necessary.

From 1905 to 1913, Gertrude undertook five extraordinary expeditions that made her first two treks seem like garden strolls. As before, she traveled alone except for her crews. But these trips each

lasted four to six months. They were made possible by a sale of the family steel business that freed up capital to fund Gertrude's adventures. They took her through the most desolate regions of every country we now consider part of the Middle East. In over 600 days, she covered more than 10,000 miles. On her trips in 1911 and 1913, she rode camels instead of horses. These trips resulted in five books; accurate maps of previously uncharted territory; and panoramic photos that still have considerable historical value.

Gertrude knew the sheiks would judge her status by her possessions and gifts. And so from 1909 on, her mode of travel was completely over-the-top. She took with her evening dresses, fur coats, feathered hats, parasols, lace petticoats, Wedgwood china, crystal stemware and silver candlesticks. And her entourages had grown to dozens of guides, mule drivers, cooks and guards and almost as many camels. The Bedouins called this remarkable European woman who travelled majestically and alone the "Queen of the Desert."

It wasn't only the Bedouins she charmed. By 1913, she had become a celebrity in the region. When Miss Bell travelled to cities and towns, crowds followed her wherever she went. She would unfailingly call on the most important local Turkish and British officials. Dinner invitations, receptions and private audiences would follow. When she talked, the room would go silent. She was an important person in a world of men. She could exercise influence by delivering first-hand knowledge and opinions about Middle East political trends, oil supplies, Bedouin tribal differences, proposed rail routes, troop movements and virtually anything else of importance to the powerful men she came to know. Was she a British spy? If a spy is one who discreetly provides her country with behind-the-lines intelligence that it could not otherwise obtain, then a spy she was. And the information she possessed would become especially valuable in the Great War.

Central to the Gertrude Bell legend in biography and film was her 1913 expedition to the fortress city of Hayyil in the barren center of Arabia. Her stated purpose was to provide intelligence to the British Foreign Office. Arabia was then controlled by two families—the Rashids, who were supported by the Turks, and the Sauds, who were supported by the British. The families hated and fought each other. And yet, incredibly, Miss Bell planned to visit both of them, starting with the Rashids in their stronghold of Hayyil. It turned out to be her longest and most difficult trip—compounded by frigid cold and ice during the winter nights followed by the usual scorching daytime sun and the presence of red insects in the drinking water. She averted human danger by working her unique magic with the sheiks along the way. Her fluency in all Arabic dialects and ability to recite entire Sufi poems entranced her hosts and bought their protection. When her caravan finally arrived in Hayyil after three months, she asked to see the Amir, or head, of the Rashid family. She was informed that the Amir had been gone for two months on a raid, and that she would have to stay until he returned. And so she remained in Hayyil under house arrest for a nerve-wracking eleven days. The Amir did not return, but finally she was allowed to leave, although she never learned why. Shaken by the experience, Gertrude abandoned her plan to visit the rival Saud family. When Amir Rashid eventually returned to Hayyil, he had his deputy killed for letting Miss Bell go.

Why had Gertrude Bell undertaken such a recklessly dangerous journey? At least one biographer suggests that she didn't much care what happened to her as she sought to escape the pain of a love affair that was ending badly. After Henry Cadogan, Gertrude had never found another man who measured up to her standards. Finally, in her early 40's, Gertrude fell in love with a married man who she regarded as her true match. Dick Doughty-Wylie was a Boer War hero who had met Gertrude when posted as a British military consul in Turkey. They started a long-distance relationship that was carried on through admiring and then passionate correspondence and punctuated by short assignations in London and Yorkshire. Despite spending several nights together, their affair was never consummated

due to her frigidity, for which she expressed extreme remorse in a stream of letters. Dick was likewise in agony. He wanted Gertrude but knew that his mentally fragile spouse could not survive a divorce. The affair was doomed when Dick accepted a new post in Albania in 1913. Gertrude left on her quasi-suicidal trip to Hayyil just six weeks later. When war broke out, Dick volunteered for the front line and was killed at Gallipoli in April 1915. It was reported that his battlefield heroics indicated indifference to whether he lived or died. Gertrude never got over it.

#### **Part 4. Miss Bell and Mr. Lawrence Meet in the Desert**

In the summer of 1909, T.E. Lawrence undertook a comprehensive survey of the Crusader castles in the Syrian desert-- alone and on foot. Upon his return to Oxford, his thesis on his findings won first honors in History.

In 1911, Lawrence finagled a spot on an archaeological excavation for the British Museum at the ruins of Carchemish in northern Syria. His duties quickly evolved into supervising some 200 local workmen. By this time, Lawrence was fluent in Arabic and spent time talking to the men and visiting their homes. To the Arabs, he had a stamina and austerity that made him seem more like them than a European. For his part, Lawrence grew to love and admire the noble Arab and despise the ruling Turks.

T.E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell met for the first time in April 1911 when she travelled to see the Carchemish dig. She was age 42 and he was 23. By this time, she was already famous as an author, archaeologist and explorer. After touring the site, Miss Bell at first criticized the excavation methods used by Lawrence's team as "prehistoric." However, she ultimately found Lawrence's defense of the techniques persuasive. They made peace at dinner and parted as mutual admirers. Strangely, Gertrude was jeered on her departure by the villagers who mistakenly assumed she had come to Carchemish to marry Lawrence. Lawrence mollified them by explaining she was too old and plain for him.

## **Part 5. Together in Wartime Cairo**

After Britain declared war in August 1914 and Turkey aligned itself with the Central Powers, Lawrence's mapping experiences in Syria got him dispatched to a new intelligence unit in Cairo-- known as the Arab Bureau. Cairo, the headquarters of the Colonial Middle East command, had been occupied by the British since 1882, when they had invaded Egypt and taken control of the Suez Canal.

As for Miss Bell, the War Office sent her to France to work in the Red Cross Office for the Wounded and Missing. But her encyclopedic knowledge and fresh insights about the Middle East were being wasted. She lamented that "anyone can trace the missing but only I can map Northern Arabia." It was not until November 1915 that she was summoned to Cairo as the first woman officer in the history of British military intelligence, with the title of Major Miss Bell.

By the time Gertrude Bell arrived in Cairo, Lawrence had become a constant irritant to the British military establishment. His flippant attitude, disregard for protocol and disheveled appearance drove them nuts, and he knew it. And yet he was tolerated because of his brilliance and his knowledge of the Middle East.

Lawrence was thrilled by Gertrude's placement in the Arab Bureau. Together, they worked on the so-called Arab question: Could an indigenous Arab revolt against the Turks succeed where the disastrous Allied assault on Gallipoli had failed? The key rested with the family of Amir Hussein, who was a tribal leader of a vast area in western Arabia. Hussein was a direct descendant of the prophet Muhammed and the religious leader of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. His ability to confer or deny blessings on actions taken by the Ottomans or any other Muslim leaders gave him tremendous power. Hussein wanted an Arab nation independent of Turkish or any other country's rule in exchange for his support in the Great War. Knowing that his allegiance was critical to the control of the Middle East, the British and the Turks both courted Hussein and his sons. Both sides promised them

independence, subject to certain conditions. The British condition was a call to revolt against the Turks. In the end, Hussein believed the British were offering a better deal and in June 1916 climbed to the tower of his Mecca palace and fired a musket toward the Turkish fort as a signal for Arabs to revolt.

Lawrence and Bell both fervently supported Arab self-determination, as did the others in the Arab Bureau who called themselves “The Intrusives.” They both lobbied for British support of the Arab rebellion even though they both knew that Britain had no intention of making good on its promise of post-war Arab independence. Lawrence was never comfortable with the British deception, which he saw as a betrayal that haunted him throughout his life. Gertrude, on the other hand, could live with the insincerity of the British intentions because she was certain that when the time came, she would be able to persuade her government to keep its promise. She would find a way to establish an Arab state supported by benevolent British administration.

#### **Part 6. Miss Bell Organizes a Country**

When the British captured Baghdad in March 1917, Gertrude was transferred to that ancient city, which remained her home for the rest of her life. Roughly half of the area that the Arabs called Iraq was now under British control and the rest would come soon. The challenge was to institute functioning governmental institutions and regulations to fill the vacuum of power when the Turks left after centuries of rule. Iraq’s Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Druze and Bedouins all had very different ideas about what freedom from the Turks should look like. How could the occupying British persuade them of the benefits of British administration as a prelude to promised independence? That task fell largely to Gertrude Bell.

One by one, the leaders of these disparate groups came to Baghdad, where Gertrude welcomed them all. Only she would recognize and be recognized by so many of them, could identify their status and interests and could interview them in their own language or dialect. They lined up outside her

office. All who came were honored to meet with the Queen of the Desert—except one. Ibn Saud, the future founder of Saudi Arabia, considered meeting on equal footing with this unveiled European woman an insult to his manly dignity.

Gertrude was doing the most important work of her life. She identified the most capable administrators that could be found and explained their jobs to them. Under her guidance, public life in Iraq began to be restructured. At Gertrude's insistence, Arabic replaced Turkish as the language for legal proceedings and all trials had to be held within a day's camel ride of defendants' and witnesses' homes.

Her presence was commanding. According to an observer at a British function attended by some 50 Arab notables, "At last the door opened and Gertrude came in. She was beautifully dressed, as always, and looked very queenly. Everyone rose, and then she walked around the room, shaking hands with each Arab in turn and then saying a few appropriate words to each. Not only did she know each of them by name—but she knew what to say to each."

During this period, Gertrude wrote her magnum opus, "A Review of the Civil Administration in Mesopotamia." This ponderously titled work eventually became the blueprint for government in Iraq. When her paper was ultimately presented to the English Parliament, Gertrude received a standing ovation (in absentia).

### **Part 7. Mr. Lawrence Becomes a Hero.**

If the most important work of Gertrude Bell's life was conducted in offices, salons and streets in Iraq, T.E. Lawrence found his glory in Arabian and Syrian battlefields.

As 1916 progressed, fighting between the Turks and Arabs had reached a stalemate and the British were losing confidence in their plan to intervene with a conventional army. Lawrence's solution

was guerrilla warfare waged by small groups of Arab fighters backed by British expertise and explosives. Lawrence persuaded his superiors that in order to provide that backing, the British needed reliable on-the-ground information, and that he, with his unique knowledge of the people and their lands, was just the man to gather it. And so in December 1916 he was sent to meet Amir Hussein's third son, Faisal, who had borne most of the fighting responsibilities. They famously hit it off. Lawrence took stock of the loyalty and admiration Faisal inspired in his men and quickly decided that he alone could unite Arabs of all sects and tribes in the rebellion against Turkish rule. For his part, Faisal recognized that Lawrence was different from other Englishmen and could be trusted as an Arab brother. At Lawrence's urging, Faisal obtained permission for Lawrence to be assigned indefinitely to the Arab fighting force, from which he would report to Cairo only if and when he pleased.

How did Lawrence, who was considered so insolent by the British military establishment, manage to pull this off? Actually, his annoying personality probably helped. They were happy to be rid of him. His talent for bureaucratic infighting was another factor. In perhaps a precursor to modern-day Twitter mischief, he telegraphed whomever and whatever he pleased and conveniently failed to receive undesired orders contained in allegedly "garbled transmissions."

In Faisal's camp, Lawrence symbolically declared his independence from British high command by shedding his military uniform in favor of Arab dress. His first campaign with Faisal was to rendezvous with a British force en route to taking a Red Sea port town. Unfortunately, for all his charisma, Faisal was not an effective field officer. His army arrived two days late. Faisal was deeply embarrassed. In March 1917, Lawrence volunteered to lead the next attack himself—on a railroad station in Arabia. The result was 70 Turkish casualties to none for the Arabs.

And so it came to pass that Lawrence became the military leader of the Bedouin forces in Arabia and Syria. Over the next eighteen months, he led scores of raids against Turkish rail depots, bridges and

installations. Lawrence's vision was to conduct a "war of detachment," ceding larger garrison towns in favor of hit-and-runs against strategic targets in the countryside, cutting off supply lines wherever he went. Lawrence's guerrilla campaign succeeded spectacularly. An indicator of the havoc he wrought was the 79 railroad bridges he blew up.

Lawrence's desert trek to capture the Sinai port of Aqaba was one of the most audacious and celebrated military exploits of World War I. He took an army of 45 men hundreds of miles over central Arabia to attack Aqaba from the land rather than the sea. The surprised Turks never imagined that an assault would come from the desert interior. Earlier in the journey, Lawrence's men noticed a riderless camel in their midst. Lawrence re-traced his tracks alone in a blinding sand storm to find and retrieve the man who had lost the camel after he dismounted to relieve himself. In the famous scene from David Lean's movie, Lawrence's men cheered the daring rescue as a noble act. In reality, Lawrence's men berated him for risking his life for a worthless man who had violated the code of the desert by failing to secure his camel. Before taking Aqaba, Lawrence's outnumbered band destroyed a 500-man Turkish relief column.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail Lawrence's other experiences during this period, but a couple are worth noting. Lawrence was to plunge the detonator on a raid to destroy a train, but he didn't have enough cable to position himself more than 50 yards away. The explosion sent him flying, which was fortunate since part of the train's engine landed atop the detonator he had seconds before held between his knees. Later, when his best friend was seriously wounded and had to be left behind, Lawrence shot him in the head so he wouldn't be tortured by Turks in hot pursuit. That night, Lawrence ended an argument over who should inherit the dead man's camel by shooting the animal.

In September 1918, the Turks were driven out of Syria and Faisal's army, followed by British forces, entered Damascus to the cheers of its citizens. The British command asked Lawrence to set up a provisional government, which he did.

How did this lowly army Captain without a single day of military training accomplish so much? It's hard to say. His exhaustive study of military history certainly helped. And his zeal for the Arab cause, fearlessness, indifference to pain and discomfort and love of danger and adventure were also keys to his success, as was his willingness to kill, indeed massacre, Turkish soldiers.

### **Part 8. Disappointment in Paris and Redemption in Cairo**

The Armistice of November 1918 ended hostilities in the Middle East, which the Turks had fled. Eighteen months of territorial uncertainty followed as the European victors jockeyed at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference over how to split up the Ottoman Empire. Lawrence, Bell and Faisal went to the Conference in hopes of advancing Arab independence. There, Lawrence arranged for Miss Bell to meet Faisal. She was deeply impressed, and they bonded.

In Paris, Great Britain publicly maintained that its long-standing promise of Arab independence to Faisal's father, Hussein, should be honored. But France maneuvered to advance its territorial ambitions through a mandate in Syria that had been promised in a secret agreement with the English reached several years earlier.

As Faisal's counselor, Lawrence worked tirelessly to stop the French mandate, but got nowhere. In the end, the slicing up of the Ottoman Empire, cynically referred to as the "Great Loot," came to pass. France would have a mandate in Syria, and Britain would have one in Iraq. The duplicitous secret agreement had trumped the public promise.

In 1920, French troops occupied Damascus, but the French were unpopular there and Syria remained ungovernable for years.

Things went better in Iraq, thanks to Gertrude Bell. By now, she and Faisal were on close terms. The British mandate went into effect in Iraq, but unlike the French, the British set about instituting Arab self-government. A provisional council was to run Iraq until the first general election of an Arab Constituent Assembly. Gertrude was instrumental in selecting suitable candidates, all of whom she had befriended.

Winston Churchill was appointed Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1921 and recruited T.E. Lawrence as his advisor on Arabian affairs. Churchill called a 10-day conference in Cairo to make decisions about the Middle Eastern areas controlled by the British. Gertrude attended with her Baghdad colleagues. Since Gertrude last saw Lawrence in Paris, he had become world famous, thanks to Lowell Thomas who had written his biography and toured the world giving lectures about his hero. For the first time, Lawrence was more celebrated than Bell. They were still great friends, still the old "Intrusives." Together, Bell and Lawrence convinced Churchill that the British provisional government in Iraq had to be replaced by an Arab ruler and that Faisal was the man for the job. Faisal would be installed as King of Iraq, with his brother Abdullah similarly crowned in a new country to be named Trans-Jordan. In addition, Bell and Lawrence were asked to map the boundaries of the new nations to be carved out of the former Ottoman Empire. I can just imagine Lawrence saying to his collaborator in his typically insouciant style: "Gertie, let's draw up some maps and make a couple of Kings."

### **Part 9. Miss Bell Finishes Her Work.**

Gertrude's vision for Iraq was taking shape. As a Sunni ruler in a country with a Shiite majority, Faisal's legitimacy was his direct descent from the Prophet. Faisal came to power as Britain's choice, but had to be seen as being elected independently of Britain's wishes. Later in 1921, the provisional

government declared Faisal king. A nearly unanimous referendum confirmed Faisal as the choice of the people, and he was crowned in Baghdad. At a separate coronation-type ceremony among the Bedouins, Gertrude Bell was the only English person on the dais, where she stood next to Faisal. Faisal ruled until his death in 1933, a year after the British mandate ended and Iraq became an independent state.

Her political and diplomatic work done, Gertrude returned to her first love, archaeology. Faisal named her Director of Antiquities in Iraq. She wrote an antiquities law and in 1923 established the National Museum of Iraq, which housed the richest collection of objects representing Iraq's early history until it was looted following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

On July 12, 1926, just short of her 58<sup>th</sup> birthday, Gertrude Bell died from an overdose of sleeping pills. Historians agree that it was probably suicide. But there is no agreement on motive. Perhaps it was failing health and depression over the deaths of close relatives and friends. Perhaps it was a realization that there were no more mountains—literally or figuratively-- left to conquer. Perhaps it was an accident.

Faisal ordered a full military funeral. She was buried outside Baghdad. Enormous crowds from all tribes, religions and nationalities came to watch her funeral procession.

#### **Part 10. Mr. Lawrence's Flame Flickers Out.**

After Cairo, Lawrence returned to England where he joined the Royal Air Force as an ordinary private. He had become a bitter man who craved anonymity and avoided social interaction. He changed his name to John Ross. He was probably suffering from shell shock, or what we now call post-traumatic stress syndrome. He wrote "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom," which was published in 1926 along with a shorter mass market version that was a best seller. He donated all the royalties to charity.

On May 13, 1935, Lawrence died at age 46 from injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident in England as swerved to avoid two bicycling boys.

**Epilogue: Their Legacies.**

Let us first consider them as Literarians. Lawrence wrote just one book, “The Seven Pillars of Wisdom,” a long, candid and sometimes grisly wartime memoir. Turgid and often confusing, it is nevertheless a realistic and unromantic account of the horrors of war. An admiring critic said it is “more often praised than read.” I must confess that I couldn’t get through it.

By contrast, Gertrude was prolific. She published seven books and scores of articles and wrote volumes of unpublished private papers and letters. Most of her stuff is also hard to slog through, unless you happen to be a Middle Eastern scholar or traveler.

Lawrence’s place in history is clear. Without him, the Arab war against the Turks would never have succeeded and the British might have been unable to defeat the Turks. Lawrence was a legendary hero whose courage and daring deeds have been admired for almost a century. He was indeed Lawrence of Arabia.

The historians’ take on Gertrude Bell is that she, more than any other person, shaped modern Iraq. One can question whether that was entirely a good thing, but the consensus—probably true—is that her work made Iraq better governed, more peaceful and more prosperous than it had been for 500 years. At least for awhile. After her death, King Faisal said: “Gertrude Bell is a name written indelibly on Arab history—a name spoken with awe. . . . One might say she was the greatest woman of her time.” Gertrude Bell was a rock star in the most paternalistic region in the world. She was indeed the Uncrowned Queen of Iraq.

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