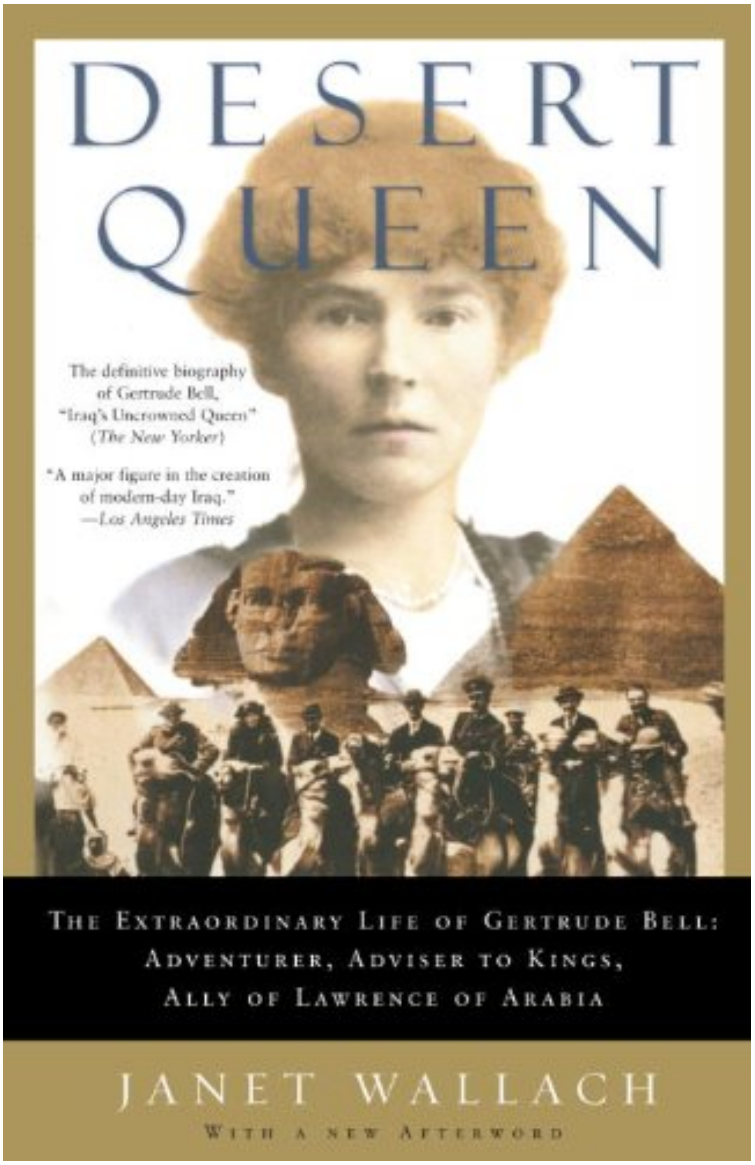
Desert Queen



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Par Janet Wallach : Desert Queen before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Desert Queen:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThis richly textured biography (Chicago Tribune) inspired the mesmerizing documentary, Letters from Baghdad, now in theaters.Here is the story of Gertrude Bell, who explored, mapped, and excavated the Arab world throughout the early twentieth century. 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. In this masterful biography, Janet Wallach shows us the woman behind these achievementsa 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 heartbreaking story and a grand adventure.ExtraitCHAPTER ONE Of Great and Honored Stock -- Great persons, like great empires, leave their mark on history. The greatest empire of all time, the one that stretched over a greater amount of ocean, covered a greater amount of land, contained a greater number of people than any before it, was the British Empire of Queen Victoria. Her superpower left its mark on continents and subcontinents, from Europe to Australia to India to America to Africa to Asia, from Adelaide to Wellington, Bombay to Rangoon, Ottawa to the Virgin Islands, Alexandria to Zanzibar, Aden to Singapore. The British navy ruled the seas, British coal fueled the ships and industries, British bankers financed the businesses, British merchants ran the trade, British food fed the stomachs and British factories clothed the bodies of one fourth of all human beings who lived and worked and played in every corner of the world. Nothing better exemplified Britain's place at the center of the universe than the very first world's fair, the Great Exhibition of 1851, held in London. Along with Queen Victoria (who visited it forty times), half a million people--entrepreneurs, industrialists, landed aristocrats, diplomats, professionals, tradesmen and workers----came on opening day to see the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations" at the new Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. Six million more people followed, most of them arriving by railway, to walk under the domed glass and along the carpeted hallways, to see goods from countries as nearby as France, Germany, Italy and Spain and from as far away as Russia, Persia, Turkey and China. They saw every imaginable product and some that were unimaginable: fabrics, raw hides, machine looms, jewelry, china, chocolates, coffee, tea, carpets, automatic revolvers, hydraulic presses, mechanical wood saws, wheat--grinding machines, gold quartz mills, high--pressure steam engines, a twenty--four--ton chunk of coal and a machine that sent messages by telegraph. The point of the exhibition, said Prince Albert, who had conceived it, was to show how far mankind had come and to give a direction for future development. No nation had come farther than Britain, the pioneer of the Industrial Revolution, "the workshop of the world." Its citizens had the highest per capita income and its workers contributed more than half of the fourteen thousand exhibitions at the Crystal Palace. In addition to the products of its colonies, the British booths displayed English cottons from Lancashire, sturdy woolens from Yorkshire, linens from Scotland, edged tools and fancy silver from Birmingham, glass and cutlery from Sheffield and huge machinery from Northumbria. Nowhere did Britain's workshops toil harder than in Northumbria. In this remote region of northeast England, gray clouds still hover like withering ghosts, reminders of the black smoke of the furnaces that once choked its air and filled its skies. Northumbria. Its very name rumbles with the grimness of murky towns, desolate moors and dark seas. From its plants and factories came ships and railroads and enough iron and steel to help Britain fill forty percent of the world's supply. From beneath its surface came vast amounts of salt, lead, alum and iron ore and enough coal to help Britain provide two thirds of the world's needs. To and from its coastline came and went massive steamships carrying goods and keeping Northumbrians in touch with every outpost of the Empire. If Northumbria was England's industrial country, Middlesbrough was its model town. Built out of bleak salt marshes, it began in 1801 with twenty--five people, but after railway lines were laid and ironworks started, it exploded into a booming town with a population of 7,431 in 1851, 19,416 in 1861 and more than 90,000 at the end of the nineteenth century. Its collieries that mined coal and converted it into coke (by 1840 Middlesbrough was mining one and a half million tons of coal annually), its blast factories that smelted iron ore into iron (by 1873 it was producing five and a half million tons of iron ore), its foundries that combined the silvery iron with the refined coke to manufacture steel (by 1879 it was producing over 85,000 tons of steel), its railroad lines, its factories, its potteries, its mills, its ships, its docks and its warehouses drew workers from all over Britain. Young men and women eager for jobs in the miserable pits or the hellish foundries came from the West Midlands, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the East Indies, even the United States, and stared in awe at the night sky lit up with the brilliant flames of the steel furnaces or watched in amazement as locomotives steamed out of town hauling railroad cars filled with coal, iron, steel and pottery for every major city in England. The people who came for jobs crammed into the sooty rows of brown brick houses and breathed in the smutty air, cheering their mayor when he told the Prince of Wales that Middlesbrough took pride in its smoke. "The smoke is an indication of plenty of work...an indication of prosperous times, an indication that all classes of workpeople are being employed....Therefore we are proud of our smoke." The men and women who prospered most--industrialists, merchants, barristers, physicians, and their wives--would sometimes celebrate a special birthday or an anniversary by traveling the thirty miles north to Newcastle. The big city on the River Tyne was the capital of northern England, a commercial

center, a bustling port, the place to go for an evening of theater, a day of shopping, a fine meal at a fancy inn. If Middlesbrough was a booming town without a past, Newcastle was an ancient city rich with history. Residents of Newcastle who yearned for a bit of fresh country air could ride out to Wallsend and examine remnants of the Emperor Hadrian's Wall, built to defend Roman soldiers against Celtic warriors; or they could explore the moors and coastline where Englishmen once battled Scotsmen from the north, Anglo--Saxons from Germany, Vikings from Denmark and Normans from France. Back in town, a nineteenth--century man could still climb the castle keep built by William the Conqueror's son in 1080 or wander through the Guildhall, where craftsmen once met to set the wages of young apprentices. Men who disagreed over land or debts no longer argued at the Moot Hall, but they still held meetings at the County Hall, celebrated special occasions in the Merchant Adventurers' Court and prayed together at the five-hundred-year-old Saint Nicho--las's Church. Their work, too, was part of Newcastle's long history. As far back as the sixteenth century, its collieries had supplied 163,000 tons of coal to London, and its shipbuilding industry had built seafaring vessels-- first, sailboats of wood, then, after 1838, steamships of iron and, later, massive ships of steel. Its old dock had been turned into a bustling quayside, harboring cargo ships bound for ports throughout the Empire. Twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, British vessels that had set off from Newcastle plunged into the great North Sea to places like Eskimo Point or Cape Town or Karachi, bringing out finished goods from Britain and bringing home food and raw materials. Racing across the distant waters, they carried coal to fuel the navy, iron to lay the railroads, machine tools for the factories, armaments to defend the lands, carriages to transport the people and clothing to dress them; and they brought back, to name just a few things, silk, cotton, rubber, rice and tea from India; fish and furs from Canada; cocoa and ivory from Africa; gold and mutton from Australia; diamonds, pineapples and bananas from South Africa; tea from Ceylon; spices from Arabia; sugar, lime and turtles (for turtle soup) from the Caribbean. If Middlesbrough was cramped and grimy, cosmopolitan Newcastle was the pride of its city planners, a spacious, orderly town with busy thoroughfares, open squares and an elegant avenue called Grey Street, considered one of the most graceful in all of Europe. The city was hailed for its Classical-style buildings, its stately houses, its first-class Theatre Royal. Its lively commercial center offered an enterprising fellow the chance to borrow money from a bank or try to make his fortune on the local stock market housed in the domed Central Exchange. Its shops boasted goods from around the world: shawls from Kashmir and sealskin muffs from the Yukon; diamonds from South Africa and rubies from India; tea from China, wine from France; and its bookstores sold guides to, among other places, Syria, Egypt and India. India, of course, was where everyone had a family member or a friend or a friend of a friend. Almost twenty thousand British controlled the lives of two hundred and fifty million Indians, mostly Hindus and Muslims, whose exports of agriculture and raw materials and whose imports of nearly everything else from British soil made India the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. Back and forth the British traveled, a grueling four--month trip by ship around the Cape of Good Hope, until the year 1869, when the great opening of the Suez Canal shortened the sea voyage to only three weeks, making it even easier to bring more goods to the shops in Newcastle. The city's merchants prospered from millionaires who came to buy. One of those who came regularly to cosmopolitan Newcastle to purchase shirts of imported Egyptian cotton or to surprise his wife with a necklace of African ivory beads was the grandfather of Gertrude Bell, the prominent industrialist Isaac Lowthian Bell. ***Lowthian Bell, as he liked to be called, was a perfect man for his time, possessing a rare combination of scientific learning and manufacturing genius. Born in 1816, he had studied physics, chemistry and metallurgy in Germany, Denmark, at the University of Edinburgh, at the Sorbonne and in Marseilles and, at the age of twenty-four, joined his father's ironworks at Newcastle. Within a short period he pioneered the use of blast furnaces for smelting iron ore and introduced the first plant in England for the manufacture of aluminum. In 1844 he and his two brothers established Bell Brothers, a company that eventually included ironstone mines, collieries, limestone quarries and steel mills. Driven mostly by Lowthian Bell's extraordinary energy and vision, the firm was the northeast's largest and most important ironworks and colliery in the 1870s. It employed more than forty--seven thousand men and supplied one third of all the iron used in England. Heads bowed when Lowthian Bell came into a room. He knew more about Northumbria's iron and coal than anyone else and could answer any question, either on statistics or the scientific side. Far better educated than any of his peers (entrepreneurs were not noted for their learning), he was the spokesman for Northumbrian industry, a director of the North-Eastern Railway and president of five different chemical and engineering institutions. Highly regarded as a scientist, he was a Fellow of the Royal Society, the country's most prestigious group of scientists, and had won the first Bessemer gold medal, along

with other medals for his work in the arts, engineering and industry. He published numerous papers and authored two books, The Chemical Phenomena of Iron Smelting and The Principles of Iron and Steel Manufacture, important contributions on the manufacture of iron and steel. A man who took a keen interest in his community, he was elected twice to be mayor of Newcastle, served as sheriff of County Durham, and held a Liberal seat in Parliament for five years. As deep as his interest was in Northumbria, however, he was always restless, traveled constantly and kept a sharp eye on the competition, especially in America, where he was even made an honorary member of the American Philosophical Institution. He was a man of the world and a man with a sense of his own place in it. Lowthian Bell not only earned the reputation as the world's greatest ironmaster; he made enormous contributions to the British Empire and created one of Britain's greatest fortunes. In time, his granddaughter Gertrude Bell would inherit his money, his brilliant mind, his inquisitive nature and his exuberance for life. In 1842 Lowthian Bell had married Margaret Pattinson, daughter of a chemical manufacturer, and a few years later, in partnership with his father-in-law, opened a chemical works at Washington, a few miles from Newcastle. Down the road from the medieval ancestral home of George Washington, the young couple built an imposing Gothic house, complete with stained glass windows, terra cotta gargoyles and a large square tower. The red brick structure had enough rooms to accommodate an endless stream of guests and enough domestic servants to care for the five babies who soon arrived. Margaret gave birth to three girls and two boys; their elder son, born on February 10, 1844, was a handsome, carrot-haired, blue-eyed lad. Thomas Hugh Bell would be Hugh to all who knew him and father to Gertrude Bell. The Bell household bubbled with activity. Visitors constantly came and went, and young Hugh was allowed into the drawing room to meet his father's friends. The boy listened as Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley expounded their ideas on evolution, and John Ruskin, the art critic and social reformer, and William Morris, the aesthetic socialist, discussed their revolutionary ideas of how man should not just improve industry but how industry should improve the life of man. It was radical talk in the home of an industrial magnate, but Lowthian Bell was no ordinary man. He was an adventurer who believed in a solid foundation of learning and a dedication to society. The year of the Great Exhibition, when Hugh Bell was eleven, he was sent to school in Edinburgh. Four years later he traveled to France to study chemistry at the Sorbonne and then to Germany to study organic chemistry and mathematics. Reluctantly, at the age of eighteen he returned to England to join his father's business. As energetic as his father, and equally curious, he would someday be considered by The Times "a great authority on all questions connected with the coal and iron trades." But Hugh had a broader intellect. First assigned to the head office of Bell Brothers Ironworks at Newcastle, he was soon made director of the company branch at Middlesbrough and would go on to run the entire business. But he spent much of his time promoting secondary education. He founded the Middlesbrough High School, was chairman of the Free Library Committee and chairman of the School Board. An effective speaker, he delivered speeches around the country on public education, public health and military reform and proudly pushed through a bill protecting children from dangerous work. Vivacious and good-humored, Hugh delighted his friends with amusing stories in English, French and German and tickled his guests with his latest pun. He would sometimes come down to breakfast with a piece of paper in his hand; from the conversation the evening before, he had elaborated on an irony or sharpened a satirical story. He loved to read, enjoyed engaging in any area of conversation and could quote contemporary thinkers as easily as he could tell an original joke. A boisterous man with a generous heart, he had the charming ways and courteous manner of a true Victorian gentleman. But he was, he admitted, a "bitter free-trader," and almost as bitterly opposed to Home Rule for the Irish; if pushed too hard, he could be mercilessly blunt. He had no fear of physical challenges, loved to ride to the hounds and climb to precipitous heights, and said frequently, "obstacles are made to be overcome." Brilliant and incisive, he gave the impression of polished steel.Revue de presse"A major figure in the creation of modern-day Iraq." Los Angeles Times "Desert Queen, as timely as today's headlines, plucks Gertrude Bell out of the shadow of Lawrence of Arabia." The Boston Globe "Wallach has done an outstanding job of bringing Gertrude Bell to life." The Dallas Morning News "A richly textured biography of a . . . woman who devoted her life to knowing the desert Arabs better, perhaps, than any other European of her day. . . . Wallach comfortably commands the tangled political and diplomatic history of the Middle East." Chicago Tribune