

The Paradox of Gertrude Bell

Social Justice, Imperialism, and Women's Rights

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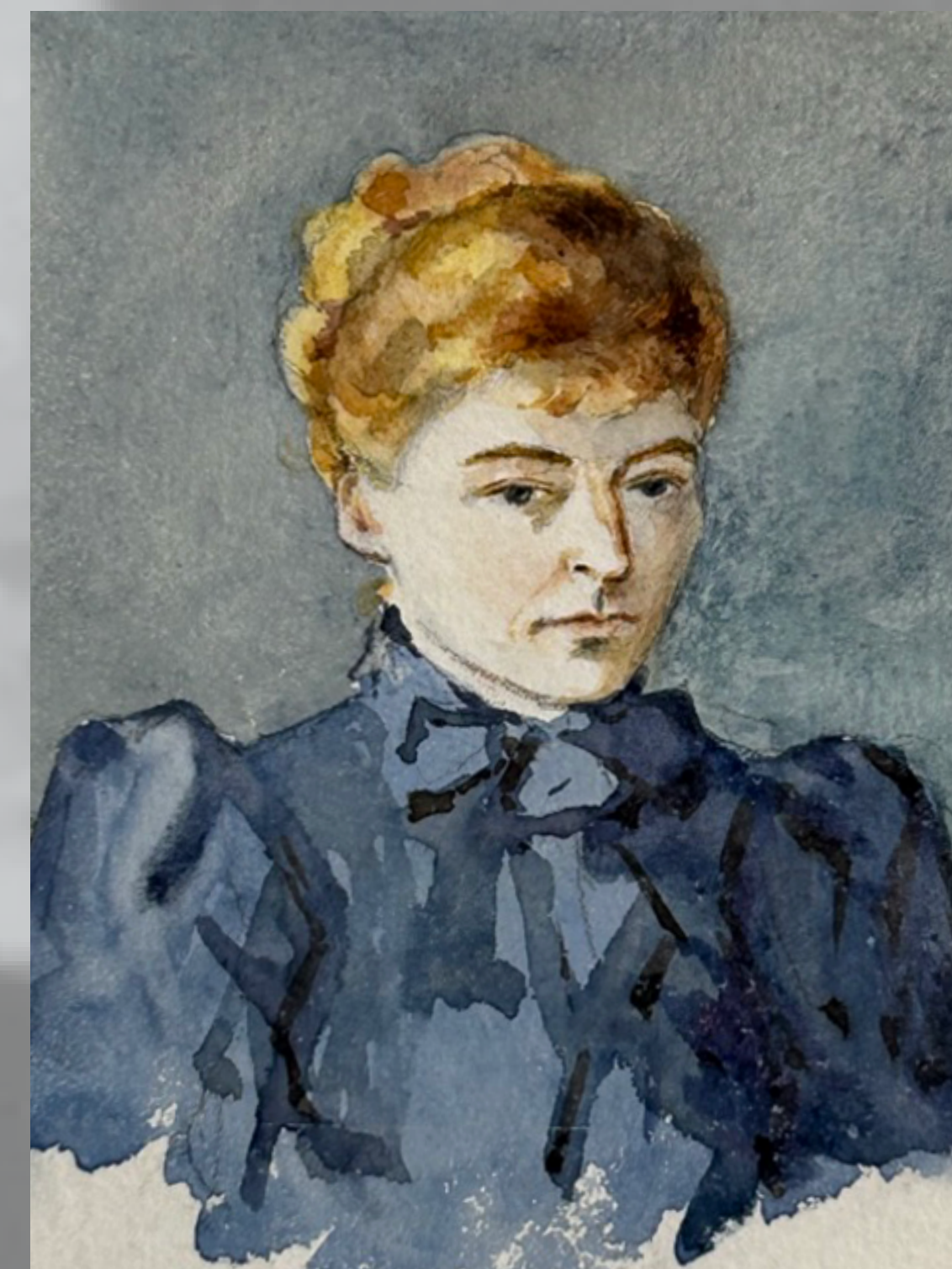
Gertrude Bell was a travel writer, archeologist, advocate, and explorer in the early twentieth century. This project has uncovered that Bell's legacy is complicated, and cannot be untangled through easy analysis.

Bell was born into the sixth richest family in England in 1868. She grew up in Redcar, North Yorkshire, and was the first woman to achieve a first in Modern History from Oxford University.



Painting of Bell with her father, at Redcar. Photography by Mary Bell, 1927.

Portrait of Bell, painted by family friend Flora Russell, 1897. Now found in the National Portrait Gallery, London.



A photograph of Bell outside of her tent in Iraq, 1909.

Click here to see an interactive exhibition exploring Bells' anti-suffrage views.



Bell's access to a man's world meant she could shape policy in the Middle East. Whilst not always acknowledging this privilege, and using the Middle East as a form of escapism, Bell helped to influence important constitutional decisions abroad. Yet, her work for the Women's National Anti Suffrage League means that, for a contemporary audience, we are left continually debating the paradox of Gertrude Bell.