



# The Extraordinary Gertrude Bell

Classroom activity 5

KS3-KS4



# 5

## TRAVELLING IN THE VICTORIAN ERA: THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE MIDDLE EAST



*It's a shocking affair how the East has wound itself round  
my heart till I don't know which is me and which is it'.*

*(Gertrude Bell, Letters)*

In the Nineteenth century increasing numbers of British women travelled via the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf, either with their husbands, brothers and fathers, on the journey to India, or exploring the Middle East as journalists, archaeologists, missionaries, intelligence officers or simply aristocratic explorers. Gertrude Bell was among them. She travelled to the Middle East, between 1900 and 1914 but she journeyed mostly without family members; she hired men and had a faithful servant Fattuh.

During and after WWI Bell's extensive knowledge of the Middle East as well as of Arabic language and culture led to her working for the British Government. She was a key figure in the discussions that led to the creation of the state of Iraq following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. As well as her books, she has left an extraordinary archive of pictures, letters and diaries that are an important source of information for understanding how she travelled, the people she met and the places she visited during her journeys.

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### RESEARCH TOOLS:

- Discover Gertrude Bell Research website: [click here](#).
- Read Gertrude Bell Comics: [click here](#).
- Watch the introductory video: [click here](#).

- Discover more on Isabella Bird, a Yorkshire born woman who travelled across the Persian Gulf and Iran in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: [click here](#).
- Discover which clothes Gertrude had to bring with her when she travelled in hot countries (Letters 7/5/1900): [click here](#).
- See where Gertrude slept during her travels in the desert, by searching 'Gertrude Bell's camp' in the Photographic archive search engine: [click here](#).
- Check BBC Bitesize on deserts (KS3 students): [click here](#).
- Discover the many features of the deserts in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula, from the endless flatlands of Nefud, to the rocky canyons of the Tor al Tubaïq and of the Jebel 'Ajja, to the water pool of Khabra Fafas: go to the Gertrude Bell Archive website <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/> → Click on Pictures → Use the Search tool and search for terms such as desert, camp, jebel, or for name places such as those listed above.

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#### FURTHER READING:

- Jackson M. P. and Parkin A. (eds.), 2015, *The Extraordinary Gertrude Bell*, Tyne Bridge Publishing (opens a pdf file): [click here](#).

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#### CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

- Discover more about the following places and geographical features by looking at the pictures taken by Gertrude Bell during her travels:
  - Baghdad (Iraq)
  - Palmyra (Syria)
  - Hail (Saudi Arabia)
  - Euphrates (river)
  - Tigris (river)
  - Nefud (desert)
- Ask your children to recreate a map of the Arab Gulf, outlining the countries, main cities and geographical features (deserts, mountains, rivers) of the region.

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#### LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM:

Geography (hot deserts), history (the British Empire).