



LINES IN THE SAND

One woman. And a map that changed the world.

A Screenplay by Michael Peter Bolus

PROJECT AT A GLANCE

FEATURE FILM: LINES IN THE SAND

GENRE: HISTORICAL EPIC/BIOPIC/DOCUDRAMA

LOCATIONS: GREAT BRITAIN & THE MIDDLE EAST

WRITER: MICHAEL PETER BOLUS



LOGLINE:

The extraordinary life of British spy, diplomat, and adventurer GERTRUDE BELL - often called the “Female Lawrence of Arabia” - whose masterful infiltration of the male-dominated worlds of Victorian England and Middle Eastern sheikdoms propels her into one of the most fascinating and consequential roles of World War I, including the creation of the modern state of Iraq.

PREMISE:

As the first woman to graduate with honors in Modern History from Oxford University, GERTRUDE BELL, a brilliant archaeologist, adventurer, and turn-of-the-century Middle East expert, plays a huge and consequential role in successfully uniting the Arab tribes against the Ottoman Turks during World War I. In the wake of the Turkish defeat, Gertrude helps broker the deal that draws the new national borders of the new, artificial Middle Eastern nation-states (Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia) that allows European colonial control to continue in the region. Gertrude ultimately sees the folly of colonial rule in the Middle East, but she fails to convince Great Britain to withdraw in order to maintain some influence in the troubled region.

THE REAL GERTRUDE BELL

- Archaeologist, Writer, Adventurer, Mountain Climber, Diplomat, Spy
- Born in 1868 to wealthy industrialist Thomas Hugh Bell and Mary Shield Bell
- First woman to graduate with honors in Modern History at Oxford University
- Traveled extensively throughout the Middle East, forging friendships and alliances with influential Arab sheiks
- Friend and colleague of both Winston Churchill and T.E. Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”)
- Led the diplomatic arm of the Arab revolts against the Ottoman Turks during World War I
- Helped establish the new national borders in the Middle East after World War I. Drew the map of modern Iraq – the consequences of which are still unfolding today



SYNOPSIS

In Baghdad 1921, FAISAL (36), a charismatic, handsome Arab leader, assumes the role of King of the newly formed British colonial Iraqi state. GERTRUDE BELL (50s), a tall, striking British woman, beams as Faisal marches to the podium to the tune of God Save the King. Nearby PERCY COX, a veteran British diplomat, remarks that the King is merely temporary “window dressing” for the nation that Gertrude created out of “nothing.”

In the Arab desert, 1905, Gertrude (37), dressed in native garb and traveling with a faithful Arab team, manages to bypass hostile BEDOUIN tribes and reach the encampment of the friendly but fierce DRUZE TRIBE and their leader SHEIK YAHYA BEY. Bey expresses his desire to unite with the rival BENI SAKHIR tribe to oust the Turks from Arab land. Gertrude concurs that an alliance with the Beni Sakhir would be the most effective weapon against their Turkish colonial oppressors. Though not overtly committing to anything, Gertrude makes it clear that she might play the role of intermediary between tribes.

Many years earlier, 1890, Gertrude, supremely confident and determined, impresses her professors in her final exams and becomes the first woman in British history to graduate from the prestigious Oxford University. Her educated parents are especially proud of her accomplishment.

In the coming years, Gertrude ignores the social pressure to marry, have kids, and settle down. Instead, she pursues a fast-rising career in archaeology, traveling to the Middle East to participate in the excavation of numerous important sites.



Gertrude Bell with T.E. Lawrence



Gertrude Bell with Winston Churchill and T.E. Lawrence

In 1906, Gertrude, fresh from her intermediary work among the Arab tribes, meets with an impressed British CONSUL who tells her of the Empire's interest in fending off a German/Turkish railroad from Berlin to Baghdad that would "wreak havoc upon our commercial activities in the region." To prevent this, the Brits want to mobilize the Arab Tribes against the fading Turks.

Gertrude agrees to become an undercover British intelligence officer and report all the details of the customs of the Arab tribes and their various interactions. In exchange for this information, the Empire agrees to facilitate "free and secure passage" for her "little" excavations. Gertrude accepts this deal but reminds him that there is nothing "little" about her excavations.

In the coming years, Gertrude becomes a legendary and revered figure in the Middle East for her knowledge of the Arab culture on all levels. Her superiors, determined to mold the region into nation-states by geography, however, refuse to heed her warnings that this approach will be difficult, if not impossible, since religious, family, and tribal connections are much more binding. Even so, Gertrude works tirelessly to build connections between the various tribes against the Turks. She finds a friend and ally in soon-to-be legendary T.E. LAWRENCE (the future "Lawrence of Arabia"), 20 years her junior and with growing connections to the Arab tribes.



With the coming of WWI, Gertrude and Lawrence successfully build a cohesive and concerted Arab effort against the Turkish/German alliance. To seal the deal, the Brits authorize Gertrude and Lawrence to offer each of the main cooperative tribal leaders a fiefdom/country of their own. Britain triumphs and ultimately occupies Baghdad in 1917. The French occupy Syria. Much to the dismay of the Arab population, the Brits merely replace the Turks as their colonial overlord.

Many years earlier, before embarking on her life's work in the Middle East, Gertrude (25), visits Persia with her parents and falls in love with CADOGAN, a handsome, dashing man with intelligence and an adventurous spirit. They plan to marry, but Cadogan's sudden death (suicide) dashes her hopes for sharing a life with her soul mate. She spends the rest of her life as an adventurous, brilliant, but lonely single woman.

In the crucial years after WWI, Gertrude plays a key role in the cutting the deals that ultimately create the borders of the modern-day Arab states, including Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the rest. In 1921, Faisal becomes Sunni King of largely Shiite Iraq, thus setting the stage for religious conflict that still rages in the region today.



Gertrude Bell with King Faisal I of Iraq

Gertrude's dream of benevolent, paternalist colonial oversight over these countries, however, proves unrealistic and unworkable. Gertrude pleads with her superiors to withdraw colonial control as a way to maintain their economic and political influence in the region. Her warnings go unheeded.

The Brits are ultimately violently ousted from the region. Gertrude realizes that British colonialism in the Middle East was doomed to failure, but she doubts that it would have been possible for her country to resist the temptation to spread their influence to that part of the world.



Locations

Oxford, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Syria, Palestine



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SELECTED CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS

GERTRUDE BELL (18, 37, 53, and 57 years old, respectively), a brilliant, headstrong adventurer, author, diplomat, and spy, whose unbridled ambitions and prodigious intellect make her one of the most influential figures in early 20th-century geo-politics, while simultaneously destroying any chance she might have at personal happiness. Her ability to both infiltrate and conquer the male-dominated worlds of Victorian England and Middle Eastern sheikdoms secure her formidable role in establishing the national boundaries of the modern Middle East, but her hardened emotional exterior disguise profound vulnerabilities and a deep-seated, if unacknowledged pain.

SIR THOMAS HUGH BELL (46 years old), a wealthy, powerful English industrialist, and the doting father of Gertrude Bell, who never allowed his inherited wealth and privilege dissuade him from hard work and relentless perseverance. Unlike many unapologetic capitalists of his era, he holds deep respect for his workers, and ensures they are well-paid and cared for. Despite his beaming pride and love for Gertrude, he never surrenders his deep desire that she settle down with a respectable man, raise a family, and live a more traditional and conventional life.

FLORENCE BELL (40 years old), a well-educated and well-heeled writer of both fiction and drama, she is the second wife of Thomas Hugh Bell, and the loving, nurturing step-mother to Gertrude Bell. She loves Thomas's children from his first marriage as if they were her own, and never denies them the attention she knows they deserve, despite her own considerable professional ambitions. She is a devoted wife and mother, who would one day be appointed as Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

KING FAISAL I (36 years old), a charismatic Arab statesman and tribal ruler, who also serves as the first King of the newly established state of Iraq. Faisal is one of the most prominent and effective advocates for pan-Arabian nationalism during and after World War I. His prowess on the battlefield is matched only by his irreproachable leadership skills and brilliance in international diplomacy.

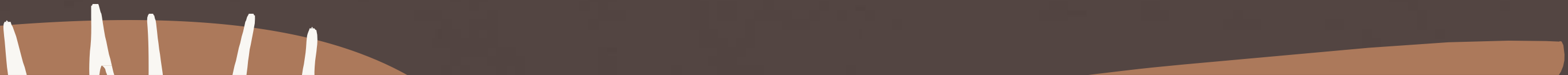


HENRY CADOGAN (mid-30s), a thoughtful, pensive, junior diplomat in the British foreign service stationed in the Middle East. His love of literature and undeniable romantic sensibilities make him a source of intrigue to those he encounters, but tragically vulnerable in a world and region that is about to erupt into unimaginable violence and horror. He is a curious, but melancholic young man who was born in the wrong place at the wrong time.

FATTUH (mid-20s), a young and eager Bedouin guide, who supports his family by serving the powerful and wealthy Europeans who dare penetrate the Arabian deserts. He is a kind, generous soul, who is eager to please both his patrons and his family and their modest village – but he is not naïve; he intuitively understands the geo-political implications of the growing European presence in the Middle East, and the imminent dangers of the bubbling tensions which will soon lead to the bloodiest conflict in world history. Although conflicted, he will not allow the problematic circumstances to destroy his optimism or subvert his clear moral code of honor.

T.E. LAWRENCE (early 20s), a flamboyant, precocious army officer and diplomat, whose organizational skills, scholarly aptitude, and gifts for interpersonal engagement garner him a degree of attention and respect which belie his age and rank. His barely concealed ambitions compel him to seek and create opportunities in situations which do not conspicuously reveal them. Despite his ability to quickly ingratiate himself with the powerful people he encounters, there is not yet any indication of the legend that he will soon become: “Lawrence of Arabia.”

SIR PERCY COX (57 years old), a renowned and accomplished British diplomat, who is instrumental in establishing the independent state of Iraq as an entity separate from British-mandated territory. Cox’s experience, eloquence, and gravitas make him a well-respected force in the most powerful of political, diplomatic, and military circles. He is the epitome of the Victorian-era scholar/warrior/gentleman.



DAME ELIZABETH WORDSWORTH (mid-70s), the Founding Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, the first college for female undergraduates at Oxford University, and a powerful force of nature whose keen intellect and relentless energy serve her well in the rarefied and male-dominated world of Victorian England and British academia. Despite her profound accomplishments and over-sized personality, she remains acutely aware of -- and ironically respectful to -- the decidedly chauvinistic structures of late-19th/early-20th century English society. As the great niece of English poet William Wordsworth, she maintains a deep reverence for great literature and the towering accomplishments of her forebears.

YAHYA BEY (50s), the powerful King of the Jebel Druze, who commands a fierce and well-trained army of fighters who aggressively protect Druze territories and interests. Hostile to the rule of the Ottoman Turks, Bey is not so prideful that he won't seek out and accept help and resources from potential allies – even the Europeans of whom he is deeply cautious and suspicious.



MICHAEL PETER BOLUS

(Writer)

Michael received his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Drama from the University of Southern California's School of Cinema and Television, his Master's Degree in Creative Writing from Boston University, and his M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Theatre Studies from the City University of New York Graduate Center. He was also awarded a Playwriting Fellowship from the Boston Playwrights' Theatre where he spent a year in-residence, working closely with 1992 Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott as Playwright, Director, and Dramaturg.

Michael is the author *Aesthetics and the Cinematic Narrative: An Introduction* (Anthem Press) and *The Light in the Dark: The Evolution, Mechanics, and Purpose of Cinema* (Cognella Press) and his Chapter, "Fortune's Knave: Sex, Politics, and Machiavellian Doctrine in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*" will be published in the upcoming anthology *Playing Shakespeare: Monarchs and Madmen* (Peter Lang Press). His articles, interviews, and reviews have been published in a wide array of scholarly journals.

Michael directed the feature film, *A Sense of Dread*, and his stage play, *Pound of Flesh*, received its world premiere at the Berkshire Theatre Festival, and was subsequently produced under his direction at the Edinburgh International Theatre Festival, The Odyssey Theatre Ensemble in Los Angeles, and the Taos Center for the Performing Arts. His plays *Attic People*, *Hats Canes Trunks Trains*, *West of Canaan*, *Shaman in the House*, and *Ex Machina*, have been seen in productions, workshops, and readings throughout the country. He has directed numerous plays in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, and Washington D.C., and wrote and directed the short films, *Sullivan Street* (Cannes Film Festival Shorts Corner), *An Idea for the Killing*, and directed the short film *Importance of Ernest*.

As an actor, his television credits include guest-starring and co-starring roles in *NCIS*, *How to Get Away With Murder*, *Law and Order*, *Law and Order: SVU*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law and Order: Los Angeles*, *Strong Medicine*, *Swift Justice*, *Sidney Lumet's 100 Centre Street*, *The Eleventh Hour*, and *J.J. Abrams's Undercovers*. His film credits include co-starring roles in *Woody Allen's Sweet and Lowdown*, *Bleach*, *Bury the Evidence*, *Sam Raimi's Drag Me to Hell*, and *Dolemite Is My Name* starring Eddie Murphy. His stage credits include *The Seagull* (directed by Anna Deavere Smith), *Sunshine* (directed by Joe Brancato), and a variety of roles in such plays as *The Country Wife*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Under Milkwood*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *True West*, to name just a few.

Since 2014, he has been the Department Chair of the Liberal Arts Program at The Los Angeles Film School, overseeing and mentoring a dynamic, diverse, and multi-cultural faculty, staff, and student body, while simultaneously managing the Department's multi-million dollar budget and cultivating both community-based outreach programs and an array of international initiatives. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Film Studies at Santa Monica College.

For more information, please visit: www.michaelpeterbolus.com