

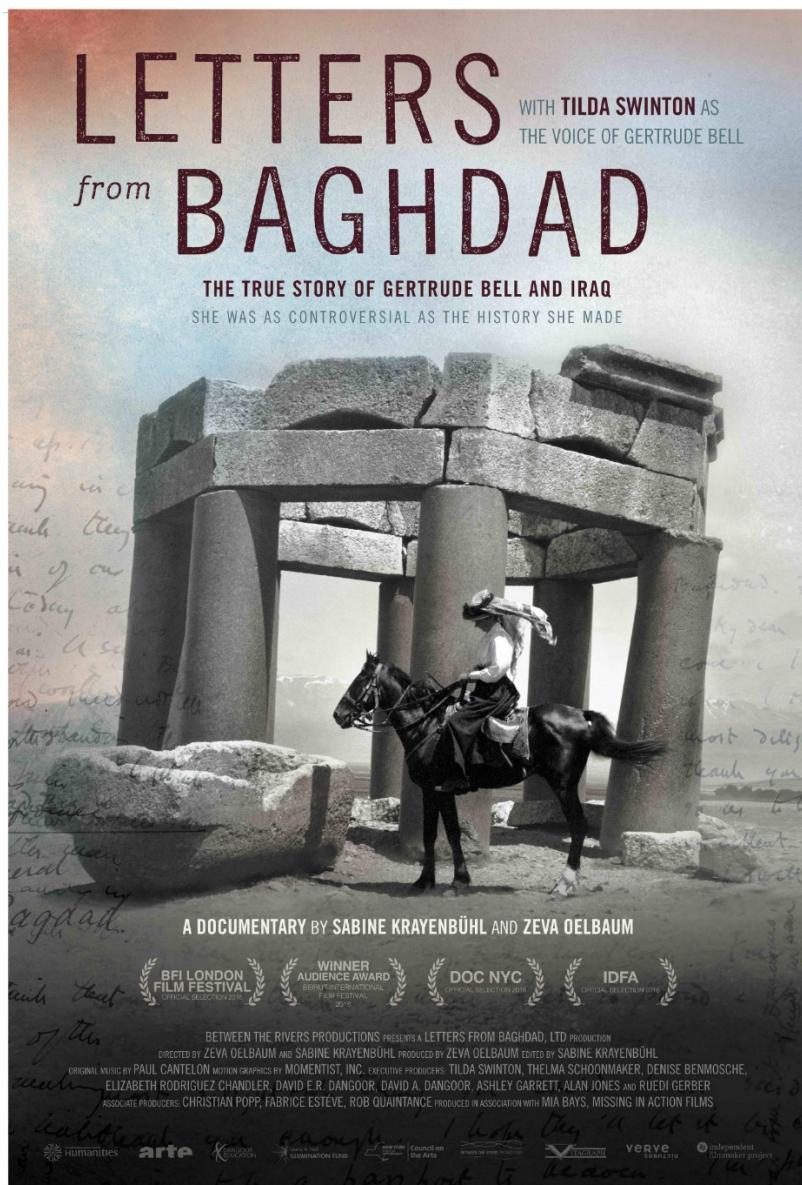


Presents / يقدم / présente

From the Film to the Book : *Letters from Baghdad. The True Story of Gertrude Bell and Iraq.*

من الفيلم إلى الكتاب : رسائل من بغداد. القصة الحقيقية لجيرترود بيل والعراق .

Du film au livre : *Lettres de Bagdad. La vraie histoire de Gertrude Bell et l'Iraq.*



لإتصال بـ BAFF : info@bafflebanon.org / +961(0)204983 / +961(0)3210424 : BAFF

Letters from Baghdad. The True Story of Gertrude Bell and Iraq.

Film directed by Zeva Oelbaum and Sabine Krayenbühl

2016, 95 minutes' documentary, English.

With Tilda Swinton as Gertrude Bell voice.

About the film. *Letters from Baghdad* is the story of a true original—Gertrude Bell—sometimes called the “female” Lawrence of Arabia. The film tells the untold story of this British spy, explorer and political powerhouse who traveled widely in Arabia before being recruited by British military intelligence to help draw the borders of Iraq after WWI and reshape the modern Middle East. Using stunning, never-seen-before footage of the region from 100 years ago, the film chronicles Bell’s extraordinary journey into both the uncharted Arabian desert and the inner sanctum of British colonial power. Bell left more than 1600 letters and the story is told entirely in her words and those of her contemporaries, excerpted from their intimate letters, private diaries and official documents. It is a unique look at both a complex woman and a long-vanished world. The film takes us into a past that is eerily current.

Inspired by Janet Wallach’s biography of Gertrude Bell, “Desert Queen”.

Film teaser : https://youtu.be/-MYs_Oj1JyA

About Gertrude Bell. Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell (1868-1926) was part proper Victorian and part modern woman. The granddaughter of a wealthy British ironmaster, Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell, Gertrude’s life took a tragic turn when her mother died. Gertrude was only 3 years old. She formed an extremely close relationship with her father, Sir Hugh Bell, which remained unshakable until her death. A brilliant, chain-smoking rebel, Gertrude attended Oxford University and was the first woman to receive a First (i.e. Highest Honors) in Modern History. She was fluent in more than 5 languages and ultimately published 6 books, including an English translation of the 14th century Persian poet Hafez.

Bell’s life was a fascinating series of trailblazing “firsts”. She was the first woman to do a solo journey into the uncharted Arabian desert (traveling by camel for 1500 miles across Central Arabia in 1914) and she provided her colleague T.E. Lawrence (a.k.a. Lawrence of Arabia) with the tribal notes and maps he used during the Arab Revolt. In 1915, she was recruited by British Military Intelligence becoming the first female military intelligence officer, Major Miss Bell.

The only woman with a diplomatic role at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and the only woman (invited by Winston Churchill) at the Cairo Conference in 1921, Bell was the most powerful woman in the British Empire in her day. And yet, in spite of all of her accomplishments, she has been virtually written out of the history.

Bell suffered 2 tragic love affairs and never married. She was an explorer searching for her own place in the world, but after a lifetime of straddling two cultures, she ultimately felt comfortable in neither. She died at age 58 from an overdose of sleeping pills. She is buried in Baghdad.

About the film's directors

Sabine Krayenbühl is an award winning editor with over 20 theatrical documentaries and narrative features to her credit, many of which have premiered at prestigious festivals around the world. Her work includes Oscar and Independent Spirit Award nominated *My Architect* for which she received an American Cinema Editors (ACE) Eddie Award nomination. Other credits include *Mad Hot Ballroom*, one of the top twenty highest grossing documentaries, *The Bridge* produced by IFC, *Picasso and Braque go to the Movies*, produced by Martin Scorsese, *Virgin Tales*, *Ahead of Time*, Jennifer Fox's Emmy nominated *My Reincarnation*, *Salinger* on which she consulted and most recently *Eric Steel's Kiss the Water*, co-produced by BBC Films. Krayenbühl has a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and is a long-term member of New York Women in Film and Television.

Zeva Oelbaum is an award winning producer and photographer. She recently produced *Ahead of Time*, a feature length documentary about centenarian journalist Ruth Gruber which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival before garnering six Best Documentary awards. The film opened theatrically across the U.S. and was broadcast on Showtime Channel. Oelbaum was also executive producer of the feature documentary, *Rene and I*. She comes to film from a career as a still photographer and her work has been extensively published in periodicals such as *The New York Times Magazine*. Her photographs are in international public collections including the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and The Brooklyn Museum and two monographs of her work have been published by Rizzoli Int'l Publishers. She is a magna cum laude graduate of Brandeis University with a degree in anthropology, and a member of the Producer's Guild.

About Tilda Swinton. Tilda Swinton started making films with the English experimental director Derek Jarman in 1985, with *Caravaggio*. She is known for both arthouse and mainstream films including *The Bigger Splash*, *Trainwreck*, *Only Lovers left Alive*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *Snowpiercer*, *Burn After Reading*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Orlando* and the widely applauded *I Am Love*, which she co-produced. In 2008, she won the Academy Award and the BAFTA for Best Supporting Actress for her performance in Tony Gilroy's *Michael Clayton* and the Evening Standard's Best Actress award in the UK for her work in Erick Zonca's *Julia*. In 2011, Swinton starred in and executive produced *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. The film debuted in the main competition at the Cannes

Film Festival to huge critical acclaim and garnered honors including Golden Globe and BAFTA nominations for Best Actress. She will play the Ancient One in the upcoming MARVEL's *Doctor Strange*. In addition to her film career, Swinton's innovative work as a performance artist has been presented at the Serpentine Gallery in London, MOMA New York and in Paris, where she and Olivier Saillard collaborated on a series called *Impossible Wardrobes on the Art of Dressing*.

This session is supported by Association Philippe Jabre, Saadallah & Loubna Khalil Foundation & Le Théâtre Bérye.



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