British Anti-Suffrage and the Emancipation of Women in Iraq: The Case of Gertrude Bell

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Abstract
For Gertrude Bell being ‘as good as any man’ was an objective she tried to prove all her life, not only by climbing the Alps and roaming the Arabian Desert but in almost all aspects of life. This challenge remained with her till the end and may well have been one of the reasons behind her success. Bell was against female suffrage and had eagerly worked to prevent granting the vote to British women, yet she became the first British female officer and many times, exceeded the performance of her male colleagues. Bell enjoyed her role as the Oriental Secretary to Sir Percy Cox to the point of forgetting she was a woman. She insisted she was sexless and dismissed most women as uninteresting. However, her sex facilitated her mission among the Arabs who wondered what British men would be like if this was one of their women. After the vote was partially granted to British women in 1918, Bell embarked on emancipating Iraqi women. This paper highlights the contrast between Bell’s public and private personas, her anti-suffrage activities and her role in emancipating urban women in Iraq.

Keywords: Gertrude Bell, British Anti Suffrage, Iraqi Women, British Colonial policy