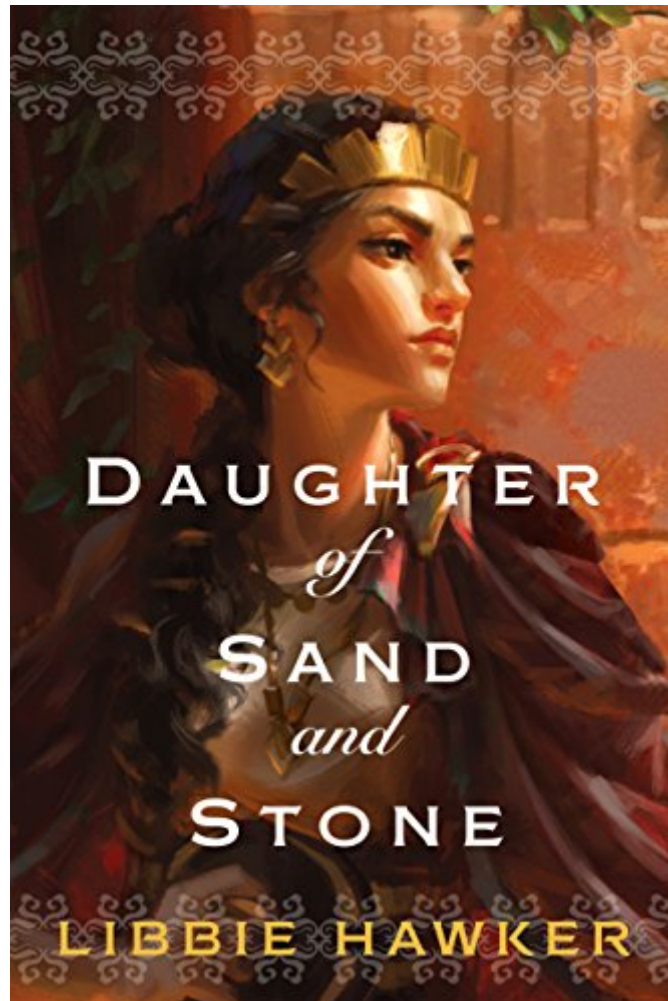




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Daughter Of Sand And Stone



Synopsis

When Zenobia takes control of her own fate, will the gods punish her audacity? Zenobia, the proud daughter of a Syrian sheikh, refuses to marry against her will. She won't submit to a lifetime of subservience. When her father dies, she sets out on her own, pursuing the power she believes to be her birthright, dreaming of the Roman Empire's downfall and her ascendance to the throne. Defying her family, Zenobia arranges her own marriage to the most influential man in the city of Palmyra. But their union is anything but peaceful—his other wife begrudges the marriage and the birth of Zenobia's son, and Zenobia finds herself ever more drawn to her guardsman, Zabdas. As war breaks out, she's faced with terrible choices. From the decadent halls of Rome to the golden sands of Egypt, Zenobia fights for power, for love, and for her son. But will her hubris draw the wrath of the gods? Will she learn a "woman's place," or can she finally stake her claim as Empress of the East?

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Customer Reviews

Why do people look down their noses at historical fiction? A well-written, well-researched historical novel makes the past come alive by putting in the half of the human race that history ignores - women. It supplies details of every day life that help the reader feel a kinship to those who are long dead. And it reminds us that things are never as simple as they look in the rear-view mirror. Today we blame Middle East conflict on religion and oil. But in the 3rd century AD, Christianity was barely a blip on the radar screen and the birth of Islam was 300 years in the future. Oil came from whales and was burned in lamps. And yet even then the Middle East played a pivotal role in European history. The "glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome" both depended on the breadbasket that was the Middle East. Empires require armies and armies have to eat and the rocky soils of Greece and Italy don't grow surplus food. Conquering the Middle East meant that grain and taxes poured into Rome and the Empire needed both. Most of what was recorded about the life of the "warrior queen" Zenobia was written by the Romans and Roman historians were as adept as modern spin doctors at re-writing history for their own purposes. We do know that she came from the city-state of Palmyra in modern Syria and that she led a revolt against Roman rule at a time when the Roman Empire was badly weakened by wars and lousy leadership. She was briefly Queen of Egypt and was considered to be the heiress of Cleopatra. Like Cleo, her story ended in defeat. In this author's tale, Zenobia is the daughter of the chief of Palmyra and his intelligent, imperious wife. Zabbai has three daughters and no sons and like most men without sons, he allows his daughters some of the privileges that would normally belong to their brothers. He's a loving father and has arranged good marriages for his two older daughters, but his strong-minded youngest daughter Zenobia has refused a number of suitable suitors. She believes that destiny has greater things in store for her than being a submissive wife and mother. There appears to be little chance that she will escape her fate until a desert tribe threatens Palmyra. Instead of waiting quietly with the other women while their men go off to fight, Zenobia takes matters into her own hands - the first of many times that she will do so. She's a town girl - a daughter of the "stones" or town walls - but she's also the descendant of nomads. Desert sand is in her blood. Her family history reflects the richness, complexity and turbulence of the Middle East and Zenobia's restlessness and ambition are the natural results of that history. I read this pretty much in one gulp and enjoyed it. The characters are lively and believable. Zenobia is flawed, but basically sympathetic. She makes terrible sacrifices for her ambition, but then she lived in a time when no one believed that a woman could "have it all." She comes a cropper in the end, but so do most of the other leaders. In Middle East politics (past or present) betting on the wrong horse is frequently a fatal error. Ms. Hawker does a good job of showing daily life in an exotic region almost 2,000 years ago, while telling the

story of a family that could very well be living down the street. That's what makes a successful historical novel.

Some spoilers - not many: In truth, I couldn't finish this book, that is how boring I found it. I generally enjoy historical fiction, especially regarding Roman era. I found this to be dull, boring and very much predictable through the parts I read. The few characters that had any depth were predictable in what they were: A spoiled and rebellious princess, a duty bound bodyguard, a jealous wife, over zealous sisters, overbearing mother, and a Roman Praetor who is superficial, backstabbing and power hungry. I had to make sure that it was actually a woman who wrote this as the feminine perspectives were so stereotyped, it was needlessly disappointing.

YOU ARE THERE! The author's rich writing style reminds me of that TV program with Walter Cronkite. It's through the author's appeal to my senses and imagination that I'm transported into the world of Palmyra in the 3rd century, and into the castle and life of Zenobia, her sisters, mother and father. Even the rhythm of the writing has that feel of ancient Arabia and grips me with its near-poetry. EXAMPLE:

"This is the season when the winds come from the east from Eran and from Indian and beyond, slow and languid and heavy with the odor of spice. What verbal art! And there is much more of it in this book. BUT -- there is also much conflict among family members and tribes of that time. The greatest conflict, though, is within 17-year-old ZENOBIA, a beautiful woman who desires much more than an ordinary marriage, or a safe and luxurious home, and even more than the rich and exuberant trading capital of Palmyra can give her. Can a woman of her time and place achieve greatness, even become a ruler? Can she experience love that is of her own choosing and not dictated by her family and traditions? AH! WE HAVE GRIPPING AMBITION AND FAITHFUL ROMANCE. We have stories of the lowly rising to glory, and of the glorious falling to ignominy. We have Zenobia and her lover battling the Roman powers. We have heartbreak and loss. And most of all, we have gods that the heroes believe guide their destinies. And yet, the heroes also fight the whims of those gods with will and strength. About one-third of the way into this book, I began to ask how true to history was this book so I read some articles on her. SHE WAS NOT FICTION! I was so pleased that she actually lived in Palmyra in the third century, that she rebelled against the government and fought to achieve her destiny. And suffered for it. I was intrigued by the Author's Note on how she created this book by seeking to remain faithful to the

historical record and to the “feel” of the characters. As a writer I learned much. As a reader, I was fully drawn into this story.

Better than some of the freebies I’ve read. But despite the author’s note about the underlying theme, I found her description of Zenobia to bear more resemblance to a proud, vain, spoiled brat chasing after her own desires rather than a warrior queen who cared about the fate of her family and her subjects. For me, it detracted from her appeal as a protagonist.

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