



The Rise of Zenobia

J.D. Smith

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My name is Zabdas: once a slave; now a warrior, grandfather and servant. I call Syria home. I shall tell you the story of my Zenobia: Warrior Queen of Palmyra, Protector of the East, Conqueror of Desert Lands ...

The Roman Empire is close to collapse. Odenathus of Palmyra holds the Syrian frontier and its vital trade routes against Persian invasion. A client king in a forgotten land, starved of reinforcements, Odenathus calls upon an old friend, Julius, to face an older enemy: the Tanukh.

Julius believes Syria should break free of Rome and declare independence. But his daughter's beliefs are stronger still. Zenobia is determined to realise her father's dream.

And turn traitor to Rome ...

The Rise of Zenobia Details

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From Reader Review The Rise of Zenobia for online ebook

Penny says

Pretty decent book - I do like a historical drama and it's nice to see a different perspective on Roman history.

It's very much a scene-setter for a grand epic - mainly who they are and how they got into their situation. Makes you want to read the next so does its job - but of course being the first of many it does feel very open-ended.

Shomeret says

I have a strong interest in Zenobia, the ancient Warrior Queen of Palmyra, Syria. I'm not interested because she was a queen, and I don't care about her being a descendant of Cleopatra. My main interest is that Zenobia rebelled against the Roman Empire. That's why I entered a giveaway on the Historical Fictionistas group on Goodreads for The Rise of Zenobia by J.D. Smith.

I felt that this book was not as suspenseful as it should have been. Perhaps it should have started earlier in the life of the protagonist, Zabdas.

The other problem for me is that this book doesn't deal with the aspect of Zenobia's life that interests me. I expect that I may like the sequel better.

For my complete review see <http://www.bookbabe.blogspot.com/2014/...>

Mark McKay says

Syria once upon a time

This book tells the story of Zenobia, a young woman of noble birth. As the Roman empire declines, we see her taking a prominent role as an envoy to Rome. Her task, to persuade the Emperor to send Roman legions to support the defence of Syria, against the Persians.

Zenobia has beauty and intelligence, and uses both to advance her ambitions for her country. Her story is told by Zabdas, who was once close to her. Zabdas is now approaching old age and is writing the story for his granddaughter.

The author draws a vivid and compelling picture of that period in history. She invokes the spirit of place, capturing the beauty of the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, and then contrasting it against the creeping decadence of Rome. Zenobia has a charisma that allows her to do things she wouldn't otherwise be able to, as a woman in a male-dominated society. Her qualities are convincingly brought to life as the story unfolds, all set against the backdrop of imminent Persian invasion. Recommended.

Marlene Brown says

I have to be honest and say that this genre is not a natural choice for me - I rarely read ancient historical fiction, but am keen to learn more about this particular era, of which I know next to nothing. I think because the narrative is derived from fact, and therefore has a real feeling of authenticity, I was quickly captivated and eager to read on.

The author has a wonderful capacity for drawing the reader into the lives of long-dead people; of making them vibrant and fully realised so that events taking place almost 2,000 years ago seem not archaic but relevant now. She does this, I think, with vivid, immersive descriptions of the desert landscape and magnificent city of Palmyra (which I had never heard of I am ashamed to say). She places her characters amidst this setting and breathes life into them, allowing them to tell their story with dialogue that seems to my sensitive ear wholly believable. I loved Zenobia, really loved her imperious spirit and was staggered to read in the very interesting notes supplied by the author at the end of the novel that Zenobia was around 14 years old when she began her climb to greatness! What an absolute heroine - without fear and totally single-minded.

Also fascinating was the depiction of a floundering Roman Empire, teetering on the brink of collapse. The author is very knowledgeable about her subject but she wields her knowledge lightly, so that facts, dates and figures are woven expertly into the narrative. Many things I learned whilst reading this book.

There are twists and turns aplenty in this terrific novel and a surprise at the end I certainly wasn't expecting. I'm really looking forward to reading the next installment to discover the fate of Zenobia, Zabdas, Samira and the cast of thousands in the desert.

Great stuff - highly recommended.

Richard Abbott says

The Rise of Zenobia is set in what is now called Syria, around 300AD, when the region was a Roman province facing apparently irrevocable decline. Although many local leaders remained loyal to the emperor, far to the west, military pressure from independent tribal groups as well as the Persians was almost intolerable. In consequence the trade routes which had brought wealth to the inhabitants had largely collapsed.

This is the rather sombre setting, with its continual sense of impending doom, that JD Smith has chosen to write about. The cast of characters is a mixed group of individuals, mostly drawn from a single extended family and their retinue, who are striving to preserve the way of life that they know. The question which dominates the book is whether Rome will be either willing or able to help, or whether the region would be better served by cutting loose altogether.

The story is told in two threads – one in the “present day”, when the protagonist Zabdas is an old man, and a series of flashbacks describing his younger life and the key events in it. Zenobia, the woman of the title, is a key figure in the earlier events but missing from the later thread, and one is led to assume she came to a bad

end somehow.

This brings me to a key difficulty – the book is only the first part in a longer series (“Overlord“). A great many issues are raised and put on hold, presumably to be revisited in a later volume. Personally I find this frustrating, and I was left with a sense that the work was unfinished. The specific break-off point did not seem particularly significant, as though it had been driven more by word count than plot.

On a technical level the Kindle copy I read had been nicely prepared. A noticeable number of errors had slipped through the editorial net, but not so many nor so serious as to be a real barrier to reading.

So, mixed feelings for me about the book. The setting is interesting and unusual, the characters are quite diverse, and the story is certainly worth telling. But on the other hand the lack of completion was a negative point for me, and I can’t say that I particularly warmed to any of the individual people. Perhaps too much narrative space was devoted to campaigning for me, or else to long and frustrating journeys, to get much feel for what was being safeguarded. I’m not sure I was led to really care what happened to the people or their culture; given the very obvious echoes in contemporary Syria this is a great shame.

Four stars, on balance, and I’m still undecided if I want to buy into the rest of the series.

Lisasue says

This book is a **very strong** three stars. I truly wish that I could give it 3.5 stars, as it is so well-written. The author is a very clever writer, using Zabdas, a slave and soldier to tell the story of Zenobia. This is an excellent choice, as it allows the reader to learn of the world of Palmyra (a city in what is now modern-day Syria) from a less limited perspective than might have been permitted by telling it only from Zenobia's point of view. It's fascinating to get a glimpse of Rome from the perspective of those living in the outlying provinces.

This is a pretty exciting story overall, but does take awhile to get going. This is book one of a series, so this must be intentional on the part of the author. They want to tell the whole story of Zenobia, which is OK. It works, nearly as well as it did for Sharon Penman in *The Sunne in Splendour* when she told the story of Richard III.

The historical details ring true throughout the novel. No irritating anachronisms here, which I really appreciate. I would recommend this book to fans of Steven Saylor, who, BTW, also does a fantastic job with historical detail.

I look forward to reading more books by this author. I will definitely read the second in the "Overlord" series. I feel certain that the following books in the series will be of four star quality, as the stage is set for some pretty exciting action at the end of "The Rise of Zenobia."

Disclosure: I received a free copy of this novel in return for providing an honest review. This did not affect my review in any way.

Jane says

I was thrilled to read this novel and highly recommend it! Since I'm reading the excellent Agent of Rome series, which occurs in the 270s, in the same geographical area more or less, from the *Roman* viewpoint, I was hoping to read something from 'the other side': i.e., *Palmyra and Syria*. I am so glad I was fortunate enough to win this novel in a Historical Fictionista giveaway. It did not disappoint! Retired General Zabdas is documenting his history of the Palmyran Revolt so people will never forget. The story moves back and forth from the 'present' [290's] to 250's. His granddaughter, Samira, reads it piecemeal as he writes each section, and has many questions about her father and those years. Zabdas keeps her on tenterhooks between each section.

Zabdas, a slave, is found in Yemen by his uncle Julius Aurelius Zabdilas, is taken from a cruel master, and is brought back to Julius' family in Palmyra and freed. One of Julius' daughters is the irrepressible Zenobia and we get a feel for her personality. Strong, stubborn, and self-willed, she shows herself a match for the political jockeying going on at the time by convincing two [2!] Roman emperors [both East and West] to send military aid to the Palmyrans against Shapur of Persia. She succeeds where others have failed heretofore. Julius, a general, goes off to fight the Tanukh tribe in the south while Zabdas trains for the Palmyran army. Eastern Roman emperor Valerian brings relief forces to Syria. The book closes with Zenobia marrying the Palmyran king, Odenathus. She has it in her mind to declare independence from Rome and set up a free Palmyra. Her father before had had the same dream. Burning with this thought, she wants to do it *now*, *not at some vague time in the future*, as was his idea. She tells her husband Palmyra gets no advantage from Rome as overlord; Odenathus is blinded by his loyalty to Rome. Rome, in its turn, has no feeling for the Palmyrans; all Rome wants is to protect *its own* border.

The writing was excellent. I liked characterization [especially of Zenobia and of the fascinating Zabdas] and felt the author conveyed the period and fight scenes realistically. Zabdas becomes more his own man and little bit by little bit loses his submissive attitude as he gains self-confidence. This novel is only 'the Rise of Zenobia' as the title tells us; her story will continue in a sequel, which I assume will treat of Zenobia as warrior-queen. Although I know the outcome of Zenobia's Revolt from history I am eager to continue and to read the author's portrayal.

Christoph Fischer says

"The Rise of Zenobia (Overlord, #1)" by J.D. Smith is a solid and gripping piece of historical fiction. The story takes place in the Middle East between 253 and 258 A.D. and tells the early life story of the legendary warrior queen of Palmyra.

It is told mainly by warrior Zabdas with part of the narrative set later, in 290 A.D. This lends the story a further perspective on top of his first hand involvement in the main plot.

The book is the first in a series and it follows only the rise of Zenobia in the unstable world of the 3rd century. Military and security alliances, the fading empire of Rome, trade routines, slavery and plenty of other aspects of life in the 3rd century and the fragile position of Palmyra are brought to life with attention to detail.

The author has done an excellent job at filling the gaps of what is reliably known about the times, making this a very convincing and fascinating read. I have been to Palmyra and took 9 years of Latin at school and found the story, the descriptions and historical details accurate and clearly well researched.

The plot has fighting action and personal drama with well-developed characters whose positions illustrate

perfectly the political situation of the time. An entertaining and enlightening book.
“Reviewed for the Historical Novel Association Indie Reviews”

Iset says

I have to admit I didn't like this as much as the second book, which I read a couple of years ago. I was a little more disinterested, and my attention wandered reading this book. I'm pretty sure, however, that the reason is because this is the first book in the series. It really serves as the introductory opening piece to the wider story. It's an origin story for several characters, and sets up a lot of plot strands that won't come to fruition until later in the series. It all depends on the individual reader whether you feel the story can hold its own in its own right, and whether the eventual payoff is worth it.

I commented in my review of the second book that I had trouble connecting to Zabdas because he's a youthful blank slate – this is even more true in the first book, although it's still an interesting and possibly long term good idea to tell Zenobia's story from the perspective of someone close to her who knew her well. I also have trouble connecting to the second plot thread, set when Zabdas is old. Again it has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that it's a great framing device for the story. The disadvantage is that since I know Zabdas will live to get old, it's difficult to be worried about his younger self in situations like the battle scene. It's a real balancing act, as a writer, and one that's difficult to get right.

Another disadvantage of Zabdas and Zenobia as youthful characters - Samira too - was that it was difficult to feel empathetic towards them and be engrossed. I suspect this changes later in the series as the characters become more complex and sophisticated in life experiences.

Deba says

"Wow! Queen Zenobia of the title doesn't make much of an appearance in this novel. This is because this book is the scene-setter for a series still to come. This doesn't, however, diminish the book's appeal. Narrated by Zabdas and his granddaughter Samira it is set in the 'present' of AD 290 and the past of the AD 250s.

The times are turbulent. Zabdas has returned home to Syria after fighting to protect his homeland and the Roman empire is about to fall. This could leave Syria even more vulnerable. But Zenobia, Zabdas's cousin is determined that no enemy shall take Syria.

Zabdas and Samira tell of battles, of capture, of many perils. There are some twists in the story, moments of great poignancy, of violence, of triumph and of loss. Based on actual history and added to and blended beautifully by the author, this is a gripping read. Its scale is epic. It leaves the reader satisfied, but also wanting more - more of Zenobia who's shaping up to be quite a warrior queen and more of all these wonderful vivid characters and places."

By Anne Stormont August 11, 2014 Format: Kindle Edition

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

"The Rise of Zenobia" is the tale of Zenobia, one of the Ancient world's warrior queens who I am not sure that I knew a single thing about before reading this book (isn't reading magical??). This book is the story of her rise to power in a world that was not always friendly to ambitious women. This is the first book in a planned series.

The book is told mostly from the perspective of Zabdas, Zenobia's close confidante, who is telling the story of Zenobia to his young granddaughter. Zabdas knows Zenobia well and is really able to make her come to life for his granddaughter in the book but for the reader as well. Zabdas himself is a very interesting character. He goes from being a slave to being a warrior for Zenobia who wants to carve out a home for herself and her people. The picture that Zabdas paints of Zenobia is one of a very personable woman who had a vision and a goal and will do anything to meet it. The story focuses much more on the characters than the battles, which I really enjoyed. There is a lot of political intrigue to be found here as Zenobia wheels and deals with various groups, including the Romans. This book definitely made me want to learn more about her.

The book takes place mostly in Palmyra, which is the area of present-day Syria. One aspect of the book that I really liked was that it also gives you the context for what else was going on in the world at the time through the people that Zenobia has to deal with. Oftentimes, you don't get that with a lot of historical fiction books so it is definitely a bonus for this one. Overall, I thought this was a very interesting book. I would be interested to see where this series goes!

Tracy Terry says

A big fan of this genre. If there's one thing I like more than historical fiction its historical fiction based on actual people/events and, even better still, historical fiction with a strong female lead and in *Overload: The Rise Of Zenobia #1* you get all this.

Set in the third century AD and told mainly from the perspective of Zabdas, a slave come warrior, who narrates the story of Zenobia (a warrior Queen who like the perhaps better known Boudicca/Boadicea also took on the might of the Roman Empire) to his granddaughter. Whilst the narrative does jump around between time and place its not an issue.

Full of the politics of the time (I loved the depiction of a teetering Roman Empire on the verge of collapse) and with everything from the people and places to the sights and smells vividly described this is a very well written book. Penned by an author who obviously knows her stuff, the facts are all there and yet woven into the story in such a clever way that it never feels heavy going.

My only disappointment? Whilst I appreciate that this is only part one in a series (part 2, *The Fate Of An Emperor*, is due for release this autumn) and therefore there is time for character development, given that *Overlord* was a short read of only 219 pages I personally would have preferred to see a more fleshed out Zenobia and, wonderful though they were, slightly less descriptions.

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Disclaimer: Read and reviewed on behalf of the author. I was merely asked for my honest opinion, no

financial compensation was asked for nor given.

Susan says

The Rise of Zenobia by JD Smith Zabdas tells us his story, that which is closely entwined with his relative, Zenobia. Palmyra, the jewel of Syria, is ruled by Odenanthus, a client king of the Roman empire. While he guards the frontier from the Persians, Rome refuses to send additional aid. Zenobia and her father, Julius Zenobius, feel it is time for Syria to stand on it's own.

This is an exceptionally engaging historical fiction. Zabdas's story was exciting, full of his own plight (going from slave to warrior), strained family relations, and the politics between Rome and Palmyra. His tale is told in a back and forth manner, his present day where he is a grandfather and a respected, aged warrior, and his past told through a memoir he is writing and his granddaughter is reading. I found it fascinating to see the young, unsure Zabdas versus the confident, aged warrior.

Before reading this book, I knew little of the Palmyrene Empire (I could spell it and I knew Palmyra was Syrian) and even less about Zenobia. I had no problems getting caught up in the story and learning as I went. The reader does not have to be versed in the times or area to follow this tale. It was delightfully educational. Zabdas's uncle, Julius is an interesting figure, being polite and gentle but also knowing when to be a bit cutthroat. He also has his fair share of secrets. So does his daughter, Zenobia. She is regal in her bearing, but also strong-willed. Various male leaders have a hard time tossing her out of meetings without looking the fool. She keeps her personal political agenda close to her chest until near the end of the book. Since we don't get to spend time in her head, we must guess her motives, as Zabdas does.

I enjoyed every minute of this book and had a hard time putting it down, like for a few hours of necessary sleep. I am very much hoping Book 2 comes to audio.

The Narration: Paul Hodgson was the perfect fit for Zabdas. He did a great job switching back and forth from the unsure youthful Zabdas to the seasoned war veteran Zabdas. There are only a handful of female characters in this book, it being of a small cast. Hodgson had a nice female voice, but I found that all the ladies sounded alike. If two were talking together, I had to pay close attention most of the time to follow who was talking. Hodgson had a variety of accents that added to the over all flavor of the book.

Jo Barton says

I've got to admit that this is a period of history of which I know absolutely nothing and what made a refreshing change was coming into a novel with no notion of where the story would take me. From the beginning I was drawn into an ancient world, a world of hostile environments where only the daring survive. And into this harsh and often brutal land, comes Zenobia, a warrior queen who dares to take on the might of the Roman Empire. Based in Palmyra, (modern day Syria) in the 3rd century and mixing scanty factual evidence alongside pure fiction, the story of a brave and bold warrior is told in easy to read segments and with a lightness of touch this story of intrigue and political skulduggery comes gloriously to life.

As with any new series there is a sense of 'getting to know' people and the introduction of people and places that may be in the series for the long haul make a lasting impression. I enjoyed the way that Zabdas recounts the story to his granddaughter, Samira, and with his help, as we flit back and forth in time; we get a sense, not just of time and place, but also of history and strategic planning on a grand scale.

Stories about the Roman Empire can sometimes become a bit too complicated, filled as they are with

complex names and long forgotten heroes, and yet I found this to be such an enjoyable read that, for once, I didn't get bewildered by too much information, and found that the story flowed easily.

So, if like me, you want palatable Roman history, with a story of a brave and beautiful warrior queen, then investing in this series from the beginning will be worth it.

Gillian Hamer says

I've been long fascinated by the Roman period, and read lots of books - fiction and non - on the Empire, but I knew very little about that same period in Palmyra (modern day Syria) and even less about the warrior Queen Zenobia. This is certainly a story worth telling - and is told in the most gripping, intelligent manner by this author. The story put me in mind of Boudicca, another woman who took on the might of the Roman army, and I loved the way the narrative took us back and forth in time as the story, and its secrets, were told.

Every character came alive on the page for me - from Zabdas, who tells us the history of Zenobia through conversations with his granddaughter, Samira, through to the numerous Roman rulers and Palmyrian Kings, to my favourite minor character, Bamdad. I thought the language and dialogue, what could have been a tricky obstacle, were both expertly handled.

If you're a fan of historical fiction and like Douglas Jackson, Bernard Cornwell, Simon Scarrow - then you will adore this novel. The Rise of Zenobia is the first in the series and I can't wait to read more from this talented author.
