

Empires of Stone and Spirit

Exploring Ancient Worlds

And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all...so the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing." Acts 19:19-29

It began with the ending, with the simple idea that I would write a 20-page short story that culminated in an intriguing incident from New Testament scriptures. In the book of Acts there is a brief description of the near riot of the silversmiths in the city of Ephesus, in response to the preaching of Paul and Timothy on the new faith in Christ Jesus. Being a city girl, it always captured my imagination that so many of the New Testament cities are not unlike our cities today – major crossroads of language, culture, and beliefs, an intriguing tapestry of humanity and fertile ground for new flowerings of faith. I thought that 20 pages would be more than enough to weave a compelling short story.

But when I immersed in the research and each turn of the page yielded a new priceless gem, I couldn't help but take those deeper dives into ancient deities and rituals, midwifery and leprosy, mining and metallurgy, garum sauce and flamingo tongue casserole. Well, a few years and almost 300 pages later, we have a novel.



If you're a bit nerdy like me, you enjoy a glimpse into the story behind the story. I've provided below a few resources that helped me research the novel, and will help you explore ancient worlds at your leisure.

Chicago is blessed with four museums that I happily perused for more hours than I can recall, providing a wealth of inspiration and visual cues for the 1st Century CE.

- The Art Institute of Chicago boasts an amazing network of galleries with Roman and Greek artifacts reflecting a range of locations, cultures and activities in the ancient world.
- The University of Chicago Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures provided an extensive body of information on Nubia based on its archeological expeditions and holdings from the early 1900s, and more recent scholarship on the region.
- My other go-to galleries were in the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center and the Field Museum of Natural History. The DuSable had a small but vivid collection of artifacts from Nubia that gave a sense of the material culture during the period of interest in the city of Meroe. And at the Field, the Grainger Hall of Gems displays a spectacular exhibition of gems and jewelry dating back to antiquity - an unexpected oasis of beauty and opulence.

I would be remiss if I didn't highlight online sources that continually refresh our understanding of Meroe, Nubia, and the richness of African history. Tragically, through neglect, institutional and academic racism, looting, warfare, and other disruptions, so much history of these locations and time periods has been lost. Fortunately, newer generations of writers, photographers, archaeologists and researchers are helping to explore, reveal and elevate these histories. Listed below is a brief sampling of resources I've read, viewed, or have on my TBR list:

- MFA Highlights: Arts of Ancient Nubia - Denise M. Doxey
- William Leo Hansberry Society
- Ancient Nubia Lessons & Resources – Boston University Pardee School of Global Studies, African Studies Center
- New Perspectives on Ancient Nubia - Dr. Solange Ashby
- Dancing for Hathor: Nubian Women in Egyptian Cultic Life - Dr. Solange Ashby
- Sensing Inequalities in Ancient Nubia - Debora Heard
- An African History of Africa - Zeinab Badawi