



Written in the Ashes

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In the bloody clash between Christians and pagans in fifth-century Alexandria, a slave girl becomes the last hope for preserving peace in this evocative and thrilling tale reminiscent of *The Mists of Avalon*. A blend of history, adventure, religion, romance, and mysticism, this shares the untold story of the events that led to the burning of the Great Library of Alexandria.

After she is abducted from her home in the mountains of Sinai, Hannah is enslaved and taken to Alexandria, where she becomes the property of Alizar, an alchemist and pagan secretly working to preserve his culture. Revered for her beautiful singing voice, the young slave is invited to perform at the city's Great Library, where she becomes friends with the revered mathematician and philosopher, Hypatia, as well as other pagans who curate its magnificent collections. Determined to help them uphold pagan culture and traditions, Hannah embarks on a dangerous quest to unite the fractured pieces of the Emerald Tablet—the last hope to save the pagans and create peace.

On this odyssey that leads her to the lost oracles of Delfi and Amun-Ra and to rediscovered ancient cities and rituals, Hannah will experience forbidden loves, painful betrayals, and poignant reunions. But her efforts may be in vain. Returning to Alexandria, Hannah finds a city engulfed in violence, even as her own romantic entanglements come to a head. Now, it's not only her future, but the fate of all Alexandria that is at stake.

Written in the Ashes Details

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From Reader Review Written in the Ashes for online ebook

Suzanne Lilly says

Let me first make a confession. I joined this book review tour because the description for Written in the Ashes sounded intriguing. What might our world be like today if the Great Library of Alexandria hadn't burned?

Once I received my copy, I put it on my Kindle, but didn't start reading it until about two weeks ago. Now I regret waiting so long to begin this book. From the very first paragraph, no, the first sentence, I was in love with Van Zandt's prose and her mastery of historical fiction. The story begins:

All trees hold secrets.

How could I put it down after that opening sentence? If only I had started the book sooner, I could have read it once and read it again by now. Yes, this is one of those books to keep on your shelf or ereader to be enjoyed many times over.

Let me make another confession. I haven't finished this book yet. However, it's because I take my time with the best historical books, savoring the sensations and descriptions as I read. I found myself stopping to reread passages and leaning back in my chair, taking a moment to picture things the author had created on the page.

K. Hollan Van Zandt has a magical way with words that sweeps you into ancient Egypt so readily, and with such finesse, that not only can you picture the setting, you can smell the dusty clay earth floating into your nostrils as you walk the trails. Her writing evokes the taste of desert honey melting in the sun and dripping off your fingers as you lift them to your lips. For example, in this very short excerpt, I can feel the breeze and taste the salt in the air as I watch the wind lift the bed curtains.

A slight ocean breeze from a north-facing balcony nudged two sheer luminous veils draped around the bed, lifting them like the hands of a dancing phantom. The scent of the sea was stronger in that room than in any other Hannah had been in, sweet and salt-laden. She relished it, breathing in and licking her lips. She did not want to leave the woman's bedside the way she would not want to draw her cold hands away from a fire.

Not only are the descriptions wonderful, the author makes the characters so lifelike, it's hard to believe they're not sitting nearby, waiting to share a meal with you. I instantly felt a connection with Hannah, a young girl sold into slavery in the opening chapters.

Written in the Ashes took Van Zandt a decade to write. My only hope is that it won't take her another decade to write the sequel.

Here is what some people are saying about Written in the Ashes.

Disclosure: I received my review copy from Virtual Author Book Tours.

Chrissie says

BEFORE READING:

This book is currently available for \$2.29 in Kindle format at Amazon. At this price and having checked the sample, I figured why not try it. Hypatia and the Alexandria library - the subject matter is interesting.

ON COMPLETION:

I have the hardest time writing reviews for those books that neither anger me because they are so terrible nor excite me because they are so wonderful. This is such a book.

I wanted to learn more about the life of Hypatia, the famed woman astronomer, philosopher and mathematician who lived at the turn of the 5th Century CE. I wanted to learn more about the Library of Alexandria and the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismagistus. However, after reading this book, I feel I could have gotten the same from a rapid search at Wikipedia. In fact I did feel compelled to read at Wikipedia anyhow. There are today so many unsolved questions. The author has done an admiral job of offering us one possible explanation detailing Hypatia's death and the circumstances of the burning of the library. In an epilog she has explained where she has altered known facts, willfully allowed anachronisms and specified the unknowns. I cannot criticize that. It is just that I simply didn't learn enough. This book is a dramatization of one possible scenario.

So let's look at the manner of dramatization. I believe a primary problem for me is that the tone of the novel is too cinematic. Many people enjoy plot oriented books with dramatic turns and bravado behavior. This is a book for them. I think it is totally corny when in the heat of the fire a character throws a shard of emerald and, whamo, kills the bad guy.....

This felt like fiction to me. Given the acknowledged known facts, how can these be puzzled together to make sense? This is how the author has approached the subject matter. This is in fact logical, but it becomes "too cleaned up", too simple. This event has to happen so that event can happen. A message is to be delivered so the characters do this or that so the message can be given. True life is so much messier and complex. In this novel, a repentant bishop is just too "sweet" for my tastes, but you see the author wants to make a particular statement that will please her readers or her own beliefs. We know that Bishop Cyril did exist, although some events remain unclear. The author has chosen one very plausible alternative to profess her point of view and to achieve a moving story. In addition, there is clear forewarning of coming events. I appreciate more subtlety.

The author employs a few writing gimmicks, for example, the repetitive use of a one word sentence: "So." The reader is supposed to stop and pause and think and then go on. It is just that it was used repetitively.

The author imagines one character who has a wonderful view of religion based on kindness, compassion and understanding. This character states that he follows all religious beliefs not limiting himself to just one. A person of any faith will nod and say: THIS is what religion should be about. I too thought the lines beautifully expressed how religion should be manifested. THIS is what we must seek. Pretty lines that I guarantee all will love.....but again, a bit obvious. On a Kindle you can see the number of people who have marked a particular passage. Yup, everyone loved these lines. No one could hate them.

For me this book was good, but I wanted a lot more. I want more nuances. I wanted more complicated people. I wanted more answers. Unfortunately we do not today have all the answers. That is certainly not the author's fault, but we have to decide if we want to spend time on the book.

This book is the first of the planned Mediterranean Trilogy. It is optioned for television. Many people will enjoy the cinematic feel. If you are curious for more, visit www.WrittenInTheAshes.com/Hannah

Anagha Uppal says

"Save your hate for someone who deserves it."

This and other beautiful quotes fill the pages of Written in the Ashes :)

Written in the Ashes was at first refreshing because this is the first non-YA book I've read in weeks, which is highly unusual. It's also a historical novel, which I don't read very often.

Every once in a while, a book comes along that restores my faith in indie/small pub books. I read indies to discover books like this - brilliant, unique, original and well-written reads - gems that only be found if you dig deep enough through the mud and the rock. I can hardly believe such a novel exists that so few people know about... well, enough that an Academy-Award-winning producer read it and snatched it up for a TV miniseries. :D

This novel is highly entertaining as well as thought-provoking, and the amount of hard work and research put into it is evident on every page. I could clearly picture the beauty and the danger of the 5th century setting and the stunning characters, especially the beautiful and brave Hannah.

Ashes has it all - love, passion, growth, drama, adventure, danger, murder, humor, and above all, an absolutely gripping and gorgeous writing style.

I am absolutely a fan of Kaia VanZandt and I have just one question for her: where can I get the sequel??

P.S. Apparently, *Ashley Judd* (yes, the lead in TV show *Missing*) talks about Kaia - "Kaia is an old soul. She's a powerful, intelligent woman. I look forward to reading her book!"
Cool, huh?

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

Oh where to begin with this book? Where to begin? There were so many things that I loved in this book. First, one of the main stars of the show is the Great Library of Alexandria. As a voracious reader with a love for history, I've always felt a little sad when I think about the Great Library burning. While it may seem silly to still be upset about things that happened hundreds and hundreds of years ago, just think of all that information that was lost when that library burned. Think of everything that was lost!!! Think of what we could have learned! Okay, now that I've made you a little bit sad about a building burning down many, many years ago, let's continue ;)

VanZandt does a fantastic job with recreating what it must have been like to live back in Alexandria during the 400s. You can see the sites of the port in your mind's eye. You can imagine the clothing of all of the different kinds of people that made their way to Alexandria. I love great settings and I love great characters but I love most of all when an author can give you a full bodied experience. And what I mean by that is when an author gives you everything you could want in a book. You feel like you could be in the setting. You know exactly what the characters look like. You can see yourself hanging out with them (oh, Hannah, you are so awesome) or punching them in the face (oh, Tareq, you're pretty terrible and have way too much for your own good). To say I got sucked into the book would be an understatement. In the interest of full disclosure, I found myself sneaking looks at my Kindle just to read another page or two whenever I could.

And yes, this book almost made me miss my Metro stop (I didn't miss it but came very close to doing so; a mark of a great book).

Let me tell you about the characters too. Hannah, the main character, was a stand out for me. She's the type of person that I'd love to have a glass of wine with and just chat. She was from Sinai and was brought to Alexandria where she was sold as a slave. She's bright and is so nice to everyone who is nice to her. She also knows how to kick you-know-what and take names when she needs to. I love that she can do both. It's such a good balance.

Not only did this book take me to a place that I had never really been before (I've read historical fiction about Egypt but most of it seemed to take place elsewhere and not in Alexandria). I think I would have gotten on well in Alexandria. It seems like my kind of place with all of the education and philophizing going on. This was sooooo good!

Bottom line: Historical fiction lovers who want a full bodied experience must read this book (emphasis on the must; this is not optional)!

Cam says

A compelling, ambitious work of historical fiction set around the time of the burning of Alexandria's magnificent library. I like big books and I cannot lie.

Let me begin by saying how daunting it is to review a work of quite epic proportions (and this is only book 1!). Once upon a time, I did entertain dreams of being an Egyptologist, thanks to Henry Jones Jr., but I claim no formal qualifications—just a fascination with history in general because it has been said that 'the past is never dead. It's not even past.'

'Hatred is a poison, you cannot drink it and expect another to die'.

What an amazing line! I feel as though an essay might better suffice, but then *Written in the Ashes* is a journey that is better experienced without the spoilers that a review of that length would no doubt be littered with. Yes, the novel is inspired by actual historical figures and events, but it is told mainly through the eyes of Hannah, a Jewish shepherd girl abducted from her home in the deserts of Sinai and sold into slavery on the streets of Alexandria.

Admittedly there are shifting viewpoints, most notably that of Hypatia, daughter of mathematician and philosopher Theon of Alexandria who herself was to become a philosopher and the first recorded female mathematician. *Written in the Ashes* is, of course, a fictionalised account of her as the headmistress of the Great Library of Alexandria, but it's not really Hypatia's story. I am ashamed to say I knew next to nothing about her and I'm grateful that reading Ms Hollan Van Zandt's novel prompted further research into this brilliant woman.

'So.'

Can I say that I have never come across a more inspired use of such an unassuming two-letter word in the English language before? With it, Hollan Van Zandt effortlessly evokes the quiet intensity of the novel's myriad of characters. Admittedly I found I lost interest in what went on with these other characters (such as the main antagonist Bishop Cyril of Alexandria) and just wanted to get back to Hannah but these parts were

few and far in between.

Eloquently told in three parts, *Written in the Ashes* has an engaging heroine who learns to survive in the life she was viciously thrust into. Exploring the religious conflict that plagued Alexandria circa 415 AD, it's not a religious book per se, but in touching on the intermingling subjects of science and religion it delivers a wonderful message of tolerance.

On that regard, I was reminded of Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, in which the book's protagonist, Pi (as in the mathematical constant), is baffled by agnosticism because he believes that 'to choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation'. I thought he would make great friends with Alizar (Hannah's kind and successful vintner 'owner') who 'adhere[s] to any religion that has love as its foundation...[because] God has no boundaries...[and] we are the ones who imagine separation'.

There is also an underlying thread of romance that I appreciated—for no grand tale is complete without a romance—and even an unexpected love triangle that wasn't intrusive to the main plot and was part of Hannah's growth as a character. I'm so glad that this book has been picked up as a TV mini-series and, last I checked K. Hollan Van Zandt's website, she is in talks with the writer of the fantastic HBO series *Rome*. This would be amazing on the screen if it were adapted properly.

YAY OR NAY?

This book is a compelling, ambitious work of historical fiction that retells the tumultuous events that culminated to the burning of Alexandria's magnificent library and the brutal death of its headmistress through the eyes of a beautiful young Jewish shepherdess. It's not a romance novel, but the love story in it is strong and aids to propel the story.

Who might enjoy it: Historical fiction readers partial to tomes

Who might not enjoy it: Readers who don't like big books and cannot lie

A review copy of this book was generously provided by Virtual Author Book Tours, but I ended up purchasing the hardback halfway through reading it.

{Review from bookthingo.com.au}

Teddy says

Written In the Ashes takes place in the 5th century after the Roman Empire collapses, in Alexandria Egypt. It opens with teenager, Hannah, a shepherd girl roaming the desert with her father in search of a new place to live that has water for their sheep and themselves to live. One night Hannah sleeps close to the sheep to keep an eye on them but she is awakened by men who kidnap her and rape her. They bring her to Alexandria and auction her off as a slave to the highest bidder, Tarek. However, Tarek is a young man, still living in his father's house. His father, Alizar soon discovers Hannah.

Alizar recognizes the beauty and talent in Hannah for her intelligence and singing voice. He decides to give her the opportunity to buy back her freedom and sends her to the Library of Alexandria to get educated and is taken under the wings of Hypatia, the library's headmistress and other's. When Hypatia gives lectures, she invites Hannah to sing and the audience is mesmerized.

Meanwhile, the Bishop, Cyril vows to rid Alexandria of all he views as pagan, including Jews and Hypatia. Cyril does find a way to chase the Jews out and a great many are killed. How far will he go? Does he and his disciples have anything to do with the burning of the Great Library? How will Hannah fair in all of this?

You must read Written In the Ashes to find out! Yes, this is a must read for all historical fiction lovers. This is K. Hollan Van Zandt's first book but you would never guess it. It sung to me like the main character, Hannah with beautiful prose, gleaming characters and 5th century Alexandria, Egypt being brought to life. The words poured off the pages and as hard as I tried to savour each word, I could not put Written In the Ashes down. I cried at the end because I was so upset that the book ended!

Written In the Ashes is book one in what Van Zandt hopes to be a trilogy. It has been optioned by Mark R. Harris, Academy Award-Winning Producer (Crash, Gods & Monsters) for a TV mini-series! Van Zandt told me that one of the big publishers really loved the book but doesn't think that readers are interested in 5th century Alexandria, Egypt and the burning of the Great Library. I find that hard to believe and I hope you will help K. Hollan Van Zandt, I, and others prove them wrong. Written In the Ashes is in my top 5 books of all time, I hope it will be yours as well!

Emmy says

There wasn't anything wrong it with this, but it just failed to capture my attention and I felt like I was just plodding along more out of determination then enjoyment.

Patty says

I finished this book a few days ago and I wanted it to settle before I wrote my review. The novel, by the author's admission is part history, part imagination and part magic. Going back so far in time leaves an author with little written record to rely on for fact. The burning of the Great Library at Alexandria was a monumental loss to humanity. The facts of the matter aside, this novel was truly arresting and I had a hard time putting it down to get anything done.

Ancient history fascinates me. Religion fascinates me. This book manages to tie both together in a story that resonates through time. People have been fighting over the "better god" for millenia and I fear it will never end. Written in the Ashes pits the ever strengthening Christianity against the Old Ways considered to be Pagan. Cyril, the bishop in charge of Alexandria wants to solidify his power base (uh-huh, as if it's ever REALLY about religion) and get rid of the practitioners of any other religion other than his own. He does this through fear and intimidation.

Hypatia, the last recorded librarian for the Great Library is a forward thinking woman who wants all to be able to practice as they feel. She has a base of support but Cyril is calling her a witch and a whore so the people are learning to fear her. One of her main supporters Alizar has recently taken a slave into his household, Hannah. Hannah is a Jewess who was kidnapped from her father. She has a destiny of which she is completely unaware.

The book was fascinating. The characters were well developed and I really didn't want to leave this world of

ancient Alexandria. The imaginary, magical priests and the beautiful goddesses created by Ms. Van Zandt lent themselves to a mystical world that was quite believable within its context. As the story unfolded I was rooting for Hannah to fulfill her destiny and find peace with her past. I am looking forward to the next chapters in these characters lives.

Amy Bruno says

After seeing the rave reviews of *Written in the Ashes* from my blogger peeps I knew I had to read it, and when Teddy emailed me with the chance to review it for Kaia's Blog Tour I immediately signed up! And boy am I glad that I did! It's just as intriguing and un-put-down-able as I hoped it would be!

Written in the Ashes brings us back to 5th century BC, to Alexandria and the events leading up to the burning of the Library at Alexandria. The story is told through the eyes of Hannah, a young girl who is taken from her homeland and sold as a slave to a prominent man in Alexandria. Her intelligence and lovely singing voice set her apart and her new owner, Alizar, sends her on a quest for the Emerald Tablet, which Alizar believed would be the key to uniting the empire.

I read *Written in the Ashes* in just a few sittings, despite the massive size (500 pages) and suffering from motion sickness on a road trip. No way was I going to let a little nausea keep me from finishing this amazing novel! The perfect mix of action, adventure, mysticism, history, and a strong female protagonist, Van Zandt knocks it out of the park and written the quintessential historical fiction novel. Highly recommended!

Important Note: I feel that I would be remiss in mentioning that there is a pretty vivid rape scene in the beginning of the novel. I don't feel that it took away from the book itself, but I would hate for someone that has been a victim of sexual assault to be triggered by such a scene.

Thanks to Teddy from Virtual Author Book Tours & K. Hollan Van Zandt for the chance to read this amazing book!

Kristin says

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Once in a very long while, there comes along a book that you wonder how you ever lived without it before. One that you have read, and your mind wanders back to on occasion. There are a few books like that for me.....*The Firebrand* by Marion Zimmer Bradley and *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. *The Firebrand* inspired my love for all things in Greek mythology, and *A Wrinkle In Time* is actually the book that inspired by first major in college, physics.

Then this book, *Written in the Ashes* comes along. I hate comparing any book to the great classics, like *A Wrinkle in Time* or *Firebrand*, but it wouldn't be fair if I didn't. It's really just that good. The book is really long, 500+ pages, but it goes into such detail and the action is so well drawn out you don't feel those pages. There are minor things I didn't like about the book. I feel like the time of Hannah's before slavery time was far too short. I would have loved to see more about the Jewish culture in there. There was the constant writing of the word "so" in the book. Maybe it broke the book down, and it was supposed to make it seem more like a very long oral story, but it didn't work for me.

Stuart Volkow says

K. Hollan Van Zandt's debut novel about the *burning of the Great Library of Alexandria* is a fantastic page-turner. Anyone who starts this will be riveted from page one to the end.

I am a lover of epics, and this filled me with its wonderful, grand sweep of history, tantalizing detail and compelling characters making me feel like I was there. This is also an action-adventure with an epic scale complete with terrifying, high-stakes battles between nation states, rulers, and those devoted to a beloved cause.

The fabric of *Ashes* is history, the thread is a grand love story that keeps building in passion, desire and some inevitable regret. It made me think about true love versus life and living. Can they meet?

As a student of history and philosophy the book teaches the importance of Hypatia of Alexandria and the Great Library itself. It was truly the Internet of antiquity. Van Zandt's exhaustive research and attention to detail make this pivotal moment in history leading to the Dark Ages come alive.

As a Jew, the book and its central character Hannah, takes on added importance, as it taught me another lesson about what it means to be Jewish, and why Israel must stay strong.

Sofia Greenberg says

In K. Van Zandt's *Written in the Ashes*, we follow young shepherd girl Hannah across the desert of Sinai, to the great city of Alexandria, through Egypt and to Greece in her initiation into womanhood and quest for the preservation of the works at the Great Library of Alexandria. An advocate for ancient cultures and a brilliant storyteller, Van Zandt passionately executes this heroine's journey with rich humor, deep compassion, sexual vibrancy, and an acute respect for knowledge.

In this time of tumultuous social change, Van Zandt's propensity to reimagine history from a non-patriarchal perspective must be applauded and relished. *Written in the Ashes* is an essential read for anyone who has felt the gravity and loneliness of protecting what is true in a shaky world.

The characters in *Written in the Ashes* will stay with me as I undergo my own odyssey for knowledge, candor, and love.

- Sofia Greenberg, student of Creative Writing and Literature at The California College of the Arts

Pattie says

I'd been wanting to learn more about the great library of Alexandria and Hypatia...along came this book to satisfy my desire!! I highly recommend this book for lovers of ancient history fiction! Xx

Sheila says

The Library at Alexandria has always fascinated me. What if it had not disappeared? What history of the

ancient world might we know?

This book is a very interesting novel which looks at one scenario for the destruction of this famed library. As the author notes in the epilogue "It is most important to recognize that this novel in your hands is a synthesis of legend, history and imagination." Since so much of the actual history of this time was lost by the destruction of this famed library, I think the author did a great job of creating a story with what history we do know, and I love how she tells at the end of the book what is based on history, what is based on legend, and what parts she created to fill in the story.

I also enjoyed learning about Hypatia, an amazing historical woman who I knew nothing about prior, and the legend of The Emerald Tablet is also fascinating to me.

A great historical novel, and an excellent job for the first work of this author. I would recommend it for fans of historical novels who have any interest in learning about this time period. The kindle edition I purchased was a great deal.

Heather says

While this book initially started out a little bit slow for me, it quickly picked up and I became instantly attached to the characters and the events that transpired. The characters were wonderfully written and I LOVED Hypatia. I had a vision of her in my head from the film *Agora* starring Rachel Weisz and I think my biggest issue was that I couldn't match the Hypatia in the book with the one in the movie. But as far as looks go, that is my least concern. For someone who we don't really know all that much about I loved getting to know her. She was a very learned woman and it was entirely unfair that people didn't understand the difference between science and witch craft and the world lost her much too soon. In terms of the leading men, I found myself intermittently in love with Gideon and Julian – both very good and brave men.

I enjoyed all of the drama brought about by the quest given to Hannah to find the Emerald Tablet. The exchanges between the characters in these scenes were some of my favorites. The scenes at the height of the novel were so action packed that I couldn't put it down; I felt like somehow I would miss things unfolding while the cover was closed.

I have to give high praise to the author for the atmospheric world of Alexandria and beyond that she brought to the page. For a lighthouse and library that no longer stand – and which I have never seen any images of – I could certainly picture them in my mind. We also travel to two oracles – one at Delphi and one in Egypt, whose name escapes me right now. I had not ever read about oracles before and really didn't know what to expect, however I enjoyed how van Zandt presented them. When they left Delphi I felt sad. After the fall of the Great Library I felt like I too was standing on the shore watching as the ash fell everywhere and again I felt the sadness that I am sure engulfed many at the time.

There were two small complaints that I have about this novel. The first I am not sure was an e-book issue or actually part of the novel – this is my first e-book on my Kindle. Sections were periodically divided with "So". Sometimes it felt like this was appropriate as in, "and then this happened" while at other times it felt like some sort of glitch in the e-book process. If anyone has read the paper copy please let me know! The other issue I had was where periodically referenced was an angel. I'm not really sure of the angel's purpose but it was distracting to me and I didn't feel like it was a necessary addition.

Overall I thought that this was a wonderful read that I would highly recommend. Not only do we get treated to a beautiful view of Alexandria but the story is one that deserves to be told. I can't wait for this to be

brought to the screen!

This book was received for review from the author - I was not compensated for my opinions and the above is my honest review.
