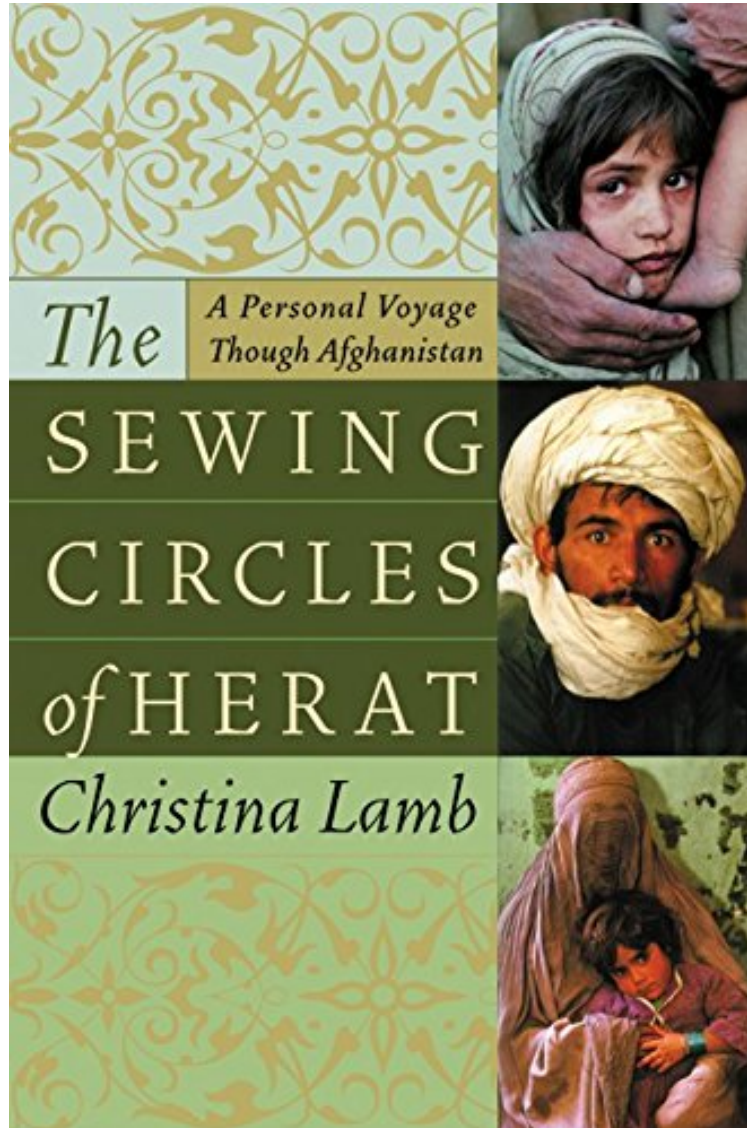


# The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan

*Christina Lamb*

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**Christina Lamb : The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Solid Overview By lit-in-the-last-frontier As a young woman, Christina Lamb traveled to Afghanistan, and through a mix of persistence, courage, connections, and writing talent

managed to document the final two years of the struggle for Afghan freedom against the Soviets. Over the years she kept her finger on the pulse of the region, wrote a couple of books, and ultimately returned again to be on the ground as the Taliban breathed its last in the early months of 2002. Christina Lamb is a wonderful writer with a knack for interweaving just the right amount of her own personal narrative in with the current events about which she is writing. In addition, she casts back into the past and gives a whole lot of background information on Afghan history, politics, monarchy, trade, and agriculture. I especially loved sections of the book where she discussed the architecture of the city of Herat during the height of its beauty, juxtaposing it against its current state. While Herat may be in the title of the book, many cities are given equal coverage, among them the more conservative stronghold of Kandahar and the capital city of Kabul. The book is fairly accurately titled in that women's issues are very prominently featured in the narrative, and she discusses the history of different areas of Afghanistan with regards to women, education, and the arts, both before and after the Taliban. Lamb does an excellent job bringing the reader's senses to life and into her environment; readers feel the ruts beneath the airplane wheels and the grit of the dust storms—you smell the pine trees and taste the mutton. Hearts ache for the children who lack for the most basic things—she heads one of her chapters with a quote that I love from the Persian poet Rumi: "Look at your eyes. They are small but they see enormous things." The things that these children have seen and survived defy comprehension. Indeed, the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Photography was awarded to Massoud Hossaini for his horrific shot of a twelve year old girl screaming in fear amidst a mass of bodies moments after a suicide bomb detonated in Kabul. That same sense of place and culture comes through in the tenor of Christina Lamb's writing; she spent a lot of time among the people, not sitting in the hotel with her western journalist coworkers, and it shows. My one complaint, and the single factor that kept me from giving the book a fifth star, is that at times her timeline can get rather discombobulated as she tries to focus on specific people or places. I would have preferred that she take a more chronological approach; obviously those places where she goes back to the Mongols that is not possible, but a stricter chronology from the late 1970's to the 2000s would have made for a much tighter narrative. My preference would have been to provide a listing of people at the beginning of the book, to help readers to have difficulty keeping all of the similar sounding Middle Eastern names straight, and then travel chronologically through the story, letting readers refer back to the list to refresh their memories as players come up again. There are a lot of books out there on this topic. This is a very good one for people without a lot of background, as the author does an excellent job giving the reader everything needed. It was published in 2002, so many of the players have since been apprehended, but that doesn't in any way take away from the history of it. Overall, I highly recommend this energetically written, informative account. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Great view of Afghanistan and Pakistan -- by a woman author By A Customer There are many good books now offering us insight into Afghanistan and Pakistan, but even the best of them -- like Carpet Wars -- are by men and almost all the people they meet and talk about are men -- not surprisingly, given where they are. Christina Lamb has been in Afghanistan and nearby Pakistan over a period of decades. Her writing is clear, direct, and sympathetic to the people she's known there for many years, including Hamid Karzai. The people she meets -- and re-meets -- along the way become part of her story which humanizes the the local situations she describes. Top notch! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Incredible insight, though from personal experience By settler This account speaks eloquently of the need/desire for education by women in Afghanistan. Also discloses quirks in the culture that we need to understand in order to be effective collaborators.

A gold-inscribed invitation to a wedding in a foreign land led Christina Lamb at the age of twenty-one to leave suburban England for Peshawar on the frontier of the Afghan war. Like the Englishmen in the Great Game of the nineteenth century, she was captivated by the Afghans she met. For two years she tracked the final stages of the mujaheddin victory over the Soviets as Afghan friends smuggled her in and out of their country in a variety of guises -- from burqa-clad wife to Kandahari boy -- travelling by foot, on donkeys or hidden under the floor of an ambulance. Among those friends was Abdul Haq, the recently executed Kabul commander, and Hamid Karzai, the new president of Afghanistan, who took Lamb to his hometown of Kandahar, where they rode around on the backs of motorbikes belonging to a group of fighters known as the Mullahs Front. It was these figures who went on to become founding members of the Taliban. Long haunted by her experiences in Afghanistan, Lamb returned there after the attacks on the World Trade Center to find out what had become of the people and places that had marked her life as a young graduate, and to report for Britain's Sunday Telegraph newspaper. She was now seeing the land anew, through the eyes of a mother and an experienced foreign correspondent who has lived in Africa, South America, Portugal and the United States. Lamb's journey brought her in touch with the people no one else has written about: the abandoned victims of almost a quarter century of war. Among them are the brave women writers of Herat who risked their lives to carry on the literary tradition of this ancient Persian city under the guise of sewing circles; the princess whose palace was surrounded by tanks on the eve of her wedding; the artist who painted out all the people in his works to prevent their being destroyed by the Taliban; and Khalil Ahmed Hassani, a former Taliban torturer who admits to breaking the spines of men then making them stand on their heads. Christina Lamb's evocative reporting brings to life these stories. Her unique perspective on Afghanistan and deep passion for the people she writes about makes this the definitive

account of the tragic plight of a proud nation.

From Publishers Weekly Expelled from Afghanistan by the Taliban for her reporting, award-winning British journalist Lamb returned after the September 11 attacks to observe the land and its people firsthand. Through interviews with locals, Lamb paints a vivid picture of Taliban rule and offers a broader sense of life devastated by two decades of war. Her well-written and moving account also reveals the heroism of the Afghans, who not only survived but also resisted their Soviet occupiers; clandestine literary circles and art preservation techniques, for example, helped Afghans salvage their education and history from total destruction. Yet this is more than a chronicle of everyday Afghan life. Lamb's probing interviews with Afghan warlords, former members of the Taliban and other influential personalities ignored by the Western media fill a gaping hole in research on the ideologies and perspectives of these actors. Her encounters with Pakistani Taliban patrons Sami-ul-Haq and Hamid Gul shed light on Pakistan's support for the Taliban. Lamb could have strengthened her account by utilizing her impressive research to further explain Afghanistan's poorly understood local rulers. Moreover, her occasional use of sensationalist language to describe Afghan suffering belittles the gravity of the situation, and her attempts to intersperse the country's complicated history with the present situation may also confuse unfamiliar readers. Nevertheless, her work leaves one with a powerful sense of what the Afghan people have endured and sheds light on the local leaders who have shaped Afghanistan's recent history. Illus. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist As a journalist covering Afghanistan during the end of the war with the Soviet Union, Lamb has a unique perspective. Observing that country after the fall of the Taliban, Lamb looks back on her days reporting on the war and is deeply unsettled to learn that the rebellious "mullahs on motorbikes" who took her to the warfront became the cruel and unbending Taliban soldiers who repressed the people of Afghanistan by perverting the ideals of Islam. "Nowhere does it say men must have beards or women can not be educated," one Afghani friend of Lamb laments, "in fact on the contrary the Koran says people must seek education." Lamb speaks to the head of the most prestigious Taliban school, a princess in exile, and women who risked everything to hold classes in their houses. She also receives letters from Marri, a young woman who barely dares to hope that the Americans will liberate the Afghan people. The scope of Lamb's book sets it apart from similar works; readers will find it both comprehensive and absorbing. Kristine Huntley Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved About the Author Christina Lamb is one of the world's leading foreign correspondents. Author of *Farewell Kabul* and New York Times bestseller *I Am Malala*, she has reported on Pakistan and Afghanistan since 1987. Educated at Oxford and Harvard, she is the author of five books and has won a number of awards, including Britain's Foreign Correspondent of the Year five times, as well as the Prix Bayeux-Calvados, Europe's most prestigious award for war correspondents. She currently works for the Sunday Times and lives in London and Portugal with her husband and son.