

## 1: Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan by William Dalrymple

*Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan*, written by the Scottish historian William Dalrymple and published in , is an account of the First Anglo-Afghan War from to

His latest offering, *Return of a King*, is a tale of imperial plotting and folly in a region that has suffered from every sort of indignity and tragedy at the hands of local and foreign rulers. It is quite simply brilliant. The latest and most brilliant in this long line of critics is William Dalrymple and his *Return of a King*. Dalrymple is in no doubt about the moral horror of the British invasion. But he is too good a historian to fall back on polemic. The cruelty and treachery with which Afghans treated one another is crisply portrayed. His pen-portraits are a masterpiece. At one level it is a compendium of ripping yarns, but at another it is the work of a scrupulous historian telling, as though he were an eyewitness, a tale so pitiless and tragic that it should be read by every politician involved in our policies in Afghanistan now. For the British it was a descent into hell with soldiers even reduced to cannibalism in their fevered attempts to stay alive. Only in the conclusion does he draw the powerful parallel with modern times, but most of us are thinking of this from the first page to the last. The galloping pace of the narrative will keep you turning the pages eagerly. My only regret reading this wonderful history is that it was not published a decade earlier. *Return of a King* is not just an animated and highly literate retelling of a chapter of early 19th-century British military history, but also a determined attempt to reach out and influence the politicians and policy-makers of our modern world. It is his mastery of the intimate details, as well as the landscape and the grand rivalry between empires, Dalrymple wins our trust and keeps our interest. There is no need for Flashman or Kim to flesh things out, for it is all here. A masterpiece of nuanced writing and research, and a thrilling account of a watershed Victorian conflict. Even years later, the events described in *Return of a King* still have the power to shock- and so they should. For while it is first and foremost a valuable contribution to the history of Afghanistan and the British Raj, it is also intended to draw parallels and convey lessons about the latest western involvement in the region. Many of them he unearthed abroad, mining archives in Kabul, Lahore and Delhi even finding first-hand material in Moscow and somehow coping with the languages involved Dalrymple employs it discriminatingly, providing a rich new dimension to a familiar story. He writes elegantly, appreciating, like all masters of his craft, that history should aspire to the condition of literature. No novelist is better at portraits than Dalrymple. He is also a subtle scene-setter. This book would be compulsive reading even if it were not a uniquely valuable history; which it is, because Dalrymple has uncovered sources never used before. To the rich material in British archives and private collections, and in Russian, Urdu and Persian archives, he has been able to add nine previously untranslated full-length contemporary Afghan accounts of the conflict, including the autobiography of Shah Shuja himself. It is this that gives his book its depth and resonance. But none would make a better job than William Dalrymple in his thrilling, magnificently evocative *Return of a King*. Extensively researched with much new material and beautifully written, it covers the story from the perspective of both invaders and invaded, and is by far the most comprehensive history of the conflict yet written. Dalrymple is a master storyteller, whose special gift lies in the use of indigenous sources, so often neglected by imperial chroniclers. No Afghan field trip, no excursion along the highways and byways of the archives of Britain, Russia, India and Afghanistan has been too much for Dalrymple. Mixing primary and secondary sources and taking the time to acquaint himself with the terrain on which the tragedy was played out, Dalrymple has resurrected an oft-told tale and brought it convincingly back to life. *Return of a King* will come to be seen as the definitive account of the first and most disastrous western attempt to invade Afghanistan. As the latest occupying force in Afghanistan negotiates its exit, this chronicle seems all too relevant now. The signal achievement of this work is that it makes a nearly two-century-old war seem disturbingly fresh. His histories read like novels. Drawing on Afghan, Russian, and Indian sources, he tells a truly epic story of imperial ambition and hubris with profound lessons for our own times. Exemplary historian that he is, Dalrymple has discovered hitherto unknown sources. This is history as it should be written: This is one history book that matters for making sense of Afghanistan, and Britain, today as well as in the past. Today, courtesy imperial intervention, it is a better

place, in spite of the return of the Taliban and because of the empty caves of Tora Bora. William Dalrymple tells the back story of the Great Game in a narrative that matches the best of historical fiction. First, he is a researcher par excellence. Second, he has the insight of a historian. And third, as a writer of exceptional dexterity, he is able to make historical research very readable. It is not easy to recount dry historical facts in this manner, but Mr Dalrymple – as he has done with all his historical books – personally travelled to the principal venues, revisited the sites of battles, forts, palaces, towns and ordinary homes, and talked to scores of people to capture the flavour of the times about which he is writing. In addition, he has located crucial new material in Russian, Urdu and Persian from archives in South Asia and used, for the first time in English, nine previously untranslated full-length accounts of the conflict, including the autobiography of the key Afghan king, Shah Shuja. No Scottish historian writes with as much panache, breaks as much new ground, or brings the past as vividly to life. But Dalrymple does it better; he has spent years piecing together archival material in Delhi, Lahore, London and elsewhere. He has wandered the streets of Kabul looking for, and finding, traces of Afghan epic poetry on the conflict. Dalrymple has emerged as a superb historian of the British Raj; he is certainly one of the most entertaining. He excels at character, scene setting, and shifting between multiple points of view. His use of sources is stunning, particularly the trove of Persian-language material - epic poems, court histories and other accounts - he found in Kabul during a research trip. No other western historian has given such a complete account of the other side. As well as producing a work that is germane to our present geo-political crisis in Afghanistan and much of the Middle East, Dalrymple brings to history a breathless sense of intrigue and wonder. The depictions of the mountainous stretches of Afghanistan, the routes of the advance of the Imperial Army and the city of Kabul itself are etched in riveting detail. Though eminently readable, *Return* is based on rigorous and painstaking research. The author has adroitly drawn a picture of imperial folly and refusal to learn from mistakes. If context is important, reading Dalrymple is paramount. The result is a captivating picture of one of the most foolhardy exercises in British imperial history, viewed through the eyes not just of British military and East India Company officials and their camp followers but also of the Afghans themselves.

### 2: Return of a King by William Dalrymple | [www.enganchecubano.com](http://www.enganchecubano.com)

*Return of a King Synopsis. In the spring of 1819, the British invaded Afghanistan for the first time. Led by lancers in scarlet cloaks and plumed shakos, nearly 20,000 British and East India Company troops poured through the passes and re-established on the throne Shah Shuja ul-Mulk.*

Reading This Book, Cover to Cover A memoir of my childhood came out in June. Previous books are readily available on Amazon. Correspondence about this Blog to [patemantrevor@gmail.com](mailto:patemantrevor@gmail.com). William Dalrymple, *Return of a King* I hesitated over buying this book: Would I really commit to reading pages on the first British Invasion of Afghanistan, way back in 1819? But then I remembered Dalrymple as a fine writer from one of his previous books, *From the Holy Mountain*, and I remembered that the Taliban remember all our Invasions. They provide the context in which the Taliban view our current stupidities, such as the deployment of a spare Prince of Wales - Harry - a move we make without thinking or caring that it will immediately revive memories of the past glories of our ruling class. We invaded Afghanistan in 1819 to overthrow a ruler, Dost Mohammad, perfectly well disposed towards us. But a paranoid fear of Russian Designs on Afghanistan clouded our judgement. At great expense in men and treasure, we re-installed his predecessor, Shah Shuja, who had been our pensioner for decades. But though he was at least reasonably capable of ruling in his own right, we made him appear a mere puppet. At the same time, we failed to get our own act together militarily (Elphinstone) and politically (Macnaghten, Burnes, Auckland). Right at the outset, the rape of a young Afghan girl by a drunken soldier (pp. 73-74) concentrated the minds of Afghans on what it means to live under Foreign occupation and, in due course and after other affronts, the clergy sanctioned a jihad for the defence of Islam. By the time they got there, most of the Afghan population had left to hide in the hills. Having ensured that the fruit trees would die, we left - and in due course, allowed Dost Mohammad to resume his interrupted rule. He reigned successfully until his death in 1842, securing what are more or less the boundaries of modern Afghanistan. Quotations from these sources - often written in the form of epic poems - form a significant part of the book and throw into relief the lack of understanding, competence and clarity of purpose shown by the British leadership. In the end, it was not difficult to read these pages, sobering as many of them are. At the end, Dalrymple lightly sketches their connection to the failure of the latest invasion of Afghanistan. Dalrymple has done a terrific amount of research to write this book, has written it well, and deserves to have a wide readership.

### 3: William Dalrymple

*William Dalrymple is the definitive modern historian of the East India company's reign in India during the 18th and 19th centuries. With already two brilliant books - 'The White Mughals' and 'The Last Mughal' - on the subject, he has now written this masterly chronicle on the disastrous British misadventure in Afghanistan during the years*

Dalrymple is a skilled storyteller and fills important gaps, mining new sources. His histories read like novels. An absorbing and beautifully written account of a doomed effort to control an apparently uncontrollably population. A magnificent and shocking story. It is difficult to do justice to the evenhandedness, vivid writing, and extensive scholarship supporting every detail of Return of a King. Dalrymple lets the action play out relentlessly and compellingly, yet has endnotes, glossary, bibliography, and index of a high scholarly standard. And as the latest occupying force in Afghanistan negotiates its exit, this chronicle seems all too relevant now. The signal achievement of this work is that it makes a nearly two-century-old war seem disturbingly fresh. It makes for grim reading. Like the current adventure in Afghanistan, this first one was undone by the unsustainable cost of occupation, waning political and public interest, and the need to divert resources. He is a master storyteller, whose special gift lies in the use of indigenous sources, so often neglected by imperial chroniclers. Extensively researched with much new material and beautifully written, it covers the story from the perspective of both invaders and invaded, and is by far the most comprehensive history of the conflict yet written. This book would be compulsive reading even if it were not a uniquely valuable history. My only regret reading this wonderful history is that it was not published a decade earlier. This is one history book that matters for making sense of Afghanistan, and Britain, today as well as in the past. Return of a King is not just an animated and highly literate retelling of a chapter of early 19th-century British military history, but also a determined attempt to reach out and influence the politicians and policy-makers of our modern world. But none would make a better job of it than William Dalrymple in this thrilling, magnificently evocative Return of a King. As taut and richly embroidered as a great novel. This book is a masterpiece of nuanced writing and research, and a thrilling account of a watershed Victorian conflict. Dalrymple writes the kind of history that few historians can match. Sure, they can all add a footnote or two about our knowledge of the past, but how many of them actually change the whole way in which we look on it? A truly epic story of imperial ambition and hubris with profound lessons for our own times. For while it is first and foremost a valuable contribution to the history of Afghanistan and the British Raj, it is also intended to draw parallels and convey lessons about the latest western involvement in the region. The story of the first Anglo-Afghan war and the retreat from Kabul in has been told many times before. But Dalrymple does it better; he has spent years piecing together archival material in Delhi, Lahore, London and elsewhere. He has wandered the streets of Kabul looking for, and finding, traces of Afghan epic poetry on the conflict. Many of his sources are previously untouched by other Western writers and as with his previous books, his vivid prose is a joy to read. Dalrymple is a masterful narrator. The range of new sources employed adds more depth to an already complex history, yet he navigates deftly between British, Afghan, Indian and Russian sources without losing his thread. A gem of a book and one hell of a story. Exemplary historian that he is, Dalrymple has discovered hitherto unknown sources. This is history as it should be written: First, he is a researcher par excellence. Second, he has the insight of a historian. And third, as a writer of exceptional dexterity, he is able to make historical research very readable. It is not easy to recount dry historical facts in this manner, but Mr Dalrymple—as he has done with all his historical books—personally travelled to the principal venues, revisited the sites of battles, forts, palaces, towns and ordinary homes, and talked to scores of people to capture the flavour of the times about which he is writing. In addition, he has located crucial new material in Russian, Urdu and Persian and used, for the first time in English, nine previously untranslated full-length accounts of the conflict, including the autobiography of the key Afghan king, Shah Shuja.

### 4: Return of a King : William Dalrymple :

*Upon finishing William Dalrymple's excellent Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan, one can't help but feel two things: 1. Read more. Published 1 year ago.*

That mission — one of the largest military expeditions mounted by British troops and their local reinforcements in decades — had gone disastrously wrong. Much of the force had been wiped out as it attempted an ignominious retreat from Kabul, leaving a weak and disillusioned ruler on the throne, and the reputation of the most fearsome military machine in the world badly tarnished. The task of the two armies sent back to the Afghan capital thus had a simple task: The long columns of troops and camp followers marched through the debris of the earlier massacres. Those coming in from the east swiftly found the remains of the men of the 44th Foot on the small hill where they had made a last stand. Among the skeletons, those of "the officers were plainly distinguishable by the long hair which still remained attached to their skulls", remembered Thomas Seaton, a young British infantryman. One narrow defile had to be cleared of hundreds of corpses still "impaled on a barrier of thorn bushes" built by the Afghan tribesmen to block the route of retreating troops the previous winter. Elsewhere, in a small watchtower, Seaton found rooms "filled with decaying bodies, up to the very roof, and there was a mound of them outside — completely covering the steps". As it marched, the "army of retribution" levelled villages, burned crops, cut down precious trees, slaughtered all livestock and frequently raped and killed, committing, as William Dalrymple points out, what would be considered war crimes today. At Istalif, a beautiful village that has had the good luck to be situated among wonderful mulberry trees, meadows and running brooks a short drive or, back then, ride, north of Kabul, and the bad luck to have been on the path of invading forces for about 3, years, "no males above 14 years were spared — Some of the men wanted to wreak their revenge on the women — the scene of plunder was dreadful — My eyes were shocked at the sight of a poor woman lying dead and a little infant of three or four months by her side, both its little thighs pierced and mangled by a musket ball," wrote young cavalry officer Neville Chamberlain. Their point made, they then withdrew. On his last day in what would become Afghanistan, once borders were eventually drawn up, Chamberlain was cantering down the Khyber Pass with a fellow officer, John Nicholson, when they came across corpses. This third shows all the elements we have come to expect from Dalrymple: This is clear-eyed, non-judgmental, sober history, beautifully told. The author spent time in both Afghanistan and Pakistan during its research and elaborates on the obvious parallels with the current situation, as western forces prepare their own ignominious exit from Afghanistan. Dalrymple is wrong to suggest the campaign in Afghanistan was as unnecessary as the invasion had been. Iraq was the war of choice that needed not to have been fought. But the incompetence, parsimony, waste and human cost of the following decade of international efforts in Afghanistan is certainly on a par with the previous episode. Through showing us the pity of one conflict, Dalrymple reveals that of the other. It remains to be seen if the legacy of this most recent intervention is as destructive.

### 5: Return of a King: the Battle for Afghanistan by William Dalrymple: review - Telegraph

*From William Dalrymple - award-winning historian, journalist and travel writer - a masterly retelling of what was perhaps the West's greatest imperial disaster in the East, and an important parable of neocolonial ambition, folly and hubris that has striking relevance to our own time.*

Email Print Advertisement HH: Special edition of the Hugh Hewitt Show. The Battle For Afghanistan, Very good to be here. Let me give a little intro. You are a historian, a travel writer, a graduate of Cambridge, born on the Firth of Forth, which I just like to say. I like to say it. As an adult, I moved to India at the age of 18, and have been more or less there ever since traveling around the whole region – Af-Pak, India. Fair to say that Saddam Hussein changed your life? Saddam Hussein did change my life, as with so many. I was planning to go, after school, I also wanted to be an archaeologist. I grew up on Indiana Jones movies and so on, and was heading off to dig in Iraq, aged And literally, about a week before I was due to go, I got a message that Saddam Hussein had closed down the British School of Archaeology in Baghdad, and said it was a nest of British spies, which for all I know, is probably true. And I had nothing to do. I had a whole year before I was going to go up to Cambridge. A gap year, so my best friend was going to India, a country I had no interest in, and in fact, had a mile aversion to. I had a brother who was kind of a typical sporting hero at school, who as the younger brother, I worshipped. He played for Oxford in cricket and rugby, came back from India as this sort of bedraggled hippy. Carrying a sitar – WD: They pour it from one silver beaker to another. I mean, anyway, the whole thing, I thought, was not going to be me at all. And I rather went into it with a heavy heart. But it was like a lightning strike. I arrived there on the 26th of January, , at the age of 18, and it very literally transformed my life. And you are married to Olive. You have three children. You live out on a farm outside of Delhi. Where did you meet Olive? In India, or back in Scotland? Our marital bathroom is a kind of mess of ground up lapis lazuli and malachite being reduced to paint textures and paint pigment, and gum Arabic. But in actual fact, we met through an Indian in London. She was at Oxford, I was at Cambridge, and she came out and took pot luck in India. It went off to a very bad start, I should say. The day she arrived, I was going ahead of her, and had a house organized and all that kind of stuff. And she arrived, and her luggage went missing, so no suitcase. New country, big change in life. On the way in, on the drive into Delhi from the airport, I am feeling a bit wobbly. And I had something called viral fever, which is like this sort of terrible thing. You are recreating in your transport – the company sending out young third sons to India along with their sweating, unhappy wives in exile for decades. I have the book, by the way. The Return Of The King: The Battle For Afghanistan, is an amazing book. And I devoured it in less than a week. It is linked at Hughhewitt. Am I correct about that? You got thrown out of Iran and not imprisoned for the rest of your natural days at 22? I went through Iran on this trip In Xanadu. I was aged 21 at the time. And actually, Iran was fine. They were in the middle of this ghastly war with Iraq, and at every roundabout, at every bus stop, there were these pictures of these hooded martyrs. It was a very miserable time to be either an Iraqi or an Iranian, these two nations by these sort of crazy governments were just going at each other and murder in huge quantities. What the kind of First World War was for the nations of Europe, the mids were between Iran and Iraq, was for these nations. And huge numbers of people dying in sort of heroic charges against each other for nothing, you know. So you are very eclectic. I write about, almost entirely, about South Asia and Central Asia, with occasional work on the Middle East, particularly the Christians in the Middle East is a great interest of mine. And I wrote a book about 20 years ago called From The Holy Mountain, looking at all the Christian minorities, which is a story which of course has only gotten more and more tragic since then with the trouble that the Copts are in, in Egypt. As we speak, that one of my main interlocutors in Syria, Bishop Yohanna Ibrahim was kidnapped last week. I did not see that. The church in India is not much persecuted. The church in Syria at the moment is going through a lot of trouble. I meant some of the attacks in India. Well no, I mean, I would dispute that. The church in India is thriving. As in here in the U. Oh, good to know that. What is your spiritual direction at this point? I grew up a Roman Catholic. I come from a very religious family. My brother is a Roman Catholic priest. My uncle was a Roman Catholic priest before him. And there are letters from a great uncle who wanted

to become a Roman Catholic priest, but died on the fields of Founders in , in the First World War. I grew up, I sent off to a really rather incredible Catholic school in Yorkshire, called Ampleforth in the wilds, which would have been a lousy education unless I had been interested in rocket science or physics or something. But the subjects I was interested in, which was history, theology, art history, was fantastically well taught by these rather incredible, rather brilliant monks. And India has always had this effect for centuries, I think, on people that have lived there. Early in your travels, you spent time with Mother Teresa. That was my first year in India. And we mentioned before we went on air that Hitch was a great friend of the show and a friend of yours, and he was a great friend of mine. And one of the things we used to disagree with very strongly was about Mother Teresa, becauseâ€¦ HH: We chose not to discuss it, actually. You disagreed with him, too, on that track. But nonetheless, at the end of the day, the amount of good that was done in those homes by those nuns a million times outweighed any anxieties that he should have had. I think he really just needed to go and spend some time in those homes and hang out with the nuns. And had he done that, rather than doing the Hitch thing of firing off from his laptop in Washington, I think he would have had a rather different impression. With that opening baiting of the hook, I hope you will stay with us through this hour and beyond, because Return of A King by William Dalrymple is really quite a set of keys to unlock the situation that we are looking at right now. But we have to go back before we can go forward, and we will begin to do so when we come back from break. William, a couple more biographical questions. I find it much easier to write. How long did this book take? For this book, about five years in all. The Brits march into Afghanistan in through the Bolan and Khojak passes, the same routes that the Taliban used to get into Afghanistan today from Qatar and Pakistan. And 18,00, the story in a nutshell is 18, troops march in, one man comes out. Brydon, the assistant surgeon, is the only man to make it out alive. It is the greatest disaster in British imperial history. And it was immediately avenged by the Army of Retribution, which we will come to. But you also said in your New York Times interview, you find history books much easier to write than travel books. If you choose a subject like this, which has a very clear narrative, you just gave it, it gives writing a clarity and ease. In fact, our young call screener, Marlon, has been to Afghanistan as a Marine. I know a lot of people who have been to Afghanistan. Well, I was perhaps a little bit underbriefed on this, because I mean, just to put this in context before I tell the story about Kandahar, a lot of Kandahar is really fairly safe.

### 6: Return of a King by William Dalrymple: review - Telegraph

*The king of the book's title - Shah Shuja - was a British appointment and gratifyingly pliable. However, his ties with the infidel British make him unpopular; violence erupts in Kabul as anti.*

### 7: Return of a King by William Dalrymple â€” review | Books | The Guardian

*William Dalrymple's Return of A King. likes Â· 2 talking about this. For news about William Dalrymple's new book and all things related! Jump to.*

### 8: The Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan - William Dalrymple - Google Books

*Review: William Dalrymple, Return of a King I hesitated over buying this book: Would I really commit to reading pages on the first British Invasion of Afghanistan, way back in But then I remembered Dalrymple as a fine writer from one of his previous books, From the Holy Mountain, and I remembered that the Taliban remember all our.*

### 9: Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan: William Dalrymple: Bloomsbury Publishing

*Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan. William Dalrymple. Bloomsbury, Â£25, pp. Read on. 1 The Great Game by Peter Hopkirk (). A history of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia.*

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