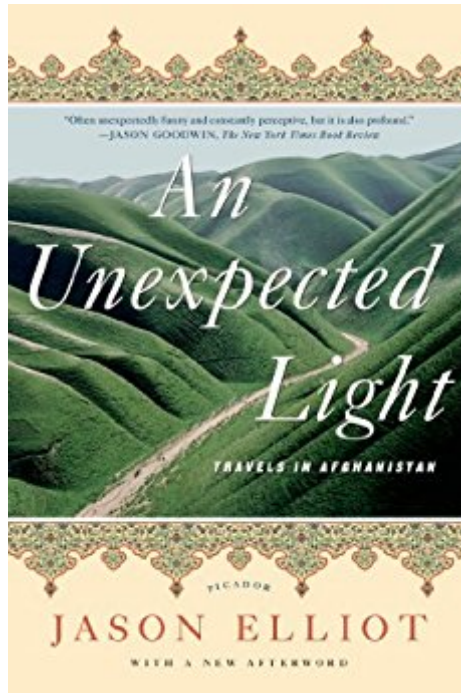




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An Unexpected Light: Travels In Afghanistan



Synopsis

Part historical evocation, part travelogue, and part personal quest, *An Unexpected Light* is the account of Elliot's journey through Afghanistan, a country considered off-limits to travelers for twenty years. Aware of the risks involved, but determined to explore what he could of the Afghan people and culture, Elliot leaves the relative security of Kabul. He travels by foot and on horseback, and hitches rides on trucks that eventually lead him into the snowbound mountains of the North toward Uzbekistan, the former battlefields of the Soviet army's "hidden war." Here the Afghan landscape kindles a recollection of the author's life ten years earlier, when he fought with the anti-Soviet mujaheddin resistance during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Weaving different Afghan times and visits with revealing insights on matters ranging from antipersonnel mines to Sufism, Elliot has created a narrative mosaic of startling prose that captures perfectly the powerful allure of a seldom-glimpsed world. Jason Elliot's *An Unexpected Light* is a remarkable, poignant book about Afghanistan and a heartfelt reflection on the experience of travel itself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I purchased this book after having read it at my local library because it has to be on my Top 25 list of favorite books of all time. Mr. Elliot lived and travelled in Afghanistan not as a journalist or tourist, but as a human being drawn to the area and its people. This was post-Soviet time and pre-American time, and probably many of the people and places he visited have changed irrevocably. What comes through is his intense willingness to meet people on their terms, without judgement or agenda, and what results is a deep love for the place and people of the land. It makes it doubly sad to know the corruption and continual war leaves so few people with any viable options for survival, let alone a good life--but I for one am very grateful and appreciative of this book and the attitude of its author towards a place and people I can only respect and admire the more for his sharing of his experience. The prose can be very lyrical and at times almost numinous, because he is being touched so by the deeper spirit of this land. Beautifully written with great respect and almost a reverence for the best of what is Afghanistan (hint: it's NOT Karzai). To me, delving into the nature of the place and people, I see that it is utterly fruitless for any other nation to occupy militarily and attempt to "win" any kind of war here. It will never happen, but I don't have another solution either. There is so much we can't understand about a foreign country, especially one with such a long history, but Afghanistan's people deserve peace and prosperity, and I wish it for them, somehow.

A thrilling tale of travel through Afghanistan with an intimate look into the culture and hospitality of the Afghan people. I highly recommend to anyone looking to learn more about the country or visit or just looking for a captivating story.

Though overly poetic at times, Elliot does a brilliant job bringing to light the situation in Afghanistan just prior to the Taliban occupation of Kabul. Throughout the narrative Elliot strives to uncover the answer to the question: What is left of the culture in this war ravaged land? Elliot does a great job juxtaposing his experiences in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion, the 1992 collapse of the communist regime in Kabul, and the time he spent exploring the country in the mid-1990s. Unlike other books I have read about Afghanistan, this title focuses on the people rather than the events which influence their lives. To answer the question as to whether culture can survive in such a harsh landscape Elliot circumnavigates the country; from travelling on foot across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, to Kabul, to Herat, to Mazar-e-Shariff, and deep into the rugged and little explored regions of the Panjshir and Nuristan. What he uncovers may surprise you... I would recommend this book to any individual who has an interest in learning about Afghanistan OUTSIDE of the events of the on-going 30 year war.

This book is more than a travel book. It's an opportunity for the reader to enjoy, know and appreciate the country and people of Afghanistan in the years during and just after the Soviet occupation post 1998. It's more than that too. It's a beautifully written and thoughtful book which is a stand-alone example of literature at its contemporary best. Elliott made at least two trips into Afghanistan as an independent journalist in the 1990 and in this book he chronicles the magnificence of the landscape, the quality of the Afghans, cut off and on their own and the warm and the hospitable nature of their customs. But don't cross them! It was a pleasure to read, my only caveat being that Elliott used a map with names and places which don't appear on my National Geographic Atlas (you'll want to read it with a magnifying glass and a good atlas at hand). As travel literature goes it can't be beat!

Very well written with humor, empathy, and thoughtfulness. Provides in-depth insights into way of living for Afghan people. Jason doesn't miss a small detail in his observations, and it is the inclusion of the small details that allow reader to visualize the events. About three-quarters of way through, book started to get a bit "preachy". Maybe the book was form of therapy for Jason who is part Afghani(???) Not sure where his strong ties to the country developed. He definitely wanted reader to feel sympathy for Afghans which is not difficult. However, I was reading the book during 2-week tour of Uganda over the 2009 holidays, and couldn't help but think that Ugandans live in equally similar conditions. I hope Jason has found a way to help a country he seems to so closely identify with, just as I am finding ways to help Ugandans having been so impacted by their poverty.

The author has traveled to Afghanistan several times in the last decade and has some harrowing experiences while painting a vivid picture of the country. Not your typical travel book. I can't say I would like to have the author's near death experiences but I was captivated by them. This is a great painting of the country and its people before 9-11 and very well written. This is a non-fiction page turner.

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