



Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War

Radek Sikorski

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The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 marked the end of a bloody, decade-long war that pitted ragtag bands of gritty Muslim rebels against the technical might of the Soviet Army. Due to the near-complete Soviet news blackout, few of the horrifying details of the Russo-Afghan War ever reached American ears—until the publication of this book. *Dust of the Saints* is the remarkable story of a young journalist's courageous journey through Soviet-occupied Afghanistan with a group of Muslim freedom fighters.

In the summer of 1987, Radek Sikorski set out on the long and perilous voyage across the breadth of Afghanistan to the mysterious city of Herat. One of the holy shrines of Islam and virtually unseen by Westerners since the anti-communist uprising of 1979, Herat was renowned for its beautiful mosques and mausolea; yet according to rumor, many had been destroyed in the eight years of fighting. Determined to find out what had happened to this most inaccessible of cities, Sikorski used contacts in Pakistan to cross the Afghan border, disguised himself as a mujahedin, and joined a group of resistance fighters carrying arms to the rebel stronghold. With a shaky knowledge of Persian and a hatred of Soviet occupation bred in his native Poland, the author won the complete trust of his guides. He worked and fought with mujahedin foot soldiers and regional rebel leaders, like the pious and energetic Amanullah and the revered Ismael Khan, in such proximity and under such dangerous conditions that the religious and cultural barriers between them melted away. His colorful portraits of these dedicated warriors of Islam provide an extraordinary inside view into this nomad culture and the daily workings of the Afghan resistance.

The author traveled by foot, on horseback and in the backs of lorries, he crept through enemy lines, was attacked by Soviet gunships and witnessed Communist onslaughts on Afghan villages. With a style that combines a journalist's eye for detail with the gripping storytelling of an adventure novelist, and illustrated with remarkable photographs taken by the author, *Dust of the Saints* is timely, exciting, and vividly evocative of Afghanistan and its people.

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