



Poetry of the Taliban

Felix Kuehn Alex Strick van Linschoten

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The universality of the poetic impulse is borne out by these poems, written by members of and adherents to the Taliban movement. This collection of over two hundred poems draws upon Afghan tradition and the recent past as much as upon the long history of Pashto, Persian, and Urdu verse. The poems offer an unfettered insight into the wider, more human worldview of the Afghan Taliban. The contrast between the severity of their ideology and the long-standing poetic traditions of the cultures they are born into is nothing short of remarkable. Unrequited love, vengeance, the thrill of battle, religion, and nationalism—even a yearning for non-violence—are expressed through images of wine, powerful women, and pastoral beauty, providing a fascinating insight into the hearts and minds of these warriors. Taliban verse is fervent, and very modern in its criticism of human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict. Whether describing an air strike on a wedding party or lamenting, ‘We did all of this to ourselves’, it is concerned not with politics, but with identity, and a full, textured, deeply conflicted humanity. It is such impassioned descriptions—sorrowfully defeated and enraged, triumphant, bitterly powerless or biting satirical—and not the austere arguments of myriad analysts that will ultimately define and endure as a record of the war in Afghanistan.

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