

The Khyber Pass – A History of Empire and Invasion by Paddy Docherty.
faber and faber 2007.

The North West frontier region has held powerful echoes for the British since the days of the Raj, and with the events of 9/11 has been at the forefront of the Western consciousness due to its proximity to Afghanistan and its likely occupation by elements of Al-Qaeda following the US-led invasion and overthrow of the Taliban.

Paddy Docherty has written a history of the role of the Khyber Pass, as both barrier and conduit, since the days of the Persian Empire, devoting a chapter to each invader who has traversed it: the identity of some is predictable, like Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and the British Raj, others less so, like the Mauryan Empire, the Kushans and the Sassanian Persians.

As these peoples and their empires ebbed and flowed through the Khyber Pass so they influenced, at the very least, their immediate region but often a much wider geographical area. Docherty argues especially that as the pathway to India for the first Muslims the Khyber has played a huge role in the way the whole world has developed, an influential synergy that continues to this day.

Paddy Docherty writes with the combined eye of a historian and a travel writer, and his love of his subject is all too clear. He has researched the different peoples and histories about which he writes with impeccable attention to detail and reproduces his research in an immensely readable way.

This is a book that will delight readers of history as well as fascinating those who wish to learn more about one of the wildest and most dangerous places on earth.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh