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SIKUNDER BURNES MASTER OF THE GREAT GAME



Front cover image: 'Lost' portrait of Alexander Burnes. Reproduced by permission of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai.

Back cover image: Eighteenth-century painting of Sans Pareil, the Governor's Residence and seat of administration at Bombay, now the Cholera Institute, Mumbai.

Jacket design: James Hutcheson



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SIKUNDER BURNES

MASTER OF THE GREAT GAME

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'An important re-evaluation of this most intriguing figure'
WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

SIKUNDER BURNES

This is an astonishing true tale of espionage, journeys in disguise, secret messages, double agents, assassinations and sexual intrigue. Alexander Burnes was one of the most accomplished spies Britain ever produced and the main antagonist of the Great Game as Britain strove with Russia for control of Central Asia and the routes to the Raj. There are many lessons for the present day in this tale of the folly of invading Afghanistan and Anglo-Russian tensions in the Caucasus. Murray's meticulous study has unearthed original manuscripts from Montrose to Mumbai to put together a detailed study of how British secret agents operated in India.

The story of Burnes' life has a cast of extraordinary figures, including Queen Victoria, King William IV, Earl Grey, Benjamin Disraeli, Lola Montez, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. Among the unexpected discoveries are that Alexander and his brother James invented the myths about the Knights Templars and Scottish Freemasons which are the foundation of the Da Vinci Code; and that the most famous nineteenth-century scholar of Afghanistan was a double agent for Russia.