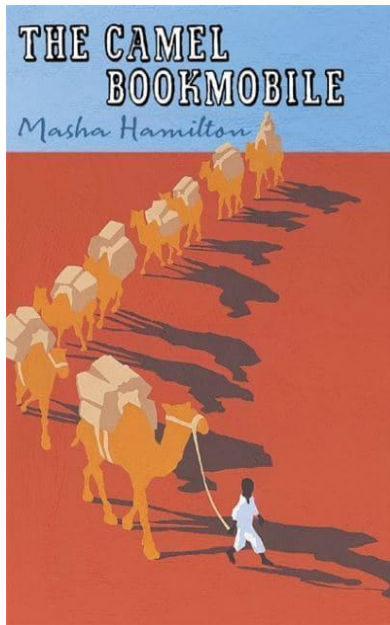


## July 2024 THE CAMEL BOOKMOBILE by Masha Hamilton

This book tells the story of an American librarian, Fiona who is looking for some meaning to her life. She travels to Africa to help start a travelling library where she visits remote communities where people are illiterate and they live in difficult circumstances without schools or roads or many other things we take for granted.



The books are delivered via camel and collected the following month and, due to their scarcity, a fine is levied if a book is not returned and the library ceases to go to that location. A book is not returned and the impact of this uncovers the personalities of many of the characters and their individual and inter-connecting lives and digs deeper into the culture showing some similarities with all cultures – who holds the power, how it is maintained etc.

This was a book which was universally enjoyed by members of the group as an example of the issues when different cultures collide and attitudes and traditions differ widely. It is an excellent example of the West's assumptions that their own culture is superior – this book makes the reader think more carefully about those assumptions as well as realising that change cannot be achieved without understanding the consequences.

The book is also a love story which emphasises the impossibility of reconciling the differences without enormous sacrifice. The ending is not what the reader might have expected but is, nonetheless, inevitable.

Some comments from our members:

“Masha Hamilton gives us a fascinating insight into a culture with which we are not familiar. Her characters are well portrayed. But I got somewhat irritated when the plot was so drawn out. I was dubious how the plot was going to end but the final outcome changed my irritation into admiration for the story.

The imposing of a culture onto another is an eternal problem and I thought the story illustrated this succinctly. Masha gave us a vivid portrayal of nomadic life. The book left many unanswered questions which I for one could not answer. In my opinion, a book well worth reading.”

“Another very interesting and thought provoking book. My main thoughts whilst reading were about the British colonial legacy and imposition of our language and culture and all societies seemingly needing to read and write and transact in the

English western way. Yes, beautiful imagery and characterisation of humans in a different world. I travelled there 30 years back, wish I had had the insight of this book then.”

“There are eight main characters and several minor ones in this book. They all interlink and grow in depth as the story goes along describing their vulnerabilities and strengths. The book raised ethical issues without expressing an opinion either way – whether or not the western world should “interfere” in other countries’ lifestyles, the nomadic way of life and (to our minds) the primitive nature of patriarchy, (eg. female circumcision, lack of education, literacy and hygiene).

It is a story about morals, love, honour and physical attraction. It finished suddenly and with an unexpected ending.

The book was well-written with good descriptive prose and some humour. I particularly liked that the librarian thought the camel was his mother re-incarnated and was going to get his own back!”

Christine Wright