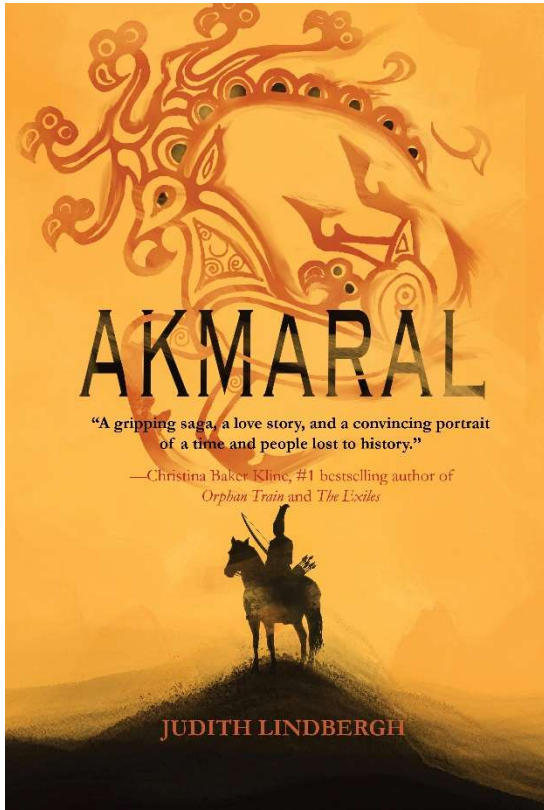


AKMARAL

A NOVEL

by Judith Lindbergh

TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



1. At the opening of the novel, what was your reaction when you realized that the battle-hardened warrior/narrator is a woman? Discuss your thoughts on women's roles in warfare and leadership. Does this role seem plausible in the distant past? What about today?
2. Early in Akmaral's training, she is sent out to hunt for wild boar. The boar she eventually confronts is a sow—a mother pig—who viciously protects her piglets. Discuss the protective nature of the mothering instinct.
3. In Akmaral's small clan, warriors cannot breed—they cannot have sex and risk getting pregnant—until they have proven themselves in battle. Moreover, a woman is only freed from her warrior's oath when she's borne a living child. What do you think of this rigid requirement? Is it fair to the women? What about to the men? Does this make sense in Akmaral's culture?
4. Both Marjan and Akmaral face a snow leopard in the novel. Discuss the symbolism of this solitary, mysterious animal. How do you feel about the way the aul treats Marjan after her confrontation? And what about Akmaral's: do you think her encounters are real or mystical? How do these experiences change each woman?
5. What did you think about Akmaral's first intimate encounter with Timor? Was it consensual or a violation? How do you think Timor felt about their early liaisons? Why do you think Akmaral made the choices she did?

6. As Timor learns more about Akmaral's people and their ways, the differences between their cultures become clearer. Discuss your reaction to the different expectations of women in Scythia. What about Timor's response toward the Sauromatae ways? Do you side with one over the other? Why?
7. Do you think that Timor is happy living with Akmaral and her aul? Do you think he loves her? When given the opportunity to leave, his choices over the course of the book are contradictory. What do you think his reasons are? Would you have done the same?
8. When Akmaral retreats to the cave at the opening of Part III, what do you believe happens to her? Discuss her visions and visitations. What does she learn from this withdrawal and lamentation? How does it drive her next actions?
9. AKMARAL is filled with animals, both living and symbolic. The domesticated animals are herded, bred, milked, sacrificed, and eaten. But there are also wild creatures, some of whom have mythic characteristics, especially the snow leopard, the golden eagle, and the flying deer. These three beasts are even tattooed on Akmaral's skin. Discuss the significance of these animals to the novel's characters and their culture. What do they say about their relationship with the natural world?
10. At its heart, AKMARAL is a story about the power of love, specifically mother-love. Discuss Akmaral's understanding of that emotion as it evolves in the first section with Marjan's struggle to commit to the warrior's life until Akmaral becomes a mother herself. How does motherhood change Akmaral's attitude toward her duties as a warrior? Are those roles mutually exclusive? Discuss why or why not. Is Akmaral ultimately successful in the way she tries to bind them together?