



Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire

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For six hundred years, the Ottoman Empire swelled and declined. Islamic, martial, civilized, and tolerant, it advanced in three centuries from the dusty foothills of Anatolia to rule on the Danube and the Nile; at its height, Indian rajahs and the kings of France beseeched the empire's aid. In its last three hundred years the empire seemed ready to collapse, a prodigy of survival and decay. In this striking evocation of the empire's power, Jason Goodwin explores how the Ottomans rose and how, against all odds, they lingered on. In doing so, he also offers a long look back to the origins of problems that plague present-day Kosovars and Serbs.

Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire Details

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From Reader Review Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire for online ebook

Angela says

This book is sort of like a curiosity cabinet of travelogue and ethno-history, which is both its strength and weakness. You'll learn about obsessive clock-collecting, tulip madness, Istanbul's stray dogs, the sultan's silver slippers, madness and drownings and strangulation. Old-fashioned generalizations of ethnic character border on political incorrectness in a fun-but-wrong 19th century way. It's a theatrical, moody, stage-setting book. It's a zeitgeist book, more a diorama than a dissertation.

A potpourri of anecdotes and facts are sprinkled about in something loosely inspired by chronological order. There's a decent glossary and basic map, but casual references to archaic words, obscure places, and historical & literary figures frequently sent me to Wikipedia. If you're looking for in-depth historical analysis, you're in the wrong place. This is more like a crazy uncle's attic, with a drawing here, a letter there, and little snatches of poetry.

Jonfaith says

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things . Machiavelli

Of course Niccolo also said that conquering the Ottomans would be most difficult, but afterwards rather easy to hold or occupy. It is good being glib. I violated my latest reading plan over the holiday weekend.

Ottomans did not, on the whole, engage in trade; they worked in administration; their minorities, Greeks, Jews and Armenians, seperated from them by a gulf of culture and sympathy, traditionally looked after the money side.

Jason Goodwin has provided us with a sprawling popular history, one surveying an empire which stretched across three continents for around 600 hundred years and conducted its affairs in a likely two dozen languages. The matter is presented in a predictably uneven manner. The text is both compelling and insightful as the reader gauges the expansion and retraction of the House of Osman. The Ottoman core principles contributed almost solely to conquest. The reality of an increasing population and the ravages of time forced and exacerbated its fatal contradictions. Is it me, did anyone else know the origins of the croissant extend from the Siege of Vienna? I did not and remain unsure what I think about all that. I'm a bagel fellow by trade.

Lauren Albert says

One of the best written histories I've read. Very writerly. I sometimes got lost in the names but that's not the fault of the book. It probably would have helped if I knew more about the subject though I wouldn't discourage someone from reading it because they didn't. 9/09

Rebecca says

There's a lot of interesting detail here. Unfortunately, it's incredibly confusing. The author seems to believe that his readers are already intimately familiar with many of the people, battles, titles, etc of the Ottomans (in which case, why read a survey history book on the topic?). Since many of the sultans have the same name, this becomes extra confusing. Worse, there's only a vague nod towards linearity. Often, the century being discussed will jump from something in the 1500s in one paragraph to something in the 1400s in the next to a supporting quote from someone who you realize halfway through the book lived in the 1700s. Some chapters are about history, which are slightly more linear. Others are about culture, which bounce around insanely. It makes keeping cause and effect and the evolution of the culture impossible to keep clear in your head.

The author fancies that he has a lyrical style. Sometimes it works. Sometimes, it's just kind of annoying.

This did, in fact, have the content I was looking for. (I'd started with Lord Kinross' book, and given up because it was so dry a recitation of dates and names that I couldn't keep that straight, either. Sultan A went to place B and fought battle C. Then Sultan D went to place E and fought battle F.) There was a nice mix of major events, entertaining trivia, and cultural analysis. But it was so muddled up temporally that I think I may be a little more confused than I was to begin with.

Jessica says

Never caught fire for me - the meandering style made it too difficult to see the connections between people and places that make history interesting to me. I really wanted to like this one more, as I enjoy Goodwin's fiction tremendously.

David Berry says

Jason Goodwin, previously a travel writer and later a novelist, turned in a very successful history. Don't expect footnotes, historiography, or debates about what really happened. This isn't the history you read in college. It belongs to that nearly lost genre, literary history. Its purpose is to impress on the reader with the splendor, magnificence, and difference of bygone societies and personalities. This Goodwin does spectacularly.

I was lucky enough to read this book in Istanbul. These strange men, the Ottomans, were not what I had thought. Utterly cosmopolitan, they made Greeks and Albanians into Grand Viziers. Ruthless, they killed their brothers to assure no battles over succession. Practical, they not only let Christians practice, they ensured the Patriarch of Constantinople persecuted politically dangerous heresies. "Better the Sultan's turban than the bishop's mitre," was the saying on the Greek islands.

Goodwin writes an elegy to the time when the Ottomans did not try to emulate Europe, they simply surpassed it. As the West advanced, the Ottomans tried to follow suit. Their copycatting wrought all the problems of European monarchy-- popular resentment, succession intrigue, and multiple political loyalties. But it never brought the wealth or technology the sultans wanted.

When the Ottoman Empire fell, it was hailed as a cause for liberty. But thinking on the brutal nationalist suppression that followed, one wonders just how it became a truism that secular democracies respect minority rights and Islamic regimes run roughshod over them.

WarpDrive says

I chose this book as I wanted an introductory overview on this peculiar and fascinating polity, with the objective to gain a better knowledge of one of the main players in Middle Eastern and Balkan history, a multi-ethnic and complex Empire so often unfairly neglected or stereotyped in history books.

I must regretfully state that my objectives have been only partially fulfilled, and that this book has been a bit of a hit-and-miss reading experience.

I perfectly understand that the task of condensing centuries of history of this complex, multicultural empire within 300 pages of one single book is a quite fearsome challenge, but I must also say that the author's approach did not help either: in fact, rather the keeping the focus on the main social, political and cultural trends, the narrative gets too often dispersed into a myriad of factoids and curiosities narrated in what is supposedly a "lyrical style", elements that actually detract from the flow and linearity of the exposition, frequently turning what is supposed to be a history book into some sort of meandering curiosity cabinet. This is compounded by an overall lack of a chronological framework in the narration, which makes the reading of this book an occasionally highly frustrating exercise.

There is also a significant amount of mistakes and several questionable/unsupported interpretations, of which the following list is just a subset:

- chapter 2, page 12: the author claims that, in 1389, the Ottoman army obtained a big victory and shattered the Serbs at Kossovo, on the Blackbird Field.

Well, the reality is somewhat different: firstly, BOTH armies were virtually annihilated, even though the Ottomans significantly outnumbered the Serbians; moreover, the Sultan himself died during the fight (and I think this was the only battle in Ottoman history when the Sultan himself was killed), and finally it took another 70 years and another battle in 1448 (this one much more decisive than the one in 1389) before the Ottomans managed to completely subdue Serbia.

- in chapter 5 there is the claim that the face-veil was introduced by the Byzantines: this is completely unproven and not supported by evidence; actually, Byzantine art does not depict women with veiled faces, although it does depict women with veiled hair

- still in chapter 5, page 45: the author claims that the Venetians, after the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, "*toyed with the idea of moving Venice there, lock, stock and barrel*". In all the books I have read about Venetian history, I never found any reference to such event. This actually runs completely contrary to the very special relationship between Venetians and their own beautiful and unique city, and it is contrary to what actually happened historically: as soon as Constantinople was open, the Venetians did not waste any time in sacking some of its most treasured monuments and objects, and in bringing them to Venice (*as anybody visiting Venice itself can still clearly see by looking at the Four Tetrarchs, the Quadriga, or the porphiri marbles adorning St Mark's basilica*).

- page 52: the author talks in pretty disparaging terms of the Topkapi Palace. Well, I understand that it may be a question of personal tastes, but I do not think that I am alone in finding this palace quite magnificent and utterly elegant and beautiful:

- later in the book (page 215), the author talks in similarly disparaging ways of the so called “Blue Mosque”. Well, I personally find it a beautiful and an almost otherworldly example of the finest religious architecture buildings ever designed:

- page 65: the siege of Baghdad during one of the wars of the Ottomans with Persia happened in 1623, not in 1683 as claimed by the author
- page 86: the author states that, during the battle of Mohacs, a Polish mercenary suggested that the Hungarian army adopt the same technique adopted by the Hussites at the battle of the White Mountains. This is simply not possible, as such battle was actually waged more than a century later (in 1620, as part of the Thirty Years War), while the battle at Mohacs happened in 1526.
- page 87: in 1529, during the first siege of Vienna, the author states that the Sultan “*Suleyman abruptly announced his decision to withdraw on 14 October 1529*”. Actually, the reality is quite different: the Sultan's decision was not so “abrupt” nor arbitrary, as the siege was slowly turning into a monumental disaster and the janissaries (the best troops of the Ottomans, possibly) had already come very close to outright mutiny.
- page 128 and page 163: while I agree with the author that the outcomes of the Battle of Lepanto have been wildly exaggerated by Christian sources, the author neglects to investigate the important psychological and political effects of such event. Moreover, while it is true that the Ottomans managed to quickly rebuild their fleet sank at Lepanto, it is also true (but not mentioned in the book) that the new fleet was of significantly lower quality than the original, so even purely from a military standpoint the effects of the battle were not completely negligible either.
- page 150: the author claims that Constantine founded Constantinople in AD 370. This actually happened in AD 330.
- the author refers to Sufism as a sect. I am not expert at all in Muslim religious aspects and doctrines, but my limited understanding on the matter is that Sufism, more than a sect, can be seen as an interpretation, an aspect or dimension of Islam that cuts across the Shia/Sunni divide.
- Page 315: the author, when referring to episodes like the Armenian Holocaust (when over 1.5 Armenians were exterminated with the encouragement and open complicity of the Ottoman authorities) makes what can be easily regarded as a significant understatement when he says: “*the authorities made little effort to check the atrocities*”. This episode is a real tragedy, and a big black spot in the history of an Empire that in most of its evolution throughout the centuries demonstrated a remarkable level of tolerance.

The inaccuracies mentioned above do not make this book something that should be avoided. On the contrary, there are some parts of the book that are highly informative, interesting and well-written.

I particularly liked the description of the peculiarly egalitarian, meritocratic (*in all Europe the Ottoman Empire alone possessed no hereditary nobility*), and religiously and culturally tolerant political system (*providing some similarities to the approach followed by the Roman Empire towards the conquered peoples*), all characteristics that the Ottoman Empire developed and demonstrated until the process of fossilization, increasingly reactionary conservatism and decadence started to set in, particularly in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Moreover, the Ottoman Empire implemented a relatively light taxation regime, and a generally friendly and light-handed approach to economic development and enterprise, which resulted in a generally healthy and growing economy in the 16th century, when the population of the empire doubled.

The complex relationship between the Ottoman Empire and its Christian neighbors is also described sufficiently well, in particular its intimate, contradictory relationship with the Republic of Venice, a relationship characterized by bouts of conflict, ongoing rivalry in the Mediterranean sea, interspersed with an ongoing commercial association.

The book has also a pretty good timeline, and a handy list of the Ottoman Sultans, together with a small but handy glossary of Turkish terms.

Overall, a reasonably good book, which I think can be fairly graded with a 3-star rating.

Jim says

Perhaps one of the reasons we are having so many problems relating to the Middle East and the Muslim world is that we choose to avert our gaze from it. Practically no one of my acquaintance knows anything about the Ottoman Empire, which lasted some 600 years. *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire* by Jason Goodwin is an excellent place to start. It ranks with the classic **The Ottoman Centuries** by Lord Kinross, which takes a more traditional chronologically structured approach to the subject, while Goodwin, while appearing to be more impressionistic, actually covers the ground just as well.

As he states in his introduction,

This book is about a people who do not exist. The word 'Ottoman' does not describe a place. Nobody nowadays speaks their language. Only a few professors can begin to understand their poetry -- 'We have no classics,' snapped a Turkish poet in 1964 at a poetry symposium in Sofia, when asked to acquaint the group with examples of classical Ottoman verse.

Who, then, were the Ottomans? Originally, they were a roving military clique under the command of a sultan. They differed from the Arabs in their great seventh century conquests by not caring all that much about converting infidels to Islam. In fact, during the early centuries of the Empire, they were far more liberal in their treatment of Orthodox Christians, Jews, and others than almost any other peoples.

And they had a formidable army, one that threatened twice to invade Central Europe by besieging Vienna, only to fail twice. Their infantry, incidentally, did not consist of Muslims, but of *Janissaries* "recruited" from among their Christian client states. Only the *spahis*, their cavalry, was substantially Turkish and Muslim.

Goodwin regales us with hundreds of anecdotes which are endlessly fascinating and make his one of the most fascinating histories of the last few decades. Did you know, for example, that the Empire did not have a printing press until the 18th century (both Kinross and Goodwin point this out in their histories)? Did you know that the streets of Constantinople and other Ottoman cities were crowded with stray dogs, and that the French offered to buy them to manufacture gloves?

When Osama bin Laden was setting up Al-Qaida, he referred to the Caliphate of Islam as having been vacant for some 70 years, and suggested by implication that he wanted to try out for the job. What the late terrorist forgot to mention was that the Sultan/Caliphs (until almost the very end, they were the same) did not take their role as titular head of Islam terribly seriously.

Yelda Basar Moers says

I just finished this dark and stormy popular historical book about the Ottoman Empire and I have to say that within fifteen pages of reading it I was utterly confused! Confused because studying Ottoman history for

more than a decade now, and having lived in Turkey (and born there!), I didn't find anything Ottoman Turkish about it! And then that confusion I mentioned turned to anger! And then I was enraged!!! The last time I felt this feeling of injustice was several years ago when I read Glenn Beck's awful book-- It IS About Islam-- basically slamming Islam as a faith with footless arguments!

I sincerely felt that author Jason Goodwin gave an unfair and dismal portrayal of the Ottoman Turks and their history (late 13th to early 19th century). It's sad that Goodwin left out much of its glory, and beauty, and its tolerance as a model of meritocracy, multiculturalism and egalitarianism. Some even say it was a model for the United States!

The Ottoman Turks ruled for 600 years over a vast territory which included half of Europe. They let the people they ruled practice their own religion in their own houses of worship. In Istanbul you could find a mosque, church and synagogue on the same block! The Ottomans were pious and spirituality was infused into every part of their life. They revered nature, flowers, and time spent outdoors among trees and birds. They gave special, caring attention to animals, dogs, cats and children (that's probably why we have so many stray cats in Turkey!!!). They were highly charitable. I'm not saying the Ottomans were angels, but they were most certainly not the people portrayed in this book!

Some examples of egregious depictions of the Ottomans and Istanbul...In the prologue he mentions the "grey, grey waters of the Bosphorus." Not true!!! I don't know what he is talking about! Has he ever visited Istanbul? The waters of the Bosphorus are so vividly blue that you would have to be colorblind not to notice this. But instead he tries to give a murky landscape to the main body way that flows through Istanbul. He writes of Topkapi Palace, the glorious palace that was home to the Sultans of the Empire for hundreds of years as a "petrified encampment of some defeated army." This is insulting to our past and the palace is no such thing-- I can attest to it myself having visited it numerous times. It is gorgeous and breathtaking. I wonder if he even visited it? He writes that the Ottomans were "ignorant of geography" and didn't use clocks! The Ottomans were working with the British, the French, even the Russians! How could this be possible if they didn't know geography or use clocks, or live in a modern way. Sultan Murad III was in correspondence with Queen Elizabeth I whom he had an alliance with, and Sultan Suleiman dealt constantly with the Venetians. The Ottomans were constantly interacting with the European world, yet Mr. Goodwin portrays them as anachronistic barbarians!

He describes the empire as "darker," "gloomy," and "helpless." He writes of the Ottoman dynastic family as "mad." He specifically writes that they were an "incredibly mad and morbid family." He doesn't at all mention the magnificent Westward and Enlightened reigns of Selim III, Mahmud II and the incredible women who ruled it, Kosem Sultan and Hurrem Sultan, one as regent, the other behind the scenes.

For me, this was not a true account of the empire but rather something created in Goodwin's own imagination. In the resources section I don't see the well known Turkish historians of the Ottoman Empire or many Turkish sources at all. This is his idea of this time and place, not the time and place itself! It's fascinating how even nonfiction historical books can become fiction in how they are penned!

I would suggest that Mr. Goodwin spend some time in Turkey and take a course in Turkish, for starters. And then consider rewriting his version of our history! And I'm totally shocked that Picador (the publisher) did not do their diligence and allowed this book to be published!

If you want a fictional account of the Ottoman Empire made up by the author's own imagination, then read this book. Otherwise I'd toss it! I've read over 100 books on the Ottoman Empire and lived in Turkey and can say this book has nothing to do with it!

Barbara Franklin says

I could not finish this book.

Olethros says

-Tan especial como “especialito”.-

Género. Historia.

Lo que nos cuenta. Aproximación al Imperio Otomano, su historia, sus estructuras sociales y políticas, su auge, cénit y lento declive, a través de sus líderes y de los rumbos que marcaron sus ciudadanos para definir las peculiaridades tan llamativas de la idiosincrasia del imperio que permitieron tanto su grandeza como su caída.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...>

Pete daPixie says

Almost seven hundred years of history here, and most of it completely new to me. 'Lords of the Horizons', published in 1998, chronicles the astonishing rise and fall of the Ottoman empire, from the late thirteenth century to the end of World War One.

From the birth of Osman Bey in 1281, which set a spark around the Sea of Marmara to engulf Byzantium in a Muslim fire that roared across the Dardanelles to the Adriatic, and in less than a century was consuming the Balkans. After Constantinople fell in 1453, Greece and the Crimea quickly followed and by the end of the sixteenth century the Ottomans had landed in southern Italy, consumed Syria, Cyprus and Egypt, laid siege to Vienna and made war with Persia. Perhaps the decline began with the Ottoman fleet's defeat at the battle of Lepanto in 1571. It does explain why the maritime explorations of Portugal, Spain, England and the Dutch headed west and kept away from the eastern Mediterranean.

The writing of Jason Goodwin earns one extra star. He provides a flourish and style that is quite rare in a historical work.

GoldGato says

From its beginnings as a nondescript tribe dwelling in the foothills of Anatolia to the dazzling victory over the Byzantines at Constantinople, the Empire of Osman (Ottoman) was the powerhouse of its day. It was an empire that adapted to the countries it overran, so that a day in the marketplace at Istanbul would find Turks, Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, Jews, Serbs, Moors and others mingling together, regardless of race or language.

"There is a great difference between our loss and yours. You have shaved our chin; but our beard is growing again. We have lopped off your arm, and you can never replace it."

The Ottomans suffered their first major loss against the Christian West at the Battle of Lepanto but managed to rebuild its navy and to continue its hold over the Balkans. The history of how the Ottomans took over the exotic identity of the Byzantines and made it their own is fascinating. The Empire was run as a corporation, focused on goals and metrics and organizational structure. Janissaries, harems, sibling rivalries make for enthralling history.

This volume is laid out as a three-act structure, with the beginning followed by the rise followed by the decline of the Empire. But as Goodwin showed in his other Istanbul-inspired book *On Foot to the Golden Horn: A Walk to Istanbul*, the delight in turning the pages here leads to finding little gems of history. For example, the croissant was created to commemorate the city bakers of Vienna who heard the Turks tunneling beneath the streets, thus sounding the alarm. Thus was born the bun shaped as a crescent (the symbol of the Ottomans). And then there's the footnote about the creation of the first cigarette, rolled by Ottoman gunners who had to replace their broken clay pipe.

The Ottoman vizier had the forts painted very white, to give his enemies the impression that they were all newly fitted up.

The last chapter of the book is an epilogue of sorts. For as long as the Turks had ruled over Istanbul, the mongrel dogs of the city were kings of the streets. Each dog belonged to a gang which in turn was part of a strictly-defined territory that other canine packs could not cross. The Ottomans accepted these mangy wolves as part of the divine plan, so human and dog tolerated each other. But when the end of World War I came, and the defeat of the Ottomans, the Sultan no longer had the power to prevent progress from seeping in, and the dogs were moved to an island. They could not return to their old kingdom, just as the Ottomans found theirs at an end.

Book Season = Spring (painted forts)

Nazmul Hasan says

I'm so sorry for Mr. Goodwin. I'm sure the man honestly loves the ottomans. But apparently he doesn't love accurate research. There are several GLARING errors in this book. In addition, Goodwin mentions outlandish stories without even providing citations. It's amazing what lengths the author will go to shock or grab his readers attention. Apparently, coming up with a non-existent Quranic verse is one of these tactics (on pg. 55)

If you want to be entertained, do read this, but at the risk of also encountering dubious information.

David says

The best short overview of the Ottomans I have read. Very lively and full of fascinating bits of information, it makes the rise and decline of the empire seem like an exciting romp, and is not without humour. The army had a regiment of madmen, for example, who were used as cannon fodder in the front line, 'because they

didn't mind'. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent fell in love with a blonde slave girl from the Caucasus called Roxana, and slept only with her until the day she died. Highly recommended.
