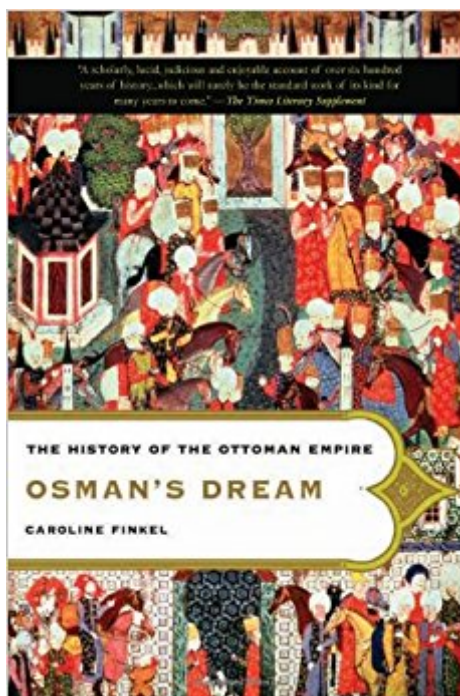


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Osman's Dream: The History Of The Ottoman Empire



Synopsis

The Ottoman Empire was one of the largest and most influential empires in world history. Its reach extended to three continents and it survived for more than six centuries, but its history is too often colored by the memory of its bloody final throes on the battlefields of World War I. In this magisterial work—the first definitive account written for the general reader—renowned scholar and journalist Caroline Finkel lucidly recounts the epic story of the Ottoman Empire from its origins in the thirteenth century through its destruction in the twentieth.

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Customer Reviews

What Finkel calls the "old" narrative of the Ottoman Empire is simple to relate: "it rose, declined, and fell." An exotic parade of salacious sultans, grand viziers and duplicitous eunuchs inhabit the sultry harems and domed palaces of Istanbul—*at least in our imaginations*. Finkel, a long-time resident of Turkey and Ottoman scholar, relates a "new" narrative of empire that properly accounts for the richness and complexity of the Ottoman state over nearly seven centuries. By presiding over their multiethnic empire for so long, and ushering it from medievalism to modernity, the Ottomans should be ranked alongside the Hapsburgs and the Romanovs, she argues. That they are overlooked is the fault of Western historians who have peered at their subjects through the lens of their own prejudices. Finkel's striking innovation is to turn a mirror on the Ottomans and examine how they saw themselves and their empire. While this approach yields a refreshingly original perspective, Finkel's quest to improve Westerners' understanding occasionally leads her into some questionable stretches (an implication, for instance, that Westerners think all Muslims are terrorists).

Happily, these remain unintrusive and this history makes a riveting and enjoyable read for all audiences. 16 pages of photos; maps. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review To be blunt, historians have neglected the Ottoman Empire. Stifled by language barriers, problematic sources, and cultural blinders (and no doubt somewhat bewildered by the task of narrating an empire that lasted from 1299 to 1922 and extended from Sarajevo to San'a), American and European academics have been content to chew on small pieces of Ottoman history, limiting public conception of the empire to narrow notions of sultans, military maneuvers, and elaborate bathing facilities. With this superb book, Finkel boldly covers new ground in striving to show the Ottoman Empire from within, as the Ottomans themselves saw it--a perspective that, thanks to centuries of politically motivated selective perception, even modern Turks have had great difficulty ascertaining. Having spent 15 years living in Turkey, Finkel is uniquely positioned to overcome the practical hurdles to Ottoman research, but her real strength is in historiography: she has a keen ability to extract salient observations from her sources even as she renders their political motives transparent. The result is a panorama of the Ottoman Empire to rival the best portraits of the Romanovs and Habsburgs, and a must-have for history collections. Brendan Driscoll Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is a complete chronology of the Ottoman empire. The completeness is both its strength and its weakness. Each of the more than thirty sultans is discussed with the same amount of detail, along with an endless list of vezirs. So, you will not miss any historical fact. But if you are not familiar with the main developments in the Ottoman empire, it's hard to see the forest for the trees. None of the persons discussed in the book gets any depth of character: they are just names and facts. Also, cultural developments get little attention. Surprisingly, though, the book is still fairly readable. All in all, it's not useful as introduction to the history of the Ottoman empire, but it is probably a very useful book for someone who wants more details.

Caroline Finkel's book "Osman's Dream" is a useful book on the history of the Ottoman empire. It starts with the dream of the first sultan, Osman. He is said to have dreamt about a large tree growing from his navel. Its shade encompassed large parts of the world including distant mountains

and mighty rivers. It was a clear sign of the wishes of the early sultans to build an empire. It would stretch across North Africa, including Egypt and also Persia as well as the Middle East. It should be remembered also, that Turkey was important in the attempts to stop Russian imperialism from Peter I and through the nineteenth century. During the Great Northern War (1700 - 1721) the Ottomans cooperated with Sweden, Poland and Ukraine against Moscow. Sweden's King Charles XII, Ivan Mazepa and Pylyp Orlyk were permitted to reside on Ottoman territory. Later Sweden, France and Turkey cooperated to stop Russian expansion. The first Turkish treaty with a Christian nation was with Sweden in 1739 when Sweden sought to reconquer territories lost during The Great Northern War. These events are covered in Mrs Finkel's book. Published in 2006 this book is still one of the best books on the Ottoman empire. Mr. Bertil Haggman, LL.M. author, Sweden

The book was very interesting, and it covers some very controversial topics in ways that are sure not to please all. The kindle ebook, however, had some issues. About 20 pages of pictures were included in one section of the book with no explanation as to why, other than brief captions for each. Presumably this is not the layout of the print version.

Much of us Westerner's view of Turkey has come from Euro-centric accounts via the middle age chroniclers and early historians without access to the Turkish archives. And so, we are aware of Turkey's peripheral roles in the Crimean War and then the two World Wars in more modern historical tracts. However, Caroline Finkel is a historian who takes an insider's view of this most interesting, multifaceted and multi-layered empire on Europe's eastern boundary. She presents an enormous wealth of material that many western readers might find overwhelming in its detail. She points out many early trends but I am not sure of her rationale for the empire's expansion beyond its Anatolian beginnings when she discounts religion or jihadism. Like the many headed Hydra, the emerging Turkish Empire is featured in all its glory and weaknesses. While still adopting a 'kings and queens' approach to historical research, albeit with Turkish names, Finkel paints a very broad canvas, but we readers are left feeling a little overwhelmed in the detail of court intrigues. Apart from her account of Turkey's quite general resistance to modernization, one weakness is that there is little description of broader social trends in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries affecting Turkey. Nevertheless the broad sweep is there underneath well sourced detail and an easy to comprehend writing style.

Finkel's history of the Ottoman empire is certainly comprehensive in scope, encompassing the

empire from its origins in the late middle-ages to the rise of Ataturk. Yet I begrudgingly give it four stars. While the scope and scale of the Ottoman empire is presented in detail, there was an ebb and flow to the relative strength of her writing, which was distracting. The first quarter of the history is remarkable - I assume this is Finkel's area of expertise, given the detail of the political, religious and social climate of Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean in the 13th and 14th centuries. How Osman began to exploit the various divisions of competing ethnic groups, religions, and constantly shifting political loyalties is shown masterfully. With such a strong start, I was disappointed in her treatment of the founding and expansion of the empire in the 15th and 16th centuries. Recognizing that this is an *Ottoman* history, I had expected more detail and information on the conquest and occupation of the Balkans, the political competition between Hungary, Poland, Habsburg Austria and the maritime powers of Venice and Genoa. These states were of course discussed, but I had expected a deeper, more nuanced historical analysis of the complex economic and political competition between each of them. Thankfully Finkel again finds her footing as she writes about the 18th and 19th centuries - in fact, her discussion of the slow and painful implosion of the Ottoman empire was, to me at least, the best part of the book as she intertwines the various causes of its decline: increased economic competition from industrializing European nations, the influx of silver from the New World, new shipping routes to India and Asia, the adoption of "real politik" by European nation-states (and the reluctance to do so by the Ottomans), growing national movements within the Ottoman empire, and of course the overall reluctance by the Janissaries and ulaema to embrace change and modernization in any form. In writing, the amount of historical detail is almost overwhelming - repeatedly I had to remind myself what the larger point being made was given the sheer volume of information she shares. Clearly she is writing for an academic audience, something potential customers may want to keep in mind. In writing for an academic audience, I was disappointed at the relative lack of primary sources she used in her research and writing; many sources are translations or are cited in previously published works. All criticism aside, this is a densely detailed work, with a comprehensive view of the Ottoman empire, and a solid history of an important empire in world history.

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