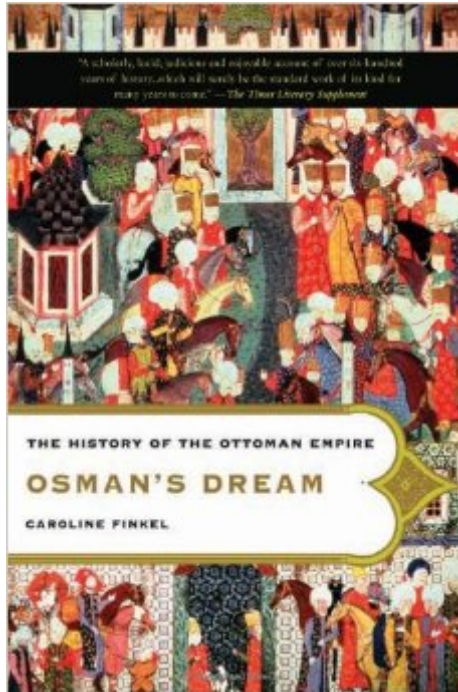


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Osman's Dream: The History Of The Ottoman Empire



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Though more people today associate the word "ottoman" with fancy cushioned footstools than with a mighty regime, the Ottoman Empire dominated much of southeastern Europe and the Middle East from the fifteenth century to the end of the First World War. In many respects it was the last of the great Muslim empires which challenged Christian Europe, while its' lengthy decline concerned generations of Western statesmen and its successor states still demand the world's attention. In this book, Caroline Finkel offers us a single-volume history of the Ottoman Empire, ranging from its obscure origins to its demise in the 1920s. Though similar overviews have been written before, her goal is to dispel the traditional "rise and fall" approach and to free the empire from its' stereotyping as, in her words, "a theatre of the absurd." Tapping into the enormous wealth of recent scholarly work on the Ottomans, she offers a far more complex and nuanced portrayal of the empire than in most popular accounts - pointing out, for example, that the ranks of the soldiers of the early empire included as many Christians as it did Muslims, and that it was not until well into the empire's decline in the 18th century that the Ottoman sultans began to embrace the previously disused title of

caliph. Yet the book suffers from a relatively narrow focus. Most of the text is dominated by a narrative of high politics, one concentrating on the machinations and maneuvering of the sultans; other elements, such as the complex social and economic structures of the empire, are addressed only in passing. Moreover, Finkel rarely explains the empire in any depth.

This is a scholarly review of the political and military history of the Ottoman Empire, from its foundation in the early 14th century until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. Because the material covers over six hundred years in just over 550 pages, it is unavoidably superficial in most places. As a result, it is helpful as a college-level, introductory survey of the Ottomans, best followed up with more detailed study. It is far too general to be of much use to a specialist. I believe it is too dense for the casual reader, so I would not recommend it to anyone without a real interest in middle eastern history. The book is a political history, with extremely rare forays into matters of culture, religion, ethnicity, art or architecture. We are presented with an endless list of Sultans, viziers, military commanders, battles, treaties and boundaries, and virtually no analysis. For example, we have no discussion of the reasons the early Ottomans were so overwhelmingly successful at expanding the empire. The Ottomans were one of the first middle eastern empires to adopt gunpowder weapons, but Finkel does not discuss this adoption, or the impact it had on early conquests. Indeed, Finkel's discussions of warfare in general is universally vague -- she tells us who won the battles, but not why. Another problem is that the book gives extremely little notice to more distant Ottoman realms, in North Africa, Egypt, the Hijaz and Syria/Palestine. Near the end, when the Empire begins to fragment, we get some mention of Mehmet Ali [Muhammad Ali] and the sharifs of Mecca. This is extremely cursory, and the subject is abandoned soon after it is taken up.

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