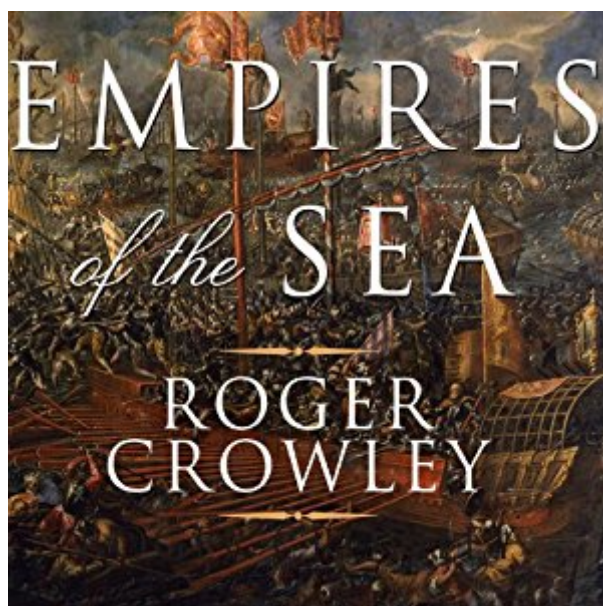


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# Empires Of The Sea: The Contest For The Center Of The World



## Synopsis

In 1521, Suleiman the Magnificent, Muslim ruler of the Ottoman Empire, dispatched an invasion fleet to the Christian island of Rhodes. This would prove to be the opening shot in an epic clash between rival empires and faiths for control of the Mediterranean and the center of the world. In *Empires of the Sea*, acclaimed historian Roger Crowley has written a thrilling account of this brutal decades-long battle between Christendom and Islam for the soul of Europe, a fast-paced tale of spiraling intensity that ranges from Istanbul to the Gates of Gibraltar. Crowley conjures up a wild cast of pirates, crusaders, and religious warriors struggling for supremacy and survival in a tale of slavery and galley warfare, desperate bravery and utter brutality. *Empires of the Sea* is a story of extraordinary color and incident, and provides a crucial context for our own clash of civilizations.

--This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Roger Crowley, *Empires of the Sea: How Venice Ruled the Seas* (New York: Random House, 2012). A marvelous and cautionary tale of how Venice founded, maintained and eventually began to lose its *Stato da Mar*, the commercial and military empire which included Zara, Scutari, Corfu, Crete, Negroponte, Salonika and Kaffir, stretching along the Adriatic, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea on to trading with Mamluks in Palestine and Egypt. Through wars with Genoa, trade with the Mongols and the relentless pressures of the Ottoman Turks, Venice held its own for centuries. Crowley has written a marvelous work showing the need

for, and the penalties for failing to protect the capital from people. Everything the city bought, or sold, came by sea during the three periods under review: 1000-1204 *The Merchant Crusaders*, 1204-1500 *The Princes of the Sea* and then 1400-1503 *The Rising Moon of the Ottoman Turks*. And the sea required, at all times, the projection of force to protect commercial interests.

A description of the century-long naval struggle for control of the Mediterranean between the Ottoman Turks and the West, focusing on 4 major areas, the sieges of Rhodes, Cyprus, and Malta, and the great battle of Lepanto. Many other reviewers criticized this work as providing incomplete descriptions of some very complex military conflicts, but for me the depth of this work was exactly right. Although I have read a great deal of military and naval history, I am not one for recreating the movement of every ship or every battalion. I suppose you could write a whole book, for example, on the siege of Malta, but that's not what the author intends. His idea is to lay out the motivations of the Turks and the struggles of the West--primarily the papacy, the Venetians, Philip II of Spain, and the Knights of Malta to try to bury their many differences to confront the seemingly inevitable thrust of the Ottoman empire. Crowley's narrative sweeps the reader along, describing not only the conflicts but the people behind them and their motivations. The savagery of the fighting is examined in detail, a level of violence and barbarity (on both sides) that will shock modern readers. It's one of the most gripping and comprehensive descriptions of a century-long conflict that I have read. I would award this book only 4 stars, however. The maps (in the Kindle version, anyway) were unreadable, split between pages and undecipherable when expanded. Although the author doesn't seek to delve into enormous detail in terms of military hardware, I found it difficult to understand how galleys functioned and how they were used in battle. The fleets involved also consisted of galleases, galliots, and many other craft which were not explained. I had to study my faithful Wikipedia to gain some insight as to the strengths, weaknesses and uses of all these craft. The author would have been better advised to concentrate some effort here, as it's really not possible to understand naval strategy without some idea of the limitations that were imposed on battle plans by the technology of the era.

I asked LtCol Tom Kratman, USA (Ret.), the author of excellent military science fiction, for a recommendation for a high school graduation gift for a nephew of my wife who is joining the Army. (My fault, I think; the last time I saw the lad he was about 10 and I showed him the manual of arms with a training rifle.) The book looked so good, I bought a copy for myself. It is excellent history. I

knew, of course, about the siege of Malta and Lepanto, but this filled in all the details. The author writes, "The idea of conquest was central to the Sultanate, intricately interwoven with its holder's position as leader of the Muslim world. ... Only spectacular conquests could legitimize a sultan." The battle of Lepanto, the most decisive sea battle between Salamis and Trafalgar, ended the efforts of the Muslim Ottomans to conquer Europe and capture Rome, though they rebuilt their lost fleet. I was interested to learn that the commander of the Holy League, Catholic King Philip II of Spain's illegitimate half brother Don Juan, was only 22. Philip had ordered him not to fight to preserve the fleet, but he was eager for battle and glory. Some interesting notes: One of the fleet's Spanish arquebusiers was Maria la Bailadora, a flamenco dancer, disguised as a man to stay with her lover. The writer Cervantes, then 24, was there as a volunteer and was wounded in the battle. 25,000 Muslims died as did 15,000 Christians, but 12,000 Christian galley slaves were freed. (Both sides depended on slaves, often but not always of the opposite religion, to power their fleets. Raids by Muslim pirates/slave catchers were one of the causes of the conflict.) The author writes that, "Not until Loos in 1915 would this rate of slaughter be surpassed." I highly recommend this well researched and balanced history.

This book is essential reading for anyone trying to understand late 16c European history, the Siege of Malta in 1565 and the naval Battle of Lepanto in 1571. The narration is engaging and captures the personalities and geopolitics as well as the brutality and suffering of the times. The author occasionally uses unfamiliar English words like 'mizzle' (a mix of drizzle and fog) and 'march out of a confined space', so I recommend the Kindle edition which allows for easy lookup of word definitions.

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