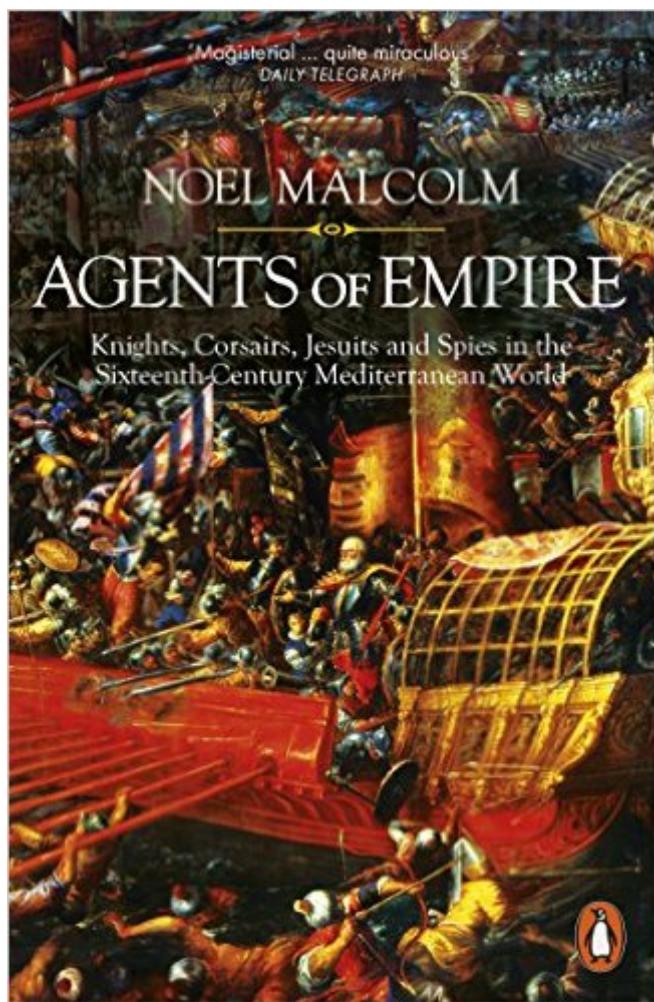


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Agents Of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits And Spies In The 16th-Century Mediterranean World



Synopsis

In the second half of the sixteenth century, most of the Christian states of Western Europe were on the defensive against a Muslim superpower - the Empire of the Ottoman sultans. There was violent conflict, from raiding and corsairing to large-scale warfare, but there were also many forms of peaceful interaction across the surprisingly porous frontiers of these opposing power-blocs. *Agents of Empire* describes the paths taken through the eastern Mediterranean and its European hinterland by members of a Venetian-Albanian family, almost all of them previously invisible to history. They include an archbishop in the Balkans, the captain of the papal flagship at the Battle of Lepanto, the power behind the throne in the Ottoman province of Moldavia, and a dragoman (interpreter) at the Venetian embassy in Istanbul. Through the life-stories of these adventurous individuals over three generations, Noel Malcolm casts the world between Venice, Rome and the Ottoman Empire in a fresh light, illuminating subjects as diverse as espionage, diplomacy, the grain trade, slave-ransoming and anti-Ottoman rebellion. He describes the conflicting strategies of the Christian powers, and the extraordinarily ambitious plans of the sultans and their viziers. Few works since Fernand Braudel's classic account of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean, published more than sixty years ago, have ranged so widely through this vital period of Mediterranean and European history. A masterpiece of scholarship as well as story-telling, *Agents of Empire* builds up a panoramic picture, both of Western power-politics and of the interrelations between the Christian and Ottoman worlds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While I was surprised at how academic this book was - I was expecting something more popular - it is an absolutely excellent read. The context of the book is the period immediately following the apogee of the Ottoman Empire under Suleiman the Magnificent. The "plot", if you will, is an extended family over 2 generations of nobles from Albania, who make their careers involving virtually all the great powers of the Mediterranean. There were a number of powers operating in the region at that time. By far the most powerful, the Ottoman Empire was master of about 2/3 of the Mediterranean, combining man-power rich infantry and an enormous navy. Though Suleiman was turned back at Vienna and Malta, his Empire was regarded as unstoppable. His sea-based enemies included Venice, Spain, the Vatican territories, and the Habsburgs, who controlled southern Italy; they occasionally allied themselves, however suspicious they were of each other as their interests conflicted. For its part, France was more or less allied to the Ottomans, a tactical advantage to counter its enemies. One of the most interesting forces were the semi-autonomous forces that existed on the fringes of the empires, who paid some fealty to their superiors but were able to take actions under their own initiative and profit; these were the corsairs (kind of like pirates with a code, allied to patron states, e.g. the knights of Malta), nomads on the plain (Tatars, Cossacks, and many others). To put it mildly, this concatenation of forces made the Mediterranean a cauldron of intrigue and opportunity. Into this stepped the Bruti family, nobles who were not of the highest aristocracy. They were educated, energetic, and ambitious.

Good book on the subject of Venetian rule of the small coastal towns of modern Montenegro, written from the perspective of their inhabitants and more prominent families of Albanian origins. Interestingly enough some of the members of these interwoven families had careers in Turkish empire, Venetian republic, Knights of Malta and Papal state public and secret services. One of the cousins was Turkish pasha who later became grand vizier of the empire, another fought for Papal state against Huguenots in France and had a Catholic bishop brother present at council of Trent, yet another was a spy, knight and merchant of the Venetian republic. Their offspring continued in the footsteps of their fathers, for better or worse trying to serve many masters in the Mediterranean and to survive and prosper in uncertain and dangerous times. One even managed to get himself installed as the prime minister for Wallachian Grand duke and eventually exchanged diplomatic letters with the Queen Elizabeth I of England, others formed a long lasting caste of Venetian spies and translators at the Ottoman court. Interwoven with these individual lives and stories there is also the big strategic game being played out in the background, with many and various governmental interests and conflicts being revealed. One part of the book focuses for example on the battle of

Lepanto and another on anti reformation in France. Mr. Malcolm provides insightful view on the less known part of Mediterranean history in which there was much more cooperation and pragmatism then the later generations were led to believe.

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