



Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World

Roger Crowley

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World

Roger Crowley

Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World Roger Crowley

Shows the Mediterranean as a majestic and bloody theatre of war. Opening with the Ottoman victory in 1453, this title tells the story of military crusading, Barbary pirates, white slavery and the Ottoman Empire - and the larger picture of the struggle between Islam and Christianity.

Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World Details

Date : Published 2008 by Random House

ISBN :

Author : Roger Crowley

Format : Kindle Edition 368 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Military, Military History, War, History, European History, Military Fiction, Historical

 [Download Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of L ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World Roger Crowley

From Reader Review Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World for online ebook

Liviu says

part of a tetralogy (including the fall of Constantinople, the history of Venice's maritime Empire and the creation of the Portuguese Empire) - earliest written I think but latest chronologically as it covers the naval conflict for the Mediterranean between the Hapsburg empires (especially of Spain) under Charles Quintus and Philip II (and assorted allies) and the Ottoman Empire under Suleiman the Magnificent and the corsairs of North Africa from 1521 end the fall of Rhodes to the Ottomans to 1580 and the informal truce which essentially ended large scale naval warfare in the Mediterranean at least between the two powers (corsairs, the liquidation of the remnants of Venice's empire and later extension of European colonial conflicts continued until the 19th century but the Mediterranean became mostly a backwater to the larger geopolitical issues after 1600)

another page turner from the author with memorable events and characters (Rhodes, Tunis, Barbarossa, Malta, Cyprus, Lepanto, Don Juan of Austria...) and a reasonable presentation of the events in what became a seemingly crucial operation theaters for the two main empires of the day, only to peter out due to mutual exhaustion and history moving away from the area and to the trans-oceanic theater that would dominate from the late 1500's on

highly recommended and the best of the author alongside the Constantinople siege as the relative compactness of the area and timeline allows the narrative skills of the author to shine

MarcosKtulu says

Set in 16th century mediterranean, Empires of the sea renders the picture of an epic confrontation between the Ottoman empire in it's heyday and several christian polities.

As other reviewers correctly point out, the book is divided into 3 sections. The first refers to a description of the sea, the assumption of promising Soliman and Charles V, their empires and their strategic goals, ambitions, and actions in it. For the Ottoman empire, their need to clear Rhodes and the St. John order with it's pirate raiding near Anatolian coasts. For the Holy roman empire, necessity of setting foot in northern africa and fighting off berber pirates. These could be better described as proxy wars, and despite ottomans faring better, they are inconclusive.

In a nasty story twist, the expulsion of St. John order knights from Rhodes would indeed have consequences for the second part of the book.

Setting presented, fast forward 40 years, with a small cast replacement: Ferdinand enters, Charles exits. A now aged Suleyman pursues the conquest of Malta, where St. John order had taken refuge and settled. This short but detailed (110+ pages) siege is the second and main section of the book. Left on it's own, the knights resist ottoman onslaught up until the point of exhaustion, when spanish reluctantly come into rescue. This section is lavish on siege warfare minutiae, though it can be a little bit repetitive: ottoman attack, failed, defense can't stand any more. Another attack, another failure, defenses can't stand anymore, etc.

Third section is the big, naval battle, to end all battles (not). Unable to grab Malta and advance further to western mediterranean, under the new sultan Selim pressure is made on Venetian colonies, starting with the

invasion and conquest of Cyprus (it's main battles being Nicosia and Famagusta).

This event, along with the assumption of its promoter, the new pope Pious V, triggered christian entities, much to their chagrin, to form the Holy league. A powerful and short bursting alliance consisting of heterogenous members of Spain, Genoa, Venice and The Holy see.

The famous (overrated?) ultimate clash of clashes of Lepanto and practical destruction of ottoman fleet leaves christians with a victory of virtually little consequences. A demonstration of how useless these wars for the sake of warring are, especially these crusading type, no matter how much faith and effort is involved. By the time Spain and Ottoman empires were shooting the last rounds each other, their climax soon proved to be the precursor of their doom. The power center was shifting northwards, away from the Mediterranean, onto new empires hungrier and better suited for the global quest of trade, money and power. A bitter lesson learnt too late.

Malapata says

Crowley nos cuenta la lucha por el dominio del Mediterráneo entre dos Imperios, el otomano y el español, a lo largo de gran parte del siglo XVI. Y lo hace con una narración llena de ritmo y emoción, que se lee de un tirón pero que sin embargo me ha dejado un regusto amargo.

El libro está dividido en tres partes de prácticamente la misma extensión. La primera narra los acontecimientos en las cuatro décadas que van desde la toma de Rodas por los turcos en 1523 hasta el sitio de Malta (1665). En estos poco más de 40 años el imperio turco pasa de tener escaso interés en la supremacía marítima a convertirse en la potencia hegemónica en las aguas del Mediterráneo Oriental y el terror de las costas cristianas en general. Son alrededor de cien páginas que leí casi de una sentada y me dejaron con ganas de saber más sobre los Barbarroja, los piratas de berbería, la posición interesada de Francia o Venecia y tantas otras cosas.

Si algo le podía reprochar a esta primera parte es que fuera demasiado breve, pero mientras leía suponía que era porque aún quedaban muchas cosas que contar en los años que faltaban. Y el problema es que, en parte, estaba equivocado. Tras recorrer más de cuarenta años en su primer tercio, el siguiente bloque del libro está dedicado en exclusiva a un puñado de meses, en los que se desarrolló el sitio de Malta. De repente el libro ya no es sobre el enfrentamiento entre dos imperios, sino que todo era una alargada introducción para detenerse en la lucha por la isla. Y bien es cierto que se trata de una historia épica y apasionante, no deja de tratarse de un único elemento en un tapiz mucho más extenso.

Del mismo modo parece que el último tercio es un epílogo que se centra casi exclusivamente en la batalla de Lepanto y sus preparativos, pero no entra en los años que siguieron e ignora la serie de luchas que aún habrían de enfrentar a venecianos y turcos, además de la situación de los piratas del norte de África.

Lo cierto es que me sentí algo defraudado. No era esto lo que prometía el título ni la sinopsis. Ciertamente la narración es muy interesante, pero yo esperaba una visión más global, algo como lo que prometía tanto el título como la sinopsis y a lo que parecía responder durante el primer tercio de la narración.

Jonfaith says

Later that day the guns of Saint Angelo opened up. A volley of human heads bombarded the Ottoman camp across the water. There would be no repeat of the chivalrous truce at Rhodes.

As noted this marks my first ever tandem read with my brother. I am immensely proud of him but few would ever regard him as bookish. He had a brief infatuation with Rimbaud and Keats 20 years ago but that was soon abandoned. He now works on or around Pennsylvania Avenue. His attitudes have softened and become more nuanced. Over Thanksgiving I had expressed an ongoing interest in Medieval/Renaissance matters and we wound up agreeing on this text.

I remarked rather quickly to my brother that this isn't great history but it is a compelling albeit horrifying narrative. Mr. Crowley couches his text in terms of a teleology, an ongoing "clash of civilizations" which will only be resolved in some distant future. There is no regard for the Pirenne Thesis. There are simply arguments about a universal dichotomy, one of which neither party could agree on anything, not even the primacy of their conflict. Nor is there any need in speaking of a consensus regarding either the Christians or the Muslims in the 16th Century. The Holy Roman Empire devoted much more of its resources to fighting the French and the Protestants than it ever did the Ottomans.

That said what unfolds is bleak. Navies of the time were dependant on rowers and this perk-free position had to be filled by ongoing slaving. Thus the soul of the World's Center was at stake and the means to victory were human bondage.

In his afterward, Crowley notes the abundance of accounts left from the events and its participants. I wish he would've spent more time sifting, parsing and comparing the merits of rival testimony. Call me an idealist, but isn't that the nature of a historian?

Gordon says

If you are going to read this book, you'd better like slaughter. It features lots of blood. Mostly, this occurs during sieges of fortified towns, but sea battles claim their fair share of victims too. All of it is described with great gusto, skill and narrative flair by the author, who clearly loves a good battle and knows how to recount it. In this, the book is similar to his previous work, 1453, which was largely devoted to the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmet the Conqueror. Fast forward three-quarters of a century to Mehmet's great-grandson Suleiman the Magnificent (known as "the Lawgiver" to the Ottomans), and once again the story and the carnage resume with Empires of the Sea.

Crowley begins his story with the taking of Rhodes in 1522. Suleiman had been on the throne for only two years, and the tradition was that a sultan consolidated his authority early in his reign with a series of victories. He had already conquered the fortress of Belgrade, in what is today Serbia. The island of Rhodes was next. Since it lay just off the coast of Turkey, and was a stronghold of the crusading Knights Hospitaller who had used it to keep a toehold in the Eastern Mediterranean ever since being booted out of the Holy Land upon the failure of the Crusades, Rhodes was an obvious target. The Turks were very adept at siegecraft, and along with their massive advantage in manpower, took the Knights' key fortress after a prolonged siege and great loss of life. Suleiman generously allowed the defeated Knights to leave the island, thinking that would be the last of them. He was wrong.

The balance of power in the sixteenth century in Europe and around the shores of the Mediterranean was

mainly contested by two great powers: the Ottoman Empire and the Hapsburg Empire. The Ottomans' territories stretched across much of North Africa, and then from the Middle East through Turkey and the Balkans, all the way to Hungary. Their expansion into Central Europe was largely checked by the Hapsburgs, whose territories were a patchwork quilt across Europe, and included parts of Central Europe, Austria, parts of Germany, parts of Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain.

Suleiman the Magnificent was to enjoy a long reign of almost half a century, from 1520 to 1566, the longest serving sultan of the Ottoman Empire. His main opponent, the Hapsburg King of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, had a similarly long reign from 1516-1556. Both monarchs had other worries than just each other. Suleiman was regularly engaged in wars in the Balkans as well as against the Persians, fighting a war against the Safavid Persian Empire that lasted nearly a quarter century. Charles V had to deal with the very combative Kings of France and with rebellious subjects in the Netherlands. At various times, the French would even go so far as to ally themselves against the Ottomans to counter the power of Charles V.

Complicating matters greatly for the Hapsburgs was the Protestant Reformation, which rapidly picked up energy throughout the century after Martin Luther nailed his famous Ninety-Five Theses to the Wittenberg castle church door in 1517. Protestants, especially those of the Netherlands, did not take kindly to being ruled over by a Catholic king such as Charles -- even though Charles himself was born and raised in the Low Countries, having been born in Ghent.

Through the rest of the 1520's, after the victories of Belgrade and Rhodes, Suleiman's Ottoman armies expanded the empire relentlessly in the Balkans, defeating the Hungarians at the Battle of Mohacs in 1526 and reaching as far as the gates of Vienna in 1529 before suffering their first major defeat. With the Hungarian Kingdom removed as a power, the Hapsburgs and Ottomans were directly at one another's throats, a struggle that continued into the 20th century until World War I finished off both empires.

In the Mediterranean, the Ottomans expanded across North Africa, absorbing the Barbary States of Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers. Autonomous provinces of the Empire, they were still an important part of the Ottoman military presence in the Western Mediterranean because of their fleets of corsairs. The corsairs functioned partly as free-lance pirates and partly as instruments of Ottoman naval power, seizing shipping and mounting coastal raids in Spain, the Balearic Islands and along the coast of Italy.

In 1538, the Ottoman navy under the pirate and admiral Barbarossa defeated the naval forces of the Hapsburgs and their allies at the battle of Preveza, off the coast of Greece. This largely secured the Ottomans' control of the eastern half of the Mediterranean for some years. This battle would be a prelude for the far larger naval battle to come at Lepanto later in the century, with the same naval powers facing each other.

However, strategically situated in the middle of the Mediterranean was the island of Malta, off the coast of Sicily. The Knights Hospitaller, after their defeat in Malta, had roamed homeless for some years, before eventually being given lordship over the island, under the leadership of the Grand-master La Valette. Here, they became the Knights of Malta, and carried on their war against Islam, mainly through imitating the tactics of the corsairs. The Knights seized shipping wherever they could, roaming throughout the eastern Mediterranean under the noses of the Turks. After they seized one ship too many -- to be precise, the galley of the Sultan's Chief Eunuch -- Suleiman decided to put an end to the Knights once and for all. A massive invasion fleet was dispatched in 1565, and the fortresses of Malta were besieged. Tens of thousands died, but just as the fall of Malta seemed imminent, a Spanish relief force was landed and put the Ottomans to flight. The capital of Malta, Valletta, is named in honor of the commander who successfully defended it against near-impossible odds.

Not long after, Suleiman died on campaign in Hungary -- though his death was kept secret, by using a double to conceal his death, until his retinue could return with his cold body to Istanbul. His successor and sole surviving son, Selim, was determined to follow in his father's conquering footsteps. He immediately set out to take the Venetian possession of Cyprus, with a much larger force than the one which had attempted to take Malta. After a couple of very bloody sieges -- of Nicosia and Famagusta -- the island was taken. These sieges are described in graphic, sometimes gruesome detail by Crowley.

The new and aggressive Sultan was the proximate cause for the Christian powers of the Mediterranean, principally Philip II of Spain, Pope Pius V, and the Venetians to form a new alliance. Assembling a massive fleet, they set out to hunt down the Ottoman fleet. Amazingly, in October of 1571, they did so. What followed was the bloodiest naval battle in history, at Lepanto just off the west coast of Greece, as two massive fleets of oared galleys collided with one another in a spectacular cataclysm. The superior firepower of the Christian fleet prevailed, mainly due to the Venetians whose heavily armed gun platforms, known as "galleasses", destroyed most of the Ottoman fleet and killed 40,000.

The Battle of Lepanto is the last of the major military clashes in Crowley's story. Often painted as a turning point in the history of the Ottoman Empire, he says it's really not clear if this is the case. The Ottomans were primarily a land power rather than a sea power, though they relied on their ships to tie together their far-flung holdings around the Mediterranean. It would not be until 200 years later than the Ottomans would begin to go into serious decline, and not until the end of World War I that they were finished as an imperial power.

Through all of this, Roger Crowley's gifts as a story-teller shine through. He focuses mainly on the military events and the personalities of the major military leaders, using his great narrative powers and his eye for interesting detail and anecdote to enliven the story. Yet he sketches in enough of the background grand strategy of the major powers involved to provide wider understanding. Even if you know nothing of this era of history or its war-making techniques, Crowley manages to make the story both clear and compelling.

I look forward to his next book.

Ard says

This may very well be the most exciting history book I ever read. While it's obvious that the author has done some wide and excellent research, this book reads like an adventure story. Action-packed to the brim with extensive reports of various enormous battles, interesting characters and great storytelling, this is basically a study of the war between the Ottomans and (some of) Europe. From the early skirmishes to the defining battle at Lepanto, I couldn't get enough of it.

I read this around my holiday in Malta and I couldn't have imagined a better guide. Reading about the nervewracking siege of fort St. Elmo and walking around its perimeter the day after. I really love these kinds of things. I will never forget Malta and I will never forget this book.

I will definitely read more from this author.

Rindis says

Roger Crowley tackles the sixteenth-century clash between East and West in the Mediterranean as a grand epic story in this book. Over fifty years of history is his canvas for a tale of peoples and cultures, which he does a wonderful job with. From start to finish, it is history, and a tale to be told, and Crowley tells it very well.

He starts with the siege of Rhodes (1521), as a prelude to the action in the rest of the book, as several key players later on were there. The centerpiece of the book is the siege of Malta (1565), which gets far more attention than any other subject in the book. Of course, it is the most dramatic, and lasted several months. The end of the book details the Battle of Lepanto (1571). In between, he covers the important personalities, raids, and politics.

The only way I can't recommend this book is if you are already well familiar with the 16th century, and even then it can still be a fun read. Otherwise, I recommend this book as an excellently written overview of warfare in the Mediterranean. My only real concern is that it is less sympathetic to the Turks than the West, though that is also part of the nature of the tale. Personally, I am now eager to pick up Crowley's 1453: The Holy War for Constantinople and the Clash of Islam and the West, and City of Fortune: How Venice Won and Lost a Naval Empire.

Σωτ?ρης Αδαμαρ?τσος says

4? για το ?ργο - 2? για την απαρ?δεκτη ελληνικ? του ?κδοση ???

Καλογραμμ?νο ιστορικ? αφ?γημα, το οπο?ο αναφ?ρεται με λεπτομεριακη ιστορικ? πιστ?τητα σε μια ιδια?τερη περ?οδο της ιστορ?ας της Μεσογε?ου και του κ?σμου· στην περ?οδο της σ?γκρουσης των μεγ?λων στολ?ν με τις γαλερες και τις γαλεασσες και των μεγ?λων πολιορκιων της Ρ?δου και της Μ?λτας, της πτ?σης της Κ?πρου και της μεγ?λης Ναυμαχ?ας της Ναυπ?κτου!

Στην περ?οδο της Μεγ?λης Οθωμανικ?ς Αυτοκρατορ?ας, της Ισπανικ?ς Αυτοκρατορ?α του Καρ?λου του Ε του Ν?ου Κ?σμου και την Δημοκρατ?α της Βενετ?ας. Η σ?γκρουση αυτ?ν των μεγ?λων αυτοκρατοριων του κ?σμου για την κατ?κτηση της Μεσογε?ου τον 16ο αι?να περιγρ?φεται με ζωντ?νια και με παρ?θεση αρκετ?ν λεπτομερει?ν, απ? την πτ?ση της Ρ?δου των Ιπποτ?ν και την προσωπικ?τητα του Χαιρεντιν Μπαρμπαροσα κυβερν?τη των κουρσαρων του Μαγκρεμπ μ?χρι την αποτυχημ?νη πολιορκ?α της Μ?λτας απ τους Τορ?κους (εξ ου και το Μ?λτα γιοκ) και την κατ?ληξη στην Ναυμαχ?α του Λεπαντο.

Αλλ?...

ο?τε 2? για την μετ?φραση και την επιμ?λεια κειμ?νου για την ελληνικ? ?κδοση! Κοιν?ς π?ς ?νας ?σχετος μεταφραστ?ς και ?νας απαρ?δεκτος και κακ?ς επιμελητ?ς μπορο?ν να καταστρεψουν μια πολ? καλ? δουλει?. Ε?ναι ντροπ? να μεταφραζονται τ?σο πρ?χειρα (με λογικ?ς Google translate) και να μην λαμβ?νουν ?στω την δ?ουσα επιμ?λεια ?ρων και παρατιθεμενων αφηγ?σεων, ?ργα που πραγματικ? αξ?ζουν! Απ? λ?θος μεταφρασμ?νες λ?ξεις μ?χρι λ?θος ν?ημα στην φρ?ση και στην ορολογ?α των λ?ξεων για στρατιωτικ? ζητ?ματα, η ελληνικ? ?κδοση ε?ναι ντροπ? για τον συγγραφ?α! ?λεος!

Joselito Honestly and Brilliantly says

Cervantes, of the "Don Quixote" fame, was in one of these battles. He was a 24-year-old volunteer.

Now I know that hundreds of years ago the Mediterranean Sea and its surrounding land areas were considered the center of the world and were a battleground for two great conflicting forces: the Muslims (Turks/the Ottoman Empire) and the Christians (the French, Spaniards, Venetians, the war-waging Popes, etc.). The Muslims and Christians call each other "infidels" and had a deep desire for each other's extinguishment. There were also pirates on both sides of this religious divide which the author preferred to call "corsairs."

They already had guns and cannons on those days. The gun was called "arquebus" which was fatal only at short distances. Warships were powered by rowers done by galley slaves often chained to their rowing benches to prevent escape or suicide. Gut-wrenching were the descriptions of battles and pillages, but it was no less so of these poor, miserable creatures:

"In the heyday of Venetian sea power in the fifteenth century, galleys had been rowed by volunteers; by the sixteenth, the muscle power was generally conscripted. The Ottoman navy relied heavily on an annual levy of men from the provinces of Anatolia and Europe, and everyone employed chain labor--captured slaves, convicts, and, in the Christian ships, paupers so destitute they sold themselves to the galley captains. It was these wretches, chained three or four to a foot-wide bench, who made sea wars possible. Their sole function was to work themselves to death. Shackled hand and foot, excreting where they sat, fed on meagre quantities of black biscuits, and so thirsty they were sometimes driven to drink seawater, galley slaves led lives bitter and short. The men, naked apart from a pair of linen breeches, were flayed raw by the sun; sleep deprivation on the narrow bench propelled them toward lunacy; the stroke keeper's drum and the overseer's lash--a tarred rope or a dried bull's penis--whipped them beyond the point of exhaustion during long stretches of intensive effort when a ship was trying to capture or escape another vessel. The sight of a galley crew at full stretch was as brutal as any a man could wish to be spared. 'That least tolerable and most to be dreaded employment of a man deprived of liberty,' wrote the eighteenth-century English historian Joseph Morgan, conjuring up the vision of 'ranks and files of half-naked, half-starved, half-tanned, meagre wretches, chained to a plank, from whence they remove not for months at a time...urged on, even beyond human strength, with cruel and repeated blows, on the bare flesh, to an incessant continuation of the most violent of exercises.' 'God preserve you from the galleys of Tripoli,' was a customary valediction to men putting to sea from a Christian port.

"Disease could decimate a fleet in weeks. The galley was an amoebic death trap, a swilling sewer whose stench was so foul you could smell it two miles off--it was customary to sink the hulls at periodic intervals to cleanse them of shit and rats--but if the crew survived to enter a battle, the chained and unprotected rowers could only sit and wait to be killed by men of their own country and creed. The nominally free men who made up the bulk of the Ottoman rowing force fared little better. Levied by the sultan in large numbers from the empire's inland provinces, many had never seen the sea before. Inexperienced and inefficient as oarsmen, they succumbed in large numbers to the terrible conditions.

"One way or another the oared galley consumed men like fuel. Each dying wretch dumped overboard had to be replaced--and there were never enough..."

When a town, settlement, fortress or city is captured--always after a siege long or short--there wouldn't be

just a change of government. The victors would loot and ransack the place, take whole able-bodied populations as slaves, and those whom they find no need for (like the sick or the very young or the very old) they would hack to pieces or have their skulls split open.

In one battle there was a negotiated surrender. The leaders were offered safe passage by the victorious Ottoman chief. But his Christian counterpart exhibited haughtiness even in defeat. So the Ottoman had the latter's ears and nose lopped off. Then he ordered him skinned alive. He died only after half of his body's skin was gone.

A great historical narrative helped a lot by the fact that those warring forces were the world's superpowers at those times and had each other's atrocities faithfully recorded to show how great human beings and their religions were, with their deeds of valor watched by their common god they call by different names.

Bruce says

A number of years ago I gazed at the large painting of the Battle of Lepanto in the Doge's Palace in Venice, finding the work complex and intriguing. But never having heard of the battle, I had difficulty fitting it into an historical context. So it was with interest that I encountered Crowley's work, subtitled "The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World." The book accomplished what I had hoped it would, in perhaps more detail than I needed.

The period covered includes the middle eighty years of the sixteenth century, focusing on events in the Mediterranean. During this time the expansionist goals of the Ottoman Empire collided with the troubled and defensive actions of Christendom in Western Europe. For most of that time the internal unity of the former exceeded the often fragmented and mutually competing interests of the West, the Pope having his own agenda, France looking after its own interests, the Holy Roman Emperor intent on expanding his influence, Spain mostly concerned about the Western Mediterranean, and the often perfidious Venetians trying to play all sides against each other to protect its own commercial network. Again and again fate seemed to favor the Ottomans as they repeatedly overran the Mediterranean, their final great success having been the capture of Malta, a pivotal location in the middle of the Sea. Finally, at the Battle of Lepanto just outside the Gulf of Corinth, the Ottomans were defeated at terrible cost to all sides, effectively ending the competition over the sea that the Romans had once called Mare Nostrum.

Crowley presents these events in exhaustive detail, documenting his research carefully. It becomes a numbing tale of violence and cruelty on all sides and by all participants. One cannot help but be aware that ancient sources tend to magnify events and inflate numbers of participants – witness the writings of Herodotus – and one wonders if and how Crowley has been able to insert a corrective to such exaggerations. Even if only a fraction of what is presented is factually accurate, however, the casualties in these battles makes the losses we suffer in conflicts of today seem paltry indeed. Only with the American Civil War and the trench warfare in France during WW I do we see anything comparable.

I found the book interesting and am glad that I read it, since now I have a much better understanding of the issues and times during which this prolonged struggle occurred. There were times during the reading when I became impatient with what seemed repetitive acts of horrific violence, but my discomfort was clearly trivial to the experiences of those people who lived through the events.

José Luís Fernandes says

This is a book on the naval wars between the Spanish monarchy, the Knights of Saint John and sometimes Venice on one hand the Ottoman Empire (including the Babary Coast pirates, who were loyal to the Empire during this period), with a greater focus on the siege of Malta of 1565 and the battle of Lepanto (1571).

It's a nice introduction for those who want to know more about the subject and the book's style is very compelling for reading, but sometimes Crowley makes stupid comparisons with more modern times (like calling Algiers a "Soviet gulag") and the whole rhetoric ends up being a bit too sensationalistic. By the way, he doesn't know what the mediterranean climate is (he says it's equatorial, but actually has its own Mediterranean climate, which is subtropical) and devaluates too much the wealth of the Mediterranean of the 16th century (how can someone explain piracy in this case without wealthy trades routes?).

Patremagne says

<http://abitterdraft.com/2014/12/empir...>

Don John of Austria is going to the war.

Sudden and still—hurrah!

Bolt from Iberia!

Don John of Austria

Is gone by Alcalar.

The centuries-long conflict between East and West, Muslim and Christian, comes to a head in the Sixteenth century Mediterranean Sea. Crowley details the fascinating rivalry between Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, and Suleiman the Magnificent of the Ottoman Empire. Their greatest victories, their most ignominious defeats, and everything in between are brought up at one point or another.

The Great Siege of Malta, as reviewers all over the place say, is a point in time that begs to be adapted by any entertainment medium. Somewhere around 7,000 Christians made a heroic stand against upwards of three times their number in the great fortress-island of Malta. Led by Grandmaster Jean de Valette of the Knights Hospitaller, the very citizens themselves put forth the most effort, according to Crowley, in defense of their home and hearth. Crowley definitely stresses Philip II of Spain's epithet: the Prudent, in relation to the great siege. The course of history has proven that Christendom is utterly incapable of uniting for a common cause, and it's fascinating to see how down to the wire the siege was due to Philip's extreme cautiousness.

Andrea Vicentino's 1603 painting in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice depicts the sea of blood and corpses, the cluster of galleys.

The Holy League, vigorously promoted by Pope Pius V, in the spirit of "united" Christendom, which took ages to even have the various Christian rulers assent to involvement, finally took to the sea at the Battle of Lepanto is the culmination of the period, where the Christian fleet shattered the larger Ottoman navy in a

battle of nearly 500 ships. The young Ritter Johann von Österreich, commonly known as Don Juan of Austria, just 24 at the time, led the massive coalition fleet that included Miguel de Cervantes to the great battle against Ali Pasha, the Grand Admiral of the Ottoman Navy, and very much a mirror image of Juan himself. Juan's leadership inspired G.K. Chesterton's 1911 poem, named after the eponymous battle.

Crowley lays out a detailed (surprising for its length) narration and analysis of the Mediterranean between the Siege of Rhodes in 1522 and Lepanto in 1571 - not particularly favoring one side or the other, though it is difficult as a reader not to feel some sort of good at sieges where the defenders are hugely outnumbered. The narration itself is bloody and the bodies pile up in masses, turning the very sea that the galleys slice through crimson.

This is historical non-fiction at its best, with a strong, flowing narrative style that brings the characters of both sides back to life in a readable amount of pages (though I listened to the audiobook), complete with stats and strategies for military history buffs all the while remaining exciting as hell to read. Empires of the Sea only scratches the surface of the nearly three hundred year conflict.

And John Lee's narration was fantastic. The man could read a fuckin' shopping list and have me panting at the end, completely enraptured. "DON'T WE NEED APPLES TOO? AND CLAM CHOWDER? AND ANOTHER TWO POUNDS OF BACON?"

J.D. says

Well-written, suspenseful history of the battle between the forces of Islam and Christendom in the 16th century Mediterranean.

Daphne says

I enjoyed this one more than that last book on the 1565 Malta siege. This one went into much more backstory leading up to the several month attack on Malta by the Turks. I enjoyed getting the backstory of so many of the integral players on each side. It helped me understand their motivations.

Tudor Ciocarlie says

I've traveled to Rhodes in august and this book was the perfect companion. I had some ideas about the naval war between the Ottomans and the Catholics, but I've never thought that the Mediterranean Sea in the 16 century was such an interesting place.
