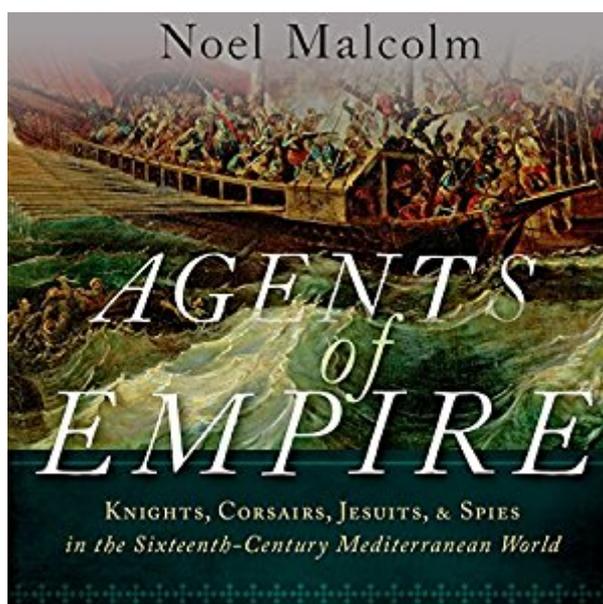


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Agents Of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits And Spies In The Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World



Synopsis

In the late 16th century, a prominent Albanian named Antonio Bruni composed a revealing document about his home country. Historian Sir Noel Malcolm takes this document as a point of departure to explore the lives of the entire Bruni family, whose members included an archbishop of the Balkans, the captain of the papal flagship at the Battle of Lepanto - at which the Ottomans were turned back in the Eastern Mediterranean - in 1571, and a highly placed interpreter in Istanbul, formerly Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire that fell to the Turks in 1453. The taking of Constantinople had profoundly altered the map of the Mediterranean. By the time of Brunis document, Albania, largely a Venetian province from 1405 onward, had been absorbed into the Ottoman Empire. Even under the Ottomans, however, this was a world marked by the ferment of the Italian Renaissance. In *Agents of Empire*, Malcolm uses the collective biography of the Brunis to paint a fascinating and intimate picture of Albania at a moment when it represented the frontier between empires, cultures, and religions. The lives of the polylingual, cosmopolitan Brunis shed new light on the interrelations between the Ottoman and Christian worlds, characterized by both conflict and complex interdependence. The result of years of archival detective work, *Agents of Empire* brings to life a vibrant moment in European and Ottoman history, challenging our assumptions about their supposed differences. Malcolm's book guides us through the exchanges between East and West, Venetians and the Ottomans, and tells a story of worlds colliding with and transforming one another.

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 than the later generations were led to believe.

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