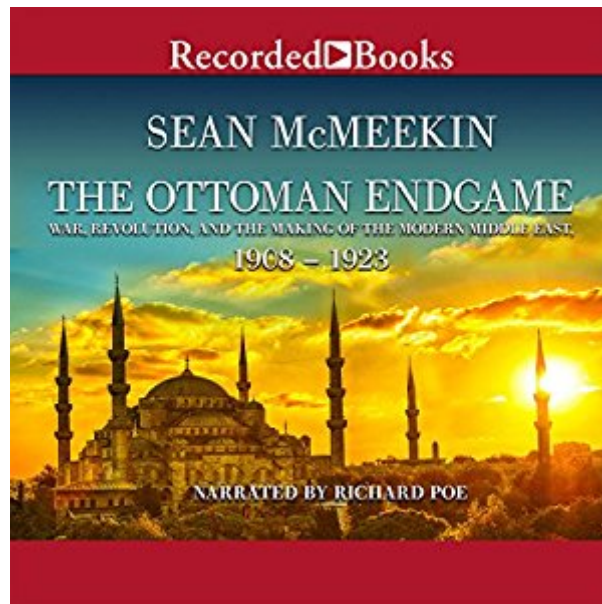


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The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution, And The Making Of The Modern Middle East, 1908-1923



Synopsis

An astonishing retelling of 20th-century history from the Ottoman perspective, delivering profound new insights into World War I and the contemporary Middle East. Between 1911 and 1922, a series of wars would engulf the Ottoman Empire and its successor states, in which the central conflict, of course, was World War I - a story we think we know well. As Sean McMeekin shows us in this revelatory new history of what he calls the "wars of the Ottoman succession", we know far less than we think. The Ottoman Endgame brings to light the entire strategic narrative that led to an unstable new order in postwar Middle East - much of which is still felt today. The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Modern Middle East draws from McMeekin's years of groundbreaking research in newly opened Ottoman and Russian archives. With great storytelling flair, McMeekin makes new the epic stories we know from the Ottoman front, from Gallipoli to the exploits of Lawrence in Arabia, and introduces a vast range of new stories to Western listeners. His accounts of the lead-up to World War I and the Ottoman Empire's central role in the war itself offers an entirely new and deeper vision of the conflict. Harnessing not only Ottoman and Russian but also British, German, French, American, and Austro-Hungarian sources, the result is a truly pioneering work of scholarship that gives full justice to a multitiered war involving many belligerents. McMeekin also brilliantly reconceives our inherited Anglo-French understanding of the war's outcome and the collapse of the empire that followed. The book chronicles the emergence of modern Turkey and the carve up of the rest of the Ottoman Empire as it has never been told before, offering a new perspective on such issues as the ethno-religious bloodletting and forced population transfers that attended the breakup of empire, the Balfour Declaration, the toppling of the caliphate, and the partition of Iraq and Syria - bringing the contemporary consequences into clear focus. Every so often, a work of history completely reshapes our understanding of a subject of enormous historical and contemporary importance. The Ottoman Endgame is such a book, an instantly definitive and thrilling example of narrative history as high art.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 19 hours and 4 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: October 13, 2015

Language: English

ASIN: B016E6F8QE

Best Sellers Rank: #49 in Books > History > Middle East > Turkey #59 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Middle East #159 in Books > History > Military > World War I

Customer Reviews

I received a free copy of this book through Goodreads First Reads in exchange for a fair review. Initially I wanted to summarize the content of this book but it is not an option since the book is five hundred and fifty pages, and my political views or feelings are no consequence to anybody who will read this review. Instead, let me say this is an extraordinary book with amazing details backed up by historical documentations from the most recently opened Ottoman and Russian archives. Although I had studied WWI and the end of the Ottoman Empire in school as well as having read different books about them over the years, this is the first time I saw the whole picture behind the names, numbers, figures, and dates frequently quoted, while talking about this subject. Another thing impressed me about this book is the neutral way it describes events with numbers, figures and facts, instead of expressing author's political views or personal biases. I was blown away by the amazingly detailed content, writing style and the way information was organized. I can't even imagine how much work, effort, and time must have taken writing this book. Dr. McMeekin says he writes his books for his children to enjoy someday. I say this book is more than that since it is more like a gift to humanity in the sense that we must learn from the history to make sure same mistakes are not repeated again. My enjoyment from reading such a well-documented book with a neutral tone was somewhat taken away by the lump in my throat and sadness in my heart reading about the carnage and the extent of human suffering from all sides and ethnic backgrounds in three continents for years as a result of greed and a handful of politicians wanting to make names for themselves.

Europe just before World War I was still in the absurd Middle Ages mode of ultimatums, land grab and mass migration of refugees. Mostly kingdoms, countries were forever dragging out old claims or inventing new insults that would result in takeovers, either peaceably or through conquest. Hundreds of thousands of people had to flee or were deported every year from one misery to another, based on their race, religion, ethnicity, ancestry and nationality. The ever shrinking Ottoman Empire was everyone's favorite target, and WWI was the perfect excuse for Britain, Russia, France, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and even Australia and New Zealand to tuck in. The

Ottoman Empire was embattled from every compass direction, but it was made far worse by internal issues. From this book, it seems there were four:-Incompetent leadership of both the sultan and the government-Disorganized strategy, tactics and execution in WWI-Armenian rebellion leveraging Russian support-Losing the Caliphate of Islam to Mecca. The book is almost entirely a blow by blow description of eastern battles, and largely from a British standpoint. There is constant reference to TE Lawrence and Lord Kitchener, to Lloyd George and Churchill (making gigantic strategic blunders from thousands of miles away). They seem to be the main characters. There is a great deal on the Russian Revolution that obviously affected the outcome for Turkey. But until the final hundred pages, it is rarely a Turkish perspective. After the armistice, the Russians stopped battling the Turks and supplied and supported them. The British were still making a murderous mess of everything, and the French were still looking for spoils of a war they hadn't really participated in.

I'm puzzled by the several bad reviews. Some of the narrative discusses events that remain highly controversial a century later. Among these are the Armenian genocide (McMeekin says while very large numbers of Armenians were victims, there were some atrocities by Armenians as well), the Turco-Greek War (McMeekin says large scale atrocities by both sides), and the post-Ottoman histories of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. The book seems to me to be thoroughly researched and thoroughly objective. The region remains a hotbed of anger and danger, so what one reader sees as objective another reader may see as bias. I read the book carefully and closely, and have read a great deal about the Ottomans over many years. In my opinion, this is by far the best book overall. There are some excellent books on specific topics, but on this grand narrative scale, McMeekin has given us a superb book. I've never used the word "magisterial" in a review before, but this book comes very close. In recent years there has been more availability of archives, particularly Russian and Turkish. McMeekin says in his preface "All translations from the French, German, Russian, and Turkish, unless otherwise specified, are my own." McMeekin is especially good on several aspects. One is the arrival of the famed German navy ships in 1914; McMeekin covers the German/ Turkish admiral Souchon throughout the war, and also the Russian navy, in more detail than I've read before. The massive and sometimes troubled relationship with Germany is a central aspect of this book, and is the best about it I have read. The Gallipoli campaign is covered in excellent detail, and seems to me to be unbiased, and sees Turkish courage and determination as important as German officers--Mustafa Kemal emerges as key.

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