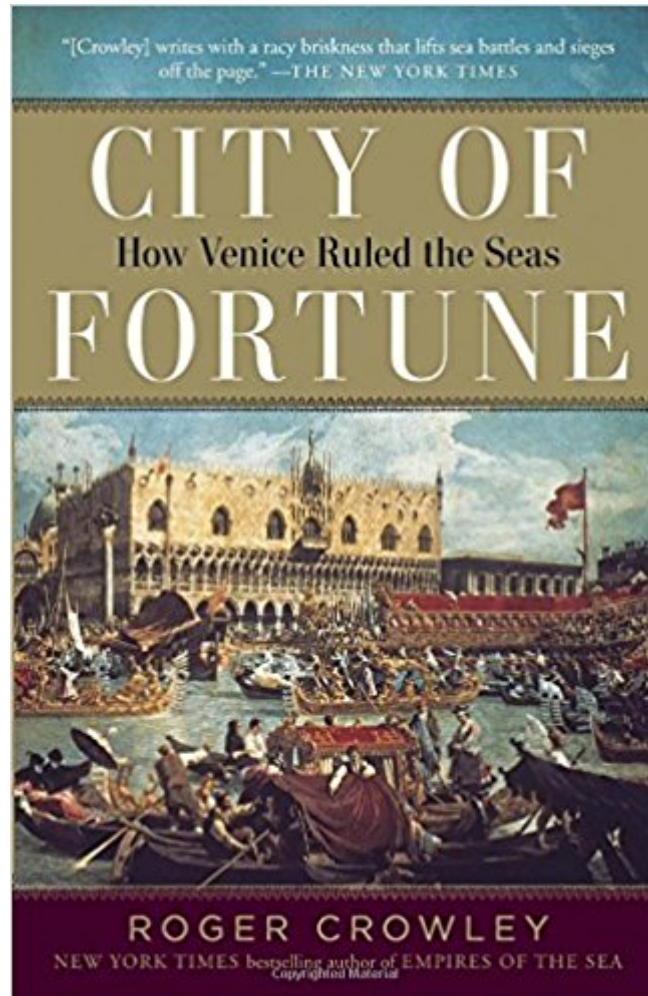




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City Of Fortune: How Venice Ruled The Seas



Synopsis

“The rise and fall of Venice’s empire is an irresistible story and [Roger] Crowley, with his rousing descriptive gifts and scholarly attention to detail, is its perfect chronicler.” —The Financial Times

“The New York Times bestselling author of *Empires of the Sea* charts Venice’s astounding five-hundred-year voyage to the pinnacle of power in an epic story that stands unrivaled for drama, intrigue, and sheer opulent majesty. *City of Fortune* traces the full arc of the Venetian imperial saga, from the ill-fated Fourth Crusade, which culminates in the sacking of Constantinople in 1204, to the Ottoman-Venetian War of 1499–1503, which sees the Ottoman Turks supplant the Venetians as the preeminent naval power in the Mediterranean. In between are three centuries of Venetian maritime dominance, during which a tiny city of lagoon dwellers grow into the richest place on earth. Drawing on firsthand accounts of pitched sea battles, skillful negotiations, and diplomatic maneuvers, Crowley paints a vivid picture of this avaricious, enterprising people and the bountiful lands that came under their dominion. From the opening of the spice routes to the clash between Christianity and Islam, Venice played a leading role in the defining conflicts of its time—the reverberations of which are still being felt today.” —[Crowley] writes with a racy briskness that lifts sea battles and sieges off the page.” —The New York Times

“Crowley chronicles the peak of Venice’s past glory with Wordsworthian sympathy, supplemented by impressive learning and infectious enthusiasm.” —The Wall Street Journal

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Customer Reviews

Crowley’s popular histories—this is his fourth—pivot around power politics of the Mediterranean Sea, circa 1453 (2005). Venice is the player this lively narrative focuses on, specifically during the

three centuries, from 1200 to 1500, in which it was at the apex of its sway over maritime trade. Accenting the city-state's mercantile spirit, Crowley supports his narrative of the period's numerous naval wars with explanations of the commerce they were fought to command. Acquiring an imperial archipelago in the process of serving as spice broker between Europe and Asia, Venice reached around Greece to Constantinople and as far as southern Russia. Anchored by fortresses, linked by galleys, Venice's commercial empire faced challenges from Mongols, Genoa, and Ottoman Turks, and the diplomatic and military means by which Venice addressed those threats provide the most vivid passages and personalities in Crowley's account. Had Vittorio Pisano not defeated Genoa in 1380, Venice might not be the tourist attraction of today. A deft writer, Crowley renders the Venetian part in late medieval times interesting indeed to history buffs. --Gilbert Taylor

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• "The rise and fall of Venice's empire is an irresistible story and [Roger] Crowley, with his rousing descriptive gifts and scholarly attention to detail, is its perfect chronicler." • "The Financial Times" • "[Crowley] writes with a racy briskness that lifts sea battles and sieges off the page." • "The New York Times" • "Crowley chronicles the peak of Venice's past glory with Wordsworthian sympathy, supplemented by impressive learning and infectious enthusiasm." • "The Wall Street Journal" • "A pleasure to read . . . a gripping story." • "Washington Independent Review of Books" • "Fascinating . . . [Crowley writes] absorbingly and accessibly for all readers of history." • "Library Journal"

Crowley is entranced by Venice. It has two great lures: the sea, and its status as a very modern state in medieval times. The two led it to become Europe's first economic superpower. Venice was ideally located to provide the sea link between the great Middle East overland spice routes and continental Europe. In the time of feudalism and a landed aristocracy, Venice was a republic "run by and for entrepreneurs," replacing "the chivalrous medieval knight with a new type of hero: the man of business." The city of merchant-princes understood the value of a rational and stable legal system. The two made the Venetian ducat the dollar of its day and provided a model for later naval empires like the British Empire. City of Fortune has four focal points--the Fourth Crusade, the great struggle for dominance over commerce in the Mediterranean between the Venetians and Genoese, Venice's subsequent rise as the dominant commercial power in the eastern Mediterranean, and the struggle with the Ottoman Empire that led to Venice's decline. The Venetians were never the most pious of people, but the Pope had no one else to go to for the Fourth Crusade. Only the seafaring

Venetians had the naval capacity to transport a Crusade by sea. Venice agreed to transport 4,500 knights and horses and 20,000 foot soldiers in 450 transport ships accompanied by 50 war galleys. It was an incredible commitment that required 2 years of effort by the entire city. The Venetians, as always, had their own commercial interests in mind when negotiating the deal. One has to admire the audacity of a people who respond to a request by the pope to transport crusaders by ship by asking permission to trade with the Muslim world in return! The novelty of the Venetian focus on trade is dwarfed only by the novelty of their interest in engaging with the Islamic world. And they were instrumental in both creating an opportunity for the Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor and in decimating the economic importance of the southeast Mediterranean Islamic states. They did the first by playing a role in the sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (a long, and fascinating, story told in the first quarter of the book). They did the second by pumping goods from the Islamic world into the West, leading to both the shifting of production across the Mediterranean and to the Portuguese seeking another route to India. The first half of the book is the more interesting. The events of the Fourth Crusade and Venice's wars with Genoa are captivating. Its truth is stranger than fiction stuff. The events of the second half cannot compete on that measure, but if you're both a history and business junky like me, the story of Venice's commercial rise is still compelling. Having spent so much time with the Venetians and seen them accomplish so much, it is almost painful to watch how ineffectual they ultimately were in combating the Ottoman Empire. Crowley has a great subject, and he takes full advantage. I would heartily recommend *City of Fortune* to anyone with an interest in not only Venetian and Mediterranean history, but also in European, medieval, or Islamic history. Venice played an integral role in each. This review is of the Kindle edition. The illustrations, and there are many, look good on the Kindle. Approximately 20% of the book is devoted to notes and a bibliography. Unlike some Kindle books, the notes (for quotations only) include links that allow the reader to jump from the note to the quote in the main text (without endnotes, however, you cannot jump directly from a quote in the main text to the note).

Roger Crowley does a good job explaining the compulsions of Venetian elite to forge the first example of a globalised state based on mercantilism; Venice laid the seeds of future Empires based on extracting value from trade and location. To protect its geographical advantage, Venice began to colonise to protect its lines of communications; but its wealth and its imperial advantage was destroyed by the destruction of Constantinople which was a suicidal move by the 4th Crusade warriors; instead of combating Islam, the greed of the 4th Crusade coalition in emasculating the Byzantine power, ultimately lead to the fall of Venice at the hand of the growing Ottoman power.

Roger Crowley has written an absorbing account of this struggle; it is a very good read indeed.

I really enjoyed reading this book. It didn't feel like I was reading history and it's a shame that most of this period of history has simply been forgotten by the general public. It's absolutely fascinating and Mr. Crowley does a great job recounting these events and how these people lived centuries ago. What was really striking was how modern of a society Venice was. Outstanding book, a great read!!

having just finished 'Lost to the West', a history of the Byzantine Empire, it seemed logical to read this book about Venice, as the fates of the two were so intertwined. So getting a Venetian perspective on the sack of Constantinople and the final fall in 1453 was very interesting. It was also very interesting to see the arc of Venice. From a scrappy maritime republic to a bloated bureaucracy and its decline and fall. I thought it was very poignant that after the fall of the Byzantines, they were engaged in a life and death struggle with the Ottomans. Meanwhile, the Portuguese are sailing around the Cape of Good Hope to India and the Spice Islands, making the whole purpose of the war- control of the trade in spices irrelevant. And though they didn't realize it at the time, it also marked the start of the decline of both powers. Genoa was the mortal rival of Venice and they waged some savage wars to gain the upper hand in trade of the Eastern Mediterranean. Venice ultimately prevailed, but it was the Genoan, Christopher Columbus, who drove the final nail in Venice's coffin by his voyages to the New World. Had these two republics cooperated rather than fight and had they not conspired together against the Byzantines, the whole history of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East could have been significantly different and many of the problems we face today would be very much better. (Of course, had that alternate history taken place, we wouldn't know any differently.)

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