

## Levant Splendour And Catastrophe On The Mediterranean Philip Mansel

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Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean ...

Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean is a non-fiction book by Philip Mansel. The book discusses the development of the Levant region, with the cities of Alexandria, Beirut, and Smyrna being the primary three cities catalogued, with all three having perceived as declined by the time of the book's publication. According to Mansel, nationalism caused these cities to decline from their previous splendour. Noel Malcolm of The Daily Telegraph stated that in regards to the three citie

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Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean Noel Malcolm is enthralled by Philip Mansel's Levant, an attempt to recover the vanished history of three great cosmopolitan cities Here's an unlikely pairing: what do Eric Hobsbawm, the Marxist historian, and Omar Sharif, the suave bridge-playing actor, have in common?

Philip Mansel: author and historian

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Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean ...

By Jason Goodwin. Readers of *Cornucopia* will be delighted with Philip Mansel's long-awaited return to the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, whose imperial capital he explored so brilliantly in *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire*. His latest book, *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe*, focuses on three less imperial cities, with a sideways glance at Thessalonika: cities on the edge of the Ottoman Empire in which a hybrid society arose to channel trade.

Not so long ago, in certain cities on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived and flourished side by side. What can the histories of these cities tell us? *Levant* is a book of cities. It describes three former centers of great wealth, pleasure, and freedom—Smyrna, Alexandria, and Beirut—cities of the Levant region along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. In these key ports at the crossroads of East and West, against all expectations, cosmopolitanism and nationalism flourished simultaneously. People freely switched identities and languages, released from the prisons of religion and nationality. Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived and worshipped as neighbors. Distinguished historian Philip Mansel is the first to recount the colorful, contradictory histories of Smyrna, Alexandria, and Beirut in the modern age. He begins in the early days of the French alliance with the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century and continues through the cities' mid-twentieth-century fates: Smyrna burned; Alexandria Egyptianized; Beirut lacerated by civil war. Mansel looks back to discern what these remarkable Levantine cities were like, how they differed from other cities, why they shone forth as cultural beacons. He also embarks on a quest: to discover whether, as often claimed, these cities were truly cosmopolitan, possessing the elixir of coexistence between Muslims, Christians, and Jews for which the world yearns. Or, below the glittering surface, were they volcanoes waiting to erupt, as the catastrophes of the twentieth century suggest? In the pages of the past, Mansel finds important messages for the fractured world of today.

Every time gardens welcomed us, we said to them, Aleppo is our aim and you are merely the route.' Al-Mutanabbi Aleppo lies in ruins. Its streets are plunged in darkness, most of its population has fled. But this was once a vibrant world city, where Muslims, Christians and Jews lived and traded together in peace. Few places are as ancient and diverse as Aleppo – one of the oldest, continuously inhabited cities in the world – successively ruled by the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Arab, Ottoman and French empires. Under the Ottomans, it became the empire's third largest city, after Constantinople and Cairo. It owed its wealth to its position at the end of the Silk Road, at a crossroads of world trade, where merchants from Venice, Isfahan and Agra gathered in the largest suq in the Middle East. Throughout the region, it was famous for its food and its music. For 400 years British and French consuls and merchants lived in Aleppo; many of their accounts are used here for the first time. In the first history of Aleppo in English, Dr Philip Mansel vividly describes its decline from a pinnacle of cultural and economic power, a poignant testament to a city shattered by Syria's civil war.

Louis XIV was a man in pursuit of glory. Not content to be the ruler of a world power, he wanted the power to rule the world. And, for a time, he came tantalizingly close. Philip Mansel's *King of the World* is the most comprehensive and up-to-date biography in English of this hypnotic, flawed figure who continues to captivate our attention. This lively work takes Louis outside Versailles and shows the true extent of his global ambitions, with stops in London, Madrid, Constantinople, Bangkok, and beyond. We witness the importance of his alliance with the Spanish crown and his success in securing Spain for his descendants, his enmity with England, and his relations with the rest of Europe, as well as Asia, Africa, and the Americas. We also see the king's effect on the two great global diasporas of Huguenots and Jacobites, and their influence on him as he failed in his brutal attempts to stop Protestants from leaving France. Along the way, we are enveloped in the splendor of Louis's court and the fascinating cast of characters who prostrated and plotted within it. *King of the World* is exceptionally researched, drawing on international archives and incorporating sources who knew the king intimately, including the newly released correspondence of Louis's second wife, Madame de Maintenon. Mansel's narrative flair is a perfect match for this grand figure, and he brings the Sun King's world to vivid life. This is a global biography of a global king, whose power was extensive but also limited by laws and circumstances, and whose interests and ambitions stretched far beyond his homeland. Through it all, we watch Louis XIV progressively turn from a dazzling, attractive young king to a belligerent reactionary who sets France on the path to 1789. It is a convincing and compelling portrait of a man who, three hundred years after his death, still epitomizes the idea of *le grand monarque*.

The story begins with a parting of the sands - the construction of the Suez Canal that united the Mediterranean with the Arabian Sea. It opened the door of opportunity for people living insecurely on the fringes of a turbulent Europe. The Middle East is understood today through the lens of unending conflict and violence. Lost in the litany of perpetual strife and struggle are the layers of culture and civilisation that accumulated over centuries, and which give the region its cosmopolitan identity. It was once a region known poetically as the Levant - a reference to the East, where the sun rose. Amid the the bewildering mix of races, religions and rivalries, was above all an affinity with the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Today any mixing of this trinity of faiths is regarded as a recipe for hatred and prejudice. Yet it was not always this way. There was a time, in the last century, when Arabs and Jews rubbed shoulders in bazaars and teashops, worked and played together, intermarried and shared family histories. Michael Vatikiotis's parents and grandparents were a product of this forgotten pluralist tradition, which spanned almost a century from the mid-1800s to the end of the Second World War in 1945. The Ottoman empire, in a last gasp of reformist energy before it collapsed in the 1920s, granted people of many creeds and origins generous spaces to nestle into and thrive. The European colonial order that followed was to reveal deep divisions. Vatikiotis's family eventually found themselves caught between clashing faiths and contested identity. Their story is of people set adrift, who built new lives and prospered in holy lands, only to be caught up in

conflict and tossed on the waves of a violent history. *Lives Between the Lines* brilliantly recreates a world where the Middle East was a place to go to, not flee from, and the subsequent start of a prolonged nightmare of suffering from which the region has yet to recover.

Philip Mansel's highly acclaimed history absorbingly charts the interaction between the vibrantly cosmopolitan capital of Constantinople - the city of the world's desire - and its ruling family. In 1453, Mehmed the Conqueror entered Constantinople on a white horse, beginning an Ottoman love affair with the city that lasted until 1924, when the last Caliph hurriedly left on the Orient Express. For almost five centuries Constantinople, with its enormous racial and cultural diversity, was the centre of the dramatic and often depraved story of an extraordinary dynasty.

The Treaty of Ghent signed in 1814, ending the War of 1812, allowed Americans once again to travel abroad. Medical students went to Paris, artists to Rome, academics to Göttingen, and tourists to all European capitals. More intrepid Americans ventured to Athens, to Constantinople, and even to Egypt. Beginning with two eighteenth-century travelers, this book then turns to the 25-year period after 1815 that saw young men from East Coast cities, among them graduates of Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, traveling to the lands of the Bible and of the Greek and Latin authors they had first known as teenagers. Naval officers off ships of the Mediterranean squadron visited Cairo to see the pyramids. Two groups went on business, one importing steam-powered rice and cotton mills from New York, the other exporting giraffes from the Kalahari Desert for wild animal shows in New York. Drawing on unpublished letters and diaries together with previously neglected newspaper accounts, as well as a handful of published accounts, this book offers a new look at the early American experience in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean world. More than thirty illustrations complement the stories told by the travelers themselves.

*Britain's Levantine Empire, 1914-1923* tells a unique history of the impact of British soldiers and government policy on the Eastern Mediterranean during the First World War and its aftermath.

The shadow war between Israel and Iran has been raging for more than three decades, ever since the Iranian revolution of 1979 ushered in a fundamentalist regime whose sworn enemies have consistently included, first and foremost, Israel and the United States. Israel, especially, has borne the brunt of attacks from Iran's two most powerful proxies-- Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran's nuclear ambitions raise the stakes immeasurably. *Israel vs. Iran* evaluates the threat to Israel's security posed by a nuclear Iran, including competing perceptions of the threat, and analyzes.

Throughout history rulers have used clothes as a form of legitimization and propaganda. While palaces, pictures, and jewels might reflect the choice of a monarch's predecessors or advisers, clothes reflected the preferences of the monarch himself. Being both personal and visible, the right costume at the right time could transform and define a monarch's reputation. Many royal leaders have known this, from Louis XIV to Catherine the Great and from Napoleon I to Princess Diana. This intriguing book explores how rulers have sought to control their image through their appearance. Mansel shows how individual styles of dress throw light on the personalities of particular monarchs, on their court system, and on their ambitions. The book looks also at the economics of the costume industry, at patronage, at the etiquette involved in mourning dress, and at the act of dressing itself. Fascinating glimpses into the lives of European monarchs and contemporary potentates reveal the intimate connection between power and the way it is packaged.

Johann Michael Wansleben's *Travels in the Levant, 1671-1674*, is an account of the travels in Syria, Turkey and Egypt by one of the best known scholar-travellers of his day who collected manuscripts and antiquities and made some major archaeological discoveries.

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