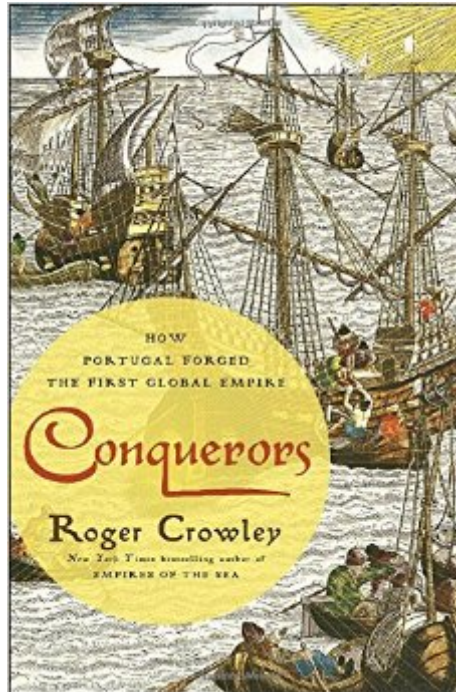


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Conquerors: How Portugal Forged The First Global Empire



Synopsis

In *Empires of the Sea and City of Fortune*, New York Times bestselling author Roger Crowley established himself as our generation's preeminent historian of the great European seafaring empires, and the go-to author for post-Crusade clashes of East and West. Now, in *Conquerors*, Crowley gives us the epic story of the emergence of Portugal, a small, poor nation that enjoyed a century of maritime supremacy thanks to the daring and navigational skill of its explorers—a tactical advantage no other country could match. Portugal's discovery of a sea route to India, campaign of imperial conquest over Muslim rulers, and domination of the spice trade would forever disrupt the Mediterranean and build the first global economy. Crowley relies on letters and eyewitness testimony to tell the story of tiny Portugal's rapid and breathtaking rise to power. *Conquerors* reveals the *Império Português* in all of its splendor and ferocity, bringing to life the personalities of the enterprising and fanatical house of Aviz. Figures such as King Manuel the Fortunate, João II the Perfect Prince, marauding governor Afonso de Albuquerque, and explorer Vasco da Gama juggled their private ambitions and the public aims of the empire, often suffering astonishing losses in pursuit of a global fortune. Also central to the story of Portugal's ascent was its drive to eradicate Islamic culture and establish a Christian empire in the Indian Ocean. Portuguese explorers pushed deep into the African continent in search of the mythical Christian king Prester John, and they ruthlessly besieged Indian port cities in their attempts to monopolize trade. The discovery of a route to India around the horn of Africa was not only a brilliant breakthrough in navigation but heralded a complete upset of the world order. For the next century, no European empire was more ambitious, no rulers more rapacious than the kings of Portugal. In the process they created the first long-range maritime empire and set in motion the forces of globalization that now shape our world. At Crowley's hand, the complete story of the Portuguese empire and the human cost of its ambition can finally be told. Praise for *Conquerors* • "Excellent . . . Crowley's interpretations are nuanced and fair." • "The Christian Science Monitor" • "In a riveting narrative, Crowley chronicles Portugal's horrifically violent trajectory from an impoverished, marginal nation to European power, vying with Spain and Venice to dominate the spice trade." • "Kirkus Reviews (starred review)" • "Brings to life the Portuguese explorers . . . perfect for anyone who likes a high seas tale." • "Publishers Weekly" • "Readers of Crowley's previous books will not be disappointed by this exciting tale of sea battles, land campaigns and shipwrecks. . . . Crowley makes a good case for reclaiming Portugal's significance as forger of the first global empire." • "The Daily Telegraph" • "Crowley has shown a rare gift for combining compelling narrative with lightly worn academic thoroughness as well as for balancing the human with the

geopoliticalâ”qualities on display here. The story he has to tell may be a thrilling one but not every historian could tell it so thrillingly.â” Michael Prodger, Financial Times â”A fast-moving and highly readable narrative . . . [Crowleyâ”s] detailed reconstruction of events is based on a close reading of the works of the chroniclers, notably Barros and Correa, whose accounts were written in the tradition of the chronicles of chivalry.â” History Today

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Customer Reviews

The Portuguese maritime empire has been written about many times, but many of the histories are academic or just not much read. Crowley's book may remedy that, for two reasons. One, he has a large following from previous books and two, this is a rollicking, gory and fascinating tale. Warning: these Portuguese are wonderful soldiers but they are overbearing, and often vicious, in breaking into the Indian Ocean world almost like Vandals breaking into the Roman world. It's not really the Portuguese empire, which lasted until Goa was taken over by India in the 1960s. It tells the story of early Portuguese exploration, the first few ventures to India and then the book is largely concerned with the quite remarkable career of Afonso de Albuquerque, whose steely determination and ruthlessness (some of his method was simply inflicting terror) was primarily responsible for the consolidation of the empire. Albuquerque conquered Goa, Malacca and Ormuz, with Goa being most important. There's a lot of background information as well, on trade, navigating the monsoons, the effective rule of two Portuguese kings, the royal dream of destroying Islam and taking back Jerusalem, the accidental discovery of Brazil, the Egyptian Mamluks and more. Look at a map of the

Red Sea, and see where Mecca and Medina are; the Portuguese knocked at the door of the Red Sea and threatened those holy cities. The Mamluks mounted a naval expedition to India, another quite remarkable story well told in this book. In the background, the gathering storm of the Ottomans ominously arises--they took Egypt just after the years in which this book closes (with Albuquerque's death), and would soon after prove to be powerful enemies, mounting naval challenges as far as India. Crowley has a gift for making the historical personage into a living character, even with all the warts and flaws. Albuquerque and his king come through quite powerfully, but so do dozens of more minor players. The Portuguese come through as ruthless, proud, judgment often clouded by honor, extremely formidable soldiers and extremely fractious, and sometimes quite murderous. Their most formidable enemies were Muslim, and the wars take on the characteristics of Crusade. Crowley also describes at length the arduous and often deadly voyages from Portugal to India and back--the ocean killed more Portuguese than the Muslims did. The men (mostly men) aboard ranged from aristocrats of ancient family to scum culled from jails. There are other situations. The horse trade from Ormuz to India, for example, or the Ethiopian emperor, about to be wiped out by Muslim forces from the Horn of Africa--that is a somewhat later story but a few hundred Portuguese stiffened the Ethiopians and helped them survive, a story I'd love to see Crowley undertake.

Most of us have read and/or been taught quite a bit about Columbus and Magellan. Not nearly as many people are familiar with names such as Vasco de Gama and Afonso de Albuquerque. I'm guilty of knowing little about these explorers, despite my own Portuguese heritage. This book initially appealed to me because of that reason, and I'm so glad I read it. There is no doubt that Roger Crowley knows his topic. This is a comprehensive book, full of detail. But I never felt the content was weighed down by the facts. Crowley brings his subject to life. He doesn't simply tell us what happened, he shows it to us. I was right there on the ships, stepping out onto new land, and making friends with or fighting the natives. With this book, Crowley gives us a fascinating piece of history from the perspectives of men who ventured out to conquer the unknown.*I received an ebook copy from the publisher, via NetGalley, in exchange for my honest review.*

Roger Crowley is a wonderful combination of historian and storyteller. Each of his books that I have read, including *The Conquerors*, makes the period and the characters come alive as though one were reading a page turner novel. The story of Portugal's 15-16th century voyages to the Indian Ocean is one that I think most people are vaguely familiar with - but much more attention is given to Columbus and other westward voyages. Crowley tells the story in a very detailed, but assessable

and very readable, book. What I liked and learned from this book: - the impressive sailing skills required to sail from Lisbon to India, including the need to first sail West to swing Eastward around the Cape; the sheer human endurance required of these long voyages; the economics of the era and how the Portuguese were able to disrupt the Venetians' and Egyptian Mamluks' monopoly of the spice trade; the fact that Indian Ocean culture was in many ways more "advanced" than contemporary European society (the Indians laughed at the "gifts" the first Portuguese offered); and the tie-in to the Crusades. I found the last point fascinating. I tend to think incorrectly of history in terms of "periods" as though the middle ages ended and the modern era began on a certain day. In Crowley's telling, the Portuguese viewed their voyages as a continuation of the Crusades with the aim of not just disrupting Muslim trade - but battling Islam wherever it was and maybe taking another run at "liberating" Jerusalem via the Red Sea. Instead their actions led to the Ottoman's grabbing greater control of the Middle East from the Mamluks (which is a prequel to another fine Crowley book - Empires of the Sea). Finally, this was a brutal error and Crowley does not shy away from the awful atrocities committed by the Portuguese (which ties in to their view that this was a continuation of the Crusades). One quibble with the book - I think he does somewhat downplay the violence on the other side. When the Portuguese arrived in India, large parts were under Muslim control - control obtained by violent conquest. And while the Portuguese pulled no punches, the fact that they were continuously able to secure supporters and allies from the locals demonstrates, I think, that the violence was not so one-sided. Still 5 Stars and a recommendation from me (for what that is worth).

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