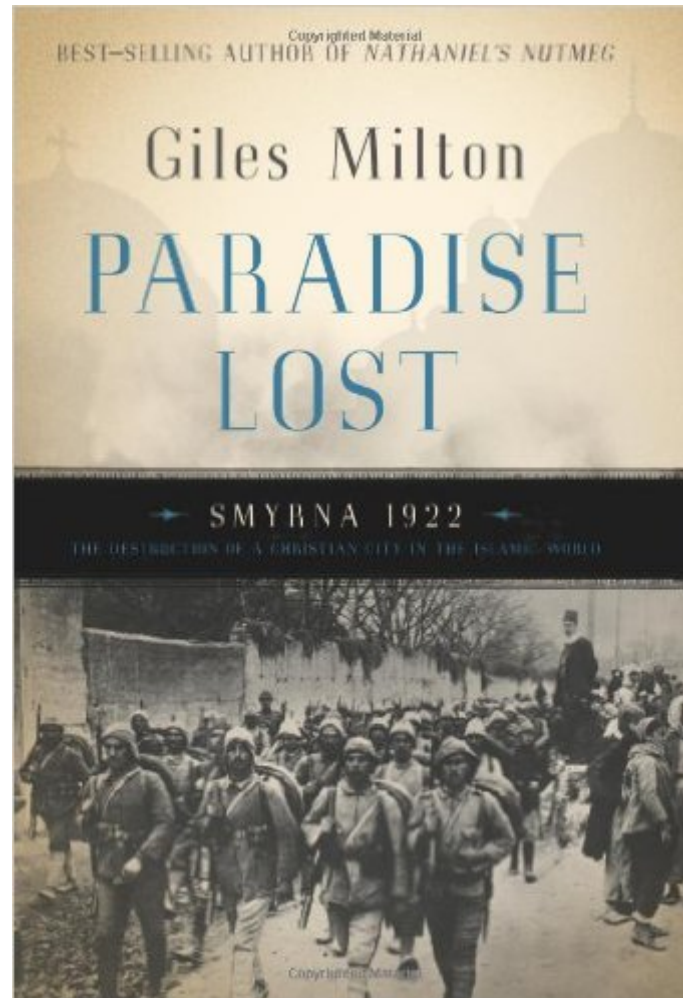




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# **Paradise Lost: Smyrna, 1922**



## Synopsis

On Saturday, September 9, 1922, the victorious Turkish cavalry rode into Smyrna, the richest and most cosmopolitan city in the Ottoman Empire. The city's vast wealth created centuries earlier by powerful Levantine dynasties, its factories teemed with Greeks, Armenians, Turks, and Jews. Together, they had created a majority Christian city that was unique in the Islamic world. But to the Turkish nationalists, Smyrna was a city of infidels. In the aftermath of the First World War and with the support of the Great Powers, Greece had invaded Turkey with the aim of restoring a Christian empire in Asia. But by the summer of 1922, the Greeks had been vanquished by Atatürk's armies after three years of warfare. As Greek troops retreated, the non-Muslim civilians of Smyrna assumed that American and European warships would intervene if and when the Turkish cavalry decided to enter the city. But this was not to be. On September 13, 1922, Turkish troops descended on Smyrna. They rampaged first through the Armenian quarter, and then throughout the rest of the city. They looted homes, raped women, and murdered untold thousands. Turkish soldiers were seen dousing buildings with petroleum. Soon, all but the Turkish quarter of the city was in flames and hundreds of thousands of refugees crowded the waterfront, desperate to escape. The city burned for four days; by the time the embers cooled, more than 100,000 people had been killed and millions left homeless. Based on eyewitness accounts and the memories of survivors, many interviewed for the first time, *Paradise Lost* offers a vivid narrative account of one of the most vicious military catastrophes of the modern age.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Smyrna was a prosperous, cosmopolitan port on Turkey's Aegean coast where Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Jews and other nationalities lived in harmony. In his searingly vivid account of Smyrna's destruction by the Turks in 1922, acclaimed popular historian Milton (Nathaniel's Nutmeg) begins with a fairy tale-like description of the city focused lopsidedly on the wealthy European dynasties known as Levantines. But Milton renders an astute account of the clash of Greek and Turkish nationalisms and the unhelpful meddling of Western powers, particularly Britain, which supported a Greek incursion into Turkey. When the defending Turkish troops under Mustafa Kemal (aka Atatürk) took Smyrna in September 1922, a horrific killing spree of Greeks and Armenians began, and hundreds of thousands of refugees were trapped on the quayside between the sea and a city willfully torched by the Turks as a score of foreign vessels looked on. Milton draws on eyewitness accounts to render these events in all their horror, and ends with an almost incredible rescue led by an unlikely hero. Milton powerfully renders this tragic tale of an army that came to liberate Smyrna and instead massacred its citizens and burned their prize to the ground in a vengeful frenzy. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In September, 1922, after the Turkish forces of Mustafa Kemal defeated a Greek army that had recklessly occupied the Anatolian city of Smyrna, members of Smyrna's Greek, Armenian, and expatriate communities were killed, raped, and robbed. Soon, a half million people were trapped on the port's narrow wharves, the city in flames behind them; "The streets were stacked with dead," a British officer wrote. Milton weaves the Armenian genocide, the birth of modern Turkey, and the tragic inanities of Versailles into his story, but his focus is the destruction of the multi-ethnic, religiously diverse cosmopolis of Smyrna (now the Turkish city of Izmir). He has a tendency to idolize the Levantines, dynasties of European "merchant princes" who remained oblivious as Greeks and Turks committed atrocities closer and closer to their enclave.

Milton's more compelling hero is Asa Jennings, a five-foot-tall Y.M.C.A. administrator who, by bluffing, begging, and desperately improvising, single-handedly saved tens of thousands of lives. Copyright ©2008 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker

I found the book sensible, balanced and fluid, with the accomplished journalist's avoidance of the dull and the tendentious. It is not history, to the extent it lacks deep background, but it is gifted historical journalism, storytelling in the Herodotus mold: panoramic, incomplete, and with gratifying perspective. The leitmotiv of the fortunes of the Levantine cynosure elite of the city is an inspired hook---a bit like describing Hong Kong's fortunes from the vantage points of its elites. The issues

involved are so sobering and hypercharged, that it is quite impossible to satisfy all those intrigued by the subject who seek to read their perfect book with all the sweeping background, judgments, and analysis their hearts would desire. It is more like an outstanding New Yorker extended article, only written almost a century after the events. The broader symmetry issues of the mutually entwined nationalisms of Greece and Turkey are wisely avoided, except in outline; and reliance on A Toynbee's classic "The Western question" pervasive and salutary. The balance between the trivial and the momentous is also soberly masterful. A neat introduction to the subject, successfully drawing the reader in moving on to professional history treatises. Achieves the best effect fiction can have, except all based on immitigable sound facts: gives nonfiction a good name.

Very good history of a place, era, and time of which I had known little. The book describes both the grand history of the disappearance of the old Ottoman Empire and the establishment of modern Turkey during the early 1920s as well as personal stories of the social elite of the city of Smyrna on the Aegean Sea coast. There is also some discussion of the war between Greece and Turkey from about 1919 and finally ending in 1923.

If you are a history fan then this is the book for you. The telling account describes in detail the Greek/Turkish war and without any bias.

Outstanding. Very informative and I recommend it highly to anyone who's interested in possessing historical knowledge.

Edited - Please be aware that many of the negative reviews about this book are, you guessed, by Turkish reviewers. Please disregard their biased slant on this book. I would recommend this book (as well as others) on the Smyrna tragedy. Giles Milton does a thorough job in giving the reader an insight into life in Smyrna prior to and after the destruction of the city. The first half of the book tells of the life of many different people and goes somewhat into the events leading up to the torching of the city. For some reason (possibly because of the information available) Miles speaks extensively about the Levantine families. This seems to be out of place considering the majority of the population were Greek, Armenia, Turkish and Jewish. The general context is the lead up to the First World War, and then the Greco-Turkish war which ended in disaster for the Greeks. The second part of the book comes alive with a step by step chronological description of the events leading up to, during and after the torching of the city. He goes into some detail regarding the atrocities carried out

by the Greeks against Turks, in their retreat throughout the Anatolia. Then the reprisal atrocities carried out by the Turks firstly on the Armenians, which then quickly spread to the Greeks. These atrocities have been lost in the fabric of time and adjusted history.(by governments in France, US, Italy & especially Turkey) The Turkish disregard for human life is evident throughout the book even to the point of describing the genocide of the the Armenians. Generally speaking this is a good book for those who wish to gain an insight in one of the least spoken acts of "ethnic cleansing" that happened in the 20th Century. But as I mentioned in my title, Good, but not great, book. I would still recommend it.

This book was exactly what I was seeking - the perfect blend of history, facts, research but intertwined with real people's stories and experiences. Giles Milton has spared no effort in presenting the events leading up to the great fire which destroyed the city of Izmir, and his writing is subtle enough for the reader to come to their own conclusions about the events and decisions which were made which brought this disaster forth.

This fascinating book provides readers with an exhaustively researched narrative tracing the events leading up to the destruction of Smyrna, Turkey's sophisticated jewel on the Aegean, in 1922. It traces the city's growth and development, and tells us about the life of this vanished metropolis; along with its exotic and cosmopolitan population. World events, particularly World War I, its aftermath and the emergence of modern Turkey doom the fabled city. The political manoeuvrings of the British, Greek and American Governments after The Great War are carefully traced, along with the birth of Turkish Nationalism under Kemal Attaturk. Rising from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, and fanned by the ill-judged intervention of victorious wartime powers, we see how Turkish forces are driven to occupy and finally destroy this beautiful relic. The ghastly denouement is brought to life through chilling accounts of survivors, and we see how this legendary, exotic metropolis is undermined, and finally meets its apocalyptic end as a result of external political pressure. A sad and gripping story.

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