

# Midnight at the Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul

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"Intrigue, violence, sex, and espionage, all set against the slow dimming of Ottoman magnificence. I loved this book."-Simon Winchester

At midnight, December 31, 1925, citizens of the newly proclaimed Turkish Republic celebrated the New Year. For the first time ever, they had agreed to use a nationally unified calendar and clock.

Yet in Istanbul-an ancient crossroads and Turkey's largest city-people were looking toward an uncertain future. Never purely Turkish, Istanbul was home to generations of Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, as well as Muslims. It welcomed White Russian nobles ousted by the Russian Revolution, Bolshevik assassins on the trail of the exiled Leon Trotsky, German professors, British diplomats, and American entrepreneurs-a multicultural panoply of performers and poets, do-gooders and ne'er-do-wells. During the Second World War, thousands of Jews fleeing occupied Europe found passage through Istanbul, some with the help of the future Pope John XXIII. At the Pera Palace, Istanbul's most luxurious hotel, so many spies mingled in the lobby that the manager posted a sign asking them to relinquish their seats to paying guests.

In beguiling prose and rich character portraits, Charles King brings to life a remarkable era when a storied city stumbled into the modern world and reshaped the meaning of cosmopolitanism.

32 photographs

Charles King is a professor of international affairs and government at Georgetown University. A frequent media commentator on global issues, he is the author of *Gods of the Upper Air*, *Odessa*, *Midnight in the Pera Palace*, and other books. He lives in Washington, DC."King has combed out the threads of this complex and highly nuanced story in a hugely enjoyable, magnificently researched and deeply absorbing book."

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Jason Goodwin, *New York Times Book Review*

"Superb-deliciously dense with detail and sheer narrative force as Charles King tells the twentieth-century history of the Near East through the prism of one great city. A sepia-toned classic!"

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Robert D. Kaplan, author of *The Revenge of Geography* and *Eastward to Tartary*

"Popular history at its best, authoritative and hugely entertaining. Few places were as colorful as Istanbul between the wars and Professor King captures all the chaotic brio and contradictions of a city, and a culture, reinventing itself."

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## Joseph Kanon, author of Istanbul Passage

"In this memorably distilled history, Charles King tells us just what the Pera Palace was—the ornately decaying hotel crouched at the center of a mare's nest of intrigue, violence, sex, and espionage, all set against the slow dimming of Ottoman magnificence. I loved this book."

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## Simon Winchester, author of Krakatoa and The Map that Changed the World

"This social history of one of the world's most fascinating cities is as illuminating as it is entertaining. Characters from Trotsky to Hemingway, from a blind Armenian musician to a future pope, help tell the story of how Istanbul transformed itself from a refugee-clogged backwater into a vibrant metropolis. Midnight at the Pera Palace is a true Turkish delight."

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## Stephen Kinzer, author of Crescent and Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds and Reset

"A diverse cast, ranging from Muslim beauty queens and Georgian royalty to Leon Trotsky, have left their mark on Istanbul, and King nimbly weaves their threads with enough color to draw in general readers and enough detail to satisfy specialists."

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## Publishers Weekly

"Elegant... multiple biographies unfold against the backdrop of an old city's growing pains."

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## Kate Tuttle, Boston Globe

"An engaging, detailed look at the old city that became the newest of them all."

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## Melissa Davis, Seattle Times

"Fascinating and perceptive."

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## Randy Dotinga, Christian Science Monitor

Other Books

Welcome to Hell?, Ask a British football fan what they know about Turkish football, and they are unlikely to describe scenes of camaraderie, hospitality and humour. They are more likely to mention banners proclaiming 'Welcome to hell'. Or Leeds United supporters stabbed to death on an Istanbul street. Frustrated by the game's distorted image back home, John McManus set out to show the Turkish football that he knew - the rich, funny, obsessive, fan culture that he had encountered on the terraces. But he hadn't accounted for the politics. Travelling from the elite training facilities of Istanbul to dusty pitches on the Syrian border, taking in visits to far-flung clubs, encounters with characterful players and experiences at riotous matches along the way, Welcome to Hell? offers a unique perspective on an alluring yet troubled football culture.

... Istanbul: Bilgi Karınca, 2004 King, Charles, The Black Sea: A History, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 ---., Midnight at the Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul , London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015 Kurt, Richard, ..."