

Gabor Agoston. *Guns for the Sultan: Military Power and the Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 277 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-84313-3.



Reviewed by Dr Tom Lewis (Department of Defence, Australia)

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An Empire's Firearms Explained

Guns for the Sultan comprehensively sets out the development of firearms technology in the Ottoman Empire. Such weapons provided the main tactical advantage utilized in this nation-state force's heyday and the work sets out to be a reference on their procurement for any scholars studying the period. Has it achieved its aim?

Author Gabor Agoston has chosen a straightforward thematic approach which works well. The reasons for acquiring the technology are charted, as are the weapons which various powerbrokers manufactured and used over several hundred years. The discussion covers a collection of firearms from small pieces firing projectiles of 30-500 grams, up to the largest items firing shots of up to 74 kilograms in weight. The author examines the process of manufacturing these weapons—from location of an abundance of saltpeter and sulfur deposits—through to the basics of design, mechanics of manufacture, and the requirements of labor.

The text takes the reader through the personnel allocations necessary to build and operate mortars, bombardards, and other weapons, and there is sufficient use of anecdotal descriptions to bring the picture to life. Thus

we are able to see aspects of the human society that underpinned the societal infrastructure necessary to provide “guns for the sultan.” The author has thoughtfully provided a mix of basic technical requirements, moving smoothly from basic and brief descriptions to a higher level of detail, which requires that the reader have a sufficient background knowledge. In this way, the work will prove attractive to both the layman and the professional, although its principal strength lies in its scholarly reference detail.

The author's use of sources has been widespread and comprehensive. Agoston capably moves from observed fact to deduction, and occasionally induction, smoothly and without lapsing into generalization. A combination of footnotes and endnotes would perhaps have added to the readability, whereas the use of footnotes alone in this volume sometimes results in the pages of text being half-full of references.

The work moves from studies of the land-based production industries for guns, to their deployment even within localized navies. Several tables are usefully provided, although I would have preferred to see totals for

“crew” and then “fighting men” numbers alone, which were not followed by a third column of “crew plus fighting men,” for the third total does not equal the sum of the two previous ones. The work also moves down into lighter weapon production such as muskets, but sensibly avoids study of tactical use. One important achievement is the placement of the Ottoman Empire and its warfare industry alongside that of other empires of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is sometimes suggested that following their defeat at the Battle of Lep-

anto in 1571, the Ottoman Empire’s achievements were largely subsumed beneath other great centers of power. The author successfully argues that this is more the product of parochial thinking than of proven scholarship.

Physically *Guns for the Sultan* is an attractive work, replete with maps, illustrations, tables, and an elegant dust jacket. The author is Associate Professor of History in Georgetown University, and overall this book matches readability with scholarship and usefulness. An impressive achievement.

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