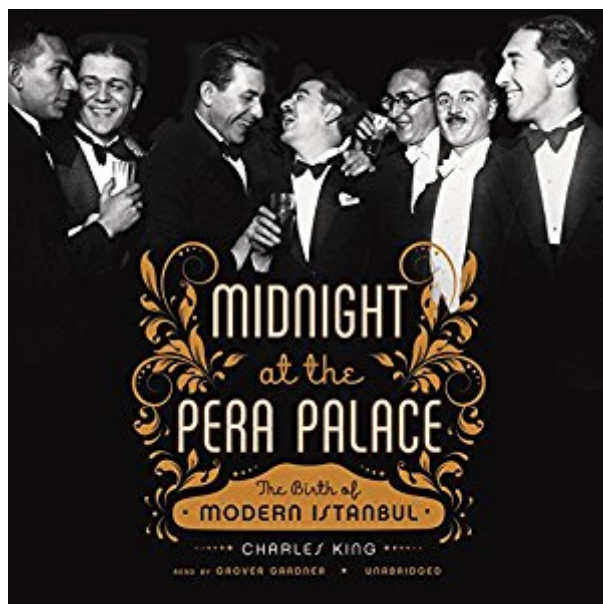


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# Midnight At The Pera Palace: The Birth Of Modern Istanbul



## Synopsis

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. With 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Midnight at the Pera Palace is far more than I expected. Far from being simply the story of a hotel, it follows Istanbul's ups and downs through some very dramatic periods in its history. Today Istanbul feels like a diverse and vibrant city. However, reading the descriptions of the ethnic communities which used to intersect daily on its streets makes it clear that today's diversity is

but a pale remnant of what it used to be. While the various religious and ethnic communities may have intersected in the streets, there seems to have been limited interactions between the groups, with most ethno/religious groups mostly doing business, socializing, and marrying within their own groups. This was further reinforced by the Millet system which allowed each group to answer to their own judges and courts in many legal matters. Sadly, many minorities were identified as a threat and literally hounded from the country. The record, in just this book, of the number of times and manners in which minorities were pushed out of the country, exploited for gain, economically and otherwise marginalized at best and exposed to violence at worst, were multitude. It is safe to say that this was not in any way the main thrust of the book, however I was astounded at the multiple instances of state-sanctioned repression. It deserves to be pointed out, however, that these were difficult times for the slowly collapsing Ottoman Empire. Russia, Turkey's historical enemy, fought numerous wars with Turkey over the period described in the book, and WWI and II brought not only successive waves of refugees, (many unwelcome,) but caused Istanbul to become a hot-bed of spies and smuggling, with some deadly results.

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