

Aleppo: from World City to Civil War

An illustrated talk by Philip Mansel

hosted by The Nomads Tent

Thursday 6th May 2021, 6pm via Zoom



Aleppo is one of the oldest, continuously inhabited cities in the world. It was successively ruled by the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Arab, Ottoman and French empires. Following the Ottoman conquest in 1516, it became the empire's third largest city, after Constantinople and Cairo. It owed its wealth to its position at the end of the Silk Road, at a crossroads of world trade, where merchants from Mecca, Isfahan and Agra traded in the largest suq in the Middle East.

Its food and music were famous throughout the region. For 400 years Venetian, British and French consuls and merchants also lived in Aleppo, trading in cloth, silk and horses. Hence Shakespeare's references in *Macbeth* ('her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger'), and *Othello* ('in Aleppo once, where a malignant and a turban'd Turk beat a Venetian and traduced the state'). For the English traveller Thomas Coryate, Aleppo was 'the principal emporium of all Syria or rather of the Orient world'. One of the best books on the city *The Natural History of Aleppo*, by two Edinburgh doctors, Alexander and Patrick Russell, was published in 1756.

Using unpublished pictures and photographs, in this talk Philip Mansel shows that Aleppo was a city which challenged categories and generalisations. Lying between the desert and the sea, the mountains of Anatolia and the banks of the Euphrates, it was Arab and Turkish; Kurdish and Armenian; Christian, Muslim and Jewish. An Arabic-speaking city with a Muslim majority, under the Ottoman Empire Aleppo also became a centre of French culture and Catholic missions. Until 2012 Aleppo was distinguished by its harmony. For four hundred years, whatever their origin, its inhabitants had lived together relatively peacefully. The reasons for this harmony, and for its destruction in the Syrian civil war, are the subject of this talk.



Tickets are £4 with an optional donation of £3, £5 or £7 and can be booked via nomadstent.co.uk/products/philip-mansel-zoom-talk. Donations and any proceeds after basic costs go to Mercy Corps.

Attendees can obtain Philip Mansel's book *Aleppo: the Rise and Fall of Syria's Great Merchant City* with an exclusive 30% discount from www.bloomsbury.com. The talk will be held live on Zoom with full details and Philip's book discount code provided at time of booking.

Biography:

Dr. Philip Mansel has lived in Paris, Beirut and Istanbul and is a historian of France and the Ottoman Empire. He was born in London in 1951 and read Modern History and Modern Languages at Balliol College, Oxford. Philip Mansel has published fourteen books of history and biography, mainly relating to France or the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East: *Sultans in Splendour* was published in 1988, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire 1453-1924* in 1995; *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean, on Smyrna, Alexandria and Beirut* in 2010; and *Aleppo: the Rise and Fall of Syria's Great Merchant City* in 2016. His most recent book is *King of World: The Life of Louis XIV*, published by Penguin in July 2019. Seven of his books have been translated into French. He writes reviews for *The Spectator*, *Cornucopia*, *The Art Newspaper* and *The Times Literary Supplement*.



In 1995 Philip Mansel was a co-founder with David Starkey and Simon Thurley of the Society for Court Studies, www.courtstudies.org, designed to promote research on royal courts and dynasties, and he edited its journal from 1996 to 2016. In 2010 he helped establish the Levantine Heritage Foundation, dedicated to the cultures and history of the eastern Mediterranean, which has since held conferences in Izmir, Istanbul, London, and Athens: www.levantineheritage.com. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, the Royal Society of Literature, the Institute of Historical Research (University of London) and the Royal Asiatic Society, and is president of the Conseil Scientifique of the Centre de Recherche du Chateau de Versailles. In 2012 he won the London Library life in Literature award.

For further information, please see www.philipmansel.com or read our blog: <https://nomadstent.co.uk/blogs/blog/aleppo-from-world-city-to-civil-war>

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