



# The Towers of Samarcand

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## **The Towers of Samarcand** James Heneage

A select band of soldiers led by Luke Magoris are given the mission of persuading Tamerlane to defend Constantinople. The great conqueror must turn his forces to the West to fight the Ottomans, who otherwise would destroy Constantinople and the Byzantine empire.

Luke, torn away from the woman he loves and all he knows, is trained as a Mongol warrior to impress Tamerlane and his army before joining his fellow Varangian guards, descendants of the men who once brought a vital treasure out of Constantinople. It is this treasure, some say, that can still save the empire – uniting the Christian churches of the east and west in one final triumphant crusade to smite the Ottomans.

No longer an innocent patriot, Luke is caught in the crossfire and begins to question if his mission is honourable – or whether those who sent him have the best interests of Byzantium at heart.

The Towers of Samarcand is a powerful historical novel full of lively characters and enthralling scenes of battle, wealth, beliefs and trade in a part of the world torn by the clash of empires.

## **The Towers of Samarcand Details**

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Author : James Heneage

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# From Reader Review The Towers of Samarcand for online ebook

## Ruth says

c2014 (14) FWFTB: Tamerlane, Mongol, Varangian, Ottomans, Byzantium. Fascinating and page turning. The descriptions of Samarcand prompted me to actually look this up on good old Wikipedia to get a frame of reference. In a strange way, this reminded me in some places of Guy Gavriel Kay's novels and style of writing. The brutality was conveyed with a deft touch (worrying) and the characters were well drawn. Highly recommended to the normal crew. *"And when he is not destroying them, he is destroying any building of beauty around him. He is eaten up with jealousy and with hatred for his own mediocrity. He is mad."*

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## Sarah williams says

A good read. Well written. Just my sort of story.

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## Andy says

I must at first admit to dreading having to read this book.... indulge me If you will as i give a little background..... having won this book on a goodreads giveaway I was surprised to learn it was in fact pt II of a series called the Mistra Chronicles & so my quest took me first to the library so I could get upto speed so to say with The Walls of Byzantium which they obliging had, Brilliant says I & settles into my 1000pg back-2-back readathon.....

You can guess, it was a shocker <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...> read allaboutit here.

BUT a deals a deal & so I MUST read onwards & to the Towers of Samarcand I rode with trepidation filled boots.... however.... its actually an ok read & perhaps the author should have started from this point in the series or at least his style of writing?

Whys it so different? There's virtually NONE of the teenage melodrama from the first book, mostly due to the fact that the characters do not feature much which really does help you to get through the narrative without endless hollywood style dramas every paragraph.

We start this story on the plains of Anatolia in Winter of 1396 with our hero Luke amongst nomads on the steppes in a Ger & its great - a real adventure story, h/f content is good & interaction with new characters. Part I is just that - The camp on the steppe & those liking Conn Iggulden's Genghis series will maybe appreciate it although perhaps the story is more for a YA audience as the characters aren't overly deep. Part two is - The Journey - as they travel across the region to reach Tamerlane & come across various tribes, assassins, agents et al & before you know it your out the other side & onto the crux of the book, Samarcand & the ruthless & very unpredictable Tamerlane of the Mongol hordes!

The second half of the book takes us into the politics of the region of the time (Ottomans, Byzantines, Mamluks, Mongols, Venetians & allies of the Pope(s)) & all the protagonists come into play with Luke being the agent of Byzantium trying to influence the major player - Tamerlane - in fact he's fairly useless at it :) &

its more that others dictate events whilst our hero jus flexes his muscle & battles away & rescues all & sunder.

Its quite enjoyable really, an adventure tale with enough h/f & political detail of the era to appeal to all sorts of readers, including YA. I would further add that the h/f content has been well researched & actually utilised in this book of the series.

As for the final mark, its more leaning towards a 3.5 stars.

I won this on Goodreads, thank you.

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### **Catharine Jones says**

I had to make sure I had this book as soon as I finished the first one. Only problem now is that I have to wait for the author to write up the third book!

This book takes places on the Steppes and in the lands of Uzbekistan. I've long been drawn to wanting to visit Samarkand, and I want to go there even more now.

A fantastic book for awakening an interest in a region and a time which I have not yet paid attention to.

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### **Paul says**

A tad manic with a few big historical alterations but good characters and political play and always enjoyable

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### **Hilary Green says**

Review of The Mistra Chronicles Books 1 and 2.  
by James Heneage.

I love books that take me to exotic and unfamiliar times and places and these books do that in spades. They are set during the last days of the Byzantine Empire, when Constantinople is under threat from the Turks. I did not know that Mistra, on the Greek Peloponnese, was one of the last outposts of the empire but Heneage's description has made me want to visit it.

His hero, Luke, is descended from one of the Varangians, exiles from England after the Norman Conquest, who formed the emperor's elite bodyguard and who, we learn in a preface, escaped from Constantinople just before it was sacked in the Fourth Crusade with a great but mysterious treasure. He is in love with Anna, the daughter of the ruler of Mistra but his low birth means they are destined to be kept apart. His adventures take him first to the island of Chios, another unfamiliar place to me, and I was fascinated to learn about the importance of the trade in mastic and the labyrinthine villages constructed to save the people from pirate attacks.

The story progresses and both Luke and Anna are caught up in the machinations of the Turkish Sultan, the wily Venetians and Anna's devious father-in-law. There are plenty of unexpected twists and turns to the plot and Luke and Anna are brave and far-thinking in their efforts to outwit them.

In Book 2 the action moves even further afield as Luke is sent to the court of Tamburlaine the Great, the Mongol lord who swept through Asia minor in the fifteenth century. This is a part of history I knew little about and Heneage evokes brilliantly the exotic combination of barbarism and luxury surrounding Tamburlaine's court. He was a bloodthirsty monster, massacring whole populations of cities that opposed him and leaving pyramids of skulls to mark his passage.

I was gripped by these stories but I have some reservations. Luke seems to me a little bit too perfect; a warrior who can overcome all opposition; a wily negotiator; brave and honourable – but I found my sympathy for him stretched to breaking point when he remains with Tamburlaine, as a trusted companion, even after the most terrible massacres. The excuse is that he is oath sworn and has a task to do, to persuade Tamburlaine to attack the Turks and so distract them from Constantinople and the writer shows that he is driven to despair by what he sees, but I kept thinking 'why don't you just ride away?'.

A more important criticism is the writer's reliance on elements of the supernatural. Luke learns in a dream that Anna is in no immediate danger, so he can leave for the east; she knows that he is still alive by looking into the eyes of his horse. There are books which are entirely predicated on the existence of the supernatural, such as Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones. I can happily accept that. But when they are used as plot devices in an otherwise well researched and realistic historical novel I think that is illegitimate. Most irritating is the use of the mysterious treasure rescued from Constantinople, which is unearthed and gazed upon with awe and wonder at the end of both books. We are never told what it is, only that it will 'change the world'. I assume the author's idea is that we will keep reading subsequent volumes in order to find out; but I fancy that the final revelation will be an anticlimax. What can possibly live up to the significance laid upon it? Does the author himself know what it is?

These caveats apart, I was hooked on these stories and would recommend them to anyone looking for a gripping historical read.

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### **Sean Barrs the Bookdragon says**

Every so often I come across a book that is absolutely impossible to get into; I find myself staring out the window and try to put off reading it; I have to force myself through its pages and wish for an end that is a long way off; I struggle and I persist, and, ultimately, regret the time I spent on the book.

Does this sound familiar?

This was a review copy, so I forced myself through it when I may have given up much earlier. I hated every minute of it though. Reading this was a very tiresome experience.

### **Uncomfortable history**

The author has clearly spent hours researching this, but the writing didn't carry the historical detail through in a comfortable way. Not everybody is an expert on the Byzantine Empire. I felt like the author was treating his readership as if they all had a close knowledge of its history. The setting of the book needed to be explained a little more and expanded upon. I know nothing of the history of this era and the empires involved. I needed a chapter near the beginning of the book that helped to outline this. The story was almost impossible to conceptualise because of this. I shouldn't have to research an era of history in order to read a fiction novel about it. It should be laid down before me.

In essence, the book needed to be dumbed down and simplified to appeal to a mass readership. I attest that not many people would be able to follow it. This may be due to the fact that this is the second novel in the series. I've not read the first, but I should be able to pick up the story here regardless. Indeed, I recently read a fourth book in a series and had no problem considering the overall story. The author should have done more to introduce the protagonists and touch a lot more on how they ended up where they were at the start of this novel. It just wasn't explained very well at all.

### **So, what is the plot again?**

The main protagonist has a mission. He, essentially, has to force two rivals to fight each other. The author mentioned this once during in the first hundred or so pages. I actually forgot what Luke, the protagonist, was trying to do though his interactions. I got to a point where I had to step back and consider what was actually happening. The whole novel just didn't flow smoothly. I had to go back and read sections again to become more informed on the already waning light of the plot. This whole novel felt poor in general; it doesn't have a single redeeming feature.

Overall, this was a very bad attempt at a novel. I think it was poor in every regard. I only made it to the end because of the need to provide a fair review. I was hoping it would get better, but, alas, it did not. I don't recommend this book in the slightest, and I will never be reading anything by this author again, ever.

### **A poor one star**

I won this as a giveaway, here, on goodreads.

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### **Augustine Kobayashi says**

So historically inaccurate (the author thinks Aeneas was Greek!), light hearted and harmless historical adventure novel nonetheless. Not as good as the first book of the series, perhaps because the novel has it that Temur was too much swayed by machinations of outsiders such as the Varangian hero (i.e., an English warrior in employ of Byzantium). OK read if you are interested in history of Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire, Central Asia etc. Not for those who take historical fictions too seriously!

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### **Linda Humberstone says**

Terrific book, can't wait for the next one to be written, hope it isn't too long! I enjoyed this even better than the first one, probably because all the characters were already in place and you could start getting into it straight away. Also, I like the informative notes at the end that enable you to learn what did or did not really happen. I am shocked at the cruelty of Tamerlane, although his daring strategies were brilliant and his advance towards the West amazing. I have learnt a lot more history about the East by reading these books. However, the fictional characters and their adventures are what the book is about and their stories are well thought out and exciting enough for you to keep on reading when you should turn the light off and go to sleep!

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### **Angel Serrano says**

Luke y Anna están separados por la guerra. Su primera obligación es defender el imperio bizantino y su capital Constantinopla del invasor otomano Bayazid. El emperador Manuel decide combatir al invasor con las hordas tártaras, que dominan la estepa.

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### **Jason Higgins says**

An epic adventure that follows the journey of a varangian knight into the world of the Mongols and their insane leader. Can he stay alive long enough to bring the Mongol hordes to the aid of Constantinople as he battles to save the Byzantium empire.

I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

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### **Afroditi Kousouni says**

Η αλ?θεια ε?ναι ?τι το βρ?κα λιγ?τερο συναρπαστικ? απ? το πρ?το μ?ρος της τριλογ?ας και αυτ? συν?βαλε ?στε να μην μπορ? ε?κολα να το τελει?σω. Αν και ιστορικ? τεκμηριωμ?νο, δεν ε?χε την ?νταση που περ?μενα και ?σως να παραλε?ψω το τρ?το μ?ρος! Ωστ?σο αναφ?ρεται σε μια εποχ? που βρ?σκω ?κρως ενδιαφ?ρουσα και π?ντα χα?ρομαι να διαβ?ζω βιβλ?α που την προσεγγ?ζουν.

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### **Cristina says**

MUCH better than the previous novel in the series, and has left me looking forward to the next one whenever it comes out!

One word in the title of this book was the whole reason I started reading both of them: Samarkand! That and the mention of Timur or Tamerlane, the great warrior emperor from Central Asia that everyone kept talking to me about on my recent trip to Samarkand. ;) Historical fiction is a good entryway into the past, gives you a taste for events and historical figures so that - if they interested you - you'll want to hit the books to find out more. And in that aspect this one did not disappoint! It definitely left me wanting to read more about Timur, his grandson and heir Muhammad Sultan, and get my hands on the original book from which this author got quite a bit of his information, the journal of the Spanish Ambassador to Timur at that time!!!

As for the story itself, this book picks up where the previous one left off, with our heroic Varangian Luke off to find a way to convince Timur to turn his armies west and fight the Ottomans (as a way to save his empire and its capital Constantinople, besieged by the relentless Ottoman troops led by the Sultan's son Salesman) instead of heading east against China. It's an interesting western view of this historic figure, and a very bloody tale of war at times.

The problems I had with the first novel (uneven dialogue, a couple of flat characters and an "empty" love story, or attempt at one) were no longer an issue here, as if "practice makes perfect" had been applied.

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## Miltos says

With this book the author attempts to take the reader on a journey along the late 14th cent silk road, a trade route that extends from Rome all the way to China. Being a history buff myself, I gave it a 4-star rating although I had given the 1st book a 3-star rating. Here's why:

The flaws I found in ToS are dragging from the first book, mainly, that the protagonist couple are a bit boring and lack some controversy or flaws that would make them more human and their motivation a bit more realistic. The plot has some serious logical flaws and it feels like the author is more interested in explaining the historical context, rather than creating relatable characters and a believable story line.

That said, here come the things I did like about ToS:

**The scale:** WOW! This book extends across empires and continents unlike any that I have read in this genre. And **the depth:** Henneage digs into the politics and scheming of late 14th cent Italian city states, Byzantine empire, Ottoman empire and Temur's empire, intertwining his plot and fictional characters with real events and actual figures of that era. Most authors in this genre will research their history but usually they narrow it down to one culture during a specific time-period. Henneage's research extends to several cultures and as you go through the book you gradually realize this as he goes into great detail with every place he takes the story to.

**Overall:** With its magnitude this novel feels a bit like Marco Polo's travels, only, with some added purpose and romance for its main characters. It feels like an improvement over the 1st book in many ways. I would like to see some more investigation into the main characters in the next book.

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## Sarah-Jayne Briggs says

(I received this book for free as part of Goodreads First Reads giveaways).

(This review may contain spoilers).

Ideally, I'd give this book 3.5 stars. It was an interesting historical read, but I found it difficult to follow the different storylines at times.

Although this book was the second in a series, I found it fairly easy to follow, even though I don't have a lot of knowledge about the time this book is set in. Luke's character was a fairly intriguing one and I liked the relationships and friendships he had with other characters, though I kind of wished more time had been spent showing how those developed.

One of the things that I liked about this book was Luke's skill with the horses. I wasn't entirely sure if there was supposed to be a supernatural element to that, though. I felt the book doesn't really make many of those things clear.



Another thing that worked fairly well was the politics in this book. Some of the characters were thoroughly unlikable and it was a bit disappointing that more time was spent on them. There were also some developments in relationships that weren't shown, so they didn't feel too realistic.

Many of the descriptions in this book worked really well and I could see a lot of the events happening in my mind - and I cringed at many of them. I'm not sure if I'll further explore this series or not. It's an interesting historical epic, but it does focus a lot on the tyrants.

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