

A FEW GOOD MEN ...

The Siege of Vienna

John Stoye

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Reviewed by Wayne Lutton

Since the events of September 11, 2001, the inhabitants of the Western world have been subjected to a relentless public relations campaign centered on the notion that “Islam is a religion of Peace” ... and tolerance. An example of what cold warriors used to describe as “disinformation” appeared in the *New York Times* of March 28, 2002. There Maria Rosa Menocal, director of the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale University, asserted that one of the greatest neglected lessons of history is that enlightened Muslims created “the most advanced culture in Europe” after they conquered the Iberian Peninsula 1,300 years ago. “Al Andalus, as the Muslims called their Spanish homeland [sic] prospered in a culture of openness and assimilation,” writes Ms. Menocal.

This contrasts sharply with the views of the people who were actually on the receiving end of the Muslim onslaught those many centuries ago. They saw Islam as a “Religion of the Sword,” as indeed it was from the time that Mohammed united the tribes of Arabia and, following his death in 632, his successors went on a rampage against the Western world that only came to a halt in the fall of 1683, when a Pan-European Christian army led by King John Sobieski of Poland lifted the Muslim siege of Vienna on September 13, 1683.

John Stoye of Magdalen College, Oxford, wrote the first account in English of this turning point in European history. Originally published in 1964, a revised edition is in print and now available in the United States.

Following their conquest of Constantinople, the Ottoman Turks, in time, went on to take the Balkans. By the spring of 1683, their ruthless Grand Vizier, Kara Mustafa, decided to launch a major campaign to seize the rest of Hungary and advance into Central Europe. The Turks' main rival in the region was Austria, whose monarch, Leopold I, was both the King of Austria, Bohemia and Habsburg Hungary, and Holy Roman Emperor (of a collection of feudal German states and independent cities).

The Turks received encouragement from Louis XIV, the "Sun King" of France. During the second half of 1682, his diplomatic representative to the Sublime Porte did everything in his power to persuade Kara Mustafa to direct his army toward Austria, not Poland or Russia, as had been mooted about by Ottoman strategists. Louis XIV had designs on northwestern and Rhenish states in Europe. The Habsburgs were the strongest of his potential adversaries.

On March 30, 1683, the Turks' vanguard of Janissaries set out from Belgrade. By May, a host estimated at over 100,000 Europeans, Asians, and Africans was heading toward Vienna. The Habsburg commander-in-chief, Charles V of Lorraine, could muster only 33,000. Leopold fled his capital, and Vienna was placed under siege on July 16.

Pope Innocent XI called for a Holy Alliance of Christian princes to resist the Muslim horde. The author portrays Innocent as a true Defender of the West who "never slackened since the day of his election" (in 1676) to organize a Crusade against the Sultan. Innocent pledged the revenues of the Church to help raise an army.

King John Sobieski III of Poland, a veteran of the wars against the Turks, was willing to lead a contingent in support of the Habsburgs. But he had to have the unanimous approval of the Polish Diet. Louis XIV's agents tried to bribe key members into vetoing the proposal. The papal nuncio, Pallavicini, was ordered by Innocent XI to use his powers, including those of his purse, to outbid the French. This they managed, though just barely. King John then set about to raise an army of 40,000.

While Kara Mustafa's savage Tartar allies pillaged the surrounding countryside, the Turkish engineers went about the business of constructing siege lines and undermining the city's defenses. Mustafa's great gamble nearly succeeded. Dysentery, considered by the author "the Turks' strongest ally," spread fast among the soldiers and remaining civil population of Vienna. The Muslims were on the verge of breaching the last defensive works, when, on September 9, it was announced that a relief force was assembling nearby.

Commanded by King John Sobieski, and including valuable reinforcements from Bavaria, Franconia, Thuringia, and Saxony, the allies attacked the Turks on September 12, a Sunday. Writes Stoye: "At last the hour was reached when the Christian army, to use the emphatic language of a contemporary Turkish writer, became a flood of black pitch coming down the mountain, consuming

everything it touched.” The next day, Sobieski made his victorious entry into Vienna, in advance of Emperor Leopold, to the acclamation of the grateful Viennese public.

In what has been dubbed the Last of the Crusades (from 1683-1699), Poland, Hungary, Austria, the Papal States, and such Mediterranean powers as Savoy continued to exert military pressure against the Turks. At Zenta on September 11, 1697, Prince Eugene of Savoy caught the Ottoman army as it was trying to cross the River Tisza in Serbia, inflicting 30,000 casualties at a cost of only 300. The sultan then sued for peace, which was signed at Karlowitz in 1699. Austria gained Transylvania and most of Hungary. While the Turks retained the Banat of Temesvar, they ceded most of the Morea to Venice. Following a series of military reforms, the Turks renewed the war in 1716 but were again defeated by Prince Eugene at Peterwardein on August 5, 1716, before finally being thrown out of Belgrade on August 22, 1717.

The French took advantage of the Turkish Wars to attempt to expand at the expense of their neighbors (in the War of Devolution, 1667-68; the Franco-Dutch War, 1672-78; the Rhineland Campaigns, 1674-75; the Scanian War, 1674-79; the Devastation of the Palatinate, 1688-89; the Nine Years War, 1688-97, the War of the Spanish Succession, 1701-14, etc.) Fortunately, the Ottomans had been so weakened that the Muslims were never again able to mount a serious threat to the West.

Stoye is a skilled writer and a master of this subject. His account of the siege, peopled by some extraordinary characters, including the garrison commandant, Count Stahremberg, who managed to hold out until the relief force arrived, makes for inspiring reading.

Today, the great men of the West who fought the Muslims are tarred as “enemies of cultural openness” (cf. Menocal). Christian leaders condemn as “overly judgmental” those of their congregants who believe that non-Christian religions should not be made welcome. And in France, and other parts of the European Union, writers are subject to fine and possible imprisonment for daring to publicly criticize the growing Muslim presence in Western countries.

Stoye’s book thus serves as a reminder of how earlier generations of Europeans reacted when outsiders attempted to force “diversity” and “multiculturalism” on their societies. Far from being a virtue, “tolerance” of the wrong variety can lead to cultural suicide and risks the very extinction of peoples. Men and women of character will not let this occur without a fight.

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