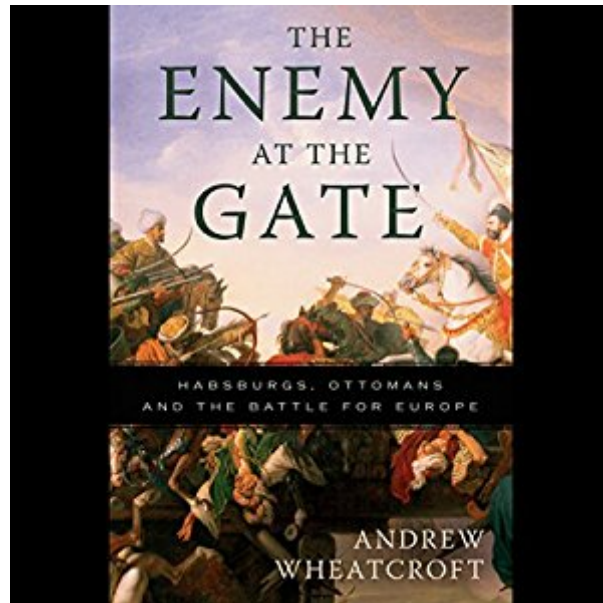


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The Enemy At The Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans And The Battle For Europe



Synopsis

Major historian Andrew Wheatcroft reveals the full story behind four centuries of Ottoman incursions into the heartlands of Europe. In 1683, two empires – the Ottoman, based in Constantinople, and the Habsburg dynasty in Vienna – came face to face in the culmination of a 250-year-old struggle for power at the Great Siege of Vienna. Within the city walls, the choice of resistance over surrender to the largest army ever assembled by the Turks created an all-or-nothing scenario: every last survivor would be enslaved or ruthlessly slaughtered. Although it was their most famous attack, the 1683 siege was the historical culmination of the Turks' sustained attempt to march westwards and finally obtain the city they had long called "The Golden Apple." Their defeat was to mark the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. With Turkey now seeking to re-orient itself towards the West and with a new generation of politicians exploiting the residual tensions between East and West, *The Enemy at the Gate* provides a timely and masterful account of this most complex and epic of conflicts. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

As an aged reader of histories, I often wonder at my seemingly insatiable appetite for more accounts of more events in more detail. Just can't get enough. We experienced pursuers of what's past pretty much know how "things," be they prominent persons' lives, or battles, or natural cataclysms, or whatever, turned out, that is, we know who won the battle, invented the whatever, caught the miscreant, etc., but we always want to know more. How many books can one read about, say, World War I, and not be completely sated? Well, it turns out, at least in my case, to be

just about every one that comes down the pike. No historian can ever adequately describe the convoluted causes, the military missteps, the human suffering, the nation-changing results. But they continue to try, and we continue to be fascinated by their efforts. I guess if my memory of relatively recent readings had served me better, I would have passed on Author Wheatcroft's latest effort in view of my reaction to his 2005 work, "Infidels." As with that earlier effort, "Enemy" gets off to a decent start but trails off in unsupported observations and uncertain conclusions. Two failings stand out in my mind. First, Mr. Wheatcroft possesses a distressingly dry and unimaginative writing style. If an author can't invigoratingly portray the inherent drama and human terror and suffering of the Siege of Vienna, then I don't know what other event could propel the effort. I understand that it was long ago and that the implicit sprawl of a siege does not lend itself to concise and engaging descriptions.

With only rudimentary knowledge about either the Ottoman Empire or the Holy Roman (Habsburg) One, I found Andrew Wheatcroft's "The Enemy at the Gate" to be a good primer about the empires, their epic clash in 1683, and 17th century European history generally. Although the narrative lacks focus, its heart - a study of the massive Ottoman campaign against the capital of the Habsburg Holy Roman Empire - is solid. The conquest of Vienna would have been the crown achievement of the Ottoman Empire, a victory to rival the conquest of Constantinople. Vienna had withstood a siege by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in 1521, and topping his achievement would have immortalized his distant successor, Mehmet IV. It was a battle for the glory of the empire and that of Islam - "to be hailed as the Conqueror of Vienna was an irresistible Prospect" (p. 82). Irresistible, but far fetched. From the get go, the Ottomans were disadvantaged - their troops, although superior to the Habsburg forces individually, were far less disciplined, and were unable to maneuver as ably. The Ottomans were facing an invasion of a well defended country in an era in which military maneuvering were moving away from pitch battles into sieges. By the late seventeenth Century, the Ottoman Habsburg border was littered with formidable castles. Vienna itself sported impressive defenses, admittedly poorly maintained. Mehmet's task was considerably more onerous than the one attempted by his legendary ancestor. Not that the Sultan was there to command the campaign - in fact, neither sovereign participated directly in the campaign. Mehmet IV, after accompanying his soldiers part of the way as a de jure commander, gave formal authority to his Grand Vizier, Kara Mustafa in Belgrade.

I must say that when I first bought this book, I didn't know what to expect. The reviews weren't the

best and this time in history wasn't one of my favorites. However, when I opened the book and started reading it, I was impressed. The pictures that it painted of this period of time, were very good. The Ottoman Empire of that period was a very dictatorial environment with the Sultan running everything and disobedience resulting in death. And, when they attacked a Christian city, the inhabitants were provided two options prior to the start of the siege - either surrender or die. At the end of the battles, if the inhabitants did not surrender, the results were truly barbaric. This was the lead in to the campaign that resulted in a near run affair of the siege of a major European city in 1683 - the siege of Vienna. The city was under siege for 2 months - and the book shares the specifics of the bombardment, the Ottoman mining (which they were very good at), the assaults of Ottomans (after mines were exploded taking down some of the city walls), the defense and the potential loss of the city. As the book continued through this section describing these events, I couldn't put it down. I kept wondering what it must have been like to experience this. And, what would have happened to the thousands of people in the city, if the city was taken. The highlight of the book is the arrival of the "cavalry". A joint army of units from Poland, Saxony and other locations arrives in the nick of time, fights a battle with the Ottomans that ends with a successful heroic attack of the Polish Winged Hussars. You can just picture the result as you are reading the book - the hussars attacking with their lances, chasing the Ottomans and routing them.

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