

The Enemy at the Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans, and the Battle for Europe

By Andrew Wheatcroft

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In 1683, an Ottoman army that stretched from horizon to horizon set out to seize the “Golden Apple,” as Turks referred to Vienna. The ensuing siege pitted battle-hardened Janissaries wielding seventeenth-century grenades against Habsburg armies, widely feared for their savagery. The walls of Vienna bristled with guns as the besieging Ottoman host launched bombs, fired cannons, and showered the populace with arrows during the battle for Christianity's bulwark. Each side was sustained by the hatred of its age-old enemy, certain that victory would be won by the grace of God.

The Great Siege of Vienna is the centerpiece for historian Andrew Wheatcroft's richly drawn portrait of the centuries-long rivalry between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires for control of the European continent. A gripping work by a master historian, *The Enemy at the Gate* offers a timely examination of an epic clash of civilizations.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal
Wheatcroft (director, Centre for Publishing Studies, Univ. of Stirling, Scotland; *Infidels*) offers a richly detailed account of the 1683 Ottoman siege of Vienna and subsequent battle with the Hapsburg central European forces. Although focusing on a single military campaign, Wheatcroft draws on decades of his own research on the Hapsburg-Ottoman conflict to provide needed historical context for the events of war. As Wheatcroft aptly states in his introduction, his is in fact a broader study that seeks to understand "Europe's fear of the Turks" within the frame of a specific Ottoman-Hapsburg military clash. Much of Wheatcroft's detail comes from European accounts of life in the Ottoman Empire and first-person descriptions of war, but the inherent bias in these sources is always acknowledged. As a result, Wheatcroft is able to move beyond tales of the "Terrible Turks" to provide a realistic portrayal of Ottoman leadership, a political context for the Hapsburg-Ottoman conflict, and a description of the shifting balance of power between these two dynasties. This is not a work of popular history for the casual reader, but scholars and students of history would benefit greatly from this well-researched account of 17th-century Ottoman-Hapsburg political power.—Veronica Arellano, Univ. of Houston Libs.
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From Booklist
Four centuries ago, the West really was involved in a seminal “clash of cultures” against an aggressive Islamic power, and that struggle reached its zenith at the siege of Vienna in 1683. Wheatcroft has written a fast-moving and exciting account of this sustained conflict and the history-turning siege that may well have preserved the Christian character of Europe. Since their smashing defeat of the Byzantines at Manzikert in 1071, Turkish nomadic warriors had threatened Europe, but the Ottomans had harnessed the power of an efficient state to their superior logistics and mobile cavalry. On the front line opposing the Ottoman advance were the forces of the polyglot Hapsburg Empire. Wheatcroft indicates that the Hapsburgs had their own particular assets, including a superbly trained infantry, and an effective, largely Polish cavalry. Relying to a large extent on contemporary Hapsburg sources, Wheatcroft offers an outstanding blow-by-blow description of the siege, which in the end was decided through a combination of luck and several critical Ottoman blunders. --Jay Freeman

Review

New York Times Book Review
“As Andrew Wheatcroft brilliantly shows in *The Enemy at the Gate*, the skirmishes and the pitched battles that raged for centuries between Habsburgs and Ottomans, and their numerous vassals on both sides, represented not so much a ‘clash of civilizations' as a collision of empires…. [H]is narrative is thrilling as well as thoughtful, a rare combination.”

Washington Times
“There are two stories here worth telling and well told: the blood-and-thunder tale of the heroic defense of Vienna against the Ottomans in 1683, the surge in morale after the Habsburg victory, and the war to recover Hungary and the Balkans from the Turks. The other story is of the obsessive fear and hatred of the Turks in Christian central Europe, exorcised by the Habsburg victory at Vienna, turning to revenge and reconquest led first by Duke Charles of Lorraine, then by the legendary Prince Eugene of Savoy, ending in exhausted and bankrupt stability.”

Telegraph
"[A] riveting narrative, Andrew Wheatcroft's *The Enemy at the Gate*…tells the story of the final Habsburg-Ottoman showdown at the gates of Vienna in 1683, one of the genuine turning points in European history."

Choice
"Wheatcroft's real contribution is his illustration of complex Ottoman administrative and military structures. In fact, the book reveals these to have been a main source of Ottoman power; not, as many have suggested, the provocation of fear through terror or oriental savagery. Wheatcroft also adeptly addresses important historiographical questions about Ottoman decline, the dangers of over-reliance on secondary source materials, syncretism of nomadic steppe tradition with Islamic values, and fine contrasts between Ottoman and European military techniques."

Journal of Military History
"Andrew Wheatcroft writes exciting and provocative books, and *The Enemy at the Gate* is no exception…. As battle history this book is great…. The descriptions of the fortifications, weapons, tactics, attacks, and counterattacks are vivid and compelling…. Even though the reader knows how the siege will turn out, he/she is eager to turn the next page to see if the next explosion and attack will enable the Turks to get into the city."

The Weekly Standard
" "[Wheatcroft's] fourth book is primarily a military history of the clashes between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires in the 17th century, the fruit of more than 20 years researching in the field…. Some of the most suggestive material here is on military organization, equipment, and tactics."

Victor Davis Hanson, *First Things*
"Wheatcroft offers a riveting account of the slow, methodical Ottoman approach to Vienna…. [A] masterful account of the siege and battle."

Michigan War Studies Review
"Wheatcroft displays exceptional awareness of the power of the printed word not only to crystallize and reproduce specific facts or news for a mass audience, but to preserve and especially propagate a particular opinion of a given subject. Throughout, he strives to distinguish between the actual siege of Vienna in 1683 and the one preserved in the Western imagination, noting print's power to distort and undervalue the humanity of the Ottoman Turks."

Independent
"Andrew Wheatcroft's *The Enemy at the Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans and the Battle for Europe* brilliantly reconstructs the climactic conflict between Muslim 'East' and Christian 'West', at Vienna in 1683."

Telegraph
"A masterpiece of historical writing….The story of the siege reads as compellingly as a Dumas novel."

Literary Review

"Intensely gripping… *The Enemy at the Gate* is rich and multilayered… Wheatcroft has done us all a service."

Sunday Telegraph
"A fascinating and compelling story, a clash between a mighty besieging army and one of the major cities of Europe, involving extraordinary efforts and sacrifices on both sides."

Financial Times
"Ambitious…Wheatcroft is undeniably expert in his field."

Times Higher Education Supplement
"It is one of the book's strengths that it demonstrates how far Ottomans, Habsburgs and the rest of Europe lived in a common world with borders that were more porous than we usually imagine."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Ybarra:

A lot of people always spent their own free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them family or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. In order to try to find a new activity here is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun in your case. If you enjoy the book that you just read you can spent all day every day to reading a book. The book The Enemy at the Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans, and the Battle for Europe it is extremely good to read. There are a lot of those who recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. Should you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book from a smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book features high quality.

Helen Thibodeaux:

Your reading 6th sense will not betray you actually, why because this The Enemy at the Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans, and the Battle for Europe reserve written by well-known writer we are excited for well how to make book which can be understand by anyone who else read the book. Written in good manner for you, dripping every ideas and producing skill only for eliminate your own personal hunger then you still doubt The Enemy at the Gate: Habsburgs, Ottomans, and the Battle for Europe as good book not only by the cover but also by content. This is one e-book that can break don't ascertain book by its deal with, so do you still needing yet another sixth sense to pick this kind of!? Oh come on your looking at sixth sense already told you so why you have to listening to another sixth sense.

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Karl Wolfe:

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