

## VIENNA 1683: CHRISTIAN EUROPE REPELS THE OTTOMANS

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The 1683 Siege of Vienna by an Ottoman army of 200,000 lasted from July to September of that year, until it was broken at the Battle of Kahlenburg by the Imperial relief force led by Jan III Sobieski of Poland. The siege represented the high-water mark of Ottoman expansion into Europe, and set in motion events which would eventually see the dismemberment of the powerful Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the rise of Russia and Prussia. Within a century, the traditional balance of power in Eastern and Central Europe would be completely altered. The continuing struggle between Islam and Christian Europe saw Ottoman holdings in Europe shrink over the next 200 years to encompass only the Balkans. Ottoman rule in the region influenced the thinking and attitudes of political elites, the Orthodox Church and social and intellectual development, ensuring that the “border of the shrinking enclave of what

came to be called “Turkey in Europe” formed one of Europe’s most deep-seated cultural fault lines.”<sup>1</sup> The Siege was an important turning point in a struggle which has lasted two millennia and still reverberates today.

This is the 191<sup>st</sup> title in the very successful Osprey Campaign series and *Vienna 1683* follows the proven and familiar format. Seven full-colour maps and a two-page 3D “birds-eye view” of the Battle of Kahlenburg support the text at appropriate locations. Dozens of contemporary maps and panoramic views are presented along with very colourful illustrations of critical points in the campaign and climactic battles. Some of the period battle maps are not reproduced large enough, making it difficult to distinguish geographic features from troop placements and movement. These are fascinating documents which deserved to be better emphasized.

In the opening chapters, the author quickly launches into this complex story to set the stage for the Ottoman decision to advance on Austria and its capital, Vienna. A brief outline of the major encounters from the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century illustrate the intense conflict between Christian Europe and Islam as the Ottomans spread their influence through the Balkans and around the Mediterranean. This is followed by an account of the decline in the quality of Ottoman leadership through out the 17<sup>th</sup> Century as a series of inept Sultans were succeeded by children or were deposed by the Janissaries. As the author states, it is fortunate for Europe that Ottoman leadership was in a weakened state during the period of the Thirty Years War and was unable to exploit the situation. Imperial Austria, involved on two fronts, was preoccupied with the rise of French power and influence on its Western borders, and had difficulty dealing with the Ottoman threat. The prelude to the battle includes a rather thin order of battle, but has useful biographies of the main political and military leaders. An examination of the opposing forces is of necessity brief, but touches on the major characteristics and aspects of the Imperial, Polish-Lithuanian and Ottoman armies.

The bulk of the book deals with Ottoman strategic decisions made on their advance toward Vienna, and the military, political and financial difficulties encountered by Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor, to organize a coalition to respond to the invasion. The harrowing experience of the Viennese defenders during the siege and Ottoman siege tactics are well described. The author is able to recreate some of the drama of the climactic Battle of

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Kahlenburg which saw the charge of the magnificent Polish Winged Hussars into the heart of the Ottoman camp.

Not so well handled is the aftermath of the battle, as only the period immediately following the lifting of the siege and the subsequent retreat are covered. The significance of the campaign and battle should have been placed in historical context, with at least as much effort as was dedicated to the prelude to the battle.

The final chapter is a description of the battlefield as it is today. The book is rounded out by a fascinating bibliography which includes some contemporary works. This volume is recommended as an introduction to the Siege of Vienna, and will add to the curiously short list of titles in English dealing with this event.

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## Endnote

1. Davies, Norman, *Europe: A History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996) 646
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