The Siege of Vienna

1529

The History and Legacy of the Decisive Battle that Prevented the Ottoman Empire's Expansion into Western Europe

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A contemporary engraving of the siege

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In terms of geopolitics, perhaps the most seminal event of the Middle Ages was the successful Ottoman siege of Constantinople in 1453. The city had been an imperial capital as far back as the 4th century, when Constantine the Great shifted the power center of the Roman Empire there, effectively establishing two almost equally powerful halves of antiquity's greatest empire. Constantinople would continue to serve as the capital of the Byzantine Empire even after the Western half of the Roman Empire collapsed in the late 5th century. Naturally, the Ottoman Empire would also use Constantinople as the capital of its empire after their conquest effectively ended the Byzantine Empire, and thanks to its strategic location, it has been a trading center for years and remains one today under the Turkish name of Istanbul.

The end of the Byzantine Empire had a profound effect not only on the Middle East but Europe as well. Constantinople had played a crucial part in the Crusades, and the fall of the Byzantines meant that the Ottomans now shared a border with Europe. The Islamic empire was viewed as a threat by the predominantly Christian continent to their west, and it took little time for different European nations to start clashing with the powerful Turks. In fact, the Ottomans would clash with Russians, Austrians, Venetians, Polish, and more before collapsing as a result of World War I, when they were part of the Central powers.

The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople also played a decisive role in fostering the Renaissance in Western Europe. The Byzantine Empire's influence had helped ensure that it was the custodian of various ancient texts, most notably from the ancient Greeks, and when Constantinople fell, Byzantine refugees flocked west to seek refuge in Europe. Those refugees brought books that helped spark an interest in antiquity that fueled the Italian Renaissance and essentially put an end to the Middle Ages altogether.

In the wake of taking Constantinople, the Ottoman Empire would spend the next few centuries expanding its size, power, and influence, bumping up against Eastern Europe and becoming one of the world's most important geopolitical players. It would take repeated efforts by various European coalitions to prevent a complete Ottoman takeover of the continent, and one of the most important battles among those efforts took place at Vienna in 1529.

At the time, the Ottomans were led by one of their most famous sultans, Suleiman the Magnificent, and different chroniclers have analyzed Suleiman's behavior in different ways. There is a plethora of opinions as to his motives for attempting the takeover of Vienna, a well-guarded city far away from his empire's center. Had he intended to conquer the whole of the Holy Roman Empire? Had he intended to strengthen his borders? Had he acted in accordance with King Francis I's needs in the West? No matter the reason, Suleiman did not halt in his advances, despite the fact circumstances were not favorable for the Ottomans. The summer rains had already begun when he set out for Vienna, making most of the roads inaccessible both for cavalry and moving the heavy pieces of artillery needed for a successful siege. The camels brought from Anatolia proved too sensitive for

the cold, constant rain and died in large numbers, and many of the soldiers shared the same fate.

By the time they arrived around Vienna in late September, the Ottoman forces were heavily depleted, and many siege armaments had been left behind when stuck in the mud. The population of Vienna had seen the enemy coming, giving them plenty of time to reinforce, strengthen, and prepare. When they launched the siege, the Ottoman forces lacked conviction, making it easy to fight back during the initial attacks. After making no real progress, the soldiers lost their motivation when the weather took a turn for the worse shortly into the siege. Suleiman's supply of food and water diminished, and the troops were close to mutiny. In a final “all or nothing” attempt, the Ottomans attacked with all the strength they had left, trying to break Vienna's fortifications, which refused to yield. Suleiman accepted defeat, gathered his men, and returned to Anatolia. The hasty departure from Vienna resulted in the loss of heavy armaments, as well as troops and prisoners in the heavy snowfall.

Modern historians speculate as to why Suleiman persisted with the siege even though the Ottoman forces were evidently weaker than the forces in Vienna upon their arrival. As an experienced, strategic warrior, it is most likely he realized his disadvantage and the full scale of his potential losses. It was also probable that the last burst of attacks was merely a means with which to weaken the city walls for a future siege. The second attempt, in 1532, was met with the same mix of bad luck and good defenses, and Vienna marked the limit of Ottoman advances in the West.

The Siege of Vienna (1529): The History and Legacy of the Decisive Battle that Marked the Beginning of the Ottoman-Habsburg Wars chronicles the events and conflicts that led to one of Europe’s most important battles. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the siege like never before.

The Rise of the Ottoman Empire

By the middle of the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was one of the largest and most powerful states in the world. With its capital in Constantinople, the old capital of the vanquished Byzantine Empire, it straddled Asia, Europe, and Africa. The sway of the sultan was felt east to the Euphrates, north to the Danube, west to Algiers, and south to Arabia. It was the largest and most powerful of the Muslim states, and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire claimed the title Caliph, head of the global Islamic community.

It is often referred to as the Ottoman Turkish Empire, but this is a misnomer since the idea of Turkish nationalism did not become a reality before the 20th century. With the takeover of Crimea and Peloponnesus, the Ottomans had come to dominate trade on the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. In the perfect location to be the only gateway between Europe and Asia, the Ottoman Empire became a

natural melting pot, which greatly benefited both the rulers and the people living under the empire.

The empire was based upon the supremacy of the descendants of Osman (Westernized as “Ottoman”), the 13th century Turkish founder of the dynasty. Sultans of the Ottoman dynasty were heads of a clan rather than feudal sovereigns in the Western sense, as their family, followers, slaves and subject peoples were considered members of the dynastic household. Ethnically Turkish members of this imperial household were in the minority, and the Ottomans ruled a truly multiethnic state. A member of any ethnic group could attain high office, so ranking officials might have been Slavic, Greek, Armenian, Persian, or Arab, to name but a few of the many nationalities under Ottoman rule.

The Sultan, as head of the Ottoman family, had absolute power over all his subjects in theory, but in practice, the exercise of that power was limited by Islamic Law as interpreted by the *ulema,* the council of Islamic scholars. His authority was also largely delegated to the Grand Vizier, the chief minister of the sultan, who not only executed the imperial will, but also commanded the sultan’s armies. The two principal obligations of the sultan were to administer justice and to wage *jihad*, the sacred war for the defense of Islam against unbelievers.

In the late 15th century, Sultan Bayezid II's emphasis was to keep the empire together, to coalesce and strengthen the state apparatus, and integrate minorities with the same incentives as his father. Except for a military campaign that resulted in full control over the Peloponnese and some minor battles with the Shah of Iran in the east, Bayezid did not take to expanding the empire further by conquest. He is most remembered for the evacuation of Jewish and Muslim populations persecuted by the Inquisition in the newly formed Spain. His action bears witness as to the high level of tolerance in the Ottoman Empire, where they not only welcomed refugees but helped them to escape. The cruelty of the Spanish Inquisition stands out in clear contrast to the policies which guaranteed a certain level of religious freedom. Bayezid sent his trusted vizier with an Ottoman fleet to ensconce religious minorities in the Ottoman territories. Bayezid is said to have laughed at the stupidity of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain for “impoverishing their own country and enriching mine!” The Jewish minority was seen as an asset, useful both culturally and economically, and Bayezid encouraged his subjugates to welcome the refugees with open arms.

He became known as “Bayezid the Just,” and his reign was the beginning of what historians today call the Pax Ottomana, a reference to the Pax Romana, which was a period of peace and prosperity for the Roman Empire. Historians using the term Pax Ottomana refer to the time of Bayezid II and the two following emperors, who also shared the goal of developing laws and regulations, giving people freedom and responsibilities as citizens, strengthening the authoritarian rule of the sultan, and building strong relationships of trust between the sultan, viziers, officials, judges, the military, and people. The work had been initiated by Mehmed II, and his successors realized the benefits of building a state based on liberation rather than subjugation, thus gaining respect and dedication in all lines. Apart from the development of political institutions, Bayezid II shared the same interest in culture, religion, science, and education as his father, and the court looked upon other cultures as an opportunity to learn and share.

As Bayezid grew older, his sons became hungry for power and coveted the throne. Even before he was dead, civil war broke out in 1509 between Ahmet and Selim, two of his sons. Ahmet gathered an unexpected army and succeeded in conquering Karamanid, as well as fighting back a Safavid uproar in Asia Minor. Bolstered by the success, he turned toward Constantinople, where his aging father refused to let him in. In his place, Selim found support among the Janissaries and defeated and killed Ahmet in battle. Selim then, more or less, forced his father to abdicate at the age of 62. Bayezid II withdrew to retire in the territory where he'd been born. Just as mysterious and sudden as his father had, Bayezid died on the road, possibly poisoned by the newly-acclaimed emperor.

Illustration:
Selim I

Selim started his reign by executing his other brothers and chased his nephew, Ahmet's son, into exile. Selim's rule was short but efficient and is generally considered a break in the Pax Ottomana. One cause for Selim's more bellicose persona in comparison to both his father and his future heir was a rising threat in the east; after several decades of relative peace and internal stability, the Sunni Ottoman Muslims discovered a new enemy in the Shiite Persians. Persian Shah Ismail was on a quest to spread Shia Islam all throughout Eurasia, Asia Minor, and across the border into Anatolia. This was the beginning of an ongoing antagonism between Shia and Sunni Islam, thanks to a mutual, personal derision between Selim and Shah Ismail, who sent messages containing insults back and forth while marching into battle with each other. Selim had also put a very strict embargo on Persian silk by shutting Persia's borders, intending to close Ismail off from the rest of the world's trade. While marching on Persia, Selim was treated to scorched earth tactics as Ismail drew further back into his kingdom, trying to starve the Ottoman armies. He was also fighting the Uzbek in the Far East, and his applicable forces were fewer than the large army coming from the west. When they caught up in Chaldiran in August 1514 after only two years of Selim's rule, the Turks were weakened but still outnumbered the Safavids under Ismail's rule.

The battle was swift and acutely executed. What made the victory even more decisive was access to artillery, something the Ottomans had acquired under Mehmed II that the Persian Shah repeatedly had refused to do. Selim gained large amounts of land in northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and present-day Azerbaijan, while the influence of the Shah diminished. He withdrew to his palace, never to be seen on a battlefield again.

After this success, Selim went on to complete his grandfather's dreams of conquering Egypt, currently under the rule of the Mamluks, where, in Cairo, the last Abbasid Caliph sat on the throne. Again, the Ottomans were faced with a traditionally equipped enemy army, proud to use bow and arrow instead of modernizing their armaments. Against the skilled Janissaries equipped with modern firearms and arquebuses, they didn't stand much of a chance, and Syria was conquered in a single battle. Shortly thereafter, Egypt was defeated after two quick battles, and the Caliph was exiled to Constantinople.

At that time, Selim was in possession of Damascus, Cairo, and Jerusalem, causing the Arabian Peninsula to fear that he was coming for Mecca and Medina. The Sharif of Mecca submitted to Selim without a fight, and with that the holiest cities of Islam had fallen into his hands easier than could have been anticipated. This was a significant conquest, as it shifted the center of the empire from the old Byzantine past toward important, Arabic Islamic strongholds. Selim was graced with the humble title of “The Servant of the Two Holy Cities”, and today it is debated whether or not the exiled Caliph transferred his title to Selim, as historians from the 17th century had claimed. Since Selim did not exercise any sacred rights following his possible elevation, modern historians conclude this was not the case.

Selim's reign lasted only eight years, but his legacy was of great importance to what would come with Suleiman, the next ruler. The eight years of conquest expanded the area of the Ottoman Empire by 70%, an expansion made possible thanks to Selim's father and grandfather's interest in science and modernisation. The acquisition of superior armaments and weapons proved pivotal in battles with the traditionally equipped Safavid and Mamluk armies, whereas the modernisation of the Ottoman armies had started since the conquest of Constantinople under the lead of Mehmed II some 60 years earlier. The Janissaries had developed into a very strong and forceful nucleus, which played a major part in Selim's successful conquests. Together with the fiscal and political apparatus improved under Bayezid II, the Ottoman Empire became a world force, ready to take the lead in political, economic, cultural, and military arenas in and outside their territory. All of this paved the way for the real apogee of the Ottoman Empire under the rule of Selim's successor, Suleiman the Magnificent. Suleiman was 27 at the time of his father's death, mature enough to revive the Pax Ottomana within his empire.

Illustration:
Suleiman the Magnificent

Suleiman the Magnificent and the Start of the Campaign

By the time of Suleiman’s ascension, the Ottoman Empire was already in good condition. It was politically stable, culturally flourishing, dominating trade in the area, and in possession of a superior military organisation, which allowed Suleiman I to continue his predecessors’ work without much need to change the direction of the empire. Selim's aggressive rule left the Janissaries efficient and strong, the Mamluks defeated, and the holy cities subsumed into the empire. The Republic of Venice in the west, as well as the Safavids in the east, had been weakened, and for the first time, the Ottoman had a fleet able to challenge old trade structures and rise as a new dominant power on the seas. Things were going well, and Suleiman intended to keep it that way.

While his somewhat belligerent father had been shaped by his fiery temperament and harsh judgment, Suleiman was more prudent and of a calmer and more pragmatic mind. One of his first actions as sultan was to lift the

embargo on the silk trade to and from Persia, which had hurt Turkish traders as much as the Safavids. He then instituted a tax on all citizens, which meant that no matter what a person's ranking or standing was, they would still be subject to taxes. Instead of the whimsical exceptions for people of certain families or descent, the new, transparent tax system would have everyone pay taxes according to their income, a system still largely used today. He later instituted protections for Christians and Jews, freeing them from serfdom and giving the millets authority to rule their subjects according to their religion. Historians called Suleiman “the Magnificent”, but to his contemporaries, he became known as “the Lawgiver”.

Suleiman had expansionist dreams—not unlike any other Ottoman sultan—and he was immediately thrown into action when an uprising started in Damascus in 1521. Suleiman personally went to fight his first battle as sultan and won quite easily when the treacherous, Ottoman-appointed governor was killed in the same battle. Later that year, Suleiman rode west aiming for Belgrade, one of the last Christian strongholds in Ottoman territory, under the rule of the Hungarian Kingdom at the time. By using both infantry, cavalry, and heavy siege armaments from land as well as a flotilla of ships hindering potential aid arriving via the Danube, Belgrade's futile attempts to defend itself were of little use, and the city fell in less than two months.

The Ottoman expansion continued targeting Christians, as had been the habit for many hundreds of years. Though the founders of the Ottoman Empire—Osman and his first successor, Orhan—had not been strong advocates of the Islamic faith, religion was an integral part of both private and official life in the empire. In the 16th century, it had become such a strong, defining element that most campaigns led by Ottoman sultans were religious in nature, whether against the old Christian enemies or the new Shiite Muslim opponents in the east. Because of this, Suleiman was compelled to march south toward Rhodes to expel the Knight Hospitallers who had resided on the island since the time of the Crusades. The knights had become a nuisance to many groups of surrounding Muslims of late, mostly through acts of piracy. The knights captured ships from the Ottomans and other Muslim states, stealing valuable goods and cargo and enslaving the Muslim crews. They also attacked Muslim ships passing by on their way to perform Hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage, in Mecca. This was something Selim had failed to put to an end during his reign and which Suleiman made his priority.

The residing knights had already anticipated an attack from the Ottomans and had been fortifying their capital using Muslim slaves as labor. By the time of the siege of Rhodes, the capital of the island had three rings of stone walls as protection and the knights were prepared for the vengeful Ottomans heading their way. Starting with a fleet of 400 ships followed by an army of 100,000 men led by Suleiman himself, the siege started in June 1522. The fortifications resisted the fury of Ottoman bombings and gunpowder mines, and the inhabitants of Rhodes refused to acquiesce to Suleiman. After months of waves of invigorating progress followed by demoralising setbacks, both sides were exhausted. No other Christian allies had come to aid the Knights Hospitallers when the Ottomans had a slight upper-hand in the internecine siege. Through major losses, it was just a matter of time before the walls would eventually give in.

Illustration:
A medieval depiction of Turkish Janissaries laying siege to Rhodes

A truce was negotiated in November, but the population's demands for safety and privileges were too high for Suleiman to accept. The siege continued for another month until the civilians had finally had enough and pressured the knights' Grand Master to negotiate peace. Suleiman showed no acrimony and gave the knights—as well as the civil population—generous terms. The knights were given 12 days to leave and allowed to take weapons, personal belongings, and any religious relics they wanted along with them. The population was given the possibility to live under Ottoman rule for three years and were able to leave whenever they wanted during this trial period. The people who chose to permanently settle on the island would be free of taxes for five years and guaranteed freedom of religion under the promise that no churches would be desecrated and turned into mosques. Most of the population stayed on the island, now a part of the Ottoman Empire. The knights marched from the city in January of the following year onto Suleiman's ships heading for Crete. He had chosen not to annihilate the Knights Hospitaller—something many of his predecessors might have done—after the successful siege. His aim had been to control trade in the Mediterranean, a goal he achieved in the name of Islam. Instead of instigating fear and hatred, his prudent nature and diplomatic solutions earned him respect across Europe and Central Asia, which was uncommon for a conqueror of his measures.

After Rhodes, he resumed his European campaign, which was preceded by some remarkable circumstances. The Habsburg Dynasty had taken over the lead of the Holy Roman Empire, currently under the rule of Charles V, one of the strongest rulers in medieval and Renaissance Europe. Charles V had chosen to battle the Franks, imprisoning their king after he ceded significant land to the Holy Roman Empire. Now, French King Francis I turned to Suleiman to form an unholy alliance against the Habsburg Empire, an alliance that greatly shocked and offended the Christian world. As it turned out, it was an alliance that would last over three centuries.

Illustration:
Charles V

Illustration:
Francis I

When Francis asked Suleiman to wage war on the Habsburgs, residing in Vienna, it coincided with Suleiman's aim to conquer Hungary, a task that would be made easier by Hungarian infighting. The Kingdom of Hungary was in disarray at the time, as the nobility was at loggerheads with their king, Louis II, and each other. Border castles fell into disrepair, soldiers went unpaid, peasants revolted, and ambitious nobles resisted royal attempts to improve taxation and defenses. A royal army of 60,000 men raised to retake Belgrade disbanded due to disease and a lack of supplies. In desperation, Louis sought alliances, and in 1522, he married

Mary of Habsburg. Mary was the daughter of Philip I, King of Spain, Duke of Burgundy and Lord of the Netherlands, and Joanna, Queen of Aragon. The Habsburgs were one of the most powerful families in Europe at the time—Maximilian I von Habsburg was the Holy Roman Emperor and Archduke of Austria.

Illustration:
Louis II

Illustration:
Maximilian I

Suleiman did not immediately set his sights set on conquering all of Hungary, and he seemed to have initially contented himself with Belgrade. However, King Francis I had urged the sultan to attack Austria as part of the alliance, and Hungary was directly in the path.

In April 1526, Louis II learned that a vast host had departed from Constantinople, so he called upon the nobles to defend the realm, but this time less than 40,000 rallied to his side. The help promised by the Habsburgs did not materialize either, as Habsburg money and arms had been committed to a war against the French in Italy. Suleiman's army was more than twice that size, and the sultan was reportedly astonished at the opposition's poor strength.[1] The Ottoman artillery alone, which usually outmatched that of Western armies, outnumbered the Hungarians by more than two to one.

The royal army was subsequently overwhelmed at Mohacs on the Danube near the present border with Serbia on August 29, 1526, and more than 20,000 Hungarian soldiers perished, including King Louis II. The government was now paralyzed, and Ottoman troops burned and pillaged all the way to the capital of Buda.[2] When Suleiman entered the city, he ordered that it should not be sacked and presently returned to Constantinople, but the Hungarian nobility had not been entirely vanquished, and Voivode (governor) of Transylvania John Zápolya commanded a sizeable force, which he, inexplicably, had not committed at Mohacs. The chance of a Hungarian recovery would very much depend on the monarch who would replace Louis II.

Illustration:
John Zápolya

The crown of Hungary was elective and relied on the nobility for support, and Louis had no clear successors. Normally, the nobles would choose the son of the late monarch, but Louis had died without legitimate issue, so two candidates naturally presented themselves. One was Voivode John Zápolya, who was wealthy, had the respect of the untitled gentry, and, most importantly, commanded the only army in Hungary strong enough to contest the Ottomans. The other was a Habsburg, Archduke Ferdinand I of Austria, who, along with being married to the late king's sister, represented the only power that could plausibly guarantee Hungary's integrity.

Since most of the pro-Habsburg nobility perished at Mohacs, only a small group of the landed class supported the archduke's candidature, so on November 10, 1526, the Diet of Székesfehérvár elected Zápolya king. However, the nobles elected Ferdinand at Pozsony (Bratislava) a month later. On October 24, the nobles of Bohemia, a kingdom in personal union with Hungary, had already accepted the Habsburg prince. In January 1527, the nobility of Croatia, long a part of the Hungarian Crown, also elected Ferdinand.

Illustration:
Ferdinand I

From the start, Ferdinand was hampered in pressing his claim for Hungary on account of the wars of his brother, Emperor Charles V, in Italy. That changed on May 6, 1527, when 20,000 imperial troops, many of whom were Protestants who believed the pope was the antichrist, sacked the city of Rome without the Catholic emperor's knowledge. The atrocity outraged the Catholic world and made it easier for Ferdinand to withdraw his support and redirect it to Zápolya. The archduke's troops captured Buda while John, engaged in a pro-Habsburg revolt in southern Hungary, struggled to raise an army. On September 27, he encountered Archduke Ferdinand at Tarcal with a heavily outnumbered army and was crushed. About a month later, on November 3, Ferdinand was crowned king of Hungary.

In the wake of the defeat, John fled to Transylvania, where he was Voivode, and raised another army. He was again defeated at Szina in present-day Slovakia on March 20, 1538. This time, he was forced to flee the country and found refuge in the court of Sigismund I of Poland. The magnates switched their allegiance to Ferdinand, leaving John with little support.

Zápolya was not to be thwarted, and one might wonder if this was due to overweening ambition or insatiable hatred of the Habsburgs that compelled him to ask Suleiman for help. Ferdinand, too, sent envoys to the sultan, pursuing not an alliance but peace, for the Habsburg finances were depleted. Still, the Hungarians attempted to bluff the sultan into thinking Ferdinand was more powerful than he was by demanding the restoration of Belgrade. Suleiman was no doubt delighted that both rival monarchs waited upon him, and in the end, he resolved to support Zápolya on the condition that he become a vassal. A secret compact was signed between Suleiman and Zápolya, obliging the latter to pay an annual tribute, fight in the sultan's wars, allow Ottoman troops to be garrisoned in Hungary, and give the Ottomans 10% of the Hungarian population every 10 years.

Suleiman gathered a great army in the summer of 1528, but it was hampered by such violent rain that its stores were destroyed and the soldiers were endangered by flooding. A year later, another giant army left Constantinople for Hungary. Oddly, Ferdinand did not take advantage of the year's respite to prepare, especially since the Austrian Habsburgs were enjoying a time of relative peace. Pope Clement VII urged him to rally his forces and excommunicated John Zápolya, who called upon the princes of Christendom to support his cause. Ferdinand may have believed Suleiman was merely blustering to gain a diplomatic advantage, given that the Ottomans had withdrawn from Hungary in 1526, presumably because they believed they could not hold it. If this is what the Habsburg king of

Hungary believed, it would explain why he could have been so bold as to demand Belgrade the previous year. He may also have been heartened by the especially wet spring of 1529, which was similar to that of the previous year and turned the roads to mud, destroyed supplies, slowed the march of the Ottoman host, and forced it to abandon some of its artillery. Suleiman was likely reminded of the campaign he abandoned in 1528 for precisely the same reason, but he still had no reason to believe the siege would succeed. After all, Ottoman sappers and engineers were among the best in the world, and they theoretically could mine the already weakened walls of Vienna, causing them to collapse.

Despite the difficulties, an Ottoman advance guard of 30,000 crossed the Danube in June and began devastating the land, pillaging and burning towns and villages, and enslaving their inhabitants. Soon after, John Zápolya, with 6,000 men, joined Suleiman and the main host at Mohacs, the scene of the Hungarian army's slaughter in 1526. On September 7, they were before the walls of Buda, defended by about a thousand Germans and Hungarians under an officer named Thomas Nadasky. Most of the population had already fled, but he was intent on defending the city to the last. After four days of bombardment, the Ottomans stormed the city and drove the garrison to the inner citadel. Against Nadasky's orders, it surrendered to Suleiman upon the promise of life and liberty. Shortly thereafter, the soldiers were massacred, though probably not by Suleiman's order since he had a reputation for keeping his word. John Zápolya was enthroned as the sultan’s vassal, and a small Ottoman garrison was installed as the great army headed toward the Austrian frontier. Suleiman had made up his mind to utterly defeat Ferdinand, and he would march on the imperial city of Vienna.

The Armies

Suleiman likely targeted the city of Vienna for several reasons. It was the seat of the Austrian Habsburgs, and its possession would secure Hungary from a western attack. Moreover, it was on the Danube, a strategic position allowing the Ottomans to control important river trade all the way to the Black Sea. From Vienna, Ottoman troops could move into southern Germany, the heartland of Europe, and even into Italy through the Alpine passes.

The conquest of Vienna would also be a profoundly symbolic victory, for it was the seat of the Habsburg Empire in Germany. The head of the dynasty, Charles V, was Holy Roman Emperor, the titular head of all Christendom, but the Ottoman sultan also styled himself Kayser-i-Rum, "Emperor of the Romans," a title the Ottomans assumed after defeating the Byzantines in Constantinople. Naturally, Suleiman thought it intolerable there should be two Roman emperors, and Vienna was therefore an affront to the dignity of the Ottoman Empire.

When Ferdinand learned that Suleiman was on the march, he left Vienna to muster troops from his dominions in Syria, Carinthia, and Bohemia. Besides being the hereditary ruler of the Austrian lands, he was vice-regent for his brother Charles in Germany, so in theory he could call upon the German princes to come

to his aid. In reality, however, the Teutonic realm was divided by religious conflict and on the verge of civil war between Protestants and Catholics.

Ferdinand was still just 26 and had been raised in the Spanish court, but he possessed both diplomatic skill and appeal, and he convened the Diet of Speyer to ask for help in his brother's name. Ultimately, the princes only committed 12,000 on foot and 4,000 on horse, but they didn't see action, owing to squabbles over who should command them and an insistence that envoys of the Diet should be sent to ascertain the danger for themselves. Charles V, for his part, sent a contingent of about 1,000 German mercenaries, while the widowed Queen of Hungary, Mary, sent 700-800 Spanish arquebusiers. With Austrian and Bohemian levies, the defending force was between 17,000 and 21,000 strong.[3]

Ferdinand removed his court to Prague and commissioned Philip, Count-Palatine of the House of Wittelsbach, to oversee Vienna's defense. The count-palatine was assisted by *Hofmeister* (governor) Wilhelm von Roggendorf. Aged 48 at the time, Roggendorf was from an ancient Styrian family who had ruled Lower Austria (northern Austria) in the name of the Habsburgs since 1491, and he had served as *Statdholder* (governor) of Friesland for Charles V before coming to Germany. His brother-in-law was Nicholas, Count of Salm-Reifferscheidt and commander of the mercenaries sent by the emperor. Nicholas was 70, but he was an experienced soldier and had distinguished himself at the Battle of Pavia only a year earlier, where he fought alongside Charles V to defeat and capture Francis I. The Spanish arquebusiers were commanded by Marshal Luis de Avalos, fresh from the Italian wars, where his soldiers valiantly performed.

In 1529, their opponent, Suleiman, was only 31 but had already been in power for years and had taken Rhodes from the Knights Hospitaller in 1522, which sent tremors of apprehension throughout the Christian world. The Ottoman military, already the most powerful in the region, was enhanced not so much by his military talent but by his administrative and organizational reforms. He had restructured the economy, made the collection of taxes more efficient, and codified the legal system, allowing him to raise huge armies and fleets relatively quickly. Besides being a gifted legislator, he was a man of culture, encouraging the arts and furthering religion. Above all, he was deeply conscious of being the leader and protector of Islam, the Commander of the Faithful, and the Shadow of God on Earth. This was his chief role, and it was probably his mindfulness of this, not his personal ambition, that drove him toward Vienna.

Suleiman was commander-in-chief, but the day-to-day command of the army was entrusted to Grand Vizier Pargali Ibrahim Pasha. The Grand Vizier was the chief minister of the Ottoman Empire and the most powerful figure next to the sultan. He was more of a vice-regent than a prime minister, acting with a great deal of independence on the sultan's behalf. It was, therefore, vital that the sultan knew his vizier's mind intimately. This was certainly the case with Ibrahim, who entered Suleiman's service as a slave around the year 1514 and became his childhood friend. His parents were Greek-speaking Christians from Epirus in northwest Greece. Named Grand Vizier in 1523, he became the power behind the throne so rapidly that foreign powers considered an audience with Ibrahim Pasha more advantageous than with the sultan.

Illustration:
An engraving of Ibrahim Pasha

The army Suleiman and Ibrahim Pasha brought to Vienna was around 120,000 strong, though only 100,000 participated in the siege directly. It consisted of infantry, cavalry, artillery, and an engineering corps in addition to non-combat personnel and paramilitary units that performed functions such as scouting and guarding approaches. The janissaries formed the elite of the infantry. They were slave-soldiers, taken from Christian families by the *devshirme* or child levy. Boys were taken at about the age of 10 to Constantinople, converted to Islam, and educated in the military arts, culture, and the civil sciences, and many went on to become state functionaries. Devshirme slaves were considered members of the imperial household and were dependent on the person of the sovereign. Janissaries were paid regular salaries, unlike most other soldiers in the Ottoman Empire or elsewhere, and were loyal to the sultan alone, at least in theory. They were expected to remain celibate their entire lives, and they were not allowed to engage in trade. This was to ensure they remained economically dependent on the Ottoman monarch, though these proscriptions were relaxed toward the end of the 16th century.

The Janissary Corps was organized into battalions headed by a *chorbaji*. The number varied, and Suleiman could call upon 165. The total number of janissaries in 1530 was 8,407,[4] but the number present in Vienna would have been considerably smaller. Thus, the janissary corps formed only a small portion of the Ottoman military. The commander of the entire corps was the *Agha*, a court official usually appointed from the imperial household who was not necessarily trained as a janissary himself.

Janissaries had their own uniforms and were expert archers, arquebusiers, and grenadiers. In fact, they adopted firearms as soon as they became widely available in the 1440s, giving them the edge over their European enemies, who were still only gradually incorporating them into their military. They used axes, shot sabers, and their iconic curved scimitar, or kilij, in hand-to-hand combat. As a swift attack force, they wore little, if any, armor. In battle, they functioned as the sultan's guard and an elite reserve that could be deployed as required.

Illustration:
A depiction of janissaries in the 16th century

The elite cavalry was the sipahi, the bulk of which were free-born members of the Turkic aristocracy. They were similar to landed knights of Western Europe in that they were granted units of land (or *timars*) in return for military service. Unlike Western knights, however, they did not enjoy rights of possession, nor were they entitled to pass their holdings on to their children. All land was considered the personal possession of the sultan to dispose of as he pleased, and so the *timariot* (or lease-holder) strove to maintain his unit of troops in constant readiness and at his own expense. The timariot sipahi were often rivals with the janissaries, for they, too, considered themselves the natural defenders of Islam and of its head, the sultan. They fought as medium cavalry with chainmail, lances,

javelins, and with armored mounts. Sipahi from Anatolia (Asia Minor) specialized in the use of the composite bow in the tradition of their nomadic ancestors.

In addition to timariots, there were also units of *Kapikulu*, sipahi who were members of the imperial household. They were not legally slaves but were, nevertheless, considered servants of the sultan and were salaried like the janissaries. They served guards of the sultan or the Grand Vizier, and elevation to the status was considered the highest honor a noble family could receive. In battle, they were normally held in reserve and deployed in cases of necessity or to deal the *coup de grace*.

The *akinci* were light cavalry units raised from ancient Turkic tribes that helped the Ottomans establish their empire in western Anatolia in the 14th century. They were not slaves, nor were they salaried. Instead, they lived off the plunder of war (the name akinci means "raider"). Armed with composite bows, they served as scouts and skirmishers, and they typically enticed enemies away from the security of their positions only to draw them into a trap where the heavier sipahi descended upon them. Light cavalry from Rumelia (Europe) were called *delil* and differed from their Asian counterparts in that they were salaried by their *bey* (lord) and were habitually armed with lances and maces. They had a reputation for fanaticism and were said to self-mutilate in order to better suffer pain.[5]

Unlike most European armies at the time, the Ottoman military consisted mostly of cavalry, following the tradition of their nomadic Turkic forebears. This was not to say that their infantries were inconsequential. On the contrary, they were essential to victory. On the field, their primary purpose was to absorb an enemy charge to allow the sipahi to turn on its flanks. Other units besides the janissaries included the *azaps*, which were light archers recruited from the peasantry. They might also be armed with scythes, halberds, or firearms and generally fought for plunder. Representatives of Islamic orders such as the dervishes might be present on the battlefield, too, as well as individuals who gave themselves to the sultan's service out of religious devotion.

Troops from Suleiman's vassal states would have also been present at the Vienna campaign. The Hungarians and Transylvanians commanded by John Zápolya were medieval levies, including heavily armored knights who held land in return for military service, as well as their vassals and infantry militias. The Hungarian monarch could also call upon hussar units. Hussars were light cavalry descended from Serbian noblemen fleeing Ottoman invasion, and by the end of the 15th century, they were preferred as elite units who could match the sipahi. Other Christian vassal states were the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, which today form a part of Romania.

The Tatars of the Crimea were important Muslim vassals. They were descendants of the Golden Horde, which had reduced Russia to a state of vassalage, though as the power of the princes of Muscovy grew, they found themselves obliged to pay homage to the Ottoman sultan. Despite their loss of fortune, their cavalry were still some of the most fearsome in Europe. They were light archers, experts in inflicting swift, hard strikes and raiding. They were not, however, suited to siege warfare, and their role at Vienna would have been restricted to reconnaissance and plundering.

The elite troops of the Viennese defenders were the *Landsknechts* sent by Emperor Charles V. These formed the bulk of the professional Imperial Army in the 16th century. Their name means "servant of the land," and they were modeled on the Swiss pikemen who, time and time again, defeated the more traditional cavalry-based armies of the 15th century. Realizing that the infantry was coming to exercise a greater role in warfare, Maximilian von Habsburg, grandfather of Charles V, raised the first Landsknecht regiments in 1486. They were armed with pikes, halberds, and swords and fought in squares 40 to 60 men deep, with arquebusiers protecting the flanks. Infantries in the front ranks were armed with two-handed swords that might be over 200 cm long, which were thrust into the enemy while protected by the pikemen behind them. A prince raised a Landsknecht by commissioning an *obrist* (colonel) to raise and organize a regiment. He paid for the soldiers himself, but he was generally not keen to employ them for too long as they were expensive, and if they were not paid, they might pillage friendlies on the countryside as well as enemies.

Illustration:
A 16th century depiction of Landsknechts

Spanish arquebusiers sent by Mary of Hungary were mounted troops clad in *cuirasses*, open helmets, and wielding carbines. They were considered support for heavier cavalry, though during the siege, they were more valuable for their firearm skills than their horsemanship.

As for the defenses of Vienna, they were miserably inadequate. The city walls were 250 years old and badly in need of repair. Indeed, they were barely maintained since the siege by King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary in 1485. In most places, they were no more than two meters thick, despite the fact large bombardments with artillery were already effective in breaching adequate city defenses. Count Nicholas oversaw the wall repairs, but he was limited by time and materials. Since he could not venture out in search of masonry, he had to make do with debris he found in the city and its environs.

Fortunately for the garrison, the topography offered some natural defenses. At the time, the city of Vienna was confined to the right bank of the Danube, and an army would not attack from the north, owing to large, marshy islands in the river. A narrow stream ran southwest along the walls of Vienna and the Vienna Woods, rising upon the Kahlenberg Heights, which hampered the approach from the west. Therefore, a hostile army would almost certainly approach Vienna from the southwest.

Vienna did not have the supplies to defend its civilian population, and a large number would be sent away to find shelter in towns to the west. The suburbs beyond the walls were razed to refuse the Ottomans' supplies and for material and fuel to start fires. Count Nicholas also placed 72 guns of various calibers along the walls.

The Siege of Vienna

As defenders prepared for the Ottoman onslaught, hundreds of refugees appeared to seek help. As Suleiman advanced, a force of 2,000 akinci looted and burned villages, took the young as slaves, slaughtered the rest, and violated the women. It must be said that where resistance occurred, those invaded could be equally as savage as their invaders. The plumes of smoke from the ravaged countryside along the Danube could be seen from the parapets of Vienna. Most towns in the wake of Suleiman's army surrendered without a struggle, and the panic of Vienna increased as it became apparent that the troops promised by the German princes at Speyer were not coming. Even forces from Bohemia tarried despite repeated messages. Indeed, Count Palatine Philip only arrived in the city on September 24, three days before the Ottomans surrounded it.

On the morning of September 23, the standards of the Ottoman army waited in the distance as survivors of its merciless rampage fled toward Vienna. A vanguard discovered a suburban hospital where its patients had been cruelly left to their fate. A number were slaughtered, and the rest were taken prisoner. Shortly thereafter, 500 heavy cavalry sallied out against the Ottomans and fell back after the loss of three men, but not before killing seven Ottomans. The commander of the vanguard placed the heads of the dead cavalrymen on pikes, together with four of the surviving hospital patients, in order to match their losses. Other prisoners were compelled to present these grisly trophies to Suleiman.

After interrogating a number of prisoners regarding Vienna's defenses, the sultan sent four of them to the city with three ducats (about $600 in today's currency) and a message for the count-palatine: if Vienna surrendered, all of its inhabitants and property would be spared. Should it resist, it would be utterly destroyed along with its people, even "the child in the mother's womb," so that "men should not know where it stood."[6] Such horrific ultimatums were standard in Ottoman campaigns, and though there was a strong ceremonial element to them, they were most certainly not empty threats, even though Suleiman habitually behaved gallantly toward his enemies. On September 26, he offered to return prisoners to the Vienna garrison to help the defense, but the Viennese, thinking they were being contemned, refused.

Illustration:
An Ottoman depiction of the siege

On September 29, Suleiman's army arrived before Vienna's walls. After discharging a heavy rain of arrows, which was more a gesture of intent than a tactical act, the sultan sent four more offers of surrender on terms. When these went unanswered, he made a fifth, this time presented by a number of prisoners richly attired and bearing presents. They repeated the sultan's threats, adding that officers would be tortured before being executed and that the surrounding land would be salted. Count-Palatine Philip returned Ottoman prisoners in like manner, but without a message.

With no agreement in hand, the Ottomans erected their tents and built siege works. The most striking tent, made of green and gold cloth, was, of course, that of the sultan, followed by that of Grand Vizier Ibrahim. A vast forest of tents

appeared in the stretch between the Kahlenberg and the Vienna River, an ominous sign that the siege of Vienna was set to begin.

The Vienna garrison gazing upon the vast encampment before the city must have been struck by the absence of heavy siege artillery. Ottoman siege guns were famous both for their number and their power, and they easily matched and even surpassed those of the Habsburgs. Some of the guns that had brought down the walls of Constantinople in 1453 weighed close to 17 tons and fired balls with diameters of almost 65 centimeters. Indeed, those guns were being used to great effect in the early 19th century. As it turned out, the heavy rains of the summer and autumn of 1529 compelled the Ottomans to abandon their heavy artillery en route to Vienna. They did have field guns of lesser caliber, but they were not designed to breach walls.

Suleiman would have remembered the campaign of 1528, aborted for the same reason, but he still had cause to be confident. The walls of Vienna were weak, and his sappers and engineers were the best in Europe. As far as he knew, no relief army was on its way, and even if it were, no European power was capable of raising a force to match the size of his own.

It was still imperative that Vienna fall quickly. Most successful campaigns were fought in spring and summer, and it was almost October. The unusually heavy summer rains that had already compelled the army to abandon its artillery had turned the earth to mud, and it only continued to rain. Flooding rivers had taken lives, supplies, and equipment, and if the siege lasted until November, ice and snow would compound the challenges. In fact, unseasonable frost had already set in, discomforting the besiegers who were not equipped for the cold. Marauding akinci could pillage further afield for supplies, but because of the heavy rains, harvests had been spoiled and there was little food to plunder.

Suleiman declared to the Viennese that he would breakfast in the city on September 29, the feast day of one of Vienna's patron saints, Michael the Archangel, but delays prevented him from fulfilling that promise, and the defenders taunted him by releasing prisoners with the message that his meal was getting cold.[7] This was followed by a sally of Spanish arquebusiers that killed a number of Turks.

On September 30, the Ottomans attempted no action except an assault against the drawbridge, which was easily repelled, and on October 1, 300 *Landsknechts* made a sally from the Scottish Gate facing the Kahlenberg Heights but made no gains. On the same day, a defector from the Ottoman camp, claiming to have been born a Christian and wishing to return to his parents' faith, divulged the location of the two principal mines, which the defenders found and destroyed.

That evening, the Ottomans fired upon the walls with the cannons they had, leading the defenders to suppose that an assault was imminent. The next day, skirmishing occurred near the Scottish Gate while the Turkish barrage continued, and the defenders returned fire.

In the early hours of October 3, 8,000 defenders made a bold sally against a contingent of janissaries and their artillery in the ruined suburbs. At first, the attack promised success, and a number of janissaries fled while leaving their guns. However, the melee drew troops to their aid, and in the end the Viennese retreated within the walls in considerable confusion and with losses they could not

sustain. Indeed, the Turks were almost at the gate before being turned back by the *Landsknechts*. The casualties sustained by the Ottomans were considerable, too, and the assault expected that day did not take place.

The defenders were bolstered by the news delivered by a messenger swimming across the Danube that Archduke Ferdinand had promised relief within a week. It is unlikely that any force Ferdinand could have mustered might have defeated Suleiman in the field, but the promise of assistance must have boosted the beleaguered garrison's morale, the commanders of which had resorted to hanging any soldier who failed to maintain his post.

On October 7, the Ottomans attacked two bastions and were repelled, and the next day, the walls were subject to another artillery barrage. The wooden bulwarks supporting a section of the wall at the Corinthian Gate to the southwest were shattered, so makeshift supports were rushed to prevent it from collapsing inwards. Two days later, the besieged noted signs of an assault and detected mines dug beneath the Corinthian Gate. Countermining destroyed these, and successive storming parties were repulsed, while the trumpets of Saint Stephen's Cathedral sounded every time the Turks retreated. When the assault was over, the Viennese repaired the walls and the Ottomans dug trenches to repel sallies.

October 10, the 11th day of the siege, passed relatively quietly. There was a small sally that captured five camels, and two mines were discovered. At about 9:00 a.m. on October 11, the Ottomans finally undermined the wall near the Corinthian Gate, and they came close to entering the city—at one point, a standard-bearer mounted the wall and was shot down by a musket—but by the middle of the day, the assault had been repelled and 1,200 Ottomans lay dead.

By now, there was plenty of resentment in the Ottoman camp. The rain, cold, and frost hindered engineering and movement, supplies were getting low, and there was scant food in the already devastated district. It was becoming increasingly difficult to keep gunpowder dry, and disease and desertion ravaged the camp. Moreover, relief might be coming as Ferdinand had promised the garrison, and there was no telling how strong or weak it might be.

Since the Ottomans had not yet breached the walls of the city, the janissaries demanded that either it fall or the siege be lifted, and Suleiman held a council on October 12 to discuss the situation. The army could not withdraw back to Constantinople in the winter, and the decision had to be made to either take the walls or retire.

Suleiman and Ibrahim Pasha agreed to make one last immediate assault, sparing no resources, and no sooner had the war council been dismissed than the assault began. A breach was made, again near the Corinthian Gate, but the Ottomans were decisively repelled by the Spaniards. Several more assaults were made during the course of the day, but always with the same result. As the Ottomans carried their dead from the breach in the dark morning hours of October 13, Suleiman convened another war council that decided to postpone lifting the siege to allow the commanders one last chance. The janissaries protested and were only persuaded by the payment of 20 ducats to each.

The assault began at daybreak on October 14, but from the start, the commanders could not rouse their men to any level of fervor, and many refused to advance even at the point of a blade. The sultan made it known that the first man

to mount the city wall would be promoted and receive 600 ducats, but this was not enough of an incentive. One mine did succeed in breaching the wall at about noon, but the attackers were repulsed despite supportive artillery fire. In the savage melee, Count Nicholas of Salm was wounded in the hip by shattering stone, and though he survived the battle, he died of his wounds the following year.

Seeing his last hope for taking Vienna dashed, Suleiman gave the order to quit the camp a little before midnight. The atrocity that followed was uncharacteristic of a sovereign known even to his enemies for his generosity and sense of justice. The departing janissaries set fire to anything combustible, presumably to prevent the victorious enemy from taking it, and took with them the younger prisoners to become slaves. The old, infirm, and children were cast alive into the flames, and those who escaped were killed by the sword or with halberds. Their cries must have dampened the otherwise exhilarated spirits of the defenders watching from the walls.

At dawn on October 15, the city's cannons fired on the retiring foe for the last time. The count-palatine ordered a mass and the *Te Deum* to be sung to give thanks in Saint Stephen's Cathedral. When Suleiman asked a prisoner the meaning of the bell-ringing and singing, the captive proudly explained. In response, the sultan, returning to his habitual disposition, clothed him and two compatriots in rich clothing and released them with gifts.

Illustration:
A modern picture of the Vienna cathedral

While Suleiman retired, Ibrahim Pasha remained in the vicinity with 60,000 men to cover the retreat, for Vienna still possessed the means to harry the enemy. It has been speculated that the ambitious grand vizier still hoped to take the city on account of the spies he had there.[8] This seems unlikely, though three individuals laden with Ottoman coins did confess to planning to set fire to Vienna after being tortured. The vizier subsequently joined his sovereign about a mile south of the city, where the sultan was holding court.

Ottoman propaganda was already at work, and Suleiman was rewarding his officers and receiving their congratulations for the campaign. An imperial bulletin concocted the extraordinary story that the inhabitants of Vienna had actually offered to surrender, but Suleiman concluded that "it was hard to occupy the frontier places" and declined the offer.[9] Responding to a request for an exchange of prisoners, Ibrahim Pasha declared to the Viennese that the sultan's sole object had been "to seek out your Archduke Ferdinand," and that the Ottomans retired after not finding him there.[10] Even after withdrawing, Suleiman is supposed to have asked (and not received) the sum of 200,000 florins to spare Vienna, further presenting the impression that he had not wanted to take the city.[11]

Of course, the propaganda couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, the Ottoman retreat was hampered by a sally on October 17, which captured prisoners and booty and liberated a number of Christians. The Ottoman response was severely limited by a heavy snowfall that lasted all day, bogging down artillery, baggage, and whatever supplies they retained. Two days later, another attack

proved successful, and on October 20, the retreating Ottomans crossed back into Hungary, but not before leaving devastation in their vengeful wake.

On October 25, Suleiman entered Buda, rested, and recommenced the march five days later. It was not until November 20 that he reached Belgrade, owing to extraordinary rain. On November 28, the Ottoman army finally reached Constantinople, whereupon Suleiman was received in triumph. He had sent ahead word that he had achieved his aims, including the conquest of Hungary and the devastation of the country of his enemies. Very few survivors among his battered army would have been courageous enough to contradict him.

It has been difficult to calculate the losses of the Vienna campaign. German sources naturally tend to exaggerate, while Ottoman and Hungarian authorities minimize them. 15,000 dead, captured, or wounded seems a reasonable estimate for the Ottomans,[12] but this does not account for the many who died of disease or who perished on the march before and after the siege. The defenders lost around 1,500, not counting the loss of civilians and the many who were taken prisoner and subsequently slaughtered or enslaved.

Further Fighting

Had Suleiman begun his campaign at a more favorable time, Vienna would almost certainly have fallen, especially since the relief promised by Archduke Ferdinand and commanded by Frederick of the Rhine only arrived toward the end of November. Even when they arrived, they encountered problems of their own. The defenders of Vienna demanded extra pay for their efforts and would have sacked the city had Frederick not restored order with the promise of threefold pay. Moreover, Count Frederick was mindful that the threat was not over. Ottoman marauders still plundered the Austrian countryside, especially near the Hungarian border, and Suleiman might very well return.

When the Ottomans did not return the following year, Archduke Ferdinand went on the attack. In 1530, he invaded Hungary, taking strategic forts along the Danube and advancing as far as Gran (Esztergom) before being turned back from Buda by John Zápolya. In response, Suleiman raised an army with the intention of besieging Vienna once more, and the army that left Constantinople in the spring of 1532 was considerably larger than that of 1529, but yet again it was hampered by heavy rains. By July 12, the sultan was in Esseg (Osijek) in Croatia, writing to Ferdinand that he would receive envoys suing for peace (after initially refusing his entreaties) and that his quarrel that time was not with him personally but with the "King of Spain," by which he meant Charles V, whom he could not bring himself to address as emperor.[13] It was possible that he hoped the offer of peace might dissuade the archduke from joining with Charles V, who had made peace with the Vatican and was preparing to march against the Ottomans. Charles V had also made peace with his French enemies and had negotiated a working relationship with the Lutheran (Protestant) princes of Germany. Ferdinand may have preferred to avoid war, but he was not prepared to renounce the Hungarian crown, nor would Charles permit him to do so.

This time, Ferdinand fielded about 45,000 men while his brother could muster 80,000, half of which would be supplied by the German princes. They still had to find the money, an estimated 130,000 florins, to ensure the Christian forces assembled in time to meet Suleiman. This was a source of anxiety for Ferdinand, who was compelled to keep talking with the Ottomans, but eventually a substantial army assembled at Regensburg in Bavaria.

Suleiman and Ibrahim did not want to repeat the mistake of 1529 by marching directly on Vienna in adverse conditions, especially with an army of unknown size and experience nearby. Instead, they marched into Hungary, hoping to draw the enemy to a location of their choosing. They selected Güns (modern Koszeg), a fortress on the Hungarian border nearly 60 miles south of Vienna. In and of itself, this had no particular significance save that it was defended by about 800 Habsburg soldiers under the command of Baron Nikola Jurišić, a Croatian nobleman who was commander-in-chief of the border defense and Habsburg envoy in the failed peace negotiations. It may be that Suleiman believed the destruction of this base would damage the Habsburgs' morale, but if so, he was disappointed, for Jurišić and his men valiantly withstood no less than 19 attacks throughout August under constant artillery fire and with no artillery of their own. Their extraordinary resistance was rendered all the more remarkable given that stronger fortresses had surrendered with little or no struggle.

Suleiman and Ibrahim Pasha had assaulted Güns in the hope it would draw the Habsburg army into the field, but unbeknownst to them, the Habsburg force was still not ready for a confrontation. Due to this fog of war and the unrelenting summer rains, the Ottomans faced a dilemma. If they remained at Güns, they risked losing artillery and munitions as they had in 1529 and would be ill-equipped to face Charles V and Ferdinand.

What followed is unclear. In one version of events, Jurišić rejected an offer of terms, and the Ottomans, probably expecting the Habsburg army to arrive at any point, withdrew.[14] Another alternative is that the Croatian nobleman made a purely token surrender, in which the Ottomans were permitted to raise a standard inside the fortress before withdrawing on August 30.[15]

As it happened, Charles V did not arrive at Vienna with his army until September 23, but the Ottoman campaign could not survive another wet season. Furious at this second humiliation, Suleiman withdrew through Styria (southeastern Austria), marauding and pillaging as he went. Even in this venture, he met with setbacks, as the Habsburg troops were particularly successful in checking the Akinci. They inflicted a devastating blow at the Battle of the Triesting (September 19), while at sea, the great Genoese Admiral Andrea Doria, in the service of the emperor, harried the Adriatic Coast and captured towns in the Peloponnese. A frustrated Suleiman returned to Constantinople in the middle of November, and the prize of Vienna had eluded him for the second time.

Immediately after Suleiman's withdrawal, Archduke Ferdinand invaded Hungary and conquered territory in the west, while Charles V journeyed to Bologna to be formally crowned emperor and cement an anti-Ottoman alliance with the pope and the princes of Italy. Meanwhile, war broke out with the Persians on Suleiman's eastern borders, so the sultan sought peace with the Habsburgs. The Treaty of Constantinople was signed on July 22, 1533 and confirmed John

Zápolya's kingship as the sultan's vassal. Ferdinand was to be allowed a small strip of territory in western Hungary and had to pay an annual tribute of 30,000 guldens for it. Ferdinand was accorded the same diplomatic rank as a grand vizier by the Ottomans, and Charles V, who was not a party to the treaty, was still acknowledged as the king of Spain.

Illustration:
A depiction of Suleiman giving Zápolya the crown

The peace did not last long, and Ferdinand was the first to violate the treaty. In 1537, he sent nobleman John Katzianner to capture Osijek in Croatia with 24,000 men in an attempt to block the Ottoman route between Belgrade and Buda. The Ottomans managed to reinforce the town in time, and they blocked the withdrawing army at Gorjani, utterly annihilating it on October 9. So calamitous was the defeat that it came to be known as the "Austrian Mohacs."

Unlike that battle, however, it did not presage a dynastic crisis—in fact, John Zápolya decided he needed to come to terms with Ferdinand. He was coming to despise his alliance with Suleiman since its demands were becoming insupportable. Hungary was a Catholic country, and like every Catholic prince, he needed the Vatican's blessing, but he could not receive it while friends with the enemy of Christendom. He was also childless, meaning that when he died, the sultan would appoint his successor if he didn't decide to annex Hungary outright. The security of the realm demanded stability of the kingship, so he agreed to name Ferdinand his successor. The Habsburgs would have the resources to defend the kingdom, and they would preserve the Catholic faith.

The Treaty of Nagyvárad (February 24, 1538) infuriated Suleiman, and Ferdinand was anxious to find the money needed to meet the threat of invasion (the Habsburg army of 1533 had long since disbanded). Ferdinand was also upset when John married Isabella of Poland and had a son, John Sigismund, born on July 7, 1540, just two weeks before his death. His dying words to the nobles present were to ensure that his son reign in his place, and the Hungarian Diet duly elected the infant king. The magnates of Upper (northern) Hungary threw in their lot with Ferdinand, who had the temerity to ask Suleiman to compel the Hungarians to honor a treaty in which he had played no part. Not surprisingly, the sultan confirmed the election of John Sigismund as his vassal.

Illustration:
John Sigismund

Ferdinand declared the regents of the boy king—Queen Isabella and Archbishop Martinuzzi of Esztergom—usurpers, and Roggensdorf laid siege to Buda on May 4, 1541. In June, Suleiman set out from Constantinople with a huge army for the fourth time in 12 years, and while the size of this army is not known for sure, it was probably similar in size to the armies besieging Vienna and Güns. It attacked the Austrian army of 50,000 and routed it with a loss of 20,000. The Hungarians hoped the victorious sultan would receive the submission of the nobility and leave with his army, but as Isabella and the magnates presented the

infant king to Suleiman in his tent, Ottoman troops entered the city ostensibly as tourists and disarmed the garrison. When the noblemen learned what had happened, they attempted to leave, but Suleiman cried out to them, "The black soup [coffee] is still to come!" This was the signal for the imperial guard to disarm them. It thus became clear that Suleiman had no intention of supporting John Sigismund's regency; instead, he would only reign over the lands east of the River Tisza. The remainder of the kingdom (save the western and northern territories occupied by Ferdinand) would be absorbed into the Ottoman state. The sultan actually wanted to annex the entirety of Hungary, but envoys from France persuaded him against it.[16]

Needless to say, the return of the Ottomans to Hungary was a great cause of concern in Germany, but it did not prevent the Protestants from exacting more concessions from the fervently Catholic Charles V. Suleiman might have marched on Vienna again, but Ferdinand forestalled the possibility by going on the offensive. He had the advantage of working against a divided Zápolya kingdom—there was a separatist movement in Transylvania, and George Manuzzi had switched sides and favored the archduke. In 1542, Joachim II, Prince-Elector of Brandenburg, laid siege to Pest with 60,000 men but was driven back with heavy losses. The war continued, nevertheless, and the Ottomans generally had the advantage. Then, in 1543, Suleiman launched a major campaign that captured Esztergom from the Habsburgs in August after a two-week siege. French troops were present with the Ottomans and attacked Charles V in Germany and Italy, and Suleiman would have marched on Vienna if they had made better progress in the west. His enthusiasm for the war further abated when hostilities with Persia resumed again. In September 1544, the sultan received the unwelcome news that Charles had concluded peace with Francis I, and one of the conditions was that the king of France participated in the war against his Ottoman ally. In fact, Francis had no intention of fighting Suleiman, but Charles and Ferdinand used his discomfiture to pressure him into negotiating a truce.

After a lengthy discussion at Adrianople (modern Edirne), an armistice was signed. Ferdinand kept western and northern Hungary and agreed to pay an annual tribute of 30,000 florins to the Ottoman sultan. He was not, however, required to acknowledge the government of John Sigismund, probably because Suleiman intended to annex the rest of Hungary. This prompted Queen Isabella and Archbishop Manuzzi to propose a union with Ferdinand's Hungary, and the subsequent Treaty of Nyírbátor (September 9, 1549) gave no role to John Sigismund in Hungary but agreed to give him land in Silesia. Isabella reneged and warred with Manuzzi until she finally renounced the throne on behalf of her son at Weissenburg on July 19, 1551. They went to Silesia, and the Hungarian Diet acknowledged Ferdinand as king.

As it turned out, Ferdinand proved incapable of protecting his new subjects against Ottoman incursions, and Martinuzzi resumed the payment of tribute to Suleiman. On December 16, 1551, he was assassinated on the orders of Ferdinand, who believed he was about to surrender Hungary to the Ottomans. Since Martinuzzi was a cardinal of the Catholic Church, Pope Julius III excommunicated the archduke, placing a cloud over his head and damaging his position in Hungary until he was absolved in 1555.

Around the same time, in 1552, the Ottomans invaded northern (Habsburg) Hungary, laying siege to the strategic castle of Eger, which repulsed them with heavy losses. In 1556, Queen Isabella and her 16-year-old son were disillusioned with their estates in Silesia, and they returned to Eastern Hungary at the behest of Suleiman and the Transylvanian Diet. It was not long before Isabella was negotiating with Ferdinand again, offering to depose her son if the archduke would confirm him as ruler of eastern Hungary and give him a daughter in marriage. After she died in September 1559, John Sigismund undid her plans by demanding Hungarian land under Ferdinand's rule, and his conversion to Protestantism further hampered any dynastic union between Habsburg and Zápolya.

Meanwhile, Emperor Charles V, in failing health and burdened by the government of a dominion extending from the Americas to the Ottoman frontier, abdicated in 1556. It still took two years for Germany's prince-electors to crown Ferdinand emperor, and the pope did not recognize his election until 1559.

The new emperor had only eight years to enjoy his crown before he died on July 25, 1564. He had been a cautious yet effective statesman, bringing peace to a divided Germany and defending central Europe from Ottoman aggression, most of the time with limited resources. His son and successor in the imperial seat, Maximilian II, continued his policy toward Hungary, seeking the union of all of Hungary under a Habsburg crown.

On May 1, 1566, Suleiman, now 71, led a grand army of around 100,000 men from Constantinople on the 13th campaign of his reign. His object was Vienna once again, but this time, the sultan, afflicted with gout, had to be carried on a litter and played no active part in combat. The actual command was held by Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, his grand vizier.

On June 27, they arrived in Belgrade and joined John Sigismund, to whom the sultan promised all of Hungary. The Habsburg resistance was led by the ban (governor) of Croatia, Nicholas IV Zrinski, a veteran of the 1529 siege of Vienna and the 1542 siege of Pest. He was proving a formidable opponent, prompting Suleiman to redirect his campaign from Eger to Szigetvár, Zrinski's base in southern Hungary. The ban was present with around 3,000 troops, mostly Croatians. This decision was controversial since the fortress was of no particular significance and would only delay the attack on Vienna, where an imperial army was assembling. Zrinski had destroyed an Ottoman encampment at Siklos and executed its commander, infuriating the sultan.

This time, Suleiman's army was not hampered by rain and he possessed plenty of siege artillery, but Szigetvár presented unique challenges. It was actually three fortresses, each built on an island in an artificial lake created by the Almus River, and they were connected to each other and the shore by narrow causeways. Szigetvár was one of the most formidable strongholds in Hungary, and the defenders taunted the Ottoman army when it arrived on August 5 by hanging red cloth over the parapets and firing a single cannon. The Ottomans attacked the fort closest to the shore, the New Town, and it took a month to fall despite its small garrison and lack of adequate artillery. Even that effort cost the Ottomans 3,000 men, and Zrinski successfully withdrew his troops to the Old Town, the second fortress. The Old Town also fell, but only after 10 assaults, and Zrinski managed to withdraw to the last fortress, the Citadel.

From his bed, Suleiman offered to make Zrinski his vassal, but no reply came, and the Ottomans had no choice but to assault the Old Town. There was some urgency, not only because autumn was approaching but also because Maximilian II was, by this time, an estimated 100 miles to the north with 80,000 men. What Suleiman could not have known was that Zrinski had already sworn before God and his men to die before surrendering.

Then, on September 6, Suleiman the Magnificent died in his tent. The grand vizier was anxious that nobody in the camp should learn of what had happened, and he even ordered the execution of the physician who attended the sultan while he sent secret word back to Constantinople. On that day, miners had breached a section of the Citadel, but no soldiers attacked, owing to Mehmed Pasha's dealing with Suleiman's death. The following day, Ottoman troops assaulted the Citadel with cannons and Greek fire in preparation for the final assault.

Zrinski roused his men for an attack, knowing it would be their last, and they charged the causeway from their stronghold, driving the attackers back into the Old Town. There, they were surrounded, and they cut down many Ottomans before being slaughtered themselves. Zrinski perished in the first few minutes of the melee, and when the Ottomans swarmed the Citadel, they found that Zrinski had left one last surprise—he had ordered 1,360 kilograms of gunpowder lit by a fuse. Mehmed Pasha was present and only escaped because a prisoner warned him to flee, but 3,000 of his troops perished in the explosion.

The Ottomans were in possession of the fortress, but at a terrible cost. As many as 30,000 perished, likely a third of the army.[17] The grand vizier could no longer conceal the fact that Suleiman was dead, and orders from the new sultan were not at hand. The assault was meant to be short, allowing the army to march swiftly to Vienna, but winter was approaching and Maximilian II was nearby, while the Pasha's troops depleted, exhausted, and running out of supplies. The siege had been a disaster, and one might wonder if Suleiman would have ordered the siege lifted if he had been in better health. Mehmed led the army home and paid his respects to the new ruler, Suleiman's son, Selim II, who confirmed him in the grand viziership.

The heroism of Zrinski and his men was celebrated throughout Christendom. Vienna had been saved once again, and Selim II had no inclination to continue his father's war. He consented to receive the Austrian ambassadors in August 1568. After five months of talks, the second Treaty of Adrianople was signed on February 21, 1568. The settlement was basically the same as the 1547 treaty, also signed at Adrianople. Maximilian II was confirmed in his possession of northern and western Hungary, for which he paid 30,000 ducats annually, and Ottoman suzerainty was acknowledged over Eastern Hungary, Wallachia, and Moldavia. Selim thus abandoned John Sigismund, who had been promised all of Hungary by Suleiman, and it took two more years before the prince acknowledged the fact. By the Treaty of Speyer, he had formally abdicated the crown of Hungary in favor of Maximilian, contenting himself with the title "Prince of Transylvania and *Partium Regni Hungariae*" (part of the kingdom of Hungary). He died on March 14, 1571, and it seemed that Maximilian would inherit his dominion, yet the Diet of Transylvania insisted on choosing the next ruler and elected the nobleman Stephen Bathory. A few years later, Stephen Bathory also became king of Poland

and grand duke of Lithuania. A civil war ensued between Stephen's supporters and Maximilian's nominee, Gaspar Bekes, who was defeated.

The Bathory dynasty continued to rule Transylvania as an autonomous state, sometimes under Ottoman suzerainty and sometimes under Habsburg control. Thus, Transylvania, successor state to the Eastern Hungarian Kingdom, continued to be a source of tension between Austria and the Ottomans. Formal war broke out between the two in 1593, with Transylvania siding with the Habsburgs. Peace was not concluded until 1606, and though some fortresses were exchanged, it settled nothing except the fact that the Ottoman Empire could no longer penetrate the Habsburg heartland.

Transylvania was definitely reduced to vassal status by the Ottomans in 1661, and the Ottoman sultans made two more attempts to break the Habsburg hold in Hungary, the first at the Battle of Gotthard in 1664, where they were decisively beaten, and the second in 1683. The last expedition was another famous Vienna campaign, and the city was besieged by the Ottomans for the first time since 1529. On this occasion, the Ottomans were not hampered by adverse weather or a lack of artillery, and the city would almost certainly have fallen had not Polish and German armies arrived at the eleventh hour, famously routing the Ottomans. In the wake of that, the Habsburgs and their allies went on the offensive, driving the enemy from Hungary and Transylvania.

The Ottomans never recovered from that setback, and in addition to no longer posing a threat to Western Europe, the empire began its permanent decline. By the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire had ceased to terrify the powers of Europe and was fighting for its survival. It struggled to cope with the new forces of secular liberalism and nationalism, and the last Ottoman sultan was sent into exile by Turkish nationalists in 1922. Its ancient enemy, the House of Habsburg, lost power four years prior, when Emperor Charles I of Austria and King Charles IV of Hungary abdicated at the end of World War I. Ironically, the Ottoman and Habsburg empires were allies for the last few years of their existence, and both collapsed for similar reasons.

The Legacy of the Siege

The siege of Vienna in 1529 failed for a number of reasons. Large armies were rarely raised in Europe, mostly because they were extraordinarily expensive to maintain, but the Ottoman economy did allow armies of 100,000 or more to be raised for extended periods, but they still presented enormous challenges. Logistic considerations meant they moved slower than smaller armies, especially when they contained large siege artillery. They also required enormous amounts of food and other supplies. Armies of that size were mustered near Constantinople in the spring and had only eight weeks of good campaigning weather to reach and conquer their target. Delays caused by weather or diversionary campaigns could be disastrous, and the reader will recall several occasions when this proved the case. Vienna might have been besieged in 1528 had it not been for heavy rains. The siege of 1529 had also been undone by rain and the delay in installing John

Zápolya as the king. There is also the disastrous campaign of 1566, which failed because Suleiman insisted on taking Szigetvár. The problem of distance also explains why the princes and notables of Hungary and Transylvania could play the Ottomans off against the Habsburgs so often: the Turks were only sometimes in a position to impose their will by brute force. The fall of the Hungarian kingdom is often believed to have taken place at Mohacs in 1526, but in fact, on this occasion, Suleiman had not made up his mind to conquer Hungary. The resulting decline of the kingdom was due to the dynastic dispute between the houses of Zápolya and Habsburg in which the former invited Suleiman to take a part. Indeed, a nominally independent Hungary continued to function until the Ottoman annexation of 1541, and even beyond that, Eastern Hungary (Transylvania) and the western and northern lands that had recognized Habsburg kingship continued. Indeed, if Habsburg territories are considered, the Kingdom of Hungary was never entirely extinguished.

Another factor saving Vienna and central Europe was the Habsburgs' rising power. Until 1529, the Ottomans had only faced weak, fractious, and politically isolated states that fell relatively easily. Yet, the Habsburgs established an extensive, stable, and resource-rich empire which, in 1529, was the largest and most powerful in Europe. Even if Vienna had fallen, it was by no means certain the Ottomans would have held it on account of the Habsburgs' ability to co-ordinate a strong counterattack. Given the distance between Constantinople and Vienna, an invasion of central Europe would have been logistically challenging. The Habsburgs also had the support of the Pope, at least, in their anti-Turkish ventures, and the call to crusade, while nowhere near as forceful as in the Middle Ages, was still powerful. Had the Habsburg dynasty turned Protestant, it would be unlikely the resistance would have been as determined and supported. For these reasons, Europe may never have been in any real danger of succumbing to the perpetual Ottoman jihad. On the other hand, the resourceful Ottoman sultans may have made Vienna a secondary base of operations from which to continue invading Europe. In the 1683 campaign against the Ottomans, Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa boasted he would stable his horses in Saint Peter's Basilica, and the terror of the Turk was still very much alive at the time.

Another question that might be explored is whether the failure to take Vienna and crush the Habsburgs signaled the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Certainly, the failure of the second siege in 1683 was the start of the long and torturous wane of the Ottoman state, but a case might be made that decay set in shortly after 1529 when the empire ruled by Suleiman the Magnificent was at the height of its power. To begin, the wars with the Habsburgs in the 16th century demonstrated the shortcomings of the Ottoman military machine in fighting long sustained campaigns. Beyond that, the limitation of Ottoman expansion into Europe had long-term effects on the imperial economy, which was based on slavery. Slaves worked farms, manufactured goods, and administered services. The sultan's slaves ran the government and served in the military, and women were habitually taken as sex-slaves. Only non-Muslims—in practice, Christians—could be lawfully enslaved, and the children of slaves were considered free, so war had to be perpetually waged against unbelievers to replenish the slave population. Even in times of official peace, there were raids into Christian territories, but these

never obtained the vast numbers acquired during military campaigns. Fewer conquests also meant reduced income to support an ever-growing military apparatus since the greater part of imperial revenues came from the sultan's Christian subjects, who were taxed higher than Muslims.

The Ottoman Empire also relied upon fresh conquests to increase and enhance its force of elite sipahis. When conquests declined, so did the number and quality of sipahis. In fact, over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the size of the timars was reduced, and many holders were expected to share holdings. The quality of the infantry elite, the janissary corps, also declined to debilitating effect. Realizing their importance and power, the janissaries demanded privileges, including the right to marry, to engage in trade, and to pass their positions on to their children. Suleiman's son Selim gave passively into their demands, though it is doubtful what choice he had. This was disastrous for the Ottoman sultans; for now, the janissaries possessed a power base and source of income independent of the monarch. Consequently, they became a political force able to direct government policy and even depose the sultan, which they did on multiple occasions. Acting independently and for their own interests inevitably led to a relaxation of discipline and training. The janissaries considered themselves natural guardians of the Islamic state, resisted western innovation with religious fervor, and were habitually supported in their opposition by religious jurists. Consequently, the Ottoman military did not match the evolving training, organization, and technology of the Habsburg armies.

The decline of the Ottoman Empire was not entirely caused by the Habsburg Empire. It was a vast entity, subject to pressure on all its borders. In the east, the new colonial empires of England, the Netherlands, and Portugal, assisted by Persia, interrupted its trade routes and caused widespread inflation and subsequent civil unrest. In the Mediterranean, its expansion was checked by a Christian fleet composed of Habsburg and allied forces at Lepanto in 1571, and the Ottoman Navy never completely recovered.

The religious ethos as expressed in the idea of the manifest destiny of the Ottoman State made reform and recovery difficult. The sultan could not treat Christian monarchs as equals, for he was the lord of the world with the God-given role of subjecting it to the rule of Islam. The natural state of the Christian foreigner was as a subject, and the Ottoman ruler found it impossible to form true alliances or even admit that he might need them. Europeans were only directly experienced in military situations, and even in diplomacy, they were expected to come subserviently to the sultan or his grand vizier. This is why treaties ending wars, even where the Turks were habitually defeated, had to be signed in Constantinople or the secondary Ottoman city of Adrianople—the sultan could never be seen to acquiesce to a lesser race. Even the long alliance with the French monarchs was purely opportunistic and not founded on any concept of equality. Indeed, the Ottomans raided the shores of France for slaves and booty as avidly as they did those of Spain and Italy. Consequently, the empire became increasingly isolated as its power declined.

Given all these considerations, it was somewhat fitting that Vienna would hold out against the Ottomans and eventually break them, not so much on account of

the power of the Habsburgs but more on account of the weakness inherent in the last major Islamic empire.

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(1) Bodolai, 1978.
(2) The cities of Buda and Pest did not unite to create the present capital of Hungary until the 19th century.
(3) Dupuy, Trevor, et al., *The Encyclopedia of Military Biography*, 653.
(4) Ágoston, 2014, 113.
(5) "Ottoman Military," 2016.
(6) Schimmer, 2015, 24.
(7) Ibid, 28.
(8) Ibid, 41.
(9) Ibid.
(10) Ibid, 42.
(11) Ibid.
(12) Turnbull, 2003, 51.
(13) Setton, 1984, 364.
(14) Wheatcroft, 2009, 59.
(15) Turnbull, 2003, 51.
(16) Setton, 1984, 455.
(17) Coppée, 1864, 565.