CHAPTER 16

WARS OF RELIGION

Excerpted and adapted from L. Hunt et al., *The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures*, 4th edition, vol. "B" (Boston, 2012) pp. 473-479 and 484-490; J. Coffin et al., *Western Civilizations: Their History & Their Culture*, 17th edition, vol. 2 (New York, 2011) pp. 433-437.

Just as the Protestant revolt was developing in Germany, the Catholic rulers of Europe were busy fighting among themselves. Specifically, the Habsburgs (the ruling family in Spain and then the Holy Roman Empire) and the Valois (the ruling family in France) warred with each other for domination of Christendom. French claims in Italy provoked the Italian Wars in 1494, which soon escalated into a general conflict involving the major Christian monarchs and the Muslim Ottoman sultan as well. From 1494 to 1559, the Valois and Habsburg dynasties, both Catholic, remained implacable enemies. The fighting raged in Italy and the Habsburg-controlled Netherlands. In 1525, the troops of Habsburg emperor Charles V crushed the French army at Pavia in northern Italy, counting among their captives the French king himself, Francis I. Forced to renounce all claims to Italian territory to gain his freedom, Francis furiously repudiated the treaty the moment he reached France, reigniting the conflict.

In 1527, Charles's troops captured and sacked Rome because the pope had allied with the French. Many of the imperial troops were German Protestant mercenaries, who pillaged Catholic churches and brutalized the Catholic clergy. Protestants and Catholics alike interpreted the sack of Rome by imperial forces as a punishment from God; even the Catholic clergy read it as a sign that reform was necessary. Finally, in 1559, the French gave up their claims in Italy and signed the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, ending the conflict. As was common in such situations, marriage sealed the peace between rival dynasties; the French king Henry II married his sister to the duke of Savoy, an ally of the Habsburgs, and his daughter to the Habsburg king of Spain, Philip II, who had succeeded his father Charles V in 1556.

This dynastic struggle (Valois versus Habsburg) had drawn in many other belligerents who fought on one side or the other for their own benefit. Some acted purely out of power considerations, such as England, first siding with the Valois and then with the Habsburgs. Others fought for their independence, such as the papacy and the Italian states, which did not want any one power to dominate Italy. Still others chose sides for religious reasons, such as the Protestant princes in Germany, who exploited the Valois-Habsburg conflict to extract religious concessions from the emperor in 1555. The Ottoman Turks saw in this feud an opportunity to expand their territory.

The Ottoman Empire was at the height of its power at this time. In 1526, a Turkish expedition destroyed the Hungarian army at the Battle of Mohács. Three years later, the Ottomans laid siege to Vienna; though unsuccessful, the attack sent shockwaves throughout Christian Europe. In 1535, Charles V led a successful campaign to capture Tunis, the lair of North African pirates loyal to the Ottomans. Desperate to overcome Charles's superior Habsburg forces, the French king Francis I forged an alliance with the Turkish sultan. Coming to the aid of the French, the Turkish fleet besieged the Habsburg troops holding Nice, on the southern coast of France. Francis even ordered all inhabitants of nearby Toulon to vacate the town so that he could turn it into a Muslim colony for eight months, complete with a mosque and a slave market. The French alliance with the Turks scandalized many Christians, but it reflected the spirit of the times: the age-old idea of the Christian crusade against Islam now had to compete with a new political strategy that considered religion as only one factor among many in international politics. Religion could seemingly be sacrificed, if need be, on the altar of state building.

Constantly distracted by the challenges of the Ottomans to the east and the German Protestants at home, Charles V could not crush the French or the Lutherans with one swift blow. Additionally, years of conflict drained the imperial treasuries, for warfare was becoming increasingly expensive. Finally, many European monarchs viewed internal religious division as a dangerous challenge to the unity and stability of their rule. Subjects who considered their rulers heretics or blasphemers could only cause trouble, and religious differences encouraged the formation of competing noble factions, which easily led to violence when weak monarchs or children ruled.

Because Emperor Charles V was unable to suppress the Lutheran revolts within the German states, many of his Protestant princes and cities formed the Schmalkaldic League in 1531. Headed by the elector of Saxony and Philip of Hesse (the two leading Protestant princes), the league included most of the imperial cities. Opposing this Protestant league were the emperor himself, the bishops, and the remaining Catholic princes. Yet Charles had to concentrate on fighting the French and the Turks during the 1530s; when he eventually secured the western Mediterranean, he finally turned his attention back home to central Europe to try to resolve the growing religious differences in his German lands.

In 1541, Charles convened the Imperial Diet of Regensburg in an effort to mediate between Protestants and Catholics, only to see negotiations between the two sides rapidly break down. Rather than accept a permanent religious schism, Charles prepared to fight the Protestant Schmalkaldic League. War broke out in 1547, the year after Martin Luther's death. Using seasoned Spanish veterans and German allies, Charles occupied the German imperial cities in the south, restoring Catholics to positions of power. When Protestant commanders could not agree on a joint strategy, Charles crushed the Schmalkaldic League's armies at Mülhberg in Saxony and captured the leading Lutheran princes. Jubilant, Charles restored Catholics' right to worship in Protestant lands. Protestant resistance to the declaration was deep and widespread: many pastors went into exile, and riots broke out in many cities. Charles's success did not last long. The Protestant princes regrouped, declared war in 1552, and chased a surprised, unprepared, and practically bankrupt emperor into Italy.

Seeing compromise as the only hope to ending the civil war in Germany, Charles V agreed to the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. The settlement recognized the Lutheran church in the empire; it accepted the secularization of church lands but "reserved" the remaining ecclesiastical territories for Catholic bishops; and most important, it established the principle that each prince, whether Catholic or Lutheran, enjoyed the sole right to determine the religion of his land and subjects; in theory, all who lived under a Protestant prince must be Protestant, and those under a Catholic prince must be Catholic. Thus the Augsburg settlement preserved a fragile peace in central Europe until 1618, when religious warfare would erupt again.

Exhausted by decades of war and disappointed by the disunity in Christian Europe, Charles V resigned his many thrones in 1555. He left the Netherlands, Burgundy and Spain to his son Philip II, and ceded his Austrian lands to his brother, Ferdinand, who was elected Holy Roman Emperor to succeed Charles. Retiring to a monastery in southern Spain, the most powerful of the Catholic rulers spent his last years quietly seeking salvation.

The Peace of Augsburg made Lutheranism a legal religion in the predominantly Catholic Holy Roman Empire, but it did not extend recognition to Calvinists. Although the followers of Martin Luther (Lutherans) and those of John Calvin (Calvinists) similarly refused the authority of the Catholic Church, they disagreed with each other about religious doctrine and church organization. The rapid expansion of Calvinism after 1560 threatened to alter the religious balance of power in much of Europe. Calvinists challenged Catholic dominance in France, in the Spanish-ruled Netherlands, and in Scotland. In England, they sought to influence the new Protestant monarch, Elizabeth I.

Calvinism spread in France after 1555, when the Genevan Company of Pastors sent missionaries supplied with false passports and often disguised as merchants. These missionaries soon converted key noble families to their cause, and these Calvinist nobles provided military protection to local congregations and helped to establish a national organization for the French Calvinist – or Huguenot – church. Soon rival Huguenot and Catholic armies began fighting a series of civil wars that threatened to tear the French nation into shreds.

By the end of the 1560s, nearly one-third of the French nobles had joined the Huguenots, and they raised their own armies. Conversion to Calvinism in French noble families often began with the noblewomen. Charlotte de Bourbon, for example, fled from a Catholic convent and eventually married William of Orange, the leader of the anti-Spanish resistance in the Netherlands. Most importantly, Calvinist missionaries converted Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre in south-western France. She was closely related to the royal family, and one of her Protestant sons, Henry, would eventually inherit the French throne in 1594, but not until France had torn itself apart through civil war.

Calvinist (Huguenot) churches in France, 1562

A series of family tragedies prevented the French kings from acting decisively to prevent the spread of Calvinism. King Henry II was accidentally killed during a jousting tournament in 1559, and his fifteen-year-old son died soon after. Ten-year-old Charles IX (r. 1560- 1574) then became king, with his mother, Catherine de' Medici, as regent or acting ruler. An ambassador

commented on the weakness of Catherine's command: "It is sufficient to say that she is a woman, a foreigner, and a Florentine to boot, born of a simple house, altogether beneath the dignity of the Kingdom of France." The Huguenots followed the lead of the Bourbon family (headed by Jeanne d'Albret and her son Henry), who were close relatives of the French king and stood first in line to inherit the throne if the Valois line failed to produce a male heir. The most militantly Catholic nobles took their cues from the Guise family, who aimed to block Bourbon ambitions. Catherine tried to play the Bourbon and Guise factions against each other, but civil war erupted in 1562. Both sides committed terrible atrocities. Priests and pastors were murdered, and massacres of whole congregations became frighteningly commonplace.

Although a Catholic herself, Catherine feared the rise of Guise influence, so she arranged the marriage of the king's Catholic sister, Marguerite de Valois, to Henry of Navarre, a Huguenot and Bourbon. Just four days after the wedding in August 1572, an assassin tried but failed to kill one of the Huguenot leaders. Nevertheless, violence against Calvinists spiraled out of control. On St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24, a bloodbath began, fueled by years of growing animosity between Catholics and Protestants. In three days, Catholic mobs murdered some three thousand Huguenots in Paris. Wherever Calvinists lacked military protection, they were at risk. Ten thousand Huguenots died in the provinces over the next six weeks.

Yet the massacre settled nothing. The religious division in France only intensified and grew even more dangerous when Charles IX died and his brother Henry III (r. 1574-89) became king. Like his brothers before him, Henry III failed to produce an heir. Next in line to the throne was none other than the Protestant Bourbon leader Henry of Navarre, a distant cousin of the Valois ruling family and brother-in-law of the French kings Charles and Henry. Convinced that Henry III lacked the will to root out Protestantism, the Guise family formed the Catholic League, which requested help from the Spanish king Philip II. Henry III responded with a fatal trick: in 1588, he summoned the two Guise leaders to a meeting and had his men kill them. A few months later, a fanatical Catholic monk stabbed Henry III to death, and Henry of Navarre became Henry IV (r. 1589-1610), despite Philip II's attempt to block his ascension with military intervention.

Henry IV soon concluded that to establish control over war-weary France he had to place the interests of the French state ahead of his Protestant faith. With the Catholic League threatening to declare his succession invalid, Henry publicly embraced Catholicism, reputedly explaining his conversion with the statement, "Paris [the royal capital] is worth a Mass." Within a few years he defeated the ultra-Catholic opposition and drove out the Spanish. In 1598, he made peace with Spain and issued the Edict of Nantes, in which he granted the Huguenots a large measure of religious toleration. The approximately 1.25 million Huguenots became a legally protected minority within an officially Catholic kingdom of some 20 million people. Protestants were free to worship in specified towns and were allowed their own troops, fortresses, and even courts.

The Edict of Nantes ended the French Wars of Religion, but Henry still needed to reestablish monarchical authority and hold the fractious nobles in check. He allowed rich merchants and lawyers to buy offices attached to a noble title; in exchange for an annual payment, they could pass their positions and title on to their heirs to sell them to someone else. This new social elite was known as the "nobility of the robe" (named after the robes that magistrates wore, much like those judges wear today). Income raised by the increased sale of noble offices reduced the state debt and also helped Henry strengthen the monarchy. His efforts did not, however, prevent his enemies from assassinating him in 1610, after nineteen unsuccessful attempts.

Although he failed to prevent Henry IV from taking the French throne in 1589, Philip II of Spain (r. 1556-98) was the most powerful ruler in Europe. In addition to the western Habsburg lands in Spain and the Netherlands, Philip had inherited from his father, Charles V, all the Spanish colonies recently settled in the New World. A deeply devout Catholic, Philip II came to the Spanish throne at age twenty-eight determined to restore Catholic unity in Europe. He started by attempting to quell Protestant revolts in his own realm, particularly the Netherlands (which he had inherited from his father, Charles V). Calvinism had spread to the Netherlands by 1560, and when Calvinist mobs began systematically attacking Catholic churches in 1566, Philip II sent an army to punish them. Calvinist resistance continued, and in 1576 after the devastating sack of Antwerp outraged Calvinists and Catholics alike, Prince William of

Orange (whose name came from the lands he owned in southern France) united the various Catholic and Protestant provinces of the Netherlands into a military alliance that drove out the Spaniards. Despite the alliance, the southern provinces remained Catholic and, growing increasingly suspicious of the strict Calvinism developing in the north, returned to the Spanish fold three years later in 1579. And although William of Orange was assassinated in 1584, Spanish troops never regained control in the north. Spain would not formally recognize Dutch independence until 1648, but by the end of the sixteenth century the Dutch Republic (sometimes called Holland after the most populous of its seven provinces) was a self-governing Protestant state.

Calvinists desecrating a Catholic church in the Spanish Netherlands

Well situated for maritime commerce, the Dutch Republic developed a thriving economy based on shipping and shipbuilding. Dutch merchants favored free trade in Europe because they could compete at an advantage. Whereas elites in other countries focused on their landholdings, the Dutch

looked for investments in trade. After the Dutch gained independence, Amsterdam became the main European money market for two centuries. The city was also a primary commodities market and a chief supplier of arms – to allies, neutrals, and even enemies. Dutch entrepreneurs produced goods at lower prices than competitors and marketed them more efficiently. The Dutch controlled many overseas markets thanks to their preeminence in seaborne commerce; by 1670, the Dutch commercial fleet was larger than the English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Austrian fleets combined.

Religious strife could spark civil war, as in France, or political rebellion, as in the Netherlands. But it could also provoke warfare between sovereign states, as in the struggle between England and Spain. Indeed, key to the success of the Dutch Republic was the financial support it received from England during its war with Spain. Philip II, it should be recalled, was married to Mary Tudor, the Catholic queen of England from 1553 to 1558. When Mary's half-sister Elizabeth took the throne in 1558, Philip seemingly offered his hand in marriage to her, hoping to confirm England's return to the Catholic faith. Yet it appears that Elizabeth coldly rejected this offer and instead adhered firmly to the Protestant cause.

Adding to the animosity created by religious differences and dynastic politics was the fact that English economic interests were directly opposed to those of Spain. English seafarers and traders were steadily making inroads into Spanish naval and commercial networks and were also engaged in lucrative trade with the Spanish Netherlands. But the greatest source of antagonism lay in the Atlantic, where English privateers, with the tacit consent of Queen Elizabeth, began attacking Spanish treasure ships returning home from the New World. Taking as an excuse the Spanish oppression of Protestants in the Netherlands, English sea captains such as Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Hawkins plundered Spanish vessels on the high seas. In a particularly dramatic exploit lasting from 1577 to 1580, prevailing winds and lust for treasure propelled Drake all the way around the world, to return with stolen Spanish treasure worth twice as much as Queen Elizabeth's annual revenue.

All this would have been sufficient provocation for Spain to retaliate against England, but Philip resolved to invade the island only after the English openly allied with Dutch rebels in 1585. Even then, Philip moved slowly. Although enraged by Elizabeth's aid to the Dutch rebels, Philip II bided his time as long as Elizabeth remained unmarried and her Catholic cousin Mary Stuart, better known as Mary, queen of Scots, stood next in line to inherit the English throne. In 1568, Scottish Calvinists forced Mary to abdicate the throne of Scotland in favor of her one-year-old son James (eventually James I of England), who was then raised as a Protestant. After her abdication, Mary spent nearly twenty years under house arrest in England. In 1587, when a letter from Mary offering her succession rights to Philip was discovered, Elizabeth overcame her reluctance to execute a fellow monarch and ordered Mary's beheading.

Now determined to act, Philip II sent his armada (meaning "fleet") of 130 ships from Lisbon toward the English Channel in May 1588. His plan was to ferry huge numbers of Spanish troops, then stationed in the Netherlands, across the English Channel. Yet before this plan could materialize, the English scattered the Spanish Armada by sending blazing fire ships into its midst. A great gale then forced the Spanish to flee north around Scotland. When the armada limped home in September, half the ships had been lost and thousands of sailors were dead or starving. Protestants throughout Europe rejoiced, while Philip and Catholic Spain had suffered a crushing blow. By the time Philip II died in 1598, his great empire had begun to lose its luster. The costs of fighting the Ottomans, Dutch, English, and French mounted inexorably and finally bankrupted the treasury. Spain would never again be the leading world power.

With the promulgation of the French Edict of Nantes in 1598, with peace between England and Spain finally concluded in 1604, and with the truce between Spain and the Dutch republic of 1609, religious warfare in northwestern Europe came briefly to an end. But in 1618 a major new war broke out in Germany. Because this struggle raged more or less incessantly until 1648, it is known as the Thirty Years War, and it eventually encompassed Spain and France as well, becoming an international struggle in which the initial religious provocations were all but forgotten. The Thirty Years War thus marks the end of the age of religious strife which consumed Europe for over a century.

After the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, the balance of powers between Protestant and Catholic territories within the Holy Roman Empire had remained largely undisturbed. In 1618, however, the Catholic Habsburg prince who ruled Poland, Austria, and Hungary was elected king of Protestant Bohemia, prompting a rebellion among the Bohemian aristocracy. When this same prince, Ferdinand, became Holy Roman Emperor a year later, German Catholic forces were sent to crush the rebellion. Within a decade, a German imperial Catholic league seemed close to extirpating Protestantism throughout Germany. But this threatened the political autonomy of all German princes, Catholic and Protestant alike. So when the Lutheran king of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, championed the Protestant cause in 1630, he was also welcomed by several German Catholic princes.

To make matters still more complicated, the Swedish king's Protestant army was secretly subsidized by Catholic France, whose policy was then dictated by its regent, Cardinal Richelieu (d. 1642). Sweden had French support because Richelieu was determined to prevent France from being surrounded by a strong Habsburg alliance. Something of a military genius, Gustavus Adolphus began routing the Habsburgs. But when Gustavus died in battle in 1632, Cardinal Richelieu found himself having to conduct the war directly; in 1635, France openly declared itself for Protestant Sweden and against Catholic Austria and Spain. In the middle lay Germany, a helpless battleground.

Germany suffered more from warfare in the terrible years between 1618 and 1648 than at any time until the twentieth century. Several German cities were besieged and sacked nine or ten times over, and soldiers from all nations, who often had to sustain themselves by plunder, gave no quarter to defenseless civilians. With plague and disease adding to the toll of outright butchery, some parts of Germany lost more than half their populations. Most horrifying was the loss of life in the final four years of the war, when the carnage continued unabated even after peace negotiators arrived at broad areas of agreement.

The eventual adoption of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 was a watershed in European history. It marked the emergence of France as the predominant power on the Continent, a position it would hold for the next two

centuries. The greatest losers in the conflict (aside from the millions of German victims) were the Austrian Habsburgs, who were forced to surrender all the territory they had gained and to abandon their hopes of using the office of Holy Roman Emperor to dominate and unite central Europe. Spain became increasingly relegated to the margins, and Germany remained a volatile checkerboard of Protestant and Catholic principalities. Although Luther himself did not foresee these dire political consequences, they are certainly the products of his radical religious revolt.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

1.) How was Calvinism successively established in France?

2.) What role did the German states play in the various Wars of Religion?

** PRIMARY SOURCE **

Otto von Guericke, *The Sack of Magdeburg*

Excerpted from T. Helfferich (ed.), *The Essential Thirty Years War: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis, 2015) pp. 46-52.

*** When, during the course of the Thirty Years War, the brilliant Swedish general Gustavus Adolphus advanced his armies into the northern German states seeking to aid the Protestant cause, he was met with some initial hesitation from those he was theoretically aiding. And while most princes of the Empire did not rush to ally with the Swedish king, some, such as the dukes of Mecklenburg and the landgrave of Hesse-Cassel were indeed energized. Among those who eagerly welcomed the king of Sweden was the free imperial city of Magdeburg, which took this opportunity to rebel against the emperor. Too weak to withstand the imperial forces in the field, however, the city found itself besieged, able to do little but wait for promised aid from Gustavus Adolphus – aid which never came. Finally unable to hold out any longer against the encamped army of General Tilly, the city council agreed to come to terms on the morning of May 20, 1631. But the council had deliberated too long, and before they could surrender, the city walls were breached. Tilly's troops – hungry, lacking pay, and angry at the long resistance of the city – looted with abandon. They carted off every valuable they could carry and destroyed nearly everything else. Fire, which either sprang up accidentally or was purposely set by one side or the other, swept through the entire city. As many as twenty thousand people died. The following account comes from the pen of Magdeburg resident Otto von Guericke (1602—1686), later known as a skilled inventor and early expert on vacuums. Guericke's full report chronicles the events of the days leading up to and immediately after the city's destruction. Below is an excerpt from the last few pages, which describe the sack itself and its horrible aftermath. **

… Then the city was lost, and all resistance came too late and was useless. For although citizens and soldiers in some places tried to put up some opposition and come to arms, meanwhile the imperialists always had more and more troops to help them, as well as enough cavalry, for the trench at the top of the bastion had not yet been completed, and the new rampart was very flat, so that they could ride over it into the city. And finally they opened the Krocken Gate and let

in through it the entire army of the imperialists and Catholic League, made up of Hungarians, Groats, Poles, Heyducks [mercenaries], Italians, Spaniards, French, Walloons, Lower and Upper Germans, etc. Thus it happened that the city, with all of its inhabitants, fell into the hands and under the power of its enemies, whose fierceness and cruelty came partly out of a common hatred for the adherents of the Augsburg Confession [i.e. Lutheranism] and partly from the fact that people had shot at them with crossbar shot and other things from the ramparts, belittling them, provoking them, and leading them to become enraged. Then there was nothing but murder, burning, plundering, torment, and beatings. In particular, each of the enemies sought more and greater booty. When such a party of looters entered a house and the head of the household had something he could give them, then he could use this to save and preserve himself and his family until another soldier, who also wanted something, came along. Finally, however, when everything had been given out and there was nothing left to give, then the misery really began. For then the soldiers began to beat, frighten, and threaten to shoot, skewer, or hang the people, so that even if something had been buried under the earth or locked away behind a thousand locks, the citizens would still have been forced to seek it out and hand it over. Through such enduring fury – which laid this great, magnificent city, which had been like a princess in the entire land, into complete burning embers and put it into such enormous misery and unspeakable need and heartache – many thousands of innocent men, women, and children were, with horrid, fearful screams of pain and alarm, miserably murdered and wretchedly executed in manifold ways, so that no words can sufficiently describe it, nor tears bemoan it.

This dismal time in the city, however, did not actually last much more than two hours, but in this time the fire, which had originally been ordered by Count von Pappenheim in order to perturb and frighten the citizens and inhabitants but which had afterward been used by the common soldiery without discretion or pause, took the upper hand by means of the sudden appearance of the wind, so that by ten o'clock in the morning everything was ablaze; and by ten o'clock in the evening the entire city, including the beautiful courthouse and all the churches and cloisters, had been reduced to ashes and heaps of stone. Thus the imperial army, lest it incinerate itself, had to withdraw from the city and retreat to its encampment.

This renowned and genteel city, the ornament of the entire land, thus went up in flames and smoke in a single day, and its remaining inhabitants, with their wives and children, were taken prisoner and driven out by the enemy, such that the shouting, crying, and howling could be heard from faraway, and the seething embers and ash from the city were transported by the wind as far away as Wanzleben, Egeln, and other places.

And as for those from Magdeburg who had escaped the fire and sword, each was forced to pay a ransom in order to obtain his and his family's life and honor; and depending on the status of the person, he would have to buy them back by paying as much as a thousand or more *reichsthalers*. If he did not have this amount, he would be held and even kept in prison until he could obtain the ransom money from other outside people, whether as an active debt, a petition, or a loan, or until he could make some other sufficient guarantee. As to common craftspeople, day laborers, servants, and apprentices, as well as soldiers who had served on the side of the Swedes and the city, people who could give nothing, they had to carry the booty and bundles of the enemy for a while and do all kinds of service for them, or even join the enemy's service and so be supported by them. However, things went very badly for many of those women, girls, daughters, and maids who either had no men, parents, or relatives who could pay a ransom on their behalf, or could not appeal to high officers for help or advice … however, there were also many who similarly had no friends or means, but who still, amazingly, kept their honor, partially due to honorable soldiers who, by dint of the decency of those they had taken prisoner, simply let them free or even married them. …

Almost four thousand people were in the cathedral church, where they had retreated and holed themselves up. And although in the beginning some of the imperial troops had gotten in, killing several people, soon they set up a watch at the doors and further violence was averted. …

As for the number of those slain and dead in the city, since many people were devoured not only by the sword but also by the fire, one cannot really know: for not only did General Tilly, soon after this wretched incineration, have the burned corpses and other dead from the alleys, ramparts, and other places

loaded onto wagons and driven to the waters of the Elbe River, but also for almost an entire year after this time we found many dead bodies, five, six, eight, ten, or more at a time in ruined cellars where they had suffocated and died, and also because those bodies that had lain in the alleys had been so badly consumed by the fire and then been smashed to pieces by the collapsing buildings, one often had to load up the pieces using a pitchfork. Thus no one can name the actual number. Altogether, however, one could say that including the two suburbs and those imperial troops who had died and were burned (for many had fallen here and there during the attack or had been too long in searching cellars or houses or had otherwise gotten lost), it was about twenty thousand people, young and old, whose lives were ended in such cruel conditions or who otherwise had to suffer from bodily injury. The dead corpses, which had been carried out to the Elbe in front of the Water Gate, were not soon able or willing to flow away, for in that place all the water forms a ripple or eddy, such that many of them floated around for a long time, some with their heads out of the water, others reaching out their hands as if toward heaven, giving onlookers quite a horrible spectacle. Many blatherers suggested that it was just as if these dead people still prayed, sang out, and cried to God for vengeance; and then, in the same way, people spoke of many visages, wraiths, and other such things, but no one wished to affirm this in the light of day.

As soon as the heat and embers had somewhat died down, the imperial artillery general … had all the brew kettles, bells, and other copperware brought together into variously sized heaps and had them kept as his booty. … In addition, a great many magnificent and irrecoverable household effects and all kinds of stately personal effects – including old books, writings, statues, paintings, and so on, which had belonged partly to the genteel nobility of the city who had fled, partly also to the most genteel citizens, and which were now priceless – were burned with everything else or taken by the troops as their booty. One could also walk around in many cellars up to the knee in beer and wine because the high spirits and iniquity of the common soldiers had grown so great that when one had drawn a bucket of beer or wine from a barrel, he had not bothered to replace the plug but had simply let the remaining beer and wine flow out. The stately clothes, covers, silks, gold and silver cords, all kinds of linen and other household equipment were acquired for a song by the merchants and then

transported and sold by the wagonful throughout the archbishopric of Magdeburg and the lands of Anhalt and Brunswick. One could also barter for and buy golden chains, rings, gems, and other gold and silver utensils from common servants for more than ten times less than their true worth.

Where the city archives, letters and seals, privileges, registers, protocols, and other documents had gone, no one knows, inasmuch as the leading councilors and citizens, at least those who had remained after the fire and the sword, could neither return to the city nor find any lodging there. Whether such documents, letters, and manuscripts were removed by anyone is debatable, because everything was in vaults and was badly burned; nonetheless, the city hereby suffered an irreparable injury. Whatever still existed in the cellars was used by Tilly's soldiers, who built huts on the deserted scenes of the fire.

The clergy and other members of Catholic religious orders, monks and so on, who had long awaited such an opportunity to come in and reform the cathedral (which, standing in the wide, spacious area of the new market, had remained standing and unburned along with several houses), have begun to create a new institution of both this and of other churches.

The king of Sweden, surmising that this sad circumstance, whereby the city was not relieved in time, would cause some to have unfavorable thoughts about him, had a manifesto published in which he … laid out the reason that the people had not wished to pay the considerable sums required for new recruitments and similar necessities of war. …

After this unspeakable misfortune happened to this city, which had been the residence of the first German emperor, and after those Magdeburgers who were still alive had been scattered here and there, there was a great deal of inquiry by those foreigners to whom the displaced Magdeburgers had come. How had it happened that the city had gotten into such misery and need? Had the people perhaps not resisted or not given the soldiers the proper support so that they could fight? Or had the citizens given up hope and fled from the ramparts? Or had they fallen asleep on watch? Or had they become so godless that God had had to punish them in this way? Or had it happened in some other

way? … Overall, however, because there had been two parties in the city – the one which had advised and promoted the conjunction with the lord administrator [and supported rebellion against the emperor], and the other which had advised against this, declaring that it would lead to a disturbingly large calamity – each laid a part of the guilt on the other and were thus, both before and after the conquest, fierce opponents. Those who had prophesied the misfortune could manifestly show that it had happened as they had said. The others, however, who had initiated the work and then had, by leading the common man astray, accomplished it, renounced those who had not joined in. These had been good imperialists, they claimed, and had secretly conspired with them (the imperialists) and had, indeed, even betrayed the safety of the city to the enemy, for otherwise the situation would have gone differently.

This is thus the correct, true progression of events during the conquest of this good city, Magdeburg. No one can gainsay this, for the truth shall be known.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

1.) Why did such extreme destruction occur after the peaceful surrender of the city of Magdeburg to the Catholic forces of the German emperor?

2.) What troubles could the loss of the city's books, records, and other legal documents cause?

CHAPTER 17

END OF THE OTTOMAN THREAT

Excerpted and adapted from R. Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars, 1559-1715*,
2nd edition (New York, 1979) pp. 68-72;
J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization since 1300*, 7th edition (Belmont, 2009) pp. 464-466.

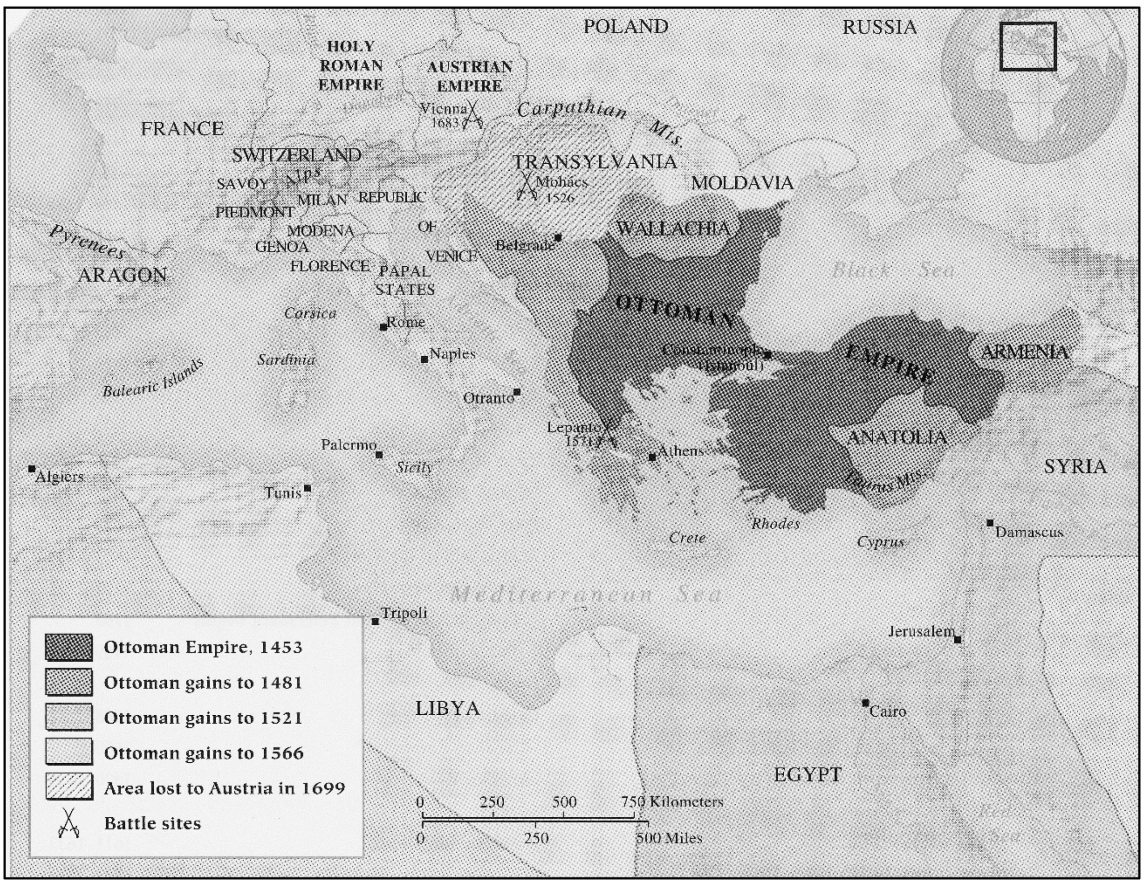
To the east of the Holy Roman Empire lay the imposing and threatening Ottoman Empire, a state which seemed profoundly alien to western and central Europeans, and deeply hostile. Travelers found the Turks almost as barbaric and exotic as the Indians of America, and infinitely more dangerous because of their large armies, equipped with modern weapons. English merchants, venturing to trade with the Turks in the late sixteenth century, wrote home to describe the amazing Muslim and Greek Orthodox religious practices they had witnessed, the bizarre architecture, food, and dress, the stark contrast between an opulent ruling caste and an impoverished peasantry, the vast extent of these eastern lands, and the herculean scale of their armies. "We arrived at the great and most stately city of Constantinople," one traveler reported, "which for the situation and proud seat thereof, for the beautiful and commodious haven, for the great and sumptuous buildings of their temples, which they call mosques, is to be preferred before all the cities of Europe. And there the Emperor of the Turks kept his court and residence, at least two miles in compass." Yet no westerner forgot that the Turks were infidels. Their lavish oriental ceremonies seemed tedious and empty. Their eunuchs and harems evoked incredulous contempt. Turkish warriors had an unrivaled reputation for cruelty and deceit.

Fortunately for the West, the Turks were politically weak in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Size was deceptive in their sprawling eastern territories. The Turkish sultan was a less effectual ruler than western observers supposed. Their armies were much smaller than westerners thought them to be, and in any case generally faced east in order to cope with the Persians and Tartars. Hence, despite the near paralysis of the Holy Roman Empire following Luther's revolt, the Turks did not intervene effectively in German affairs between 1555 and 1618; nor did they participate in the Thirty

Years War. Considering the violent, rapid expansion of the Ottoman empire earlier in the sixteenth century, how can this political softness among the Turks be explained?

The Ottoman Empire had been anything but soft before the middle of the sixteenth century. Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520-1566), the last of the great Turkish warrior sultans, had conquered the whole Balkan peninsula and most of Hungary by the end of his reign. He had also expanded into the Mediterranean. In 1522 he captured Rhodes, expelling the sorely outnumbered Knights Hospitaller (who had been relocated to the island following the collapse of the Crusader States centuries earlier). The Hospitallers then relocated to the island of Malta (just to the south of Sicily), which they successfully held despite another Turkish assault in 1565. If Suleiman had taken Malta, he could have used it as a base of operations from which to invade Italy and southern France. During the interim between the sieges of Rhodes and Malta, Suleiman's navy terrorized the rest of the Mediterranean and allied with Muslim pirates based in Tunis. Emperor Charles V's successful attack on Tunis in 1535 helped check but not eliminate the Turkish threat. After Suleiman's death, the Turks captured Venetian Cyprus in 1571, but later that same year the combined forces of Spain and Venice, encouraged by Pope St. Pius V to cooperate for the common good of Christendom, finally crushed the Turkish fleet at the Battle of Lepanto. Following this important Christian naval victory, the Ottomans gradually began to relinquish control over the Mediterranean.

Suleiman was also a threat on land. He had thirty million subjects, a revenue greater than that of the Charles V, and a much more efficient military system, including a permanent standing army of over ten thousand infantry (janissaries), over ten thousand cavalry, and at least a hundred thousand auxiliary cavalry available for annual campaigns. The janissaries were forced converts to Islam, mainly drawn from the conquered Greek Orthodox peoples of the Balkans. Taken captive as boys by the sultan's forces, they were rigorously trained to fight for Islam and to administer the Ottoman Empire. They formed an enslaved elite, permanently dependent on the sultan, given a professional schooling, never allowed to marry or to inherit lands and titles, yet freely promoted on the basis of talent and merit to the highest imperial posts. They made superb soldiers.



Relying on the strength of his janissaries, Suleiman expanded beyond the Balkans further into eastern Europe. Based out of Constantinople (now called Istanbul), his armies took Belgrade in 1521 and all of Hungary by 1526 following the Battle of Mohács, a devastating defeat for Christian Europe and a great victory for the Turks. From Hungary Suleiman pushed into Austria, besieging Vienna in 1529. Despite numerous assaults, the outnumbered Austrian defenders prevented a breach of the city walls. Poor weather, supply difficulties, disease, and discouragement finally convinced the Turks to give up the assault. The heroic defenders of Vienna had thus prevented the Ottomans from pushing into the very heart of Europe.

Ottoman Europe – that is, the Balkan peninsula – was something of a cultural no-man's-land in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; it was only superficially Turkish, cut off from Latin Christendom, and possessed a very rudimentary peasant style of life. The Turks had wiped out the native ruling class when they conquered the Balkans, but they never migrated into the area in

large numbers, nor did they try to assimilate the local peasantry, which they preferred to keep as permanently unprivileged agricultural laborers. From the Turkish viewpoint, the Balkan peasants were fairly easy to subjugate as long as they remained divided into six rival language groups: Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Serbo-Croatians, Romanians, and Magyars. Instead of imposing Islam upon the subject peoples, the Turks encouraged the perpetuation of the Greek Orthodox Church, largely to keep the Balkan population hostile to western Christianity. This Ottoman policy did indeed effectively curb Balkan defection to the Catholic Habsburgs or Poles. The Orthodox patriarch in Constantinople repaid his Turkish patrons by teaching his people to submit docilely to Ottoman rule. Certainly the Ottoman Empire was more tolerant of all sorts of alien cultures and customs than any contemporaneous state in western Europe. French, English, and Dutch merchants were granted their own trading enclaves near Istanbul. Jews flocked from Spain to enjoy relative freedom under the Turks. Thus the few towns in the Balkans were inhabited mainly by Turks and Jews; minarets and bazaars gave these towns an oriental atmosphere. In the Balkan countryside, the Christian peasants were confined to the lowest rung of the Ottoman social ladder; illiterate, ignorant, and silent, they paid extortionate taxes and tributes. In the sixteenth century their young sons were frequently levied as janissaries, and in the seventeenth century their farms were often pillaged by brigands.

After the death of Suleiman the Magnificent, the Turkish fighting machine lost much of its fearsome power and its expansive drive. As mentioned above, in 1571 the Holy League, organized by Pope St. Pius V and guided by the Spanish Habsburgs, smashed the Turkish fleet at Lepanto. In the 1590s the Austrian Habsburgs tried to capture Hungary and Transylvania, and did keep the Ottoman armies mostly on the defensive, though the peace terms of 1606 left the Balkan frontier unchanged. Ottoman passivity gave the Habsburgs freedom to concentrate on German affairs after 1618, and when the Thirty Years War went badly for the Habsburgs, the Turks, suffering a crisis of leadership, failed to capitalize on a golden opportunity for further western expansion.

The key to Turkish success had always been strong military leadership by the sultan. After Suleiman came a long line of feckless sultans who abandoned Mars for Venus. They ceased to conduct military campaigns, ceased even to

emerge from the massive harem in Istanbul. Back in the days of tough, ruthless leadership, each new Ottoman sultan had stabilized his accession by killing his younger brothers (they were strangled with a silken bowstring so as not to shed exalted blood). Now, with the sultans' amorous proclivities resulting in numerous progeny, this custom was turning the harem into a slaughterhouse. In 1595 the new sultan had forty-six brothers and sisters, and he thought it necessary to have his nineteen brothers and fifteen pregnant harem women strangled. In the seventeenth century this systematic fratricide was stopped, but by then the sultan himself had become a puppet, frequently deposed in palace revolutions. With no new lands to conquer and little war booty to enjoy, the Turkish soldiery became preoccupied with status and intrigue. The janissaries changed radically, becoming in the seventeenth century a closed, self-perpetuating caste. They now married, passed their jobs on to their sons, agitated for new perquisites, and engineered palace coups. As the economy stagnated and tax levies dwindled, bribery and corruption greatly increased.

In the 1650s, a drastic administrative shake-up in Istanbul temporarily revived the old Ottoman militancy and efficiency. In the 1660s the Turks captured the island of Crete from Venice. They tightened their grip over Hungary and resumed their drive up the Danube into Austria. In 1683 they again laid siege to Vienna. But in the closing decades of the seventeenth century, Ottoman expansion was once again stopped, this time decisively, thanks to the valiant efforts of a combined Christian force composed of Austrians, Poles, Bavarians, and Saxons. Following this second failed siege of Vienna, the Turks were forced to surrender Hungary in 1699, and their huge empire began to shrink. Although they long retained the core of their empire, the Ottomans would never again be a serious threat to Christian Europe.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

1.) What were the major Turkish conquests under Suleiman the Magnificent (d. 1566), and what setbacks did he suffer?

2.) Why did the Turks decline in strength following Suleiman's reign?

** PRIMARY SOURCE **

Eyewitness Account of the Turkish Defeat at Vienna

Excerpted from C. Macartney (ed.), *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York, 1970) pp. 59-66.

*** Taken from a pamphlet "Printed for Samuel Crouch at the Corner of Popes-Head Alley next Cornhill, 1683," this English eyewitness account offers a vivid picture of Christian-Turkish warfare in seventeenth-century Central Europe. As the text makes clear, Polish king Jan Sobieski won great renown for breaking the Turkish siege that had pinned down Habsburg forces within Vienna (although heroic Austrian resistance before the Poles' arrival had sapped Turkish strength). The lifting of the second Siege of Vienna ended, after centuries of hostility, the great assaults of Turkish forces into Christian Europe. ***

A true and exact relation of the raising of the Siege of Vienna and the victory obtained over the Ottoman army, 12 September 1683.

After a siege of sixty days, accompanied with a thousand difficulties, sicknesses, want of provisions, and great effusion of blood – after a million of cannon and musket shots, bombs, grenades, and all sorts of artillery fire, which has changed the face of the fairest and most flourishing city in the world, disfigured and ruined the majority of the best palaces of the same, and chiefly those of the Emperor, and damaged in many places the Beautiful Tower and the Church of St. Stephen along with many sumptuous buildings – after a resistance so vigorous and the loss of so many brave officers and soldiers, whose valor and bravery deserve immortal glory – after so many toils endured, so many watchings and so many orders so prudently distributed by Count Starhemberg [who commanded the city's defenses] and so punctually executed by the other officers – after so many new retrenchments, parapets, and ditches in the fortifications and principal streets and houses in the town – finally, after a vigorous defense and a resistance without parallel, heaven favorably heard the prayers and tears of a cast-down and mournful people, and retorted the terror on

a powerful enemy, and drove him from the walls of Vienna, who since 15 July to 12 September had so vigorously attacked it with 200,000 men; and by endless workings, trenchings, and minings had reduced it almost to its last gasp.

Count Starhemberg, who sustained this great burden, assisted by so many gallant officers, having given notice to the [approaching] Christian Army [of the Polish king Jan Sobieski], by discharge of muskets from the Tower of St. Stephen, of the extremity whereto the city was reduced, they discovered on 12 September, early in the morning, the Christian troops marching down the neighboring mountains of Kalemberg, and heard continually the discharges of their artillery against the Turks, who being advanced thither, were fortified with parapets of earth and great stones, to hinder the descent of the Christian Army from the mountains, who notwithstanding did advance. The vanguard of the horse and foot, seconded by the Polish horse, had a long skirmish with the Turks, disputing every foot of ground; but seeing themselves totally vanquished by the Christian forces, who had surmounted all the difficulties of the mountains and had drawn down their cannons in spite of them, they retired fighting, leaving to the Christians all their camps full of pavilions, tents, barracks, and eight pieces of cannon (with which they had raised a battery on that side four days before) and retreated towards their principal camp between the villages of Hernalls, Haderkling and Jezing. But as they passed by the Bastion of Melck they fired their cannons furiously on them. The Christians being ravished with the victory, pursued them with so much heat that they were not only forced to leave their great camps, but likewise all their others, flying towards Hungary. And it is certain that, had not the night come on, they would have totally defeated and routed the Ottoman army.

During these hot skirmishes on the mountains, the Christians lost nearly 100 men, among whom the Sergeant Major of the Regiment of Schultz, Prince Maurice of Croy, Captain of the Regiment of Grana, Marshal Lieutenant of the Field, was wounded there in his shoulder. They fired then continually against the approaches and batteries of the Turks, with the artillery from our bastions and ramparts. The besiegers, animated by the presence of the Grand Vizier, answered vigorously from theirs, and great vollies of muskets were discharged from both sides, intermingled with great quantities of grenades. The Grand

Vizier, who was in the approaches, gave them hopes of carrying the place. Prince Lewis of Baden and Colonel Heusler entered their trenches, and at the same time Count Staremburgh sallied forth and seconded them, repulsing the Janissaries, who saved themselves along with the Grand Vizier, whose son was either killed or taken prisoner, and himself wounded, as it is said. Of late the enemy had not shot so many bombs nor stones nor artillery salvos as they did that Sunday morning when our men descended from the hills towards the Scotch and Melk Bastions, upon which there stood a great many people to see from afar our descent and combat; but they observed the enemy did but little hurt. Towards the evening, the Turks, seeing the Christians masters of their camp over against the Scotch Bastion and that our cavalry had entered it, planted two pieces of cannon and shot against them. A while after, seeing themselves surprised, they quitted their approaches and all their artillery, consisting of 75 pieces of cannon, 14 cannons for battery, and some mortar pieces being comprised therein. At the same time, there happened a skirmish in the camp with the Janissaries, who were come out of the trenches, but they made no great resistance and like cowards ran away.

In the night the Christians made themselves masters of all the Turks camp. Afterwards, four companies of our foot soldiers entered into the enemies approaches with torches and lighted straw, but found nothing but dead bodies. They took possession of the enemy's artillery, some whereof were brought into the city. All the night long we saw fires at a distance, the Turk having burned as many of their camps as so sudden a flight would give them leave, and retreated from the island by favor of a bridge which they had made below the river, upon one of the arms of the Danube, the Christians having seized the bridge above on the same river.

On Monday morning we saw all the camps and fields covered with soldiers, both Poles and Germans. The city was relieved on Sunday about five o'clock in the afternoon, and everyone's curiosity carried them to see the Muslim camp after they had been shut up above two months.

The King of Poland having in the meantime with the greatest vigor repulsed the enemy on his side and put them to flight, leaving the plunder of their camp behind – which consisted of a very rich tent of the Grand Vizier, his

Colors, two ensigns with the horse tails, their usual signal of war, and standard set with diamonds, his treasure designed for the payment of the army – in short, all his equipage was possessed by the Poles. As for the rest of the tents, baggage, artillery, ammunition, and provisions enough to load eight thousand wagons, it was all divided among our army.

Night coming on, we could no longer pursue, having followed the enemy about a mile from their camp, and our army having been all that time without eating and drinking, we were forced to establish a retreat to refresh them. We had all that night to rest in, and the enemy to save themselves. The next day being 13 September, we continued not the pursuit for the same reason, which without doubt we might have done with great advantage, since they fled in much disorder toward St. Godart to get over the River Raab. … On Sunday night, after the battle, his Imperial Majesty came to Cloister Nuburgh, four hours from Vienna, whence he sent the next day to compliment the King of Poland and the Electors upon their good success the day before.

On 14 September, Count Staremburgh came to his Imperial Majesty (who received him with all manner of demonstrations of affection and esteem) and gave him an account of several memorable events during the siege. A short time after, the Emperor embarked on the Danube and landed above the bridge before the Town, and entered the City at the Stuben Gate. At Landing he was received by the Electors of Bavaria and Saxony, who were attended by their guards and a great many noble men. It was impossible to remove in so short a time such a number of dead bodies, both Turks, Christians, and horses, whereof the stench was so great on the road that it was enough to have caused an infection.

We saw the mines of the Turks which had made such great breaches, one in the Bastion of Leb and the other in that of the Palace, each about six fathoms long from bottom to top. There were also five mines under the fortifications, which would have been ready to spring in two days, when they designed a general assault, which would have been dangerous, as well for the greatness of the breach as for the diminution of the strength of the besieged. While his Majesty passed over the bridge erected at the Bastion of Stuben-Tower, he was hailed in Latin by the Magistrate, and thence he went to the Cathedral of St. Stephen. Three royal vollies were made by all the artillery, the first at his Majesty's arrival near

the town, the second at his landing, the third during the *Te Deum*, which being ended, he returned to his palace and gave audience to several public ministers, and after dined with the two Electors. …

[The next day], their Majesties being on horse-back complimented each other upon the victory, which the one attributed to the other. The King of Poland had the greatest share of the glory of this day, which he best deserved, for he may be truly styled one of the greatest kings of Christendom, and the most valiant. After a half-hour's conversation, the Emperor was invited by the King of Poland to see his army, which he accepted of, and was conducted by his Great Marshal. In effect, nothing more great and heroic could have been seen than the four thousand Hussars, who were all well-armed with coats of mail, and all the rest of the army very bravely accoutered. Having viewed the whole Polish Army, the Great Marshal commanded the said Hussars to assume the formation which they are accustomed to make when they go to charge the enemy, wherewith his imperial Majesty was highly pleased.

Afterwards his imperial Majesty returned to court, where we learn every hour so many particulars of this happy success, that our victory and the loss which the enemy had suffered seemed greater than can be imagined.

We have taken all the tents of the enemy, about 120 great guns, all their baggage, and a very great quantity of ammunition. It is confirmed likewise that the King of Poland has taken, besides the tent of the Grand Vizier, his horses with their rich harness. It is also said that besides all the treasure in silver, which was designed for the payment of the Ottoman army, there were two chests filled with jewels, so that the booty was so great that it is hard to describe.

Last night, forty Janissaries having saved themselves upon the battlements which are called pavilions, along with a great number of Christian children of both sexes whom they had made slaves, the Poles summoned them to surrender. These Janissaries begged that they might be received into the royal guard of the King of Poland, and unless that might be granted, they would kill the children and defend themselves to the last man; whereupon the King of Poland granted their request.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

1.) Who were the various lords and commanders involved in this Siege of Vienna, and what were their relations to one another?

2.) What types of military forces, technology and strategies were used by both the Turks and Christians in the siege?