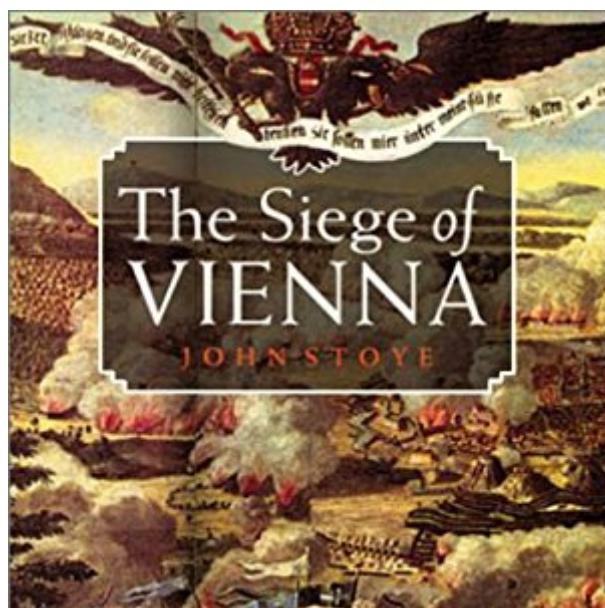


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The Siege Of Vienna: The Last Great Trial Between Cross & Crescent



Synopsis

The siege of Vienna in 1683 was one of the turning points in European history. So great was its impact that countries normally jealous and hostile sank their differences to throw back the armies of Islam and their savage Tartar allies. The consequences of defeat were momentous: The Ottomans lost half of their European territories, which led to the final collapse of their empire, and the Habsburgs turned their attention from France and the Rhine frontier to the rich pickings of the Balkans. That hot September day in 1683 witnessed the last great trial of strength between the East and the West-and opened an epoch in European history that lasted until the First World War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First of all, I must say that I prefer scholarly works of history to popular history. Scholarly history is mostly written by history professors and they tend to devote large portions of their books to analyses. They tend to be highly detailed and will cover aspects that may turn off some readers like when they examine the economics, politics and social structures of the period covered. Even though this type of history can be rather academic at times, I'm usually rewarded with great satisfaction when I finish such a book. All my favorite history books fall into this category. Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Fall of Prussia 1600-1947 by Christopher Clark, The Crimean War - A History by Orlando Figes, Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace by Dominic Lieven are all the highest forms of historical scholarship. Popular history, on the other hand is written almost exclusively by journalists. They put little emphasis on analyzing the history but instead jump into the historical narrative - and by that, I mean the story line. Popular historians are extremely fond

of quoting direct speech and love to tell their stories from personal perspectives. Popular history can be highly detailed but I'm always aware I'm reading history-lite and that somewhat compromises the satisfaction of completing a book. Make no mistake about it: The Siege of Vienna is scholarly history in its most demanding and uncompromising form. Having read the earlier mentioned Iron Kingdom just a year ago, I was pretty confident this book's analytical portion would not pose a problem. Instead, I was thrown into dismay while reading the first two chapters. The writer liberally throws lots of names of people and places around assuming the reader is in familiar territory. His writing style also includes stringing a row of historical incidents and events to back up his argument but all that does for me is to drive me further into the throes of clinical depression. I assure you - it's no fun. I always wonder why scholarly writers do this - and in no way is this limited to the field of history. Are these writers so deeply ensconced in their dark academic world they have forgotten most of the world's people do not spend their lives picking on tiny, minute details of academic interest? Are they that detached from their readers? I doubt it. For me, such writers are either lazy, doing shoddy work or are possessed with serious insecurity issues and feel the need to constantly assert their scholastic credentials. If you looked at how short this book is - the text is less than 200 pages - you might just agree with me, at least on the sloth part. Interestingly, all the scholarly history books I have read that are very good are also pretty thick. But when Stoye turned his attention from analysis to the story, the book did an about turn for me. Some portions of the book actually turned out to be scorching page-turners! I finished the book reading the last few chapters right through the night and was forced to cancel an appointment! So that's why I find myself in a very difficult position when it comes to rating this book. The early chapters probably deserve 1 or at the most 2 stars. Some of the late chapters should get 5 or at least 4. One more thing: I hate the maps in this book. Some attempt seemed to have been made to make them look like ancient maps. They end up like what you would expect treasure maps in the hands of pirates would look like. The ink is blotted, there are too many unnecessary details of trees and mountains that make looking for a town an arduous task and the smudged writing is hard to read.

By the, second, or, third, page. It had; become apparent! To me, that, there had. Been (little) to NO editing: by, the publisher. Of this work; Between the outlandish punctuation and the festival of run-on sentences, I had a devil of a time getting into a rhythm with the book. Content-wise, it was virtually impossible to follow the endless pages of European/Ottoman inter-personal and political connections, with very little in-depth fleshing out of the individual situations. There was precious little in the way of a story until mid-way through the book. The actual battle in which Christian forces

rescued Vienna and routed the Turks lasted all of ten pages and was stunningly anti-climactic. This book was recommended to me as the best on the topic. It is truly sad that one of the most important victories of western civilization does not rate a more thorough and entertaining narrative. As a frequent reader of history and historical novels, I find that related maps are critical to my enjoyment and understanding of the proceedings, as I refer to them continuously. I simply cannot fathom why on earth more thought is not devoted to this necessary aspect of historic works. That said, the maps in *The Siege of Vienna* are not the worst I've encountered. (As much as I enjoyed both of Roger Crowley's works, 1453... and Empire..., his maps were abysmal.) Still, John Stoye's were inadequate at best and the print quality sub-par. He also attempted to use period art (as many of these authors do) as a substitute for clearly detailed maps. Perhaps it is believed that the artwork lends authenticity to the book and its subject. But as actual reference material, such period art (with its distorted, medieval sense of perspective and scale) does nothing to further my understanding of the proceedings.

This is not a story of the siege of Vienna. This is a story about messengers riding back and forth asking for this and for that. The publisher should have required the author to write about the siege, not about messenger boys.

This book is a study of the event, very little is written that gives you any sense of the experience itself. 3 pages of the book explain the battle that ended the siege and probably changed the course of events in Europe. Three pages in the same chapter are devoted to the Polish King arguing about troop movement speed.

Thank God for the Habsburgs.

John Stoye has created a masterful piece of scholarship in this exposition. This is the work to consult if someone is looking for a rich amount of detail on the siege, including diagrams of the siege works and a good collection of maps rarely found in other books. It is a sometimes difficult read and could do better in terms of sequencing the dates of events. The author could also give the reader a more satisfying summation of the significance of the siege. I would also have liked a greater amount of information regarding the decision making behind the Muslim council that agreed to the invasion and a clearer total of the numbers of troops involved. But, on the whole, Stoye does provide a wealth of information in most other areas. --C. Wayne Dawson [...]

This book provides an exciting story of the Great Siege of Vienna (1893) by the Ottoman Empire. Reads like a thriller and it sounds like if John Sobieski took his time a few more days (he already took his sweet time, negotiating with others in Europe to make the best out of the situation and to strengthen his throne), Vienna would fall and the history of the Europe (and the world), and today, would be very different. Nice thriller. Waiting to be made into an epic movie!

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