

THE OTHER SIEGE OF VIENNA AND THE OTTOMAN THREAT: AN ESSAY IN COUNTER-FACTUAL HISTORY

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Abstract: By proposing a counter-factual history in which the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1529 succeeded, this essay attempts to illuminate both the parameters of Ottoman power at that time and the complexity of European politics at the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. As with many attempts at counter-factual history, this exercise seeks to offer a warning against teleological approaches to history in which major events and their outcomes are described as being inevitable.

Keywords: Ottoman history, counter-factual history, siege of Vienna, Holy Roman Empire, Protestant Reformation

Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pupils might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet.

Edward Gibbon on the possibility of Charles Martel losing the Battle Tours to the Saracens in 732 (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, New York: Bradley, n.d., vol. V: 423).

In 1521, the electors of the Holy Roman Empire chose Charles V, the Hapsburg ruler of Spain, over Francis I of France as the imperial candidate most likely to press a successful war against the Ottomans. A month later, Ottoman forces took the Danubian fortress of Belgrade, and the following year the island of Rhodes, the Eastern Mediterranean stronghold of the Knights of the Hospital of St. John. In 1526, at the battle of Mohács, Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent's artillery annihilated the Hungarian heavy cavalry and killed their king, Louis II. He left no heir. Buda fell less than two weeks later, but Süleyman chose to withdraw leaving the Hungarian Diet to elect John Zapolya, the voivode of Transylvania, as tributary king. Two months later, an anti-Zapolya faction of Hungarian notables met at Pressburg (now Bratislava) further up the Danube to offer the throne to the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand, the brother of Charles V and of Marie of Hungary,

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Louis II's widow. The following year, Ferdinand drove Zapolya out of Buda and took control of a narrow strip of Hungarian territory bordering Austria.

Ferdinand's aggressive actions, and pleas for aid from John Zapolya, provoked a return visit by Süleyman in 1529. The sultan and his army left Istanbul on May 10. On September 8, Buda again fell to the Ottomans, and Zapolya was reinstated as king. Despite the lateness of the season and the onset of autumn rains, Süleyman decided to take the war to Ferdinand. He reached Vienna with 120,000 troops, but without his heavy siege artillery, on September 27. Knowing that a relief force was on its way, Ferdinand prudently retreated from his capital, leaving a defensive garrison of 16,000 men. Ottoman siege operations against a courageous and vigorous defense lasted until October 16. Two months later, Süleyman was back in Istanbul unaware that the high point of Ottoman conquest in Europe had been reached.

Taking note of the bad weather and a German raid on Ottoman cannon and supplies being transported on the Danube, the authoritative Turkish historian Ismail Hakki Uzunçarsili concludes, "if it had been two months earlier [i.e., July] and the heavy cannon had arrived, there can be no doubt that Vienna would have fallen" (1964: 330). William H. McNeill's appraisal differs significantly:

Even at the beginning of Suleiman's reign (1520-66), the Turkish land frontiers had been pushed so far from Constantinople that the imperial field army lost a good part of its effectiveness. Sieges that had to be broken off after only a few weeks, like the famous beleaguerment of Vienna in 1529 ... were predestined to failure. (McNeill 1964: 42).

What Uzunçarsili seems to take into account, but McNeill ignores, is the fact that the second Ottoman siege of Vienna by an imperial field army from Istanbul commenced in July 1683 rather than September, clearly demonstrating that distance alone was never a guaranteed protector of the city of Vienna.

Today the second siege of Vienna is generally considered a more important historical event than the first because it presaged the rollback of Ottoman power in the Balkans. But the theme of Ottoman decline did not always trump the theme of Ottoman expansion. Writing in 1915, for example, when the Ottoman Empire was a major power in World War I and the outcome of that war was still in the balance, D. G. Hogarth displayed the continuing mindset of Gibbon when he wrote,

[T]he most brilliant and momentous of [Süleyman's] achievements ... was the conquest of Hungary. It would result in Buda and its kingdom remaining Ottoman territory for a century and a half ... and passing for all time out of the central European into the Balkan sphere; but also it would result in the Osmanli [i.e., Ottoman] power finding itself on a weak frontier face to face at last with a really strong Christian race, the Germanic, before which, since it could not advance, it would have ultimately to withdraw; and

in the rousing of Europe to a sense of its common danger from Moslem activity. Süleyman's failure to take Vienna more than made good the panic which had followed on his victory at Mohacs. It was felt that the Moslem, now that he had failed against the bulwark of central Europe, was to go no farther, and that the hour of revenge was near. (1915: 338-39)

Although the fortunes of war notoriously hinge on unforeseeable circumstances and chance occurrences, the 1529 siege of Vienna was a close enough call to justify the speculation that more clement weather might have tipped the balance in favor of an Ottoman victory. In pursuing this counterfactual speculation, however, it is important to make clear at the outset that I am *not* going to defend Gibbon's all-or-nothing scenario, his vision of a single critical battle in which Christian defeat eventuates in Muslims overrunning all of Europe and rooting out the Christian faith. Though the Ottoman armies were far better organized than the Muslim invaders of northern France that Gibbon wrote about, and their operations were part of a far superior political and strategic design, an Ottoman victory at Vienna in 1529 would no more have risked incorporating all of Europe in the domain of Islam than would a Saracen victory in that earlier semi-legendary conflict.

Instead, I shall argue that the fall of Vienna to the Ottomans would have greatly intensified the political panic in Germany and provoked a clangorous demand among Lutherans and Catholics for Christian solidarity against the infidel, possibly forestalling the Thirty Years War. As importantly, the Hapsburgs would have lost their most valuable German territories and thus seen their influence greatly reduced. And finally, a prolonged Ottoman presence deep in German territory would eventually have forced Western Europe to see the Muslim state more as a part of the European state system than as an "oriental" nemesis.

The argument as schematically proposed contains several second-order counterfactuals. As the analysis proceeds, however, it should become apparent that the results of the first-order counterfactual, an Ottoman victory at Vienna, need not be conceived of in a linear – $A > B > C > D$ – fashion. Rather, I shall maintain that if a single, chance-driven, event is changed, the result is a node of uncertainty, a situation that could possibly resolve in several ways.

For example, Vienna might have been retaken in the following campaigning season. Or, the Ottomans might have sacked the city and withdrawn. Or, Ottoman forces might have used Vienna as a staging point for further penetration of the Danube valley. Or, German and Hungarian forces might have combined to cut off and destroy an Ottoman garrison left at Vienna after the sultan's return to Istanbul. One may also look farther afield. An Ottoman victory against Archduke Ferdinand might have spurred his brother, Charles V of Spain, into some sort of retaliation in the Mediterranean. At a minimum, however, any of these immediate outcomes,

or others that might be imagined, would have intensified the Christian panic and wrought changes in the texture of Catholic-Lutheran relations.

Of course, the counterfactual historian cannot just assert such an outcome. He must winnow the imaginable possibilities and choose the one (or several) that have the highest probability. Each choice becomes, in turn, a node of uncertainty that has to be addressed in the same fashion, with obviously increasing vagueness as one moves on to imagine third or fourth-order counterfactuals.

To be at all useful, this sort of exercise must transcend personality. If the Ottomans had won the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, for example, Cervantes, who was present, might have been killed and *Don Quixote* might never have been written, leading to a markedly different history for the European novel. Probability and improbability at this scale are completely imponderable. It is only with larger groups and institutions that probability becomes assessable. But how large? Can one imagine with any plausibility, for example, a single event that would have altered the evolutionary trajectory from *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens*? The answer to this must be yes. A massive meteor strike could have terminated the entire primate line at any point in the past just as it could at any point in the future. Yet, however stimulating this prospect might be to a writer of science fiction, historians engaged in counterfactual exercises must scale their speculations somewhere above the personal and below the cosmic. The nodes of uncertainty they conceive of must involve actors whose motivations are sufficiently known and general to be susceptible of plausible speculation, but sufficiently insulated from the vagaries of biographical detail to free the speculative endeavor from the impact of random chance.

Turning to the siege itself, Süleyman's war aims in Eastern Europe seem clear from the series of campaigns he waged there. Time and again, he led his armies up the Danube, reducing one fortress after another in an obvious effort to establish Ottoman dominance over the region. Though he considered the papacy to be his ultimate Christian foe, his objective in the Balkans was not so much a specific enemy as strategic control of territory. The strongholds he captured normally remained in Ottoman hands. With the exception of Ferdinand retaking Buda, which had been left under a weak tributary ruler, no Christian counterattack succeeded in regaining significant territory from the Ottomans until the latter half of the seventeenth century. The repeated test of battle, in other words, confirmed the superiority of Ottoman land forces on their Western front throughout the sixteenth century. This fact must be taken into account in considering the most likely aftermath of a seizure of Vienna.

Since the history of Ottoman campaigns and strategy in the sixteenth century is not seriously in dispute, the immediate consequences of a victorious siege in 1529 seem easy to visualize. Given his mistake with Buda, Süleyman would not

have withdrawn from Vienna without leaving behind a strong garrison. Given the lateness of the season, the Christian relieving force could have made little more than a token attempt to retake the city before retiring for the winter. The sultan would probably have spurned any suggestion of making Austria a tributary kingdom, as he had attempted to do with Hungary. Archduke Ferdinand, the rightful king, would still have been alive, making it all but impossible for an Ottoman-backed successor to effect a claim to legitimacy.

But would the Ottomans have waited a year and then continued on in subsequent campaigns with the intent of subduing the remainder of Europe? Historians' appraisals of the two failed sieges of Vienna bring this into question. Ottoman military campaigns began each year in Istanbul. Whether marching westward into Europe or eastward toward Persia, additional forces might be met en route, but the pace of the campaign was set by the main force coming from the capital. With no capacity to winter in the field, particularly in Europe, campaigns normally terminated with the onset of wet autumn weather. Thus, a crucial factor for any Ottoman campaign in the sixteenth century was how long it took for the army to reach the frontier and confront the enemy. If the march to the frontier took several months, a delay to reduce a fortress or the early arrival of bad weather could stop a campaign before it had accomplished much. Several of Süleyman's post-1529 expeditions in Europe demonstrate this limitation. By this analysis, Vienna's location at the maximum Ottoman operational limit would have made a series of further expeditions into Bavaria or Bohemia unlikely.

A contrary scenario looks at how the Ottomans reacted to the failure and how Sultan Süleyman appraised his enemies. The 1530s saw major changes in Ottoman administrative practices. At Süleyman's accession in 1520, the empire had been divided into eight provinces governed by a *beylerbey*, the highest ranking provincial official. By 1544, there were eleven, and at the end of his reign in 1566, twenty. Strategic considerations were central to this expansion, and it is not implausible to think that a successful siege of Vienna would have led the sultan to consider the upper Danube a spearhead penetrating the Christian heartland and to fortify and garrison it accordingly. Süleyman, by this interpretation, was at heart personally absorbed in the dream of defeating the forces of the Pope, valuing campaigns on his Western frontier much more highly than those against Persia in the east.¹ Thus, he might well have sought to use Vienna as a launching pad for further conquests in Germany, or across the Alps in northeast Italy.

Both of these projections are the product of hindsight, of course. At the time, fears of further Ottoman advance were beyond question. The fall of Belgrade in 1522 had touched off a cascade of anti-Turkish publications among both Catholic and Lutheran Germans. These have been intensively studied by John W. Bohnstedt (1968), Kenneth Setton (1992), and Stephen Fischer-Galati (1959). Bohnstedt's

analysis, which for convenience we will be following here, makes it clear that regardless of its aftermath, an Ottoman seizure of Vienna in 1529 would have greatly intensified the existing fears. The first pamphlet, titled *Türcken biechlin* (a South German dialectical version of *Türkenbüchlein* or “Turk-booklet”) appeared a few months after Belgrade’s fall. The anonymous author presents a discussion among a Turkish spy, his gypsy assistant, a worried Hungarian, and a Christian hermit. The spy boasts that the Sultan will soon make more conquests because the Christians are divided into feuding groups and the German soldiery wallow in drunkenness, gluttony, and indiscipline. To this the hermit confesses that it would be a good thing if the Christians enjoyed the unity and efficiency of the Turks and opines that the Sultan’s successes are God’s punishment for sinful Christian deeds. He then calls on Europe’s Christian kings to come to the defense of Hungary. This pamphlet was an instant bestseller. Seven editions appeared in 1522, and it was republished in 1527 and 1537.

In 1523, a Lutheran knight addressed a Turk-booklet to Pope Adrian VI calling on him to abolish the papacy and devote the wealth of the Church to fighting the Turk. Next, just before the battle of Mohács in 1526, came a tract urging the Germans to quit their factionalism and unite to face a potential Turkish attack. This went through numerous editions after the Hungarian defeat and was followed by an anonymous Catholic pamphlet, published in two editions, which asserts that the rise of Lutheranism has roused God’s anger, of which the Sultan’s triumph is a token.

Luther himself chimed in with his treatise *On War against the Turks*, started in 1528 and published the following year. He, too, sees the Turkish menace as a divine punishment, but he advocates a strong defense led by the emperor rather than a holy war sanctioned by the Pope. Protestants generally deplored the temporal power exercised by the papacy in the form of crusades. But then came the siege of Vienna. Luther again put pen to paper composing his *Military Sermon against the Turk*. Interpreting the Ottoman advance as an eschatological sign, he called again for vigorous defense and for prayer against the spread of Islam.

Lutheran tracts then multiply. A theology professor’s description of the Turks as agents of Satan and a portent of the Last Judgment came out in 1529 after Luther’s *Sermon* and went through five editions. In 1531, there appeared Johannes Brenz’s *Booklet on the Turk: How Preachers and Laymen Should Conduct Themselves if the Turk Were to Invade Germany*. It went through two editions that year, three in 1537, and one in 1542. The same author published his sermons against the Turks in 1532, and these too went through several editions down to 1538.

The Catholic pamphlets did not markedly differ. One published in 1529 called on all Germans to come to Austria’s aid and portrays the struggle as a holy war. The following year, Johan Haselberg took the same line, calling on Charles V to

lead the Christian armies against the Ottomans. Two more Catholic Turk-booklets appeared in 1531 and another in 1532.

A new crop of pamphlets hit the bookstalls in 1541 and 1542 in response to further Christian setbacks. Luther's *Exhortation to Prayer against the Turk* (1541) demonstrates a deep worry about a possible invasion of Germany and advocates prayer for salvation from God's punishment and for the advent of the Last Judgment. Other Lutheran writers followed his lead while Catholic pamphleteers added their voices to the anti-Turkish chorus. These later tracts are outside the range of our consideration since we are proposing that a successful siege of Vienna in 1529 would have significantly altered the political landscape. They do, however, demonstrate the depth and persistence of Christian fears.

Here is a sample of Johannes Brenz's Lutheran rhetoric of 1537:

Christians should also take comfort in the knowledge that the Turkish Empire is God's enemy, and that God will not allow it to annihilate the Christians. Although God has caused this empire to arise in these last times as the most severe of punishments, nonetheless He will not allow the Christians to succumb completely, and Mahomet will not rule alone in the whole world ... Therefore those who fight against the Turk should be confident ... that their fighting will not be in vain, but will serve to check the Turk's advance, so that he will not become master of all the world. (Bohnstedt 1968: 44)

And this is a corresponding Catholic sentiment from a sermon of 1532:

The attitude of the Christian fighters against the Turk should be as follows. They should fight not in order to gain great honor and glory, nor to acquire lands and possessions, nor out of anger and a desire for vengeance. Such motives are Turkish, not Christian, and one cannot vanquish Turks with Turks. Our warriors should fight in order to preserve and maintain, defend and protect, the name and honor of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of His holy faith, which the Turk, its hereditary foe, is seeking to extirpate. (Bohnstedt 1968: 4448)

More fevered presentiments of the end of days would not alone have pushed the course of history in a different direction. But the fall of Vienna would have had more material impacts as well, particularly on the circumstances of the house of Hapsburg. And a religious climate spiraling toward hysteria would certainly have amplified these political tremors.

Even if Vienna had not been the Hapsburg capital, it would have been of utmost strategic importance. The Marchfeld plain that surrounds it forms a corridor that connects the German lands to the west with the Hungarian and Slavic lands to the east. While the social, political, and religious outlook of Vienna was fully that of the Christian principalities of Western Europe, the next important downstream city – called Pressburg by the Germans, Pozsony by the Hungarians, and Bratislava by

the Slovaks – marked the frontier between Western and Eastern Europe. Beyond it lay the great central plain of Hungary, a land of steppes and marshes long used by Huns, Magyars, and Mongols as a route for invading Western Europe. In 1500, its Magyar lords and oppressed Magyar, Slavic, and Rumanian peasantry constituted a sparse rural population. Its still undeveloped towns, whose trading potential was limited by the marshiness of the Danube and its tributaries, were populated mainly by Germans.

Vienna, therefore, was the key strongpoint separating Germany from the grasslands of Hungary, and no one was more aware of its strategic situation than the Hapsburgs. Since the Archduke Ferdinand, whose assassination in Sarajevo in 1914 lit the fuse of World War I, was a Hapsburg just like the Archduke Ferdinand who fled Vienna in 1529, we are accustomed to thinking of the Hapsburgs as timeless dynastic rulers. But their credentials were not so imposing five hundred years ago. From territorial origins in Alsace, the Hapsburgs had gained possession, over several centuries, of Upper and Lower Austria along the Danube; the mountain lands of Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, and Tyrol to the south and west; and a southern corridor to Trieste and Istria on the Adriatic Sea. To the north lay the forested mountains of Bohemia, a much more potent kingdom in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. To the west was Bavaria, the powerful kingdom ruled by the Wittelsbach family.

The title of Archduke became formally established during the mid-fifteenth century when the Hapsburgs temporarily gained control of both Hungary and Bohemia, and several Hapsburgs were elected emperor. Yet they were by no means the wealthiest or the most powerful of the German princes. After various ups and downs, Hapsburg fortunes turned decidedly up at the end of the fifteenth century when Maximilian I succeeded his father Frederick III, who had been rather ineffective as Holy Roman Emperor. Maximilian retook Vienna from Hungary in 1493 and made a strategic marriage with the daughter of Charles the Bold of Burgundy.

This union not only brought the Hapsburgs new lands in the west but produced a son, Philip, who eventually married Joanna, the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. Their two sons, Charles and Ferdinand, were brought up in the Netherlands and in Spain, where teen-aged Charles inherited the throne in 1516 and took office as Holy Roman Emperor three years later. Charles then gave Ferdinand the family's Austrian territories in 1521, the same year Ferdinand married Anna, the sister of Louis II, the king of Hungary and Bohemia.

The point of this tedious narration is to demonstrate that as of 1529, Hapsburg power in Austria was neither overwhelming nor secure. Not only was Hapsburg wealth and might centered in distant Spain, but their eastern lands were closely hemmed in by neighbors: Bavaria, Hungary, and Bohemia. After the death of

Louis II at the battle of Mohács in 1526, of course, Ferdinand claimed the two latter crowns through his wife. As we have seen, however, Sultan Süleyman had his own candidate for the Hungarian throne and was able to reinstall John Zapolya in 1529.

Supposing counterfactually that the subsequent siege of Vienna had proven successful, what then would have been Ferdinand's situation? Politically, he would certainly have enjoyed the support and encouragement of other Christian monarchs, most notably his brother in Spain who was marching to his aid. But where would he have stood geographically (and literally)? Without Vienna and the surrounding Marchfeld plain, the eastern Hapsburg territories would have been fatally split. The sparsely populated alpine provinces to the south and southwest could hardly have served as a base for a major counterattack, and the Bohemian lands to the north, only recently acquired, were riven by Catholic-Protestant animosity.

Ferdinand's immediate prospects after the loss of Vienna would have been bleak. Though young and vigorous, he would have lacked a strong territorial base for making a counterattack. Within this node of uncertainty, three possibilities stand out: first, a shrinkage of Hapsburg power in the east and fearful Christian acceptance of an Ottoman beachhead in Western Europe; second, a mustering of Christian forces from Germany and beyond behind Ferdinand; or third, the launching of a potent Christian counterattack in the Mediterranean by Charles V, conceivably supported by his French rival Francis I.

The first course of events is not out of the question, given the historic feuding among the German princes. With an Ottoman salient splitting their lands, the eastern Hapsburgs might have faded away as a significant military power. Indeed, even with the successful repulsion of the Sultan's forces in 1529 and subsequent efforts to defend Christian territory, Hapsburg fortunes were not untroubled. As Kenneth Setton puts it, "In the years before and after 1600 the Hapsburgs were ... at the nadir of their history, and owing to Hapsburg ineffectiveness, the Turks were again a great menace" (Setton 1991: 3).

Moreover, the Ottomans were not unaware of the serious religious divisions among their Christian foes. An intelligence report sent to Süleyman in the summer of 1530 by an agent in Durrës (It. Durazzo) on the Albanian coast reported that Fra Martin Luther, the leader of a new sect opposed to the "false" rite of Catholicism, had raised an army of 30,000 men and routed Charles V's Spaniards in a battle at a place in Germany called San Borgo. The battle was a fantasy, of course, but the report shows a clear awareness of the virulence of the Protestant-Catholic divide. In addition, the intimation that Fra Martin Luther might command a major army against Charles V might well have suggested to Süleyman that the Protestants

could be seduced into an alliance, just as in 1542 he briefly made common cause against Spain with Francis I (Isom-Verhaaren 1996).²

The actual course of events, however, makes an eclipse of Hapsburg power in the east seem less likely than the two suggested alternatives. Christian rulers did rally behind Ferdinand in a seemingly endless defensive war against the Ottomans, and the Mediterranean did become a cockpit of Muslim-Christian strategic rivalry. The spate of anti-Ottoman pamphleteering that followed the battle of Mohács would unquestionably have turned into a flood. Vienna lost! The Turk at the gateway to Germany! Christianity in peril! If the failure of the siege of 1529 provoked the Lutheran and Catholic outcry discussed earlier, a successful siege would surely have amplified it manyfold. And it is hard to imagine that Charles V and his French rival Francis I could have ignored the pressure to act.

A new crusade? The imagination need not be stretched so far. But there would surely have been a reappraisal of the Ottoman threat to Western Europe, and plans would have been devised for countering it. One plan might plausibly have focused on Bohemia and Bavaria and aimed at a rollback along the Danube. Yet a strong Ottoman garrison in Vienna would surely have seemed like a tight cork sealing the Danubian bottleneck between the Alps and the Bohemian highlands. The Sultan's prosperous Mediterranean coastlands, his soft underbelly, would have seemed a more tempting target, and one easily reached from Spain without risk of French treachery. In fact, the Christian naval assaults launched in 1530 by the Italian admiral Andrea Doria, working for the Hapsburgs, were countered by equally skilled forces commanded by North African corsairs working for Süleyman. Nevertheless, the combination of a defensive strategy in central Europe and an offensive strategy in the Mediterranean seems perfectly plausible, since that is more or less what actually transpired.

Such is the dilemma of the counterfactual historian. Knowledge of what really happened tends to make the outcome that deviates least from the record of subsequent historical events seem the most plausible. Second-order counterfactuals that radically depart from that record tend to sound hyperbolic, if not absurd. Yet a node of uncertainty truly is uncertain. Unlike a gyroscope that resists perturbation because of the physical properties of a spinning object, single events can trigger dramatic historical changes that in hindsight would have been declared impossible to predict.

Thus, despite the attractiveness of seeing an Ottoman seizure of Vienna as simply a relocation of the Christian-Muslim frontier a bit farther up the Danube, and a consequent intensification of the Christian will to resist both in central Europe and the Mediterranean, the likelihood of a major shift in the European balance of power seems even more likely.

Assuming that Süleyman would have placed a powerful, indeed an invincible, garrison in Vienna and further assuming that he would have had the vision to reorganize his territories and his forces to concentrate more intensively on confronting the papacy, a significant Muslim presence in Germany would most likely have become a fact of European political life.

What would the longer term consequences have been? Without trying to detail a series of third-order counterfactuals, it is fair to conjecture the following: The rollback of the Ottoman Empire that got underway late in the seventeenth century under Hapsburg leadership would have been delayed, or never would have occurred. A strategic resettlement of Muslims in Vienna, followed more slowly by religious conversion of some of the natives, would have brought into being a significant German-speaking Muslim population. A cosmopolitan Vienna would have bridged the cultural divide between Eastern and Western Europe and served as a conduit for the transmission of Western European ideas and practices into Ottoman lands, a phenomenon well attested in Istanbul itself at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

More intriguing than any of the foregoing is the likelihood of the Ottomans becoming an active player in the drama of Reformation. Without going so far as to suggest that the sultans would have championed the Protestants against the Catholics, there is nothing implausible in the notion that either Catholic or Protestant princes might have sought tactical advantage by soliciting Ottoman support. After all, the history of the crusades is replete with tactical alliances between Christians and Saracens.

In the long run, this last possibility adumbrates a European future in which the Ottoman Empire becomes accepted as a “normal” part of the continental balance of power and never experiences the conceptual relegation to a position of “oriental” inferiority that became increasingly evident in the eighteenth century. And as a corollary of such an acceptance, this alternative future might have seen individual Muslims, speaking German and perhaps other Western European languages, visiting or living as normal people on the Christian side of the frontier. However farfetched such fraternization across a European Muslim-Christian divide might seem, today’s nearly universal harmony between Protestants and Catholics would have seemed equally unthinkable to Germans fated to live out their lives during the Thirty Years War of the seventeenth century.

With the establishment of the Centre for Islamic Studies at Oxford in the 1990s, Gibbon’s horrified imagining of the interpretation of the Koran being taught in the schools of Oxford and her students imbibing “the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet” ironically and peaceably came to pass. It did not require the conversion of Europe by the Saracen sword to make it happen; the aftermath of imperialism and the advent of oil money did the trick. By the same token, it should

not be assumed that the eighteenth and nineteenth century “orientalizing” of the Muslim world, most notably in the guise of the Ottoman Empire, was unavoidably determined by fundamental matters of faith. If the summer of 1529 had been a bit drier and the Ottoman siege cannons had kept on schedule, the trials Christians and Muslims in Europe are now experiencing in learning how to live together might have been weathered two or three hundred years ago.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Professor Cornell Fleischer for elucidation of this point of view.
2. I am grateful to Professor Cornell Fleischer for bringing this article to my attention.

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