

Lifting the Muslim Siege of Vienna (1683) Bringing History to Life

WAYNE LUTTON

Americans and much of the rest of the world associate September 11, 2001, with the four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic group al-Qaeda. But how many recall that on that date in 1683, the Ottoman Islamic assault on the heart of Europe was defeated before the gates of Vienna? Italian film director Renzo Martinelli came up with the idea of portraying these historical events with that reference in mind.

While the Ottoman Empire of Sultan Mehmed IV had signed peace treaties with the European Christian kingdoms, it is clear that he wanted to be known as one of the great conquerors. On August 6, 1682, he officially launched a campaign, the goal of which was to capture Vienna, known as “the Golden Apple,” and then move south to Rome and symbolically turn St. Peter’s Basilica into a mosque. A horde of three hundred thousand departed for the Eastern Marches of Hapsburg Austria.

The film accurately portrays the vacillation of Vienna’s defenders. Given the existing peace treaties, they were shocked when messengers warned that a huge Muslim army was on the way. In one scene, an Austrian official exclaims that “no one is threatening us,” to which Father Marco d’Aviano, played by F. Murray Abraham, replies, “Islam wants to conquer the world.”

The main Ottoman army finally arrived on July 14, 1683, and demanded that the capital surrender and its inhabitants either convert to Islam or pay taxes. Vienna’s commander, Count Rudiger von Starhemberg, rejected these demands.

Father d’Aviano, around whose activities much of the story revolves, was a true character. Born in Aviano, in the Italian republic of Venice, he gained a wide reputation as a healer, eventually becoming a key advisor in matters both holy and secular to the Holy Roman

Emperor Leopold I. We see him here warning that they must all prepare to defend “their homes, traditions, and faith” from the Muslims.

As the siege wore on, the Turks used sappers to dig tunnels under walls in especially vulnerable locations, blowing up mines that created dangerous breaches. Such operations are among the battle scenes included in the film.

THE DAY OF THE SIEGE

September Eleven 1683 (aka: The Battle of Vienna)

Directed by: Renzo Martinelli

Starring: F. Murray Abraham, Enrico Lo Verso, Alicja Bachleda, and Jerzy Skolimowski

A Polish-Italian co-production of Agresywna Banda & Martinelli Film Company International

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DVD release 2014

Running time: 2 hours; In English

Available on DVD from Amazon.com



By early September, Vienna’s garrison was reduced to only 4,000 defenders and it seemed that the city must soon fall. Father d’Aviano reflects that, “We are alone... God help us.” It turned out that Pope Innocent XI managed to organize a Holy League against Islam, and a relief army led by Jan Sobieski III, King of Poland-Lithuania, and Charles, Duke of Lorraine, arrived in the nick of time on September 11, catching the Ottomans in a vice. As you might expect, these battle scenes are the highlight of the film.

The film ends with Kara Mustafa Pasha’s execution for failure by his sultan. The defeat of the Turks outside the gates of Vienna started a retreat of Islam in Eastern Europe that lasted until 1918. But what of today? As Douglas Murray concludes in *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*, the descendants of the defenders appear bent on suicide. ■

Wayne Lutton is the editor of The Social Contract.