

THE  
ENEMY  
AT THE  
GATE

HABSBURGS, OTTOMANS  
AND THE BATTLE FOR EUROPE



ANDREW  
WHEATCROFT

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Battle for Europe*

ANDREW WHEATCROFT



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For  
Denise Gurney Wheatcroft  
1914–2007

Mutter, *du* machtest ihn klein, du warsts, die ihn anfang;  
dir war er neu, du beugtest über die neuen  
Augen die freundliche Welt und wehrtest der fremden.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Die dritte Elegie'

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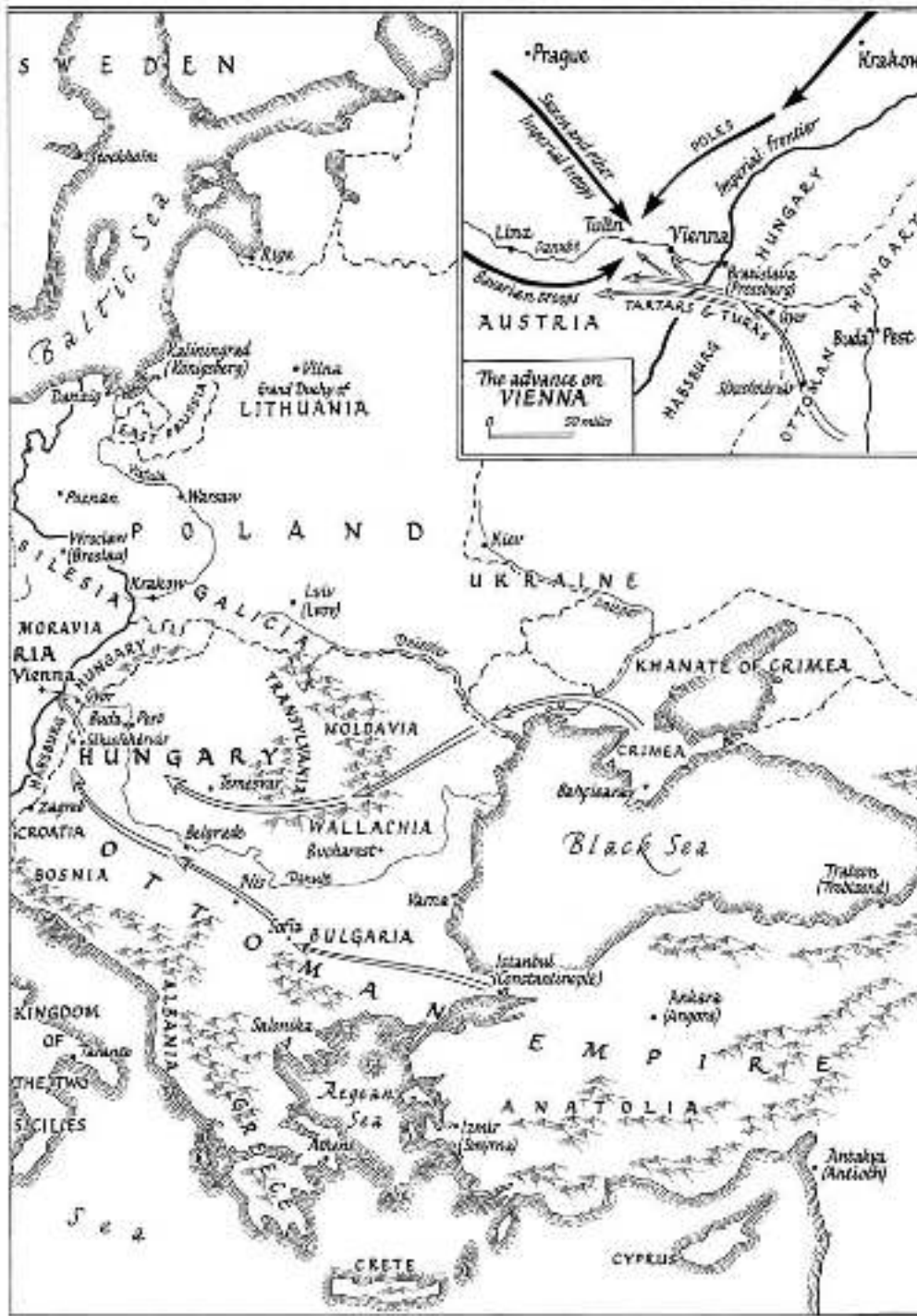
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# The Road to War, 1683

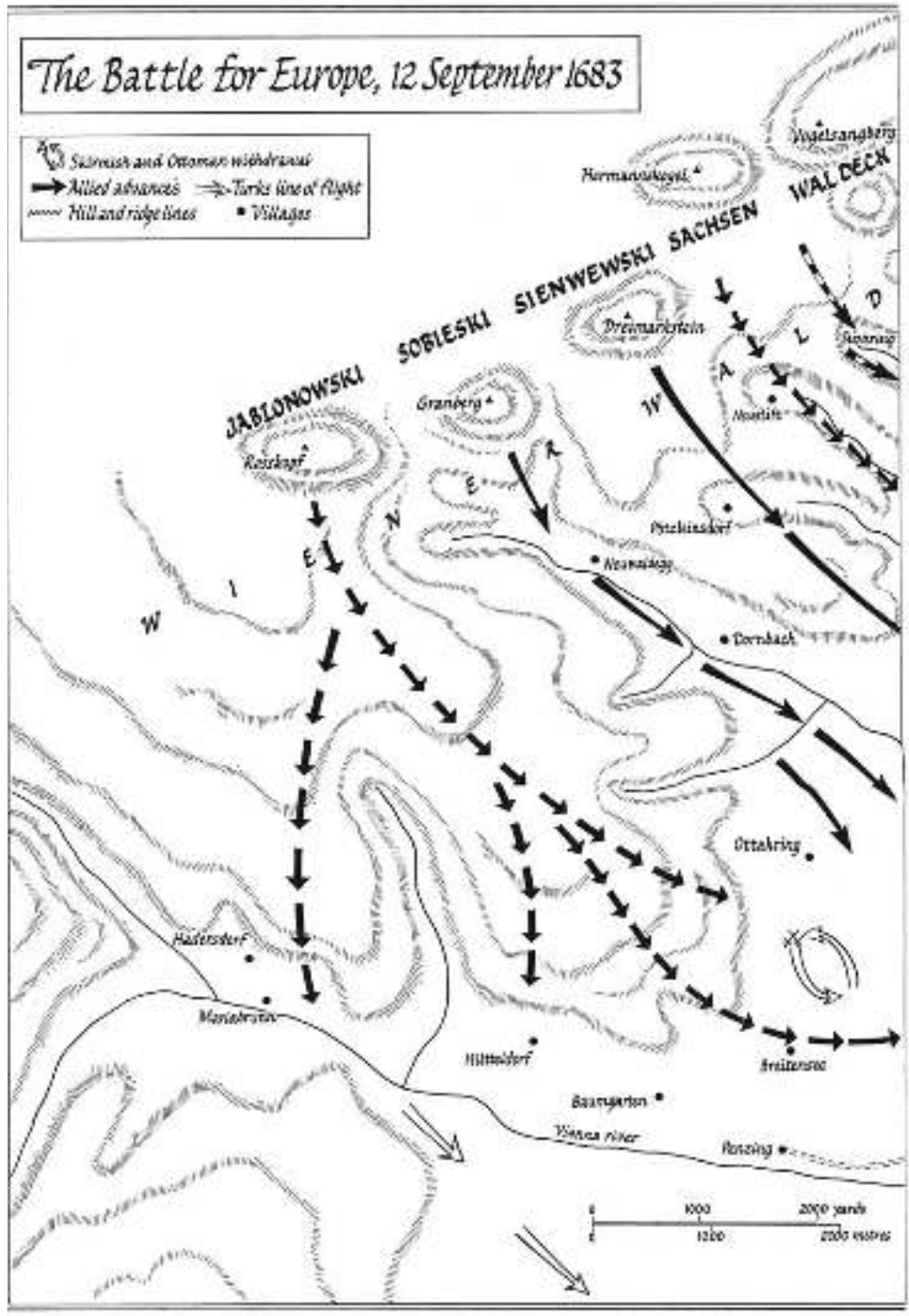
← Ottoman forces approaching Vienna and Tartar raids into Austria (see also inset)  
— H.R.E. boundary

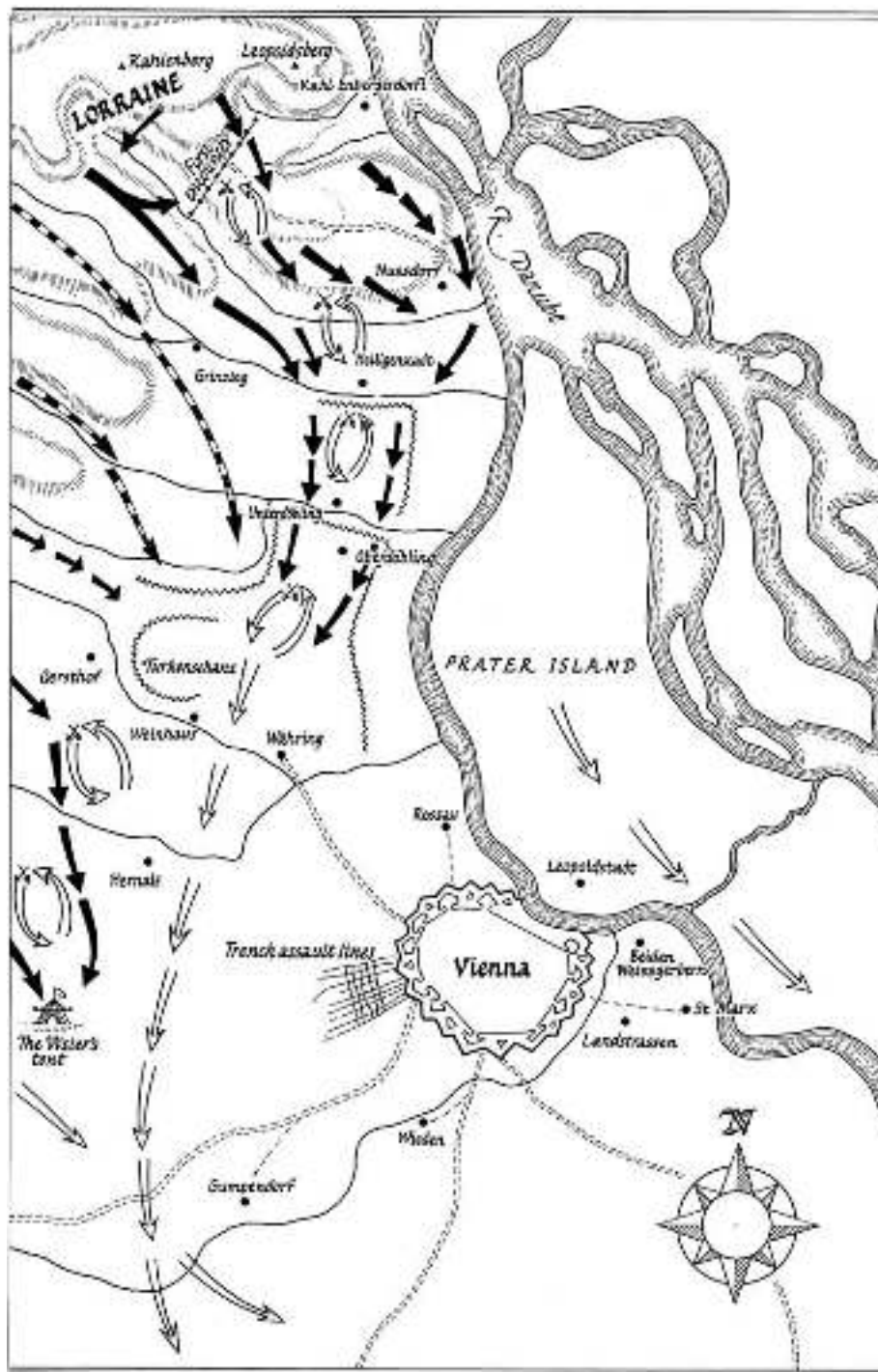




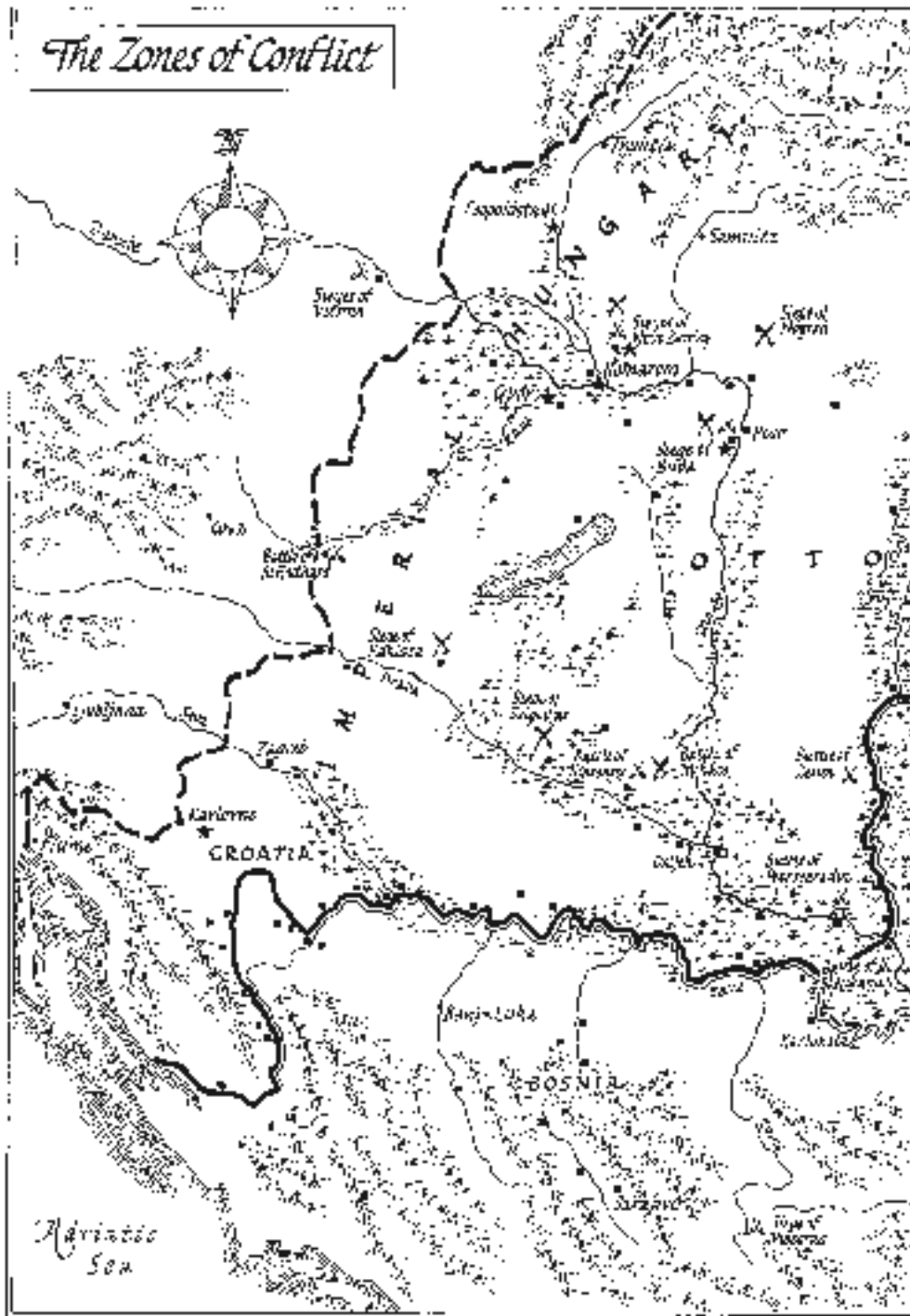
# The Battle for Europe, 12 September 1683

 Saracens and Ottoman withdrawal  
 Allied advances  
 Turks line of flight  
 Hill and ridge lines  
 Villages





# The Zones of Conflict





Map showing the Habsburg-Ottoman border after the Treaty of Karlowitz, 1699, the Habsburg border after the Treaty of Belgrade, 1739, and the borders of the Holy Roman Empire (Austro-Hungarian border). The map also indicates marshy ground, mountain areas, fortified strongpoints, major strongholds, major field battles and sieges, Habsburg victories, and Ottoman victories.

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## *Illustrations*

For permission to reproduce illustrations author and publishers wish to thank the following: akg-images: 10 and 16; Belvedere, Vienna: 9; Bridgeman Art Library: 2, 11, 15 and 18; Magyar Nemzeti Galeria, Budapest/Tibor Mester: 1.

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## Acknowledgements

The *Enemy at the Gate* has been slowly growing for almost the entirety of my writing life. In a sense, the idea for this book began with one conference and ended with another. In 1972, Geoffrey Best and I organised a meeting at the University of Edinburgh in the then-new field of War, Peace and Peoples. We had both switched from other interests to the study of war and society; Geoffrey has gone on to be much more productive in the field than I have been: his friendship has been a constant in all the years since then.

In the late 1990s I picked up the threads of this subject which had been in abeyance over fifteen years. By then I had written other works on the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, and felt confident enough to take up the main questions which are the subject of this book: why did they fight each other for so long – and why did they finally stop fighting? In 2007 I had almost finished the text and then attended another conference, at the University of Reading, on 'Crossing the Divide: Continuity and Change in Late Medieval and Early Modern Warfare. Whereas at Edinburgh we had quite rapidly assembled a hand-picked group who met, talked and argued (sometimes fiercely) day and night for four days, Frank Tallett and David Trim had spent two years organising a much larger and more open meeting of experts: it was a huge success. The battlefield is not my preferred territory; descriptions of war and suffering can still cause me a very real sense of revulsion. Yet both Edinburgh in 1972 and Reading in 2007 demonstrated to me that war and conflict are central to our understanding of the past.

I want to thank those who have been both an inspiration and, like all good friends, a practical help. I have boldly dispensed with titles in listing them here.

John Keegan was in our Edinburgh group in 1972, and I have valued



both his friendship and his work ever since. We have written books together and he was the first person to encourage my interest both in the Habsburgs and in the use of visual material in the study of history. For this book I have tried to apply some of the insights contained in his groundbreaking work, *The Face of Battle*.

John Brewer flits invisibly through these pages. He has been a trail-blazer in almost every topic that I have covered. *The Sinews of Power* showed the economic consequences of war in developed societies; and the huge collective work, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, edited with Roy Porter, provided the superstructure for my work on images and networks of communication. Now, with the final chapter of his book *A Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century*, John has again introduced me to ideas and material I would never have found for myself. Over the decades – in Florence, Los Angeles, Oxford and London – John and Stella have been the best of friends; neither of them can know how much their constant support has meant to me.

Writing this book has created a new passion for Hungary. I only wish that I could read and understand the marvellous sinewy language beyond a few words and phrases; my colleague Dána Káli has assured me that it is now too late to begin. I am very grateful for her help by translating material from the Hungarian, including a marvellously spirited version of the last section of Miklós Zrínyi's epic *Szigeti vészedelem* (The Peril of Sziget), published in 1651 and never translated into English.

I now can entirely understand the old Latin tag *extra Hungariam non est vita, si est vita non est ita* – there's no life outside Hungary, and if there is, it's not life. My guide in this discovery has been Stephen Pálffy who, with the spirited support of Annamaria Almásy, has introduced me to the Hungarian way of life – from perfect food and wonderful wine to a sheer joy in life – and has provided often complex answers to my endless questions. I have benefited especially from Stephen's extraordinarily broad knowledge of the issues and the personalities I encountered in the course of writing this book. Since Pálffys have appeared for generations on these battlefields, this has been invaluable.

Budapest has become for me a quintessence of scholarly excellence. Thanks to Gábor Ágoston in Washington D.C., who smoothed my path, I met Pál Fodor and the group of erudite and immensely active Ottomanists at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Terza Obórni in

turn introduced me to Agnes Sálgo Wojtila at the National Széchényi Library, which houses the best researched collection of images I have encountered anywhere. Her kindness and expert knowledge have been a very great help. Opposite the Library, a Habsburg palace on the castle hill – the scene of so much bloodshed in this book – now contains the National Gallery of Art, a treasure house of nineteenth-century history paintings; next door to it, the City Museum is home to a huge collection of material on the siege of Buda in 1686. From their resources I have culled some of the paintings and images that appear in these pages.

Other parts of this book have been researched in Vienna, Graz, Edinburgh, London, Washington DC and Philadelphia. In Vienna, I consulted the Wien Bibliothek, the Österreichische National Bibliothek and the Wien Museum; in Graz, the Joanneum; in Great Britain, the British Museum, the London Library, Cambridge University Library and the National Library of Scotland; in Washington, the Library of Congress and the Folger Library. In Stockholm Henrik Andersson showed me the unique printer's manuscript of Marsigli's last work in the collection of the Livrustkammeren; in Philadelphia, Earle Spamer helped me with the volumes of the Lindsay manuscripts held by the American Philosophical Society. I especially appreciated the kindness of Peter Parshall, who introduced me to the extraordinarily rich collection of engravings and woodcuts in the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

To Claudia Fabian at the Bayerische Staats Bibliothek in Munich, I owe a great debt of gratitude. She was the first person to understand how my pursuit of images in books could 'add value' to the great digitisation projects in European libraries. She joined in setting the direction of our research project – the Printed Images Research Consortium – by James Knowles, Gerald Maclean, Agnes Sálgo Wojtila, Sylvia Mattl Wurm, and the project manager, Susanne Peters. No one has provided more input into this book than Susanne. She has read every word through endless drafts, tactfully suggested changes, more firmly excised some of its excesses, loaned me books, and provided a stream of ideas. I do not think a simple 'thank you' could ever express my gratitude. Gerald Maclean, both in writing and in conversation, has been the stimulus of much that finally appeared in these pages. He and Donna Landry have also helped me to understand much better a world that centred on the horse, and by implication its role

in the eastern war. At times, they must have dreaded my simplistic interrogations.

I also want to thank Peter and Barbara Geymeyer for their extensive hospitality in Bavaria, and Peter for his exceptional knowledge of Austrian engraved images. His book collection, for example, provided in an instant the detail of where Bosnian regiments were stationed before 1914, turning a supposition into a historical fact. That Graz features repeatedly in these pages is partly because it should, for good historical reasons, but also because Peter and Greta Kocevar entertained me, and proved a wonderful source of arcane information about Styria: a magical region and the heart of old Austria.

Working on the text with Tessa Harvey has been thoroughly enjoyable and fruitful. Her unerring sense of what works on the page taught me a great deal; I can still hear her voice: 'Don't give the story away *yet*.' I would like to thank Lara Heimart and her team at Basic Books, who have been effective, fun to work with, attentive to every detail, and above all, most wonderfully encouraging.

It may seem bizarre to acknowledge a place – Craigieburn. This book is about borders and boundaries: living in this very old house, writing at the top of a Scottish border tower first burned out by reivers in 1570, makes this history of raiding and border warfare along another, far distant frontier very real. It has always been a contested and debatable land, much like the territory fought over by Habsburgs and Ottomans. It was a land of war and skirmishing, but now it exemplifies amity.

My wife Janet is at the centre of this book and of everything else. She has found time to work with me on this project, with advice and recollections of places we had been to and which I had forgotten. Most valuable of all has been the half-expressed 'no', saving me from many fine messes.

Andrew Wheatcroft  
Craigieburn House  
April 2008

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## Preface

I first set foot in Vienna in late August 1963 from the Belgrade train.<sup>1</sup> The dingy 'hotel' that I found not far from the station was the worst I have ever stayed in, surpassing in awfulness even a workers' hostel in Seville, with its bedbugs and cockroaches. But it was all I could afford. Other dejected occupants came and went carrying their cardboard suitcases strapped up with rough string, but none of them stayed long. I did, because there was a good local (*Beisl*) in the next street and I could live off soup and bread and sometimes, every few days or so, a redemptive glass of rough white wine.

In 1683, exactly 280 summers before, a vast Ottoman camp had occupied the same spot: the Turks were besieging Vienna, for the second time in history. They had been there before, during the first siege in the autumn of 1529. Of course, there was no sign or memory of either ferocious struggle and in 1963 I had barely heard of them. What you could see were traces of a much more recent assault. In 1945, the Soviet 3rd Ukrainian Front armies had fought for twelve days street by street with the Nazi *Waffen SS*, finally taking the city on 13 April. Eighteen years later, high up on the façade of a long apartment block, I could still see the tell-tale spatter of bullets.

Just a few months earlier I had seen those same marks on the park walls behind the Humanities Faculty (*Facultad de Filosofía y Letras*) in Madrid; within the buildings where we studied, in the early winter of 1936 the Republicans had fought desperately, retreating from floor to floor, but still successfully holding back General Franco's Army of Africa. Seeing those pockmarks in Vienna produced an instant frisson: I knew what they meant. So from those first moments, submerged beneath the more normal responses to Vienna's exuberant life of food,

drink, art, music and culture, I also had an uneasy sense of war, violence and mortal struggle.

For an eighteen-year-old, fuelled with his Austro-Hungarian grandmother's romantic pre-1908 memories, Vienna was both enticing and a little depressing. But those pitted walls, in some places like a huge, ugly rash, were what stayed in my mind. Next time I came, I at least knew about the Turks besieging the inner city in 1683. My guide was John Stoye's then-new book *The Siege of Vienna*, published in 1964, and every day I traced an identical path through streets of the Inner City, trying to relate what had happened in 1683 to the buildings that now stood there. The street plan in most places had remained much the same, but there were then (before the days of 'heritage') no signs or plaques that suggested what had happened centuries before.

Nevertheless I soon created my own landmarks: a butcher serving wonderful fresh sausages with a plate of sauerkraut and a glistening potato salad; a seedy bar that had good cheap wine, best during September and October. I later found much better wine by taking the tram out to the wine villages like Grinzing or a local train to a *Lokal* in the shadow of the great abbey at Klosterneuburg. But through the subsequent decades, my old haunts began to vanish, although more slowly than in other European cities. The building of the Underground (*U-Bahn*) in the 1980s, Vienna's most spectacular construction project since the demolition of the ancient walls and the building of the Ringstrasse a century before, was the end of the old pre-1914 world.

Or so it seemed. In fact, it promoted a rediscovery. The ancient walls and bastions, supposedly demolished, are still present, at least in their trace and foundations, just below the surface of the new nineteenth- and twentieth-century city. A few months before I finished this book, I told a friend of seeing some excavation work close to the National Theatre (*Burgtheater*). The builders were digging the foundations for a new office block, and had exposed what looked like some old vaults. The colour of the walls and rubble was odd, rather pale, and I was not sure whether it was brick or stone. He believed he knew what I had seen: the walls of Vienna. When the builders of the Ringstrasse removed the fortifications, stone by stone, from the 1850s onwards, they were only taken down to just below ground level, providing a solid foundation for the new buildings of the great project. So the walls of Vienna are still there, or at least the vestiges of them,

just as the more recent marks of the Russian assault on the city were still there in 1963, if you knew where to look.<sup>2</sup>

Knowing where the events took place was important. Walking the ground was a good idea, but often the landscape had altered irrecoverably. Nevertheless, as the story took shape, and grew inexorably, there were more trips to battlefields and to other places we would now call sites of memory. In fact more often than not they were sites of oblivion. No one there knew or could even suggest where some long-forgotten battle had taken place. Sometimes I had more luck. Above the site of the Battle of St Gotthard, on the modern frontier between Austria and Hungary, near the village of Mogersdorf, there is a low hill overlooking the battlefield. On it a local enthusiast and the community have created a little memorial museum.<sup>3</sup> That battle was the most historic thing that ever happened in Mogersdorf, and the people there have made, in effect, a war memorial.<sup>4</sup> But that memorial records only an instant in a long and complex history, out of context. It is just one disconnected element in a long story.

\* \* \*

This, then, is not a straightforward *history*. With something so evanescent and imponderable as fear, my main topic, I had no idea what would be relevant or useful. Late on in my quest, one of the finest historians of Ottoman Hungary, Pál Fodor, gave me a clue why this should be. One day, walking out of the Academy of Sciences in Budapest, he told me that we know a great deal about many terrible incidents that had taken place in Ottoman Hungary. We might know where an outrage had occurred; we might even know who had suffered or what had happened to them. But none of these horror stories created a universal, a stereotype, that could be generalised for every similar occasion. Each event was *sui generis*, unique, unless we could realistically suggest otherwise.<sup>5</sup> History is messy, and usually manages to surprise us.

By chance I had stumbled into a huge and only partially cultivated field. A huge amount of fine work had been done on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, very much less on the seventeenth and almost nothing on the eighteenth.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, I have concentrated on this later period, with the Siege of Vienna in 1683 as its centre piece until the final period of conflict between the two imperial powers.<sup>7</sup>

To keep the book manageable, I have had to exclude other participants in the struggle with the Ottomans, discarding the material on the role of Venice and the campaigns in the Peloponnese, the islands and the Mediterranean. Then a huge tranche on the Crimea and Russia's eventual expansion eastward into the khanates of Central Asia went the same way. I had to set aside, regretfully, my long excursus about China.<sup>8</sup>

On the later Ottoman–Habsburg military struggle the most recent sources were still those written in the nineteenth century. Plainly, the last phase of the Holy War had fallen off the historical map after occupying a central position for so long. In the years after my first coming to Vienna, my path had led not to seventeenth- but nineteenth- and twentieth-century military history. Work in the archives centred on the Austrian role in the international arms trade, and I spent weeks (happily) in the small town of Steyr with contemporary logbooks and inventories. From there I would make visits to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Kriegsarchiv (War Archive) in Vienna. Yet all the time, and in many of the records, there was an underlying sense of fear: fear that competitors or rivals would overtake the Austro-Hungarian monarchy; of being unprepared, of being left behind technologically, outsmarted.<sup>9</sup> As, eventually, I moved on to other Habsburg topics, there was still evidence of this taint of anxiety more or less ever-present. Where could it have come from?

\* \* \*

Most books require a number of preliminary explanations. First, a set of intellectual debts – a kind of paternity in the ideas. This book only became possible, although I had wanted to write it for a long time, with the publication of Rhoads Murphey's *Ottoman Warfare, 1500–1700* in 1999 and Caroline Finkel's *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1923* in 2005. I had never believed the ineradicably negative tone of contemporary publications on the 'Turk'. Although I could explain how one negative idea after another proliferated in the West, through books, pamphlets, paintings, prints, even teacups and tiles, it was impossible to suggest what an alternative might be. Murphey and Finkel demolished some of the stereotypes, but, more important, they also diminished the pragmatic differences between the combatants. Because western polemicists took the 'Turk' out of the normal span

of human behaviour – by being cruel, lustful and driven remorselessly by the power of blind faith – they presented, in effect, a race of psychopaths. Ottomans could almost never behave in any different manner: for example, humanely. This image simply did not match the evidence, which, when approached forensically, exhibits constant and disturbing ambiguities that undermine the stereotypes.

The other debt of origin was to an Austrian social anthropologist, Andre Gingrich. Most of the material and the deeper study of the events I was making did not fit any framework. Gingrich described what had developed to the east of Western Europe as ‘Frontier Orientalism’, which developed out of the peoples and cultures of the region. I tried and tested this concept against my material covering a much longer period than Andre Gingrich described. It worked. It has provided me with an underlying matrix into which the pieces of evidence can fit like a jigsaw puzzle. I think historians will find ‘Frontier Orientalism’ an immensely valuable idea in the future.

This book is not based on manuscript sources, except in one or two instances. It is written from contemporary published sources, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the material which must have informed people at the time, providing most of what they knew of these events. These are materials with which I have been working for more than twenty years; I am still making discoveries and also changing my mind about what I have researched already. It is impossible, now and then, to know how people form their opinions. But we can understand how the material comes before them. Things have not changed much since the fifteenth century. Like the book before you now, someone decided to publish it and hoped to make money from it. Some books and pamphlets were printed with other motives, but most of the material I have used was frankly commercial. They were products in a market, and printers (the publishers of their day) sought to make them as saleable as possible to the potential customers. One of the key ways to achieve this was to illustrate them with engravings and woodcuts. This was especially valuable in an era when full literacy was relatively limited.

One way of knowing if a text reached a broad audience was how many editions were printed, and over how long a period. Equally, if a book was translated and published into another language, it must have reached a new and different group of readers. Slowly, we are



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