

STUDY PACK 8

ISLAMIC INVASIONS OF EUROPE

“The great advantage which the Moslems always had over Christians was their _____, reinforced by the certainty of their warriors that _____ awaited the Faithful who died in battle. As one historian has put it: ‘The disregard of human life among the leaders of the Ottoman Turks at this time was almost incredible; to attain their end in war they sacrificed thousands upon thousands of men with a callous indifference’.”

~~ Ernle Bradford, *The Great Siege: Malta 1565*, p. 77-78, written in 1961 ~~

I. THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

In the fifteenth century, Europe finally succeeded in driving Moslem armies out of Spain. However, the Moslem dream of the conquest of Europe did not die. Most of the Moslem empire was under the control of the Turks. Sultan Suleiman I was determined that his destiny was to _____. He described himself this way:

“Sultan of the Ottomans, Allah’s deputy on Earth, lord of the lords of this world, possessor of men’s necks, king of believers and unbelievers, king of kings, emperor of the east and west, emperor of the Chakans of great authority, prince and lord of the most happy constellation, _____, seal of victory, refuge of all the people in the whole world, the shadow of the almighty, dispensing quiet in the Earth.”

The Turks called him Suleiman the Lawgiver. The Europeans called him Suleiman the Magnificent. He won hundreds of battles, conquering Mediterranean islands and Eastern European cities. He determined to capture western Europe from his bases in eastern Europe.

II. THE SIEGE OF VIENNA

In 1529, he besieged the Austrian capital of Vienna with 120,000 men. Vienna, with its 300 year old walls was defended by 26,000 men under the command of a German mercenary Nicholas Graf von Salm. Ottoman forces burnt villages, raped and pillaged all over Austria. Von Salm tried to evacuate many of his non-combatants but most were killed or enslaved by the Ottomans.

The defenders of Vienna saw themselves as the _____. Rains delayed the Ottoman army for two months, allowing dramatic improvements in the defenses of the city. Three hundred cannons began to bombard Vienna simultaneously. The defenders responded with a surprise cavalry attack. The Ottoman army began to dig tunnels in order to plant explosives to bring down the walls. The defenders dug counter tunnels, often fighting the Ottomans under the ground in fierce hand to hand combat. Some historians have referred to this as the _____.

For a month, fierce fighting raged – underground, at breaches in the walls and in the fields and pastures around Vienna. A final charge by all the Moslem forces was turned back with great losses of life on both sides, including von Salm. Over 25,000 Moslem soldiers were killed in the Siege. Suleiman attempted another campaign in 1532 but it never reached the city.

III. THE SIEGE OF MALTA

Malta is a small Mediterranean island. It has often been thought of as an ideal base for attacking Europe from the south through Spain and France. The island was defended by a military order, the Knights of St. John. Their original purpose had been to build hospitals and safe places of refuge for Christians in Palestine. After being expelled from Palestine they settled the island of Rhodes. In 1522, Suleiman drove them out of Rhodes and they settled in Malta.

The Knights took a vow of eternal warfare against Islam and operated a number of naval warships in the Mediterranean Sea. Malta had about 12,000 inhabitants with a nearby island Gozo inhabited by another 5,000. These people were of Philistine and Arabic descent but they had been Christians since the visit of _____.

In 1564, 35 years after the siege of Vienna, the Sultan determined to seize Malta as a base for an invasion of Spain. An invasion force of 180 ships and 40,000 soldiers was prepared. The Knights and several European governments had spies all over the Islamic world. Knowledge of the invasion plans soon reached Malta.

Jean de la Valette was the Grand master of the Knights of St. John. He was 70. He had served in the Knights for fifty years. He had fought in the defense of Rhodes, captained a warship, been captured and spent over a year as a galley slave and returned to captain another warship. Valette had around 600 members of the Knights of St. John and about 7,400 male inhabitants of Malta to defend the island with. They would later receive about 900 Spanish soldiers in reinforcement.

Valette knew that southern Europe was not ready to withstand a large scale Moslem invasion. He felt that the future of Christian Europe was in his hands and he persuaded the Maltese that God had destined them to defend Christianity with their lives. "It is _____, which is now to be fought. A formidable army of infidels are on the point of invading our island. We, for our part, are the chosen soldiers of the Cross and if Heaven requires the sacrifice of our lives, there can be no better occasion than this."

Valette improved fortifications, collected supplies, sent the elderly and infirm to shelter in Spain and organized the island for defense. He ordered that every post was to be defended to the death, no position was to be abandoned, no one was to surrender.

Moslem soldiers arrived in Malta wearing gold bracelets with the following Arabic inscription:

"_____."

The Moslem forces decided to take St. Elmo, one of five major fortifications, first. They expected this to take two or three days. The fort held out for 31 days. Every night reinforcements slipped into the doomed fort under the cover of darkness. Over 1,500 defenders would perish, only 5 escaped. They would inflict over 10,000 casualties on the attackers. Only one surrendered.

Defenders at the other fortifications turned back attacks day after day. When the Moslems began to publicly display the bodies of executed prisoners, Valette beheaded his prisoners and shot their heads out of cannons. Attackers and defenders died by the thousands. At the end of three months, the defenders had less than 1,000 men left. The invading army had diminished to less than 10,000. Finally a relief force of 10,000 Spanish soldiers arrived. After a final battle, the Turks withdrew. The southern part of Europe would not be invaded.

IV. THE BATTLE OF VIENNA

The Ottoman Empire again attempted to take Vienna in 1683. They besieged the city during July, August and September. For decades, the Ottomans had been providing support to any anti-Catholic elements in Eastern Europe, even evangelical Protestants.

An Ottoman army invaded Austria. Most of the inhabitants fled. Forty thousand Moslem soldiers were resisted by 11,000 troops and 5,000 local militia. The besiegers dug tunnels to the walls and engaged in trench warfare. Large sections of the walls were blown up and the Turks occupied parts of the city.

Catholic and Protestant forces set aside their differences and came to the relief of Vienna. Both sides understood their fate if Islam conquered Europe. The rescuing army was led by John III Sobieski, the king of Poland. He led a charge that broke the siege. After his great victory, he paraphrased the words of Caesar, “_____.” Moslem forces continued to operate in Eastern Europe, but they never again threatened the west.