

Abstract: Kuruzzen and Turks! en

„Kuruzzen and Turks!“

The campaign of the High Porte to Vienna in 1683

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A swearword which has been known in Austria, especially in Lower Austria, Vienna and the Burgenland for a long time, represents the conflict between the Orient and the Occident. When you hear this swearword, something has happened - something supposedly terrible, certainly not unimportant. This is what can be said about this careless remark today, and its origin goes back to the time of the Turk Wars. From an etymological point of view, this exclamation is the blending of two words, and more than 300 years ago just mentioning them caused plain fear and dismay with all inhabitants of East-Austria. Apart from the plague, the "Kuruzzen" and the "Turks" were considered the most severe of all miseries the god of Christendom had intended as a punishment for mankind. At least this is what the Augustinian monk Abraham a Santa Clara, who was a contemporary in the days when Vienna was besieged by the Turks for the second time already, preached. In fact, these fighters from the East were hard and cruel. The Turkish roaming armies and their allies, the Hungarian "Kuruzzen", robbed and looted for mere booty greed; this was, however, a weapon for psychological warfare invented by the Ottomans. It was supposed to frighten by brutality and mercilessness of the vans. Thus, the fighting spirit of the people to be subdued was to be broken already before the main army arrived at the theatre of war. These Tartar tribes were only lightly armoured, and they were urged to such rage by the commander of the Turkish military force. This is why, in the course of the siege of Vienna which lasted for two months, they carried out a real massacre in the surrounding hinterland. In spite of, or maybe just because of, all the cruelties and devastations, this strong army was not able to conquer Vienna. The defenders of the town fought with a tenacity which had been underestimated by the Turks. The same can be said about the relief forces, who were inferior in numbers, and who succeeded in liberating Vienna and in driving away the Turks far into Hungary until the end of 1683. Strategically important fortresses and towns were recaptured. Generally, this victory of Vienna was the prelude to the so-called "Great Turkish War", which finally was brought to an end when Prince Eugene of Savoy defeated the Ottoman army near Zenta in 1797. The Ottomans as well as the French King Louis XIV. had underestimated both team spirit and resistance of the Holy Roman Empire, although both of these characteristics must be seen as a surge of Christendom, coordinated by the pope. This mutual strength of Europe helped Austria to become a superpower. Never again did the Ottoman Empire succeed in reaching even near Vienna. Numerous showpieces in various museums testify to the wars of that time, and many monuments and regional place names refer to the bloody events. Only few people, however, see the connection of the famous "Viennese Croissant", the breakfast cake formed like the crescent, with that time, and the often casually uttered swearword, neither.

