



# **Terror and Toleration: The Habsburg Empire Confronts Islam 1526-1850**

*Paula Sutter Fichtner*

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From the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries the armies of the Ottoman empire brought terror, in the name of Islam, to much of the Christian world. Intermittently, but relentlessly, the Sultans' forces raided, then conquered the Danube Valley as far as Budapest and beyond. Their inexorable progress westward eventually brought them into conflict with the dynastic confederation created in central and eastern Europe by the Austrian Habsburgs. Repeatedly faced with virtual annihilation by superior Muslim forces, the ruling powers in Vienna fought to mobilise the minds as well as the military resources of their subjects in order to save both their faith and their soil. The propaganda developed by both government and church, particularly the Roman Catholic variant, created, then reinforced many of the negative stereotypes of Muslims that are still familiar to Europeans today. Gradually, after the middle of the seventeenth century, Habsburg rulers and officials came to see that its political and military survival required solid information about the Muslim foe that prejudiced ideas did not supply. In *Terror and Toleration*, Paula Sutter Fichtner traces the story of this change of heart and mind in government and intellectual circles throughout the Habsburg empire. This episode shows, she argues, that it is possible to form and disseminate negative views of an enemy for political and strategic reasons, yet be able to reconfigure those views as circumstance and necessity dictates. A highly original account of a fascinating historical and cultural encounter, this book gives readers a close view of how a Western empire not only survived Islamic aggression, but in the process learned how to consider and even work with Muslims positively and productively.

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