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CELIO SECONDO CURIONE AND HIS NARRATIVE HISTORY
OF THE SIEGE OF MALTA IN 1565

1. *A Biographical Note*

Celio Secondo Curione was born into a noble family on 1st May 1503 at Cirié in Piedmont¹. He received his primary education in Piedmont and at the age of 9 was sent to Turin to be taught grammar, as quality teaching was then known, by Don Francesco Sfrondati (Eventually Sfrondati was made cardinal. He was also the father of Gregory XIV having entered the priesthood after becoming a widower)². Curione continued his studies in *humanae litterae* and law³. At the age of 20, he adhered to Lutheran teachings and left for Germany with a friend⁴. According to his biographer A. Biondi, Curione was exposed to the works of Luther, Zwingli and Melanchton through the Augustinian Friars in Turin⁵. His other biographer Nicolò Stupano explained that his support for Luther was well-known. This led to his arrest while crossing the territories of the Catholic Bishop of Ivrea and he was imprisoned in Castel Caprino. After two months imprisonment and following strong intercession from his friends, the Bishop of Ivrea commuted his imprisonment to confinement at the Abbey of San Benigno, where he was compelled to take instruction in Catholic Doctrine. He succeeded in escaping and moved to Milan and from there to other parts of Italy.

In 1530, he returned to Milan to continue his studies in history and

¹ A. BIONDI, *Curione, Celio Secondo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma, Istituto Enciclopedia Italiana, 1985, vol. 31, p. 443.

² E.F. MIZZI, *Biographie*, in C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, translated by Emanuele F. Mizzi, Roma, Tip. Leonina, 1927, p. 13.

³ A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

⁴ E.F. MIZZI, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵ A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

literature. At Casale di Monferrato, which is a small town some 100 kilometres from Milan, he married Margherita Bianca Iasci. The couple moved to Moncalieri first and to Ramoni later but Curione kept his Protestant or better Lutheran fervour alive. At Ramoni, he confronted a friar who vehemently criticized Lutheran Reform. This brought on a new brush with the Ecclesiastical Authorities, besides instigating people to revolt against him. Once again, he had to escape, this time to Turin. It was now the duty of the newly set-up Roman Inquisition to open criminal proceedings against him, but again he fled from justice seeking refuge in Milan, where he was appointed professor of literature at the University of Pavia. The Inquisitorial arm continued to hunt him down but failed thanks to the protection and support he received from his students.

Confronted by this political tug-of-war, the Inquisition exerted more pressure on the secular authorities to have him arrested, and the Pope himself even threatened to excommunicate the Senate of Pavia if it persisted in defying the Inquisition. Realizing that he was in serious danger, Curione escaped to Venice, a city free of the clutches of the Inquisition. From there, he moved to Ferrara and then on to Lucca, where he was given a teaching post in literature.

His stay in Lucca, however, was short-lived as the threat of arrest, like the sword of Damocles, continued to hang over his head. Thus, he left for Lausanne in Switzerland, which was a city sympathetic to the Protestant movement. Lausanne turned out to be a safe-haven but in his hurry to escape, Curione committed the cardinal mistake of leaving his wife and children behind. In his attempts to be reunited with them, he proceeded to Piedmont to get them out of Italy but was arrested⁶. Once more, he was lucky to escape and return to Lausanne where he remained from 1542 until 1546, working as *'praefectus studiorum'*⁷.

In 1547, Curione together with his family left Lausanne for Basle, where he taught Classics for about 22 years. During this academic period, he wrote books, commentaries, prefaces and introductions to other publications, annotated texts and translations besides being consulted on political issues, to the extent that according to Biondi,

⁶ N. STUPANUS, *De Coeli Secundi Curionis Vita atque Obitu Oratio*, Basilae 1570; E.F. MIZZI, *op. cit.*, p. 15; A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, p. 443.

⁷ A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

Curione became «point of reference for all European students»⁸. He died on 24th November 1569 at the age of 66. He had seven children: three boys and four girls, but only one survived him, his son Leo who followed in his father's footsteps and became Professor of Hebrew at the University of Basle⁹. Of his three daughters who reached adulthood, Angela, Celia and Felice, all died during the plague in 1564¹⁰. His most famous son, Agostino Celio died in 1567¹¹. In that same year, his other son, Orazio, also passed away¹².

His academic fame was related to the publication of a number of books on various topics varying from literature to history, from philosophy to theology. He wrote critical works about Tito Livy, Giovenale and Cicero. All in all he published about 34 books. A contemporary of his, the Jesuit Girolamo Tiraboschi, wrote: «in the teaching of Latin, Curione was inferior to no one and his fame would have been even greater had his apostasy not eclipsed it»¹³.

2. *The Background to the Nova Historia*

The title itself, *Nova Historia*, indicates that the author knew of other publications relating to the Siege of Malta. Primarily, he had in mind the work of Antonio Veperano *De Bello Melitensi* published in Perugia in 1566, and that of Vincenzo Castellani *De Bello Melitensi Historia* published at Pesaro also 1566¹⁴, besides other shorter accounts that were circulated either in print, manuscript form or through sermons during the period of the hostilities (in particular in the form of maps)¹⁵.

Curione was not in Malta during the time of the Siege nor did he ever visit the Island. Nevertheless, he had read *Melitae Insulae Descrip-*

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 445: «punto di riferimento per gli studenti di tutta Europa».

⁹ *Ivi*, p. 448.

¹⁰ R. RICCIARDI, *Curione, Celio Agostino*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma, Istituto Enciclopedia Italiana, vol. 31, p. 441.

¹¹ *Ivi*, p. 442.

¹² A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

¹³ E.F. MIZZI, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 17.

¹⁵ A. GANADO, M. AGIUS VADALA, *A Study in Depth of 143 Maps Representing the Great Siege of Malta of 1565*, foreword by David Woodward, P.E.G., 1994-1995.

tio, a work written by Joannes Quintinus Haeduus and published in 1536, which contains a rather lengthy geographical description of the Island. Curione relied on this description and enhanced it by using other information he found about the Island at the time¹⁶. Besides these accounts, he had to rely on other sources, mostly oral narratives from those soldiers or knights who had fought in this war and from what appears to have been the circulation of letters from the Grand Master of the Order of Malta Jean de Valette and members of the same Order about the Siege. Curione believed these letters to have been written during the hostilities so much so that he reproduced information of what went on during the Council of War meetings held by Suleiman the Magnificent in Constantinople and the Grand Master of the Order of Saint John in Malta.

These constructed scenes and discussions appear to be factual. Furthermore, some of the letters that were exchanged by the Christian rulers during the Siege were circulated after the end of hostilities on explicit orders of the Grand Master to arouse empathy for the Christian cause¹⁷. Curione does not make explicit or implicit reference to his sources, but his narrative of the Siege is quite accurate and tallies with other narratives that were published in the Latin West, with the occasional variation in chronology, which makes his writings even more of historical interest. But his account remains partial¹⁸. More importantly, he was behind the formation of a new Siege epistemology, which went beyond a chronicle of events.

Curione's choice of title, historical methodology as well as diction follows the historiography used in sixteenth century Europe. The title of his book is influenced by Julius Caesar's work on the wars in Gaul (*De Bello Gallico*). Curione considered this Siege as nothing more than another war waged by the Ottoman Empire against Malta in order to dominate Europe. Julius Caesar gave great importance to the siege that the Romans laid against the Gallic city of Alessia, and Curione adopted a similar methodological approach as to how the Turks went about

¹⁶ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., pp. 59-61.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 91. One of the letters reproduced in this book was sent by Grand Master Jean de Valette to the Governor of the city of Mdina to announce the fall of Fort Saint Elmo. A number of copies of this letter were made and distributed all over Europe.

¹⁸ E.F. MIZZI, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Mizzi noted that Curione only mentioned but few of the many knights who gave their life during the Siege.

the Siege of Malta. Besides Caesar, Curione's historical methodology was influenced also by Plutarch's narrative about the *Life and Wars of Themistocles*, *Gaius Marius* and *The Discourses* of Titius Livius on the Battles of Alexander the Great¹⁹.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Curione's work on the Siege of Malta was translated into Italian by Emmanuele F. Mizzi, who was a medical doctor by profession, with a strong interest in the Classics. More importantly, he was the brother of two leading Maltese politicians of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The first was Fortunato Mizzi, who sought to uphold Latin and Italian Culture in Malta against the attempts to Anglicise Malta by the British Colonial Rulers. The second was Lewis, a polyglot, staunch Anglophile and supporter of the British Imperial cause²⁰. Moreover, Emmanuele F. Mizzi was also the uncle of Nerik Mizzi (Enrico) (the latter was in turn the son of Fortunato), who became a staunch supporter of the new Italian Fascist party in Italy²¹. Emmanuele Mizzi was invited to translate this volume by Henry Alexander Balbi. The latter will eventually translate another account of the Siege, this time, the one written by his ancestor, Francesco Balbi di Correggio, a mercenary soldier who kept a diary of the Siege. Henry Alexander Balbi translated Balbi's diary into English and published it in 1961 as *The Siege of Malta 1565*. Emmanuele F. Mizzi also planned to have it translated into French and wished that other scholars would follow in his footsteps and translate the work into Spanish, English, Flemish, Portuguese and German²². The English version went to print in Rome in 1928 as *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*. Alex Granville Pacha, who was another medical doctor, undertook to translate this work from Mizzi's Italian version.

3. Curione's Epistemology

Curione's work is important for two ontological concepts, which in the sixteenth century were considered to be one and the same: (i) the

¹⁹ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., pp. 107-108.

²⁰ M.J. SCHIAVONE, *Dictionary of Maltese Biographies*, P.I.N. Malta, 2009, vol. 2, p. 1198.

²¹ For a comprehensive reading about this period see H. FRENDO, *Europe and Empire Culture, Politics and Identity in Malta and the Mediterranean*, Midseabook, 2012.

²² E.F. MIZZI, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

proficiency in the Latin language and (ii) history. Both fell under the umbrella of what was defined in those days (and continues to be considered so today) as the Humanities. This short study will focus only on one aspect of these two areas: Curione's historical narrative and the way he discusses the history of the Siege of Malta in 1565. Curione was interested in writing an account that was historically correct and its language inviting.

Emmanuele F. Mizzi, thought that «amongst the many works which appeared immediately after the victory at Malta, the book of the learned Celio Secondo Curione stands out as a truthful and concise account of the events»²³.

The choice of using Latin is to be attributed to the fact that this was the language of the élite. This meant that Corinne was writing in a language that was the most defused at the time. Any scholar worth his salt, 'politicians', men who wielded power across all the different European Courts, ecclesiastics and pastors were expected to know Latin and therefore could read it. The vernacular was reserved for daily, internal communication.

Gradually, with the Reformation, the Latin Language would lose its position of prestige and its role as the *Lingua Franca* of Europe. The translation of the Bible into the different vernaculars of the European people meant that these languages acquired the necessary linguistic canons that the widespread importance of the Bible alone could furnish. Until 1518, what was simply considered vernacular would assume the same status, as Latin whose survival in the medieval world derived solely from the fact that it had become the language of the Bible in the Western Church. Curione ended up supporting a lost cause. He was trapped by his love for Latin yet at the same time could not fail to observe that this language was destined to make way for local vernaculars that would be upgraded to national status: a process which began to take place during his lifetime.

Mizzi thought that Curione wrote this narrative to reconcile himself with the Roman Catholic Church and that the work was influenced by what Mizzi defines as «the Catholic spirit»²⁴. Biondi preferred to assess this as a «civic humanism based on the belief in ones city for

²³ E.F. MIZZI, *Preface*, in C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*. translated into English by Alex Granville Pacha, Rome, 1928, p. 4.

²⁴ *Ivi*, p. 17.

which one could also die... on the industrious work for the Republic... on a dignified religiosity»²⁵. This is what the Catholic South achieved in Curione's eyes by defeating the Turks in 1565.

The victory of the Knights in 1565 brought about what may have appeared to Curione as a form of unity in Europe. Even Queen Elisabeth I of England showed concern for the eventual loss of Malta and peril that this might have entailed for the rest of Christendom²⁶. Incidentally, Queen Elisabeth I was one of the European Monarchs, together with Sigismund of Poland, with whom Celio Secondo was in direct epistemological contact²⁷. Curione sought to build on this feeling to avow a new political significance for Europe. Perhaps, the answer rests in the closing paragraph to his work where Curione made a political reflection and admitted that political division rarely leads to victory but to certain defeat.

Curione realized that within Christianity the division between Christians and Protestants had weakened Europe's defence mechanism against the Turks, particularly in Germany. He viewed the Ottoman's advance in Europe in 1566, together with Suleiman's decision to invade Hungary in that same year and his victory thereon, as a direct result of this division. He believed that it was due to this political divide that the German Emperor, ruling a split realm, could not offer the Turks adequate resistance. For this reason, he concluded that «there is no country so strong that internal dissensions will not weaken and finally ruin it»²⁸. But his call to return to a Christian unity fell on deaf ears on both sides of the political fence.

In expressing such an idea, Curione was not unique, nor was it his first attempt. While still teaching at Lausanne, he published a book attempting, unsuccessfully, to reconcile two opposing theological positions: the "*bonas artes et studia politoria*" with the interpretation given by what he defined as the "*sincerioris germanaeque Theologiae*"²⁹. More importantly, this ideal was expressed by his son Celio Agostino,

²⁵ A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, p. 445-446: «umanesimo civile basato sui valori della fede alla propria città per cui si può anche morire, sui valori del lavoro operoso per la "repubblica"... su una religione dignitosa».

²⁶ F. PRYOR, *Elizabeth I: Her Life in Letters*, University of California Press, 2003, p. 39.

²⁷ A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

²⁸ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 138.

²⁹ A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

who joined his father, as a lecturer at the University of Basle³⁰. In the same year that Celio Secondo published his *Siege of Malta*, his son Celio Agostino published his book *Sarracenicæ historiae libri III*, dedicated to Emperor Maximilian II. In this book, Celio Agostino sought to narrate the history of those he defined as the people of Mohammed (the Muslims) from their origins up to the 14th Century. In the preface, Agostino made a passionate appeal to the *Respublica Christianorum* to find unity, as unity was the “fortune” behind the creation of the great empires, while weapons were not to be used in what he termed as “fratricidal wars” but «against the common enemy of Christendom, who is the aversion to all that is humanistic, religious and literary»³¹. His work was considered to be of great importance by R. Ricciardi, an expert of Agostino’s works, even though Agostino failed to accredit his facts with the necessary historical references³². In 1575, Agostino’s work on the history of Islam was translated into English entitled *A Notable Historie of the Saracens... drawn out of A. Curione... by Th. Newton*³³.

Very few copies of Curione’s book have survived in Europe. Perhaps the fact that a copy of the first edition of this book is found only in few libraries in Europe is symptomatic of the failed political message that this work had had on the European public in the past. It was republished in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century as a result of the continued interest in the Siege of Malta and the surviving interest in chivalry rather than for its political content. By the eighteenth century, there was no enlightened reason to resuscitate any nostalgia for a totally defunct Christian unity. In fact, these republications were only intended to appease the curiosity of a small circle of scholars, mostly historians. The result is not difficult to envisage. His work was soon forgotten and is known to only a very small group of specialists.

Biondi showed that Curione had three different types of epistemologies, which he alternated in his writing. The first was that of a “civil humanism”, based on praise of the values of faith and religion. Latin appeared the best medium to transmit these Renaissance values. The

³⁰ R. RICCIARDI, *op. cit.*, p. 441.

³¹ *Ivi*, p. 442 («in communes Christiani nominis hostes, in omnes humanitatis, religionis, literarumque eversores»).

³² *Ivi*, p. 442.

³³ *Ivi*, p. 443.

second verged on the satirical, which Biondi defined as aggressive. Curione normally used this technique when writing in Italian. The episteme here takes the form of a dialogue and resembles the style used by Erasmus in his book *In Praise of Folly*. The third style was based on his "*humanae litterae*", which varied from his literary works to those of an historical interest³⁴. Without doubt, in this history book, which Biondi defines «an original work of no great level»³⁵, Curione sought to bring together his philological interest with that of civic humanism avoiding any genre of satirical or aggressiveness which was normally associated with his works. Thus he presented himself as «the scrupulous educator responsible before God, the citizens and one's own cultural conscience»³⁶.

Curione attempted to use this Siege (as was the case with other contemporary scholars) to convince politicians of the political advantages in a Christian commonwealth at a time when in Europe Roman Catholics and Protestants alike began to be convinced of the futility of the continued fight against Muslims. In fact, during the Council of Trent many Fathers believed that the Order of Saint John should be abolished for it appeared archaic and anachronistic³⁷. The leading ideology in Europe, as expressed by the Treaty of Augsburg in 1555, was that of "*Cuius regio eius religio*" (to each kingdom its religion). There was no longer room in Europe for one empire, one religion and one God.

Curione shows us that not only was de Valette aware of this drastic political change in the course of the history of Christian Europe, but that he fully supported such diplomatic developments. For this reason, the author resorted to direct speech, a literary style that was also used by his son Agostino. Celio Secondo attributed to de Valette the following sentence: «Now since by the Grace of God, domestic wars have ceased and peace exists between the Christian princes, now is the

³⁴ A. BIONDI, *op. cit.*, pp. 446-447.

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 448, «un prodotto originale di non alto livello».

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 448, «l'educatore scrupoloso responsabile di fronte a Dio, alla civitas e alla propria coscienza culturale».

³⁷ L. RAGIONI MACHIAVELLI, *L'Ordine di Malta*, in *Il Contributo degli Ordini Religiosi al Concilio di Trento*, a cura di P. Cherubelli, Firenze, 1946, p. 365; E. NASALLI ROCCA, *Il Sovrano Ordine di Malta e il Concilio di Trento*, in *Il Concilio di Trento e la Riforma Tridentina: Atti del Convegno Storico Internazionale Trento 2-6 settembre 1963*, Herder, 1965, p. 735; S. MERCIÉCA, *Aspects of the Hospitaller Commandery 1631-1798*, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Malta, 1993, pp. 198-201.

time for them to waken up, for, if by any unhappy chance, war broke out afresh, this savage beast would not slumber but would watch out for our destruction»³⁸.

4. *The Epistemology of Virtus*

In his *Nova Historia*, Curione continuously uses the terms “*virtus*” (virtue) and “*fides*” (faith) in the same meaning as these were being used by other scholars at the time, including Nicolò Machiavelli. Quentin Skinner observes that the Latin word “*virtus*” connotes in Machiavelli moral realism³⁹. This comes out very strongly in Curione’s work too, to the extent that he states in the first page of his account that “*virtus*” stands for three different but at the same time interdependent qualities: goodness (which included happiness and dignity), generosity and clemency⁴⁰.

Skinner also discusses the epistemology of the Latin word “*fides*” and shows that during this particular period it did not mean only “*faith*” but was also understood as “*justice*”. “*Justice*” was the foundation of a prince’s glory. The element of “*fortuna*” so cherished by Machiavelli was not completely missing in Curione and his view of the «società d’uomini» was described as a congregation «fondata sul diritto». For this reason, Curione specified that a State or a Republic⁴¹ could entertain both private and public fortune⁴². Like some of his contemporaries, he preferred Republican Rule to an aristocratic one, and for this reason the events of the Siege of Malta were read as part of a wider history of the *Respublica Christiana*.

But Curione also admitted that society needed to face opposing realities; those derived from a force of peace and those from a force of war. He believed that humanity could enjoy “a happier life” in condi-

³⁸ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 54.

³⁹ Q. SKINNER, *Machiavelli*, New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981.

⁴⁰ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 40. «Essendo infatti naturalmente insito nel cuore umano il desiderio del bene che si chiama Felicità, tutte le azione umane tendono all’acquisto di questa: benché poi il vero bene e la vera felicità consistano soltanto nel congiungerci a Dio Ottimo Massimo, ... frenati e composti i desideri dell’animo, foggiano la loro vita su la virtù e su la dignità».

⁴¹ *Ivi*, p. 40.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 42.

tions of peace than in those of war and that every war was declared with the sole purpose that one may live in peace. He was convinced that the desire of peace was so great in Man that no fatigue, no expense and no danger could stop him from achieving peace in order to live well. However, by peace, Curione did not intend to lay down arms or stop fighting but charity and love of citizens towards each other and towards the rest of the world⁴³. The leaders were to be judged by the outcome of their actions and by the style of their system of rule.

For Curione, all the Christian protagonists, including Pope Pius IV, were men of virtue, who together with the knights and simple folk had shown resilience in fighting against the Ottoman Turks. But Curione admitted that there was a Siege - figure that far outshone all the rest by his "*virtus*": this was the Grand Master of the Order, Jean de Valette (whose name Curione Latinizes into Valeta). De Valette was in possession of all three princely virtues: justice, mercy and generosity, and it was these points that helped the Christian leader to maintain his State throughout the period of the Siege.

De Valette was portrayed as the ideal leader in full control of his political virtuous career that led him to be in control of "*fortuna*": the good or bad luck of power. According Machiavelli, a political leader cannot survive without "*fortuna*". Curione did not attribute to "*fortuna*" the same meaning given to it by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. To accept Machiavelli's interpretation meant that Curione was accepting the separation of religion from politics, as the latter excluded the element of Divine Providence. The author of this Siege story definitely did not want this but was ready to concede that de Valette possessed both private and public fortune⁴⁴, with the added virtue that he had learned how to dominate luck.

Instead, Curione attributed to Divine Providence, that is the Christian God, the success of the Christian army rather than political luck (that is, "*fortuna*") of Grand Master de Valette, even if he admitted that de Valette was the man who was capable, in the heat of the moment to rise to the occasion and seize all political or in this case military opportunities. While Curione affirmed that God alone could give military victory to Man⁴⁵, at the same time he insisted that «God only

⁴³ *Ivi*, pp. 40-42.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 42.

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, p. 49.

helps those who are vigilant and strenuous but not the lazy or the slothful»⁴⁶.

5. *The Narrative of the Siege*

Curione opens his historical account with a discussion of the preparations undertaken both by the Christian and Ottoman sides for the Siege. He discusses the meeting held in Constantinople between Suleiman the Magnificent and his counsellors in preparation for the Siege. According to Curione, Suleiman ended his discourse by presenting the Council of War with a detailed map of Malta so that a military strategy could be worked out. It is a historical fact that the Ottoman Sultan was in possession of maps of Malta, including the one made by Piri Rais. The problem with these maps, at least from available information, was that while they were drawn up by those known to be “faithful experts”, and Piri Rais was definitely one of them, they were old. They did not take into account the improvements made to the fortifications in the decade prior to the Siege and the assessment of Mdi-na as the most impregnable fort, was in reality not the case. Perhaps such evaluation reflected only the reality of pre-1530, when Mdi-na was the sole fortified place in Malta⁴⁷.

With great accuracy, he describes the landing of the Turkish army in Malta, and its attempt to take Fort Saint Elmo, which was one of the four forts in Malta at the time. He goes into the details of the attempts made by the Knights to seek help from Don Garcia, the Sicilian Vice-roy, as well as telling us of the attempts of Pope Pius IV to raise an army, besides sending money and arms. Curione praises the Pope for his efforts and all the volunteers who chose to fight for Malta, describing it as a «sacred mission». The Pope’s army moved to Naples, where it joined the nine galleys of Giovanni Andrea Doria and together they sailed to Messina⁴⁸. Fort St. Elmo fell on 23rd June, after a series of violent battles in which many soldiers, on both sides, died.

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, p. 50.

⁴⁷ S. MERCECA, “Vale of Tears”: an analysis of Piri Reis’ maps and descriptions of Malta and their relevance to the history of the Hospitaller Knights, in *The Order of St John from Jerusalem to Malta Some aspects and considerations*, a cura di G. Cassar, Malta, Sacra Militia Foundation, 2007, pp. 19-34.

⁴⁸ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 74.

Curione's account of the fall of Fort Saint Elmo strays from the ascribed narrative of this event, even though, all the chroniclers sought to heighten the valour of de Valette. When the fall of Fort St. Elmo appeared imminent, soldiers in the fort sent a delegation to the Grand Master asking him to relieve them of their duties and allow them to abandon the fort. The official historian of the Order, Giacomo Bosio, recounts that the Grand Master made a speech in Birgu about the needs and imminent danger befalling Fort St. Elmo and many volunteered to go to fight at the fort⁴⁹. Francesco Balbi recounts that de Valette tried to send a relief force, but the boats were unable to reach the fort as they came directly under the Turkish fire, fatalistically adding «realizing that no relief could reach them, [they] made themselves ready to die in the service of Jesus Christ»⁵⁰. Curione inverts this whole narrative. He mentions a Council of War meeting held by the Grand Master and his military experts where it was agreed to send a delegation of three knights to Fort St Elmo, inviting the defenders to abandon the fort and save their lives. On receiving the news, the defenders objected and showed their courage by continuing to fight till the last man. This human sacrifice was being made, Curione reminds us, because the defenders of the fort wanted to consecrate their life to God and to the State⁵¹.

The months that followed were concentrated on attacking Fort St Michael and the fortified city of Birgu together with its Castle of St Angelo. Mortality took its toll. Curione admits that deaths amongst the Ottoman Army were not only due to battle, thus furnishing interesting details which are ignored in most Christian accounts of the Siege.

As at this time many of the Turkish troops were ill with dysentery and other diseases, they established three hospitals, one at Marsa for the wounded, with a guard of two thousand Turks, another in the stern of the ships for the Turkish volunteers, and the third between the benches of the rowers where the Christian slaves were treated⁵².

⁴⁹ G. BOSIO, *Dell'Istoria Sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano*, Roma, 1629, vol. III, p. 571.

⁵⁰ F. BALBI DI CORREGGIO, *The Siege of Malta 1565*, trans. Ernle Bradford, Malta Progress Press, 1968, p. 89.

⁵¹ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., pp. 84-90.

⁵² C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 97.

On 7th September all this came to an end when Christian aid from Sicily finally succeeded in landing in Malta bringing the Siege to an end. De Valette was never portrayed as being over cautious or too prudent throughout all the battles fought during the three-month Siege. Instead Curione gives us a man of action who whenever the battle thickened and the Christians were on the verge of defeat, de Valette was the man who could «mantenere lo stato»: virtuous enough “to uphold the state”. This same image is portrayed by Curione, when discussing the fall of Fort St Elmo to the Turks and the tormenting moment when the Knights nearly lost Fort St Michael.

Thus, de Valette is represented as a man who loved his country in the same manner and with the same intensity that he loved his soul: a man who had all the attributes of power as understood in the sixteenth century. He was intelligent, courageous, skillful, lucky, with self-control yet ruthless. Moreover, he appeared to look after his brethren and the Maltese, as a family, with the result that in the thick of battle, «his presence did not only greatly hearten the soldiers, but moved even the women and the children to take part, for humanity follows actual example more than it would mere words»⁵³.

By creating such an image, Curione wishes to convey the message that a man of principles, of high moral standing is never handicapped by politics. Thus, he was more than prepared to defend de Valette following the accusations made in Rome at the time of the fall of Fort St. Elmo. When the news reached Rome, some quarters blamed de Valette for what had happened. Curione defends his memory by affirming that «his well known valour, and the high reputation for gallantry and chivalry of those who were with him, and the real facts which appear in the true light of this history, will clear him absolutely of such calumnies. It is quite easy for those who have no reputation, and are devoid of honour, to doubt the good faith of others; ignorance is not fit to judge competence and truthful standards must judge of honourable deeds»⁵⁴.

In fact, each time that Curione states that the Grand Master invoked Divine intervention, he is referring to God, without any reference to the Virgin Mary or the saints thus affirming his Protestant or

⁵³ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 119.

⁵⁴ *Ivi*, p. 99.

rather Lutheran leanings⁵⁵, which are confirmed throughout this narrative. This is another attestation that this text should not be read as understood by Mizzi; Curione's rite of passage returning to the Catholic faith. Relics and sacred objects are only mentioned once, and this in connection with the Grand Master's decision that they should not be transferred to a place of safety as «the result of such action would be to depress the spirits not only of the Maltese, who had shown such unexpected courage and gallantry, but also of the mercenary troops»⁵⁶. But such a description was stripped of any religious significance and supernatural connotations normally associated with these sacred objects. Curione is merely expressing Lutheran culture at the time. Whilst the Lutherans view the Virgin Mary as the mother of the Son of God rather than the Mother of God, they believe that salvation does not come from Her and reject the concept of «intercession». Even if unintentionally, such a rejection and adherence to Lutheran beliefs could have led to unintentional chauvinism. His history is gender biased, and the elimination of any reference to the Virgin Mary strengthens the male episteme of his narrative. As in all the classic historical narratives, this is a story about men, told by a man to fellow countrymen.

It was a common ideal expressed in the sixteenth century (also echoed in Curione's work) that a prince should be judged by the men who surround him. Here again, Curione offers us a net contrast. Suleiman surrounded himself with military generals whom he portrays in various instances as not being in unison⁵⁷, an accusation that is upheld by all other contemporary Christian chroniclers. The truth however is that General Mustapha Pasha and Admiral Piali were two of Suleiman's most capable men.

On the other hand, De Valette was surrounded by counsellors capable of giving him good advice. For this reason even Don Garzia de Toledo, who was accused by Pope Pius IV of procrastinating in sending his support to the besieged, was exonerated from any accusation⁵⁸. As

⁵⁵ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 101: «Ti ringrazio, Sommo Re, che esaudisti le mie preghiere e non abbandonasti il tuo gregge insidiato dai lupi: è questa l'opera della tua infinita bontà, della tua Potenza e della tua sapienza».

⁵⁶ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 122.

⁵⁷ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., pp. 65, 124.

⁵⁸ F. BRAUDEL, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, London, Collins, 1973, vol. II, p. 1020.

in Ferdinand Braudel's Siege narrative⁵⁹, Curione too prefers taking a broader view of the Sicilian Viceroy's military strategy. Like Braudel, he shows more compassion and credits him with doing his duty in fortifying the fort of La Goletta in Tunis so that it would not fall into the hands of the Ottoman Army⁶⁰. In other words there was no repeat of what had happened in 1551. When the Turkish Army raided Malta and Gozo and then moved on to attack the fort of Tunis, which after a long siege was taken over by the forces of Sinan Pasha. Moreover, Curione informs his readers that on receiving the request for help, Don Garcia de Toledo sent two galleys⁶¹, that failed to enter harbour, but the Captain was blamed rather than Don Garcia. Curione continued to absolve Don Garzia on the ground that the latter was continuously preoccupied with all the delays in sending re-enforcements to Malta, while Don Garcia's son, Federico, died in battle defending fort St. Angelo⁶². This delay was caused by Giovanni Cardona who took his time to arrive from Palermo to Messina with his 12 big ships⁶³, Curione recounts the whys and wherefores of other instances of failed attempts to help Malta. He tells us of the three galleys sent to Malta that as a result of the increased patrols by the Turkish fleet around Malta, landing had to be aborted. Curione mentions also a number of soldiers under the leadership of Prospero Colonna, some of whom were slaves and «were promised their freedom if they skilfully fulfilled their duties and got the ships into harbour, and also that they should rank with the soldiers»⁶⁴. Not everybody wanted to risk his life for Malta. At least, beyond this glorious narrative, the daily reality of war offered a different perspective.

6. Torture

Renaissance rhetoric maintains war to be a great gamble. Curione limits himself to consider battles as atrocious. In this case, he wants to acknowledge what he considers a valiant defence of the Knights

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 1014-1020.

⁶⁰ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 56.

⁶¹ *Ivi*, p. 75.

⁶² *Ivi*, p. 110.

⁶³ *Ivi*, p. 132.

⁶⁴ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 100.

of Malta. Despite his Protestant and Lutheran leanings, he lauds the Knights (praising also the Templars and Teutonic Order) of this Holy Religion of Christ, who consecrate themselves and all their deeds to His service. He speaks of their original mission of founding hospitals in Jerusalem and offering shelter from the assailants: the Barbarian Ottomans.

However, his text is clearly prejudiced against the Ottomans. In fact, rather than attempt to reconcile Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, he instead highlights the intolerance that the Reformers bore towards Islam. Curione assures his readers that Suleiman «was full of hatred of the Christians»⁶⁵.

The figure of Suleiman contrasts sharply with the noble and regal personality of the popish de Valette. De Valette had all the requisites associated with Curione's vision of a princely character. This Grand Master was capable of rallying all the Maltese population and offering it security. He was not afraid to engage in person with the hostile forces and as was to be expected, this increased his prestige in the eyes of the historian.

Machiavelli affirms that leaders are there to be feared rather than loved and fear is held together by punishment. This concept must have appeared as an oxymoron to Curione had it to be applied to the ideal Christian ruler. Instead, he presents de Valette as a feared and loved leader, while reserving this Machiavellian typology for Suleiman the Magnificent.

Curione describes Suleiman as a good leader, because he was feared but not loved. Hence, he labels Suleiman a tyrant⁶⁶, and gives him appellatives, which he never uses for any of the other Christian protagonists. In a letter sent by de Vallette to Pope Pius IV, Suleiman was called a «pestiferous serpent»⁶⁷. Furthermore, Curione quotes the Grand Master describing Suleiman as «a menace to the True Faith, and to all customs and morals, to all arts, and to all order, and the plague of the whole world, the enemy of God and man. Let him feel, even in far Constantinople, amongst his delights, the sharpened points of the Holy Cross that he has despised»⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ *Ivi*, p. 45.

⁶⁶ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 50.

⁶⁷ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 54.

⁶⁸ *Ivi*, p. 50.

The Turkish soldiers are simply described as the enemy⁶⁹ or qualified by a stronger noun or adjective, such as that of “barbarians” or “barbaric” respectively, which carried a strong pejorative semantic meaning of extremely uncultured people. At the same time, Curione enters in symbiosis with the Knights and their men, with whom he identifies himself and the rest of Christendom through the possessive pronoun “ours”⁷⁰.

Once the Christians crossed borders and became Muslims, they were labelled renegades, a word with a strong pejorative meaning at the time. When a Christian renegade offered his services to the Viceroy of Algiers, Curione gives his reader the following description: «Whilst they were thus puzzled and uncertain, a Christian refugee, a man of great courage was brought before the Viceroy of Algiers. Man of this type are daring to rashness and desperately tenacious»⁷¹.

The difference between Islam and Christianity boiled down to the pivotal distinction between the two leaders. In Curione’s opinion those leaders who were feared and loved were the ones who succeeded in maintaining a balance between ethics and politics. Therefore, they were capable of carrying out honourable acts, in a strong and iron-fisted manner. De Valette was the Christian figure, who fitted this image. On the other hand, those who like Suleiman were feared but not loved were devoid of any ethical principles and carried out the most «barbaric acts in war». The fate of the Christian captives after the fall of Fort St Elmo clearly illustrates this. On describing the Turkish assault on Fort St. Elmo, Curione says that the Turks took «little or no account of the lives of their men than had they been beasts»⁷². But he admits that

the fighting was homeric on either side, and had not the determination on either side been equally great, the Turk to take the fort, and the Christians to defend it, that day would have seen the end of the war. For five hours the fighting went on till at last Turks were driven back. But instead of passing the night in sleep,

⁶⁹ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 112.

⁷⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 127-128.

⁷¹ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 103.

⁷² C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 83. In this case, as well as in the other footnotes which contain the Italian origins, means that a direct translation of Curione’s text (using Mizzi’s version) was effected to express better the sixteenth-century episteme: «non stimando la vita dei loro più che se fossero bestie».

they worked hard to further destroy the battered defences of the fort, and it was only by our most desperate defence that the enemy was prevented from trying to escalate the walls. Two hundred of our troops fell in this action, and numberless Turks lost their lives. Dragut, gallantly carrying out his duty as leader and soldier, was hit on the head and died to days later. His body was conveyed to Tripoli with full military honours⁷³.

While this narrative highlights the cruelties of war, at the end of the day, what had been achieved was putting an end to the life of one of the Turkish leaders: Dragut. The Siege narrative becomes intense when the Fort was lost. Losing St. Elmo would be used to arouse anger but the cruelties performed by the Christian side are narrated in such a way as to create compassion and understanding:

Here I must mention the outrages of the Turks on the Knights, so that one may realise how ferocious they were even against the dead. Having stormed the castle, and having found there some dying Knights, the Turks cut out their hearts, and cut off their heads, and hung about thirty of them feet uppermost in front of forts St. Angelo and St. Michael; clothed in their red uniform with the white Cross. By an ancient custom the knights are clad in red in wartime and in black when not at war. Mustafa seemed to consider this insufficient, and having had them tied together threw them into the sea, and the next day the wind and the waves washed them across into the Grand Harbour. La Valette, deeply afflicted, ordered these remnants to be piously buried with all the honours. He was so indignant at the enemy's barbarity that he gave orders that henceforth no Turk should be held as a prisoner, but that all were to be killed. Some who had already been taken were put to death, and their heads thrown over the ramparts on the side where the enemy had his camp⁷⁴.

According to Curione, de Valette said that «nothing having occurred that he had not foreseen this being the fate of war and the will of God that now one know the other won; only dastardliness not the great valour of the militia could give pain... our disaster compensated by glory and immortality had to exhort the souls to fight properly»⁷⁵.

Once the attempt made by Mustafa to finalise the terms of sur-

⁷³ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 80.

⁷⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 86-87.

⁷⁵ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 91: «nulla essere accaduto che egli non avesse previsto: esser questa la sorte della guerra e la volontà di Dio, che ora l'uno ora l'altro vincessero: la viltà soltanto, non il grande valore di militia, potergli recar dolore... la nostra sciagura esser compensata dalla gloria e dall'immortalità, ciò che doveva infiammare gli animi a ben operare».

render with de Valette failed, Curione writes that the Grand Master «was so indignant that if the ambassador had not been a Christian, he would have hanged him forthwith... In any case was sent to warn his Turkish companion he [who was waiting outside the room] to clear out at once or he would be driven away by cannon fire». On hearing this answer, Mustafa, the head of the Turkish army, «was furious, and openly declared that from that moment he would use every possible cruelty towards the Christians»⁷⁶.

To substantiate his claim, Curione refers to other occasions of cruelty by the Ottomans against the Christians such as when Maltese messengers of the Grand Master, who commuted between Mdina and the Borgo, were caught by the Turks. He tells us that they were «very cruelly put to death»⁷⁷. The same befell two captured knights, Giovanni Cantabro and Marcino, who fell during the siege of Birgu. Their heads were severed and «affixed to the end of a pole they were held high over the bulwark of the Salvatore for our people to see»⁷⁸.

7. Conclusion

Yet the Grand Master's virtue or "*virtus*" is abundantly manifest at the point of victory. The Turkish retreat is described as a total mess and the Christians are criticised for failing to seize the opportunity and attack the retreating army. Even this failed initiative, Curione seeks to explain as a virtuous action. «But I believe that they rather wished to follow the ancient maxim of military art which teaches that the path should be made easy to your enemy when he takes to flight, even to the extent of building him a silver bridge»⁷⁹ with the result that the retreating Turks had all the time to load many of their possessions onto the ships. Yet, the real reason behind the failed pursuit was that the landing of Don Garcia was carried out in such a disorderly manner that he was not in a position to give chase⁸⁰.

⁷⁶ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 91.

⁷⁷ *Ivi*, p. 105.

⁷⁸ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 116: «infisse nella punta di un'asta, furono innalzate sul baluardo del Salvatore in modo che i nostri le vedessero».

⁷⁹ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 133.

⁸⁰ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 143.

After winning the battle, Curione's hero, de Valette, «ordered public thanksgiving services to be held to the Almighty, and himself distributed rewards to the brave, praising all and thanking them for their services»⁸¹. For Curione, victory does not depend on luck, but embraces the Aristotelian-Thomistic views; victory was wanted and determined by God. Thus, it is at this moment of glory, that Curione presents the second and third elements: generosity and clemency. While victory guaranteed fame to the Grand Master, the bestowal of gifts and titles guaranteed him power and the eternal affection of his people⁸².

De Valette achieved the goal to which every prince aspires. Fame and glory can only be conceded by history. It is history that grants glory to princes who are deemed to have achieved great deeds bringing glory upon themselves and their people. For this reason, Curione considers history superior to philosophy. In history, facts rule supreme. In philosophy, fame is achieved only through words and logic⁸³. De Valette assures for himself posthumous fame. The historians gave him fame and by recounting his deeds, Curione rightly believes, he would move the hearts of his fellow men.

Finally, the seat of wisdom lies in the quest for glory and immortality achieved in total tranquillity and in harmony with peace and happiness⁸⁴. It was with this hope of keeping the memory of this war alive through immortality that Curione undertook to write for posterity.

⁸¹ C.S. CURIONE, *A New History of the War in Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 135.

⁸² Grand Master Jean de la Valette is still held in great affection in Malta not only for the Great Siege, but more important, for having founded a new Capital city, whose foundation came as a direct consequence of the victory of 1565.

⁸³ C.S. CURIONE, *Nuova Storia della Guerra di Malta (1565)*, cit., p. 42.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*