

**Knights, Memory, and the Siege of 1565:  
An Exhibition on the 450<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
the Great Siege of Malta**


**By Daniel K. Gullo**  
**Introduction by Emanuel Buttigieg**

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**DISEGNO DELL' ISOLA DI MALTA ET LA VENUTA I**  
 Verissimo disegno dell'Isola di Malta con tutti li Porsi e fortezze e Casali et li Maltesi che non piglia porto a Marzarrocco per il Mar grosso ma girando l'Isola uenne a dar con li altri cavalli e fanno prigione un Gallese. E

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*You may consider my state of mind when, having passed the Dragut Point and the formidable fortress of St Elmo, the Mulata cast anchor in the great harbour, between Fort St Angelo and the Sanglea peninsula. From there we could view the site of the dreadful siege that had taken place sixty-two years before, an episode that made the name of the island as immortal as that of the six hundred Knights of various nations and the nine thousand Spanish and Italian soldiers and citizens of Malta who, for four years [sic], fought off forty thousand Turks, of whom they killed thirty thousand; battling for every inch of land and losing fort after fort in bloody hand-to-hand combat, until all that remained were the redoubts of Birgu and Sanglea, where the last survivors fought to the end (Pérez-Reverte 2011, 123).*

Malta of the late 1620s left a powerful impression upon the Spaniard Íñigo. It was an impression mediated through the still living legends surrounding the Ottoman Siege of Malta of 1565. Íñigo is the junior companion to, and co-protagonist in, *The Adventures of Captain Alariste*, the swash-buckling series penned by Arturo Pérez-Reverte. The characters are fictitious and some details imprecise, but the feeling of wonder at setting foot on the “Island of the Knights” is very much reflected in contemporary travelogues (Freller 1999, 9-50, 605-19). “Wonder” is here used in its late medieval / early modern meaning of “a passion [registering] the line between the known and the unknown” (Daston-Park 1998, 13). As a story, the Siege of Malta of 1565 has always fascinated people and seems set to remain a source of wonder with its disproportionate number of combatants, the romantic fascination with one of the so-called last struggles of the Crusades and one of the last great clashes between Christian and Muslim forces in the Mediterranean, as well as its seemingly inexplicable outcome. Oft-cited hyperboles describing this event, which somehow never seem to diminish in their impact, include the siege being hailed as “the Verdun of the sixteenth century,” “the Stalingrad of its age,” and “one of the three greatest events of the century” (Brogini 2006, 176). Voltaire even said “that nothing is more famous in history than the Siege of Malta” (Scarabelli 2004, 104). This sense of wonder at the deeds of those involved in 1565 is set to continue as 2015 marks the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the siege, the commemoration of which in Malta will have added buoyancy through the presence of Frà Matthew Festing, the seventy-ninth incumbent to the magistracy of the Order of Saint John and heir to Grand Master Jean de Valette who led the Hospitaller-Maltese side in 1565.

The Order of Saint John the Baptist traces its roots to the Holy Land, to the decade around 1070, when a group of Cassinese Benedictines established a hospice in Jerusalem dedicated to the well-being of pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. After the First Crusade (1095-1099), the fame and wealth of this hospice soared and its shape began to change. The papal bull *Pie postulatio voluntatis* of 1113 conferred papal protection and privileges to what was now the Order of Saint John. The members of the Order are called “Hospitallers,” a title derived from their foundation as a hospice in 11<sup>th</sup>-century Jerusalem. Alongside the Templars and

the Teutonics, the Hospitallers constituted one of the three great military-religious orders of the Middle Ages (Riley-Smith 1999, 55). The Hospitallers have often been described using such terms as “Monks of War” (Seward 2000); this is a misnomer that reflects the difficulty of fitting these men into the religious frameworks of the Latin Church. They lie somewhere between priests, forbidden by canon law to bear arms, and crusading warriors who carried out their religious obligation through combat (Luttrell 1995, 86; Riley-Smith 2006, 3-4). The most apposite description of the brethren of the Order is that of religious laymen (*religiosi laici*) and not monks or crusaders (Riley-Smith 2007). The twin functions of fighting and nursing, which the Order of Malta carried on concurrently for several centuries, complemented each other and were infused with sacred meaning. Moreover, throughout its history, the Order adopted and dropped particular facets to its identity, namely military and naval functions and the claim to territorial sovereignty. The headquarters or “Convent” of the Order has also moved over time: c.1070-1291 Jerusalem and the Holy Land; 1291-1309 Cyprus; 1309-1522 Rhodes; 1523-1530 no fixed headquarters; 1530-1798 Malta; 1798-1834 no fixed headquarters; 1834 to-date Rome. The transfer of the Convent was necessary due to powerful outside forces that were able to unhinge the Order from its place of residence. Wherever the Order went—particularly in Rhodes and in Malta—it sought to assert its scope and utility by running hospitals and providing security in order to foster prosperity. The Order and these two islands left a mutually-indelible cultural mark on each other and to date the Order is still referred to as the Order of Malta (Buttigieg-Phillips 2013).

Residence on Rhodes placed the Hospitallers close to the heart of the Ottoman Empire, the major foe of the Order, but also the reason for its existence. In 1512, Selim I became Ottoman Sultan. He managed to defeat the Mameluks and conquer Egypt. The balance of power between the northern shore ruled by the Ottomans and the southern shore ruled by the Mameluks was replaced by complete Ottoman hegemony of the Eastern Mediterranean; Hospitaller Rhodes stood alone. In 1520, Selim died and his son Suleiman the Magnificent took over. In 1521 he captured Belgrade; in December of the same year he made a treaty with Venice to ensure its neutrality in his planned assault on Rhodes, which came about in 1522. Despite a heroic resistance, without substantial help from the West, Hospitaller Rhodes was doomed. Grand Master Philippe Villiers de l’Isle Adam (1521-1534) initially refused to make terms, but on 18 December he was finally prevailed upon to surrender. On 1 January 1523 he, the Hospitallers, and many Rhodians left their Aegean home (Nicholson 2006, 65-7). Formidable as Hospitaller Rhodes had been, it could only survive as long as its immediate Aegean context was not dominated by one single power and as long as vital support from the West did not dry up; when both these factors came to be, it collapsed. After seven difficult years without a base, the Order managed to secure tenure of the islands of Malta and Gozo and the outpost of Tripoli in North Africa from Emperor Charles V (1516-1556). In Malta, the Order was able to transfer the Rhodian island “model” and adapt it to this new context. It is worth noting that the first seven Grand Masters on Malta down to Pietro del Monte, who died in 1572, all had some experience of Rhodes and in most, if not all cases, of its final siege (Luttrell 2013, 27-8). These (and other individuals who had direct knowledge of Rhodes) represented an important force of continuity in the challenging Europe of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, characterized by



the divisions of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the discovery of the New World and the continued threat from the Ottoman Empire.

In 1551, Ottoman forces looted Gozo and went on to take Tripoli from the Hospitallers; grave humiliations for the Order. Hospitaller Malta's position between Italy and Africa made it the object of dispute between Christians and Muslims (Spanish Habsburgs and Ottomans), particularly as pressure intensified from both sides to assert effective control over North Africa over the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, episodes such as that of 1551 were not isolated instances, but were part of a chain of conflicts in the Western-Central Mediterranean stretching from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century to the third quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Braudel 1995, 967). An assault by the Ottomans on Malta aimed at dislodging the Order from the island lay in the logic of the Mediterranean rhythm of war. On 18 May 1565, half of the horizon off Malta was covered by the white sails of the approaching Ottoman armada sent by Suleiman (Spiteri 2005, 23). The leader of the Hospitallers and the Maltese was Grand Master Jean de Valette (1557-1568). An impression of the sense of doom which such a sight must have instilled in the hearts and minds of those in Malta is captured in a Latin poem by the Maltese patrician Luca d'Armenia:

*Now fury or anger or a heavenly sentence is against you,  
powerful of his fleet, he prepares a return  
in blood and fire (Cassar 2000, 289).*

The fighting was intensive, with the Ottomans pounding the three main Hospitaller outposts in the main harbor: Fort Saint Elmo at the entrance of the harbor (the only post to fall to the Ottomans), Fort Saint Angelo and its suburb of Birgu, and Senglea. The latter was the site of one of the most formidable episodes of the siege. Following the fall of Saint Elmo on 23 June, the Ottomans moved their navy into the harbor of Marsamxett. Their next target was Senglea, which they planned to attack both on land and by sea. To do so, some 100 small to medium-sized boats were transported overland from Marsamxett to the harbor. Thus, on 15 July, the Ottomans were able to launch a massive land and sea assault on Senglea. With much effort and with many casualties on both sides, this attack was repulsed. The attack on Senglea was but one of many dramatic moments in the siege of Malta. Eventually, the protracted nature of the conflict and the arrival of a long-expected Spanish relief force from Sicily on 7 September, convinced the Ottomans to lift the siege on the 8<sup>th</sup>, and to depart in the early hours of the 12<sup>th</sup>. It was finally over.

Dramatic as the Great Siege of Malta was, in terms of the balance of power in the Mediterranean it caused no significant changes; but as regards the Order, it signalled the commencement of a new confident phase in its history (Mallia-Milanes 1999). News of the Christian victory in Malta spread fast amid widespread rejoicing (Braudel 1995, 1019-1020). The allure of the Siege provided the Order with many admirers and it also cemented the ideal of the Soldier of Christ within its own ranks; male bonding, heroism, and a militant faith were bound together through this glorious victory that had its truths, as well as its myths. Through a combination of textual and pictorial mediums the Hospitallers forged an impressive and

lasting legacy of themselves as defenders of Europe and martyrs of the faith. Their emphasis on martyrdom fit within a wider European context of an age characterized by religious wars and missionary activity, which in turn made martyrdom as an iconographical subject very popular. Many non-Hospitallers were also gripped by this tale and wrote about it. A multitude of poems in Latin and in vernacular languages were composed and published in praise of the Hospitallers. One poem described how “The Soldiers of CHRIST, who are also his sons; Voluntarily opened up their hearts to receive death” (Boselli 1910, 79). There were also many publications that combined cartographic and other elements to spread even further knowledge about the Hospitallers’ victory; these formed part of the wider genre of “war-news” that was so popular across Europe (Vella 2006).

A number of detailed accounts of what happened during the siege appeared: Antonio Cirmi Corso, Pierre Gentile de Vendôme, Abbé de Bramtome, and others. Most gripping was the eyewitness account by Francesco Baldi da Correggio, first published in 1567 and improved and re-issued in 1568 (*La verdadera relación*). In 1589, Grand Master Hughes Loubens de Verdalle (1582-95) commissioned Frà Giacomo Bosio to write a history of the Order from its foundation to 1571 (when the Order moved to Valletta), an enterprise that would serve to preserve the Order’s collective memory. The third volume of this work contains what is considered the most complete history of the siege (Spiteri 2005, 7). Balbi [including the popular English-language translations of Major Henry Alexander Balbi (1961) and Ernle Bradford (1965)] and Bosio have served as the basis upon which most later works were based. Between 1565 and 1570 more than seventy narratives about the Siege were published in German, Latin, French, and Italian. Such accounts were popular in themselves, but also responded to the eclectic circumstances of early modern Europe. For instance, Vendôme’s *Della Historia di Malta* (1566), which presented the Siege as a Roman Catholic triumph where the papacy—along with the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Paul—played a key role, was adapted to Protestant sensitivities in the process of being reworked as the *De bello Melitensi* (1567) by Caelius Secundus Curio, a Protestant professor at the University of Basle. Curio’s work became the basis of other translations, including that by Thomas Mainwaringe in 1579, the first full narrative of the siege to appear in English. In Mainwaringe’s version, the image of Malta as an outpost that withstood a much larger enemy which threatened its existence and spiritual freedom, could have served as a suitable metaphor for England’s fears of a Catholic invasion during the 1570s (Vella Bonavita 2002). On a related note, Malta served as an ideal place for the imaginary in plays such as *The Jew of Malta* (c.1589-c.1592) by Christopher Marlowe and the *Knight of Malta* (c.1619) by John Fletcher, precisely because the Siege of 1565 had made the island familiar enough to a whole generation, while remaining as vague as was necessary for artistic license (Vaughan 2009).

The Siege of Malta also left an impression in the iconography of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. A “Map of Malta” was included among the charts depicted in the Gallery of Maps (c.1580-c.1581) inside the Vatican Palace. The lower part shows the Hospitaller outposts around the Grand Harbour being besieged by the Ottomans in 1565; the upper part shows the island after the Siege, with the outline of the city of Valletta visible. Above the island, there is

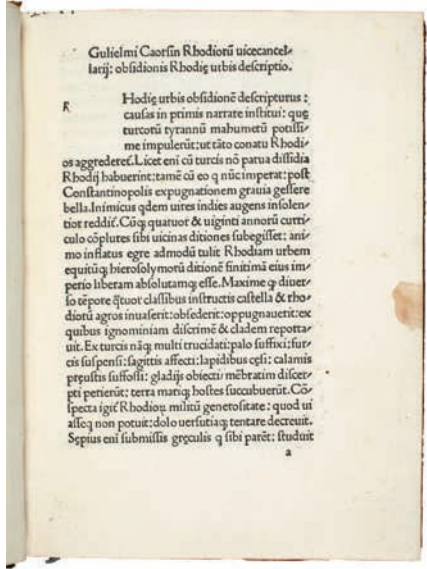


a sword-wielding angel with the eight-pointed Cross of the Order emblazoned on its chest and carrying a book with the inscription, "Malta freed from the Siege." As a bastion of Christendom, Malta's purpose within the iconography of the Gallery of Maps was to stand as a reminder of one of the Catholic Church's greatest victories over Islam (Fiorani 1996, 139). Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's frescoes (late 1570s) depicting the besieged island in the Palace of the Grand Master in the new city of Valletta, as well as versions of them to be found elsewhere in print and other media, have become some of the most enduring representations of this conflict. Like a "tweet" from the past, d'Aleccio's images convey a dramatic message in a concise and easy to comprehend manner: here in Malta, on the edge of Europe, a chapter was written in blood on stone and using steel and here a new story would unfold. In 1566, work commenced on the Convent City of Valletta, thereby creating the communal space that would act as the focal point for the Hospitallers from about 1580 onwards.

—Dr. Emanuel Buttigieg, University of Malta

**Caoursin, Guillaume. *Obsidionis Rhodiae urbis descriptio*. Venice: Erhard Ratdolt?, after 19 August 1480.**

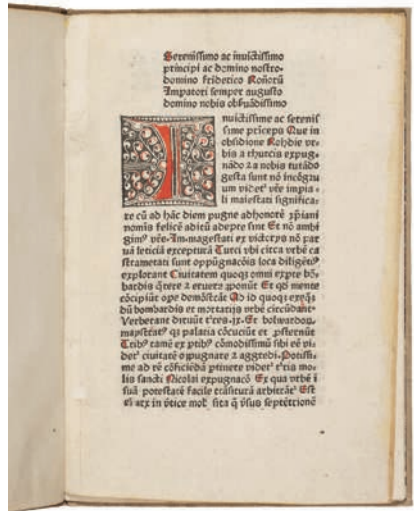
**M**ehmed II besieged Rhodes in 1480 to remove the Christian military outpost that threatened communications and trade between Egypt and Constantinople. For Western Europe, Rhodes remained an essential frontier port after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The failure of Mehmed's siege did not end Ottoman expansion, but it did increase the reputation of the Knights. Guillaume de Caoursin, the Vice-Chancellor of the Order, capitalized on this success and used the newly invented printing press to promote the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem's military activities and the need for Christians to continue supporting the Knights as defenders of Christendom against the Ottomans.



The Malta Study Center Collection. Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.

**D'Aubusson, Pierre. *Invictissime ac serenissime princeps que in obsidione Rhodie urbis a Thurcis expugnando ... gesta sunt*. Strasbourg: Heinrich Knobloch, after 13 September 1480.**

**G**rand Master Pierre d'Aubusson's letter to Emperor Frederick III described the events of the 1480 Siege of Rhodes and the successful defense of the island against the Ottomans. The letter provided a personal account of the Order's trials during the siege as opposed to Guillaume Caoursin's more narrative approach to the events. D'Aubusson hoped that the publication of the letter would encourage Christian leaders to provide much needed financial and military support for the Order after the siege. Both his and Caoursin's writings highlighted the role of the printing press as a new tool to disseminate news in Europe.



The Malta Study Center Collection. Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.

The early descriptions of the 1480 Siege of Rhodes entered the popular imagination of Europeans, who saw the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem's successful defense of the island as a model for Christian princes. D'Aubusson and his successors knew that the Ottomans would return to Rhodes to complete the conquest of the island and did not discourage the popularization of the Knights' defense in hope of donations and manpower. In the tradition of medieval chronicles, editors often added the 1480 Siege to earlier histories of the Middle East that mixed ethnographic studies and histories. This mixing of older and newer histories can be seen in the 1517 edition of the *Les fleurs de hystories de la terre d'Orient*, originally written by the Praemonstratensian Frère Hayton of Armenia during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Hayton's history described the political organization and history of the Middle East to prepare for a Crusade against the Turks. However, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century edition of *Les Fleurs* added an account of the 1480 Siege of Rhodes to Hayton's original text to update the political history of the region.



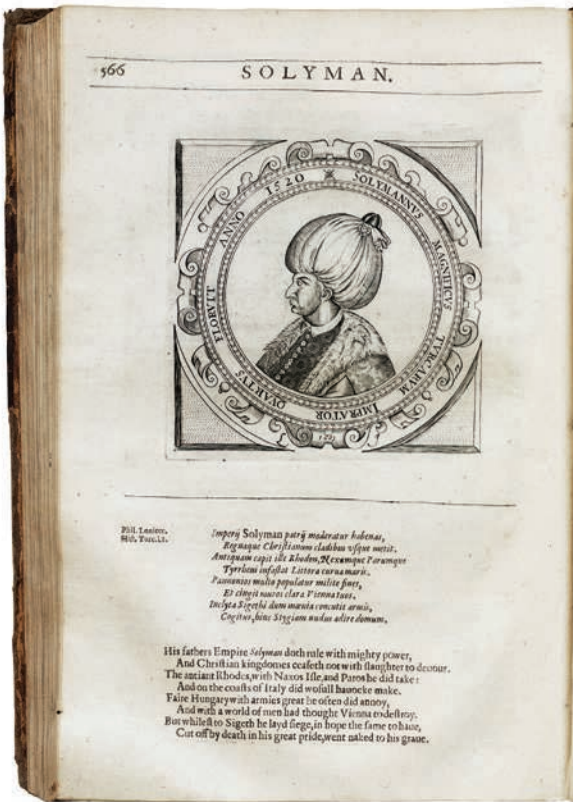
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Knolles, Richard, Thomas Roe, and Thomas Nabbes. *The Generall Historie of the Turkes, from the first Beginning of that Nation to the Rising of the Othoman Familie: with all the Notable Expeditions of the Christian Princes against them: Together with The Lives and Conquests of the Othoman Kings and Emperours.* 5<sup>th</sup> edition. London: Adam Islip, 1638.

When Suleiman I ascended the Ottoman throne in 1520, he wanted to secure his position by emulating the great conquests of Mehmed II, who had conquered Constantinople in 1453. His immediate prize was the Order of Saint John's headquarters and fortress city of Rhodes. Outside of the Hospitallers' continued threat to Ottoman shipping, Rhodes offered the new sultan the chance to succeed militarily where Mehmed II had failed in 1480. Suleiman I immediately began preparations for the invasion, including the construction of a massive fleet and the reorganization of the army for the invasion of the island. The Sultan methodically planned the assault, and used a network of spies to

receive knowledge about any relief force that could threaten his invasion. The siege began in June 1522, and lasted for six months, when the Sultan let the Knights leave Rhodes with their arms and ships after their surrender. This was the first great victory of the new Sultan after the conquest of Belgrade (1521), providing him the sobriquet "The Magnificent." The success of Suleiman and the Ottoman sultans led many Europeans to study their history and government, both as models for kingship and foils for ineffective monarchs. These early studies of Ottoman history saw increasing popularity over the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, with deluxe illustrated editions treating the sultans on the same level as European monarchs.



O. Meredith Wilson Library  
 Rare Books Collection.  
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**Bouhours, Dominique. *Histoire de Pierre d'Aubusson, grandmaistre de Rhodes*. Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1677.**

After the 1480 Siege of Rhodes, Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson and his successors assiduously worked to strengthen the fortifications of the city and harbor, knowing that the Ottoman Turks would return to the island fortress. The fortifications of Rhodes with its triple walled defenses were famous among European military architects and became the subject of several illustrations, especially during the 17<sup>th</sup> century when historians like the Jesuit Dominique Bouhours looked back to the defense of Rhodes in 1480 as a model of crusading activity for the defense of Christendom to be emulated by contemporary leaders.



O. Meredith Wilson Library Rare Books Collection. University of Minnesota.

**Fontaine, Jacques. *De bello Rhodio, libri tres. Clementi VII. Pont. Max.* The Hague: Iohann Secerium, 1527.**

Having successfully conquered Belgrade in 1521, Suleiman I began the siege of Rhodes in June 1522. After six months of combat, Grand Master l'Isle Adam surrendered the island to the sultan in the absence of military support from Europe. Jacques Fontaine's eyewitness account of the fall of Rhodes, originally published in 1524, described Suleiman's abilities and foresight, while still extolling the determination of the Knights to hold the fortress against Ottoman forces. His history was popular among Catholics and Protestants, as seen in this 1527 edition that included an introduction by the Lutheran scholar Philip Melanchthon. The loss of Rhodes inaugurated several years of instability within the Order that would only begin to be resolved when the Knights moved to Malta in 1530.



O. Meredith Wilson Library Rare Books Collection. University of Minnesota.

Quintin, Jean. *Insulae Melitae descriptio: ex commentarijs rerum quotidianorum F. Ioan. Quintini Hedui ad Sophum*. Lyon: Apud Sebastian Gryphium, 1536.

In 1530, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V offered the Island of Malta (which formed part of his Aragonese territories) to the Order of Saint John. Though the island offered the Knights a deep water port with fortifications constructed by the Aragonese kings during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it lacked substantial fresh water resources and was far removed from the Order's traditional area of military operations in the Levant. After initial surveys of the island, Grand Master l'Isle Adam and the Knights accepted the offer and transferred their headquarters to the castle at Birgu in the harbor, not to Mdina, the traditional center of government on the island. This decision reflected the Order's maritime interests and the desire to separate their administration from any local episcopal interference. The Knights continued to survey their new territory, and began administering their local and international properties to rebuild their finances and organization. Jean Quintin, a chaplain and knight who served Grand Master l'Isle Adam, traveled throughout the island, recording its towns, sites, place names, and geographical features. His 1536 *Description of the Island of Malta*, published with the first printed map of the island, became a guidebook for travelers to Malta and an introduction to members of the Order residing in Europe. Quintin's description of Malta, particularly its geography, became a principal source for historians of the Great Siege of 1565 who had never traveled to the island.



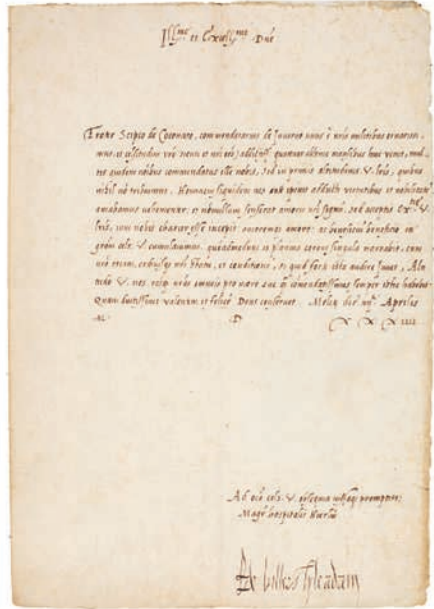
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**Phillippe Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Letter to Fra' Scipio de Coconato. Malta, 4 April 1534.** 

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The Knights needed to reconstruct the Order's chancery and government when they came to Malta in 1530. This included creating organizational networks between their new headquarters and the rest of the Order's members and properties in Europe, largely to maintain the flow of money to support the Knights' fleet and military ventures. Moreover, as an international military religious order, the Knights functioned as a quasi-state, and needed to create legal institutions to govern their new subjects in Malta and Gozo. Grand Master l'Isle Adam's letter written to the commander of Inverno (Italy) here highlights the continued importance of identifying the Order with its origins in the pilgrim's hospital in Jerusalem by including "*Magister Hospitalis Hierusalem*" in his signature.



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**Stabilimenta militum Sacri Ordinis diui Joannis hiersolymitani: vna cum bulla ipsis concessa a Summo Pontifice Claemente VII. Salamanca: Per Joannem Lunte, 1534.** 

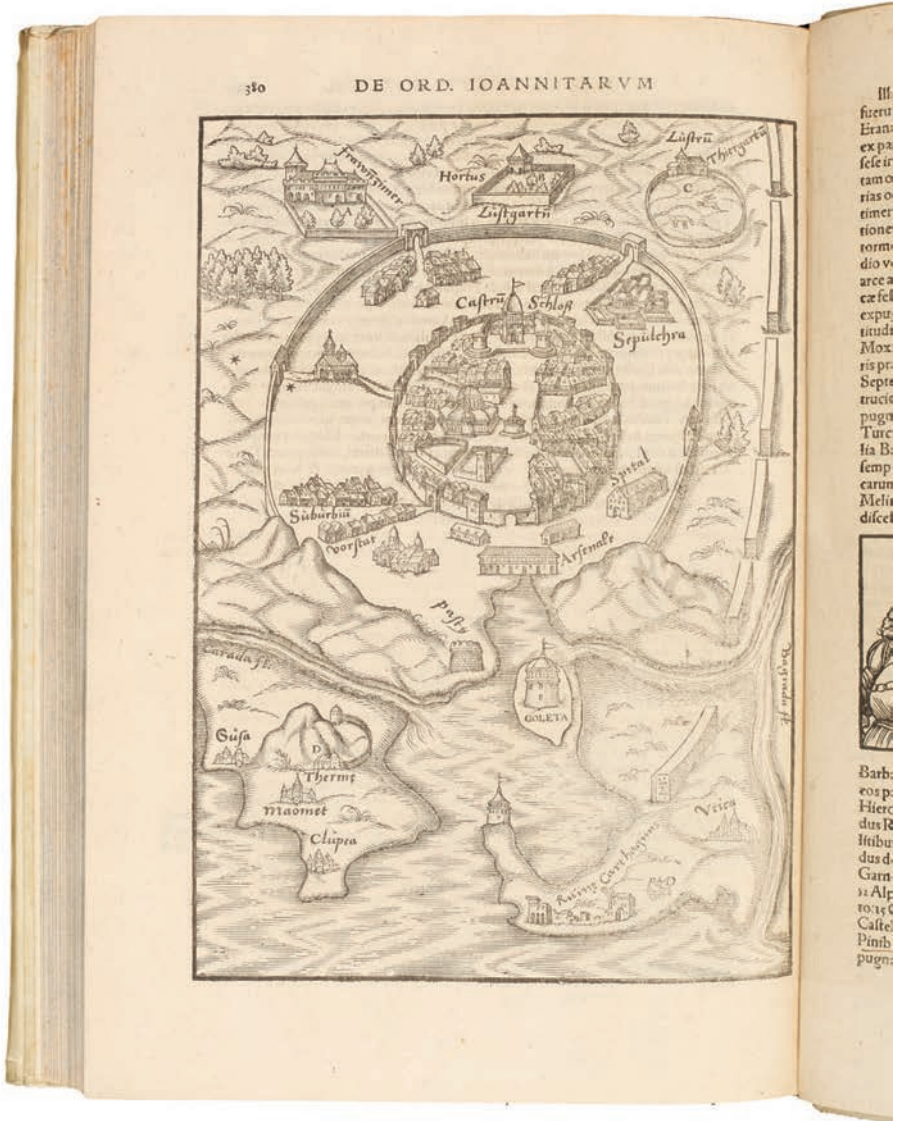
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Grand Master l'Isle Adam needed to reinstitute rules governing the daily and spiritual life of the Knights in addition to reorganizing the administration of the Order and beginning a new government in Malta. In 1534, he followed the traditional medieval method to revivify the spiritual life of a community by reissuing the Order's statutes and constitutions. By providing a uniform copy of the Order's customs to all members, the Grand Master fulfilled his desire to have each member follow the same statutes in common. L'Isle Adam hoped that uniformity would create unanimity in their daily life under the direct authority of the Grand Master.



Sovereign Military Order of Malta  
Magistral Archives and Library, Rome

Pantaleon, Heinricus. *Militaris ordinis Iohannitarvm, Rhodiorm, aut Melitensivm eqvitvm, rervm memorabilivm terra marique, a seccentis ferè annis pro republica Christiana.* Basel: [Thomas Guarinus], 1581.

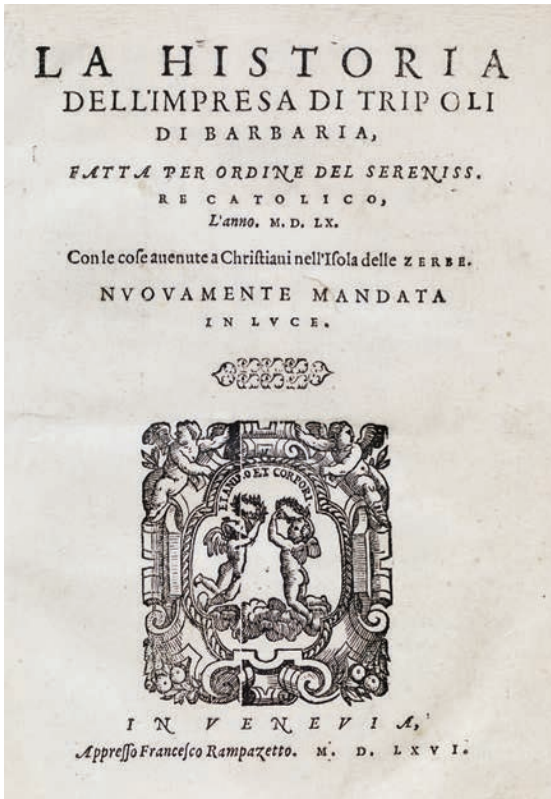


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The Catholic University of America Rare Books and Special Collections.

Ulloa, Alfonso de. *La historia dell'impresa di Tripoli di Barbaria*. Venice: Rampazetto, 1566. ■

Historians such as Alfonso de Ulloa, humanist and historian of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and Heinrich Pantaleon, placed the history of the Order of Saint John within the larger conflicts and political history of the Mediterranean after the Order's move to Malta. These comprehensive historians—Ulloa who focused on Charles V and Pantaleon on the Order of Saint John—emphasized how the Knights' arrival in Malta was due in part to Muslim corsair activity from North Africa and the expansion of the Ottomans into the central Mediterranean. Corsairs, led by the infamous Dragut and Barbarossa, terrorized coastal communities and preyed on Venetian, Aragonese, and Genoese shipping. Their piracy had the two-fold goal of capturing slaves and booty and preparing coastal regions for Ottoman expansion after the conquest of Rhodes in 1522. The Knights' fleet became an essential part

of this conflict over the next several decades, as Suleiman I, Charles V, and the Italian City-States vied for control over the sea. Early large scale invasions were necessarily led by the monarchs, such as when Charles V, seeing the rising threat, led 30,000 troops with Genoese, Hospitaller, and Spanish naval support to successfully conquer Tunis in 1535. The ensuing warfare over the next several decades was not confined to small and medium naval actions, but also led to major battles such as the 1565 Great Siege of Malta and the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. Ulloa and Pantaleon emphasized the Knights' increasing importance as naval leaders and their role within the larger military operations led by the emperor.



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*Statvta ordinis domvs hospitalis Hiervsalem. Rome: Apud Antonium Bladum, 23 June 1556.*

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By the 1550s, the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem had created the beginnings of a small maritime city-state at the center of the Mediterranean. The Knights established legal institutions to govern Malta and began to assert their authority over maritime trade routes in North Africa and the central Mediterranean. The naval military actions and corsair ventures of the Knights began to bring resources to the Order, especially in the sale of slaves and booty taken from Muslim and Turkish ships. The funds derived from corsair actions supported the maintenance of Malta's forts, including Fort Saint Michael in Senglea and Fort Saint Angelo in Birgu. The 1556 *Statutes of the Order of the Hospital of Jerusalem*, printed in Rome at the direction of Grand Master Claude de la Sengle, revealed the growing wealth and stability of the Hospitallers after the loss of Rhodes in 1522. This folio edition includes several large engravings and decorated woodcuts showing the daily life and activities of the Order. Interestingly, only one of the over twenty illustrations in the work shows the Knights' military ventures, with the rest depict the spiritual lives of the Knights and their responsibilities for caring for the sick. The trauma of the Great Siege of 1565 would change the iconography of the Order, ushering in a period where scenes from the Great Siege and military motifs would dominate the art produced for the Hospitallers.





The Malta Study Center Collection.  
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**Bosio, Iacomo. *Histoire des chevaliers de l'Ordre de S. Jean de Hiervusalem. Contenant leur admirable Institution & Police, la Suitte des Guerres de la Terre Saincte, ou ils se song trouvez, & leurs continuels Voyages, Enterprises, Batailles, Assauts & Rencontres.* 3 vols. Paris: Jacques d'Allin, 1659.**

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Ottoman military successes against the Spanish and the Order of Saint John culminated in the defeat of the Christian fleet at Djerba (Tunisia) in 1560. Grand Master Jean Parisot de Vallette ordered preparations for an extended siege and commanded the Knights in Europe to be prepared to return to the island. The Ottomans, however, hesitated for five years, and only launched their attack after the Knight Mathurin d'Aux de Lescaut dit Romegas seized pilgrim ships to Mecca and the prize ship of the sultan's chief eunuch Kustir Agha, which carried the governors of Alexandria and Cairo, 80,000 ducats worth of goods, and leading ladies of the harem. Sultan Suleiman I ordered the creation of a massive fleet of over 190 ships and around 25,000 troops to destroy the Knights once and for all. Iacomo Bosio, an early historian of the Order, described Ottoman preparations and the departure of the fleet in May 1565. The size of the armada was so vast that reports were that it could be seen from Sicily. Though Vallette spent months preparing for the invasion, the armada's size led him to ask for immediate aid from King Phillip II of Spain. Images of the massive invasion fleet entered into the European imagination through several illustrations and engravings, such as the one found in Bosio's history of the Order of Saint John.

**Nicolay, Nicolas de. *Les quatre premiers livres des navigations et peregrinations orientales.* Lyon: Guillaume Roville, 1568.**

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Nicolas de Nicolay's illustrated journey through the Middle East described the culture of the Ottomans and their subjects. Part of his description included the famed Janissaries, or household troops of the sultan. These soldiers were non-Muslim male slaves turned into specialized warriors trained in firearms. Janissaries were troops whose loyalty was guaranteed by the special salary and dependance on the sultan. They were among the most feared soldiers of the early modern period, whose march into combat included special music bolstering their courage. Janissaries had their own supply lines and medical support when engaged with the enemy, demonstrating their importance within the Ottoman army.



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**Lucini, Anton Francesco. *Disegni della guerra, assedio et assalti dati dall'armata turchesca all'isola di Malta l'anno MDLXV. sotto il governo di Fr. Gio. Parisotto di Valletta Gran Maestro.* Rome: Nicolò Allegri, 1631.**

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**W**ithin the first month after Suleiman I's grand army and fleet arrived in Malta in 1565, it became apparent that the Ottomans had made several strategic errors in their plans to conquer the island. Administratively, Suleiman divided his command among established generals and admirals in order to balance the political rivalries at the court. However, the divided command structure often created delays when giving orders to the troops as the leaders debated strategy and tactics. Strategically, the Ottomans did not account for a small, but organized, cavalry force in Mdina that continually harassed the Ottoman forces. The lack of fresh water and the summer heat also proved problematic. The decision to reduce Fort Saint Elmo—rather than neutralizing its position—wasted several weeks of campaign time while increasing casualties and reducing gunpowder and other stores. Tactically, the Ottomans took too long in bringing their heavy guns to bear on Senglea and Birgu, not accounting for the Knights' foresight in creating a wooden palisade in the water to protect Senglea from naval attack. The reinforced bastions of Fort Saint Michael further frustrated their efforts. The Ottomans' inability to reduce Fort Saint Elmo quickly, the arrival of a small relief force of 700 soldiers in July, and the extension of the campaign into August allowed enough time for King Phillip II of Spain to overcome his hesitations and commit a relief force large enough to threaten the Ottomans. On September 7 Don García de Toledo, the Spanish viceroy of Sicily, finally landed relief forces on the island, forcing the Ottomans to retreat from their position the next day. Four days later, the Turkish forces abandoned Malta, finally ending the siege after five months of combat.

**N**ews of the Order of Saint John's victory quickly spread throughout Europe. Indeed, maps depicting the Knights' defense were published even during the siege, such as the illustrated maps printed by Nicolò Nelli and Nicolas Beatrizet in Venice and Rome respectively. Other illustrated maps appeared frequently after 1565, providing a lucrative source of income for printers. Some engravings, like those of Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, proved especially popular. Grand Master Jean de la Cassiere originally commissioned d'Aleccio to paint the history of the siege on the walls of the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta in 1576. After completing the frescoes, D'Aleccio returned to Italy with his sketches and created engravings of the frescoes, which he published as a series in Rome. Anton Francesco Lucini copied D'Aleccio's work and republished them in 1631. Lucini added some details to the images and removed the captions from the maps to reduce clutter from the scenes. The images themselves became narratives, as the vivid, moving depictions augmented the prose describing the details of the Great Siege at the bottom of the page.











In quello affatto il generale il miglior maneggio al fante ed a bordo grande e quattro piccolo  
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**Gentile de Vendôme, Pierre, and Marino Fracasso. *Trattato del successo della potentissima armata del gran Turco Ottoman Solimano. Venuta sopra l'Isola di Malta l'Anno MDLXV.* [s.l.]: [s.n.], [1565-66?].**

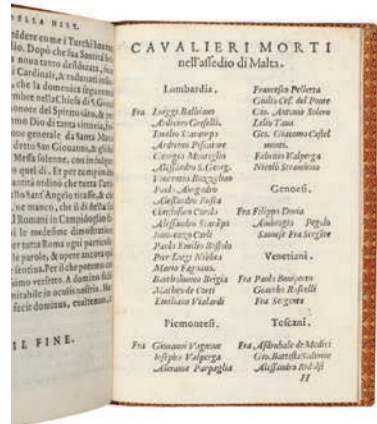
**P**ierre Gentile de Vendôme published the first history of the Great Siege, perhaps as early as December 1565. His work is both anthology and history, having gathered primary sources that had been sent from Malta during the siege, transcribing them, and adding his own commentary to form a basic narrative. Vendôme saw the conflict as a sign of Christ's enduring support for the Roman Church, a view that would pose problems for contemporary Protestant historians writing about the siege. In this 1566 edition, Marino Fracasso appropriated Vendôme's text and added his own sonnets, while also changing the dedication to Antonio Veranzio, Bishop of Agrigina.



The Foster Stearns Collection. The Catholic University of America Rare Books and Special Collections.

**Gentile de Vendôme, Pierre. *Della historia di Malta: et successo della guerra seguita tra quei Religiosissimi Caualiere, & il potentissimo Gran Turco Sulthan Solimano, l'anno MDLXV.* Bologna: Per Giouanni Rossi, 1566.**

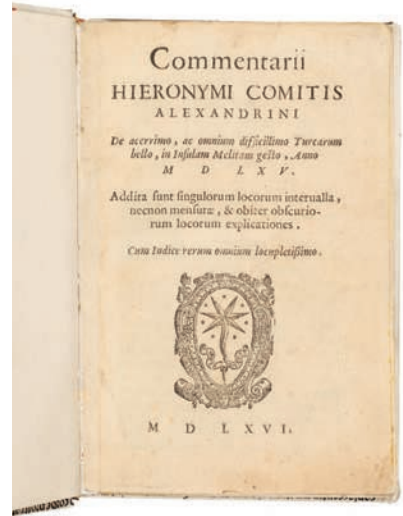
**R**ossi's edition of Vendôme's history, like all earlier editions, provided a list of the Knights who died during the battle as a reminder of the high cost suffered by the Order during the Great Siege. Later authors who used Vendôme's history, like Conte, Curione and Ulloa, dropped the list when composing their own works. The inclusion of the fallen Knights seemingly casts a somber note on the triumphalist history composed by Vendôme as he extolled the Knights' victory. However, the list can also be read as a Catholic martyrology, which highlights the role of salvation history in the events of the Great Siege.



The Malta Study Center Collection. Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.

**Conte, Natale. *Commentarii Hieronymi Comitis Alexandrini de acerrimo, ac omnium difficillimo Turcarum bello, in insularum Melitam gesto, anno MDLXV.* [Venice]: [Ex officina Stellæ Iordani Ziletti], 1566.**

Natale Conte dedicated his early history of the Great Siege to the Palatine Elector Duke Frederick III of Bavaria. A noted humanist and poet, Conte reacted against Vendôme's early account, which he described as little more than a disassembled body of facts and details. Conte composed a coherent narrative of the siege's events and included a detailed index and supplement to guide readers through the complex names and places discussed in the story. Giordano Ziletti twice printed Conte's work in Venice in 1566, while Ulrich Neubur printed his 1566 edition in Nuremburg.



The Malta Study Center Collection.  
Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.

**Castellani, Vincenzo. *De bello Melitensi historia.* Pisauri: Apud H. Concordiam, 1566.**

Vincenzo Castellani's history of the Great Siege derived in large part from the work of Gentile de Vendôme. As with the other humanist writers, he used his own training in Roman literature to rewrite Vendôme's text using Classical models, particularly the writings of the Roman historians Sallust (*Bellum Iugurthinum* and *Bellum Catilinae*) and Julius Caesar (*De bello gallico*). Rather than casting the story in terms of Catholic theology, Castellani placed the Great Siege linguistically and historiographically within the tradition of Classical writers. Like the wars of Rome, the Great Siege provided moments where scholars could learn the virtues and faults of men engaged in conflict.

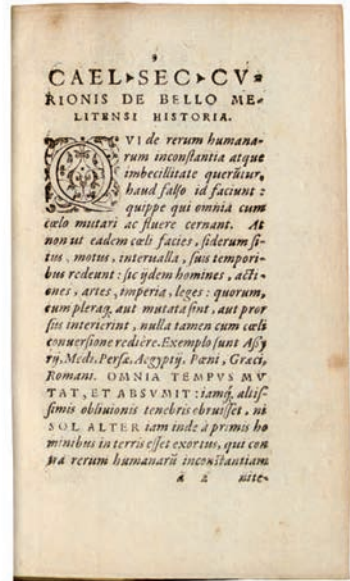


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**Curio, Celio Secondo. *Caelli Secundi Curionis de bello Melitensi historia noua.: Item Io. Valettae Melitensium principis Epistola, summam eiusdem belli complexa.* Basel: per Ioannem Oporinum, 1567.**

Curio's "New History of the War in Malta" differed dramatically from Vendôme's account, despite the fact that his text was by and large a translation of the Frenchman's history into Latin. An accomplished Protestant essayist and trained humanist, Curio did not tolerate the Catholic triumphalism found in Vendôme's interpretation of the Great Siege. Instead, he excised overt Catholic references in favor of generic Christian theological interpretations of events and people. Curio wrote a new introduction and conclusion to place the Great Siege within a more humanist view of history, thus losing the divine urgency found in Vendôme's text.



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**Viperano, Giovanni Antonio. *De bello melitensi historia.* Perugia: Andreae Brixiani, 1567.**

The Jesuit historian Giovanni Antonio Viperano, like Natale Conte, composed his history of the Great Siege to soften Gentile de Vendôme's apologetic interpretation of the victory. A noted humanist scholar who would become the court historian and chaplain to King Phillip II of Spain, Viperano used available published sources and accounts to write his interpretation of the siege. For Viperano, analyzing the Great Siege became one of the foundations for his general discussion of the writing of history and the nature of historiography, later published as the *De scribenda historia liber* in 1569. Viperano's history also included an early map of Malta based on Jean Quintin's *Insulae Melitae descriptio* to guide readers through the complex names and places discussed in the work.



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Braun, Georg and Frans Hogenberg. "Malta." In *Civitates orbis terrarium*, vol. 1. Cologne: [s.n.], 1597.

The failure of the Order of Saint John to properly fortify the Sciberras Peninsula, with the exception of the small Fort Saint Elmo, nearly proved disastrous to the Knights, since the Turks used the peninsula's natural heights to bombard the forts of Birgu and Senglea. One of the most significant consequences of the Great Siege was Grand Master Vallette's decision to begin the construction of a large fortified city to control the peninsula and support Fort Saint Elmo. The decision removed any doubts that the Order would commit itself to Malta after the devastation caused by the Great Siege. Several European monarchs and nobles, moved by the Knights' defense, contributed to its construction. Both Pius IV and Pius V supported the Knights, and lent their architect Francesco Laparelli to aid the Hospitallers in the design of the city and its fortifications. The new city, Valletta, named after its famed founder, was built with fortifications designed to resist cannons, and included wide streets and water cisterns to facilitate the movement of troops and support the population during a siege. New to the city was the Church of Our Lady of Victories, where Jean Parisot de Vallette was buried in 1570. Braun and Hogenberg's 1597 map depicts Valletta prior to the construction of its major buildings, with Our Lady of Victories given a prominent place at the center of the town, despite its actual location near the Auberge de Castille.



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Discorso  
Intorno al Supplemento del Recinto  
della Città Valletta..

L'antico Recinto della Città Valletta, restato in oggi, agevole a riconoscerlo necessario farsi in fuori et attorno il Castello di Sant'Elmo, Sant'Elmo, De' Anglioli, con nuovi aggiuntissimi per occupar il sito non poco spazioso avanzato da esso al mare, basso, et la via ca. nella et a valle. *Il Castello di Sant'Elmo, e De' Anglioli, non per foveri, e... della Città, e... di esse che tanto di esse separati.*

Il Supplemento dell'antico Recinto della Città Valletta, si fa in più luoghi per se stesso accessibile, e di agevole sbarco nelle barche della Flotta: Si anco e principalm<sup>te</sup> per la debolezza del med<sup>o</sup> Castello di quella parte. Suotendo con molta facilità il Nemico, col divertimento alla fronte della Floriana et altrove i Difensori, impadronivensene per certi dìve in una notte: e per suo mezzo aprirsi l'ingresso nella Città Stretta, senza incontrare gran resistenza, per non esservi nè posto, nè battenti a ciò destinati et apparecchiati, nè altro qualunque ostacolo da opporvisi: coti d'improvviso con efficacia battesuele a rintuzzar' un' impetuosa sorpresa, e prevenir e vietare una tumultuosa invasione. Non servendo nè giovandogli di coti alcuna tanta sue fortificazioni digninosi, per perfette ch'ellesieno, et indopii che triplicate alla sua fronte, e per altro, a mio giudizio insuperabili.

Imperochè una delle Maxime fondamentali della Fortificazione si è, che una qualunque Piazza in tanto è forte e non più deesi temer' farsi e di malaagevole espugnatione, in quanto ella lo è equalm<sup>te</sup>. *to debolo, quanto ch'è da quelle parti che si è quel mezzo, e spugnabile.*

per lo contrario tanto debolo e di si facile acquisto al Nemico, quanto che da qualche sua parte notevole e da gl'aggressori conoscintas, puol esser da essi facilmente inuata e presa.

La cui dimostrazione da me fatta alla distesa, e di molte e ordinate impugne, e di molte nella critica guata io feci più anni sono di tutte le fortificazioni di Malta e sue dipendenze, e nelle q<sup>te</sup> hebbi sorte de' Vantaggi, de' Maestri, e di tutti i più famosi Ingegneri di Francia, quali dopo letta et esaminata la a fondo, con la Sianta in grande innanzi a gl'occhi, e supplendo io con una viva tutto quello che nè la Sianta nè i Segni, per esatti che sieno, mai puo da se battevolm<sup>te</sup> dare ad intendere, e pure necessari supersti, da' Giudici competenti che n'erano, si come i primi Esperti nell'Arte, me ne diedero l'autentica loro dichiarazione et attestazione l'anno 1687.

S. Marcellino

Having survived the Great Siege of 1565, the Order of Saint John expended substantial amounts of its treasure on expanding and improving the fortifications of Malta, and especially the walls and bastions protecting Valletta, Birgu, and Senglea. Grand Master Antoine de Paule commissioned the Italian architect Pietro Paolo Floriani to build an extended set of fortifications beyond the walls of Valletta in 1635 to better protect the approach to the city. Over time the Floriana Lines would contain the town Floriana, as a suburb of Valletta. Prompted by the fall of Candia to the Turks in 1669, Grand Master Nicolau Cotoner i d'Olesa commissioned the French architect Mederico Blondel to build the massive Cotoner Lines protecting the older towns of Senglea and Birgu. Blondel, like other chief engineers of the Order, also worked on and maintained older fortifications on the island as part of his duties. In this manuscript, Blondel describes needed improvements to the original fortifications constructed by Laparelli, with additional notes added after his initial observations.



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Salmon, Thomas. "La città della Valetta nell'isola di Malta." In *Lo stato presente di tutti i paesi, e popoli del mondo naturale, politico e morale : con nuove osservazioni e correzioni, degli antichi e moderni viaggiatori, volume XXIV: Compimento dell'Italia, o sia descrizione dell'isole alla medesima aggiacenti dell'isola e Regno di Sicilia, dell'isola di Malta, dell'isola e Regno di Sardegna, dell'isola e Regno di Corsica.* Venice: Nella stamperia di Giambattista Albrizzi, 1762.

Thomas Salmon's 18<sup>th</sup>-century map of Valletta depicts the city with its walls and the rebuilt Fort Saint Elmo prior to the construction of Floriana in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The map was based on earlier depictions of the city, notably the map found in the 1588 edition of the *Statutes of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem*.



**Statvta Hospitalis Hierusalem. Rome: Ex typographia Titi & Pauli de Dianis, 1588.**

**D**espite the successful defense of Malta in 1565 and the construction of Valletta in 1566, the Order of Saint John faced internal struggles with regard to its direction and administration after the death of Grand Master Jean Parisot de Vallette in 1568. Following the methods of his predecessors, Grand Master Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle reissued the statutes of the Order in 1588 to unify the Knights behind common, uniform customs under the authority of the Grand Master. The numerous, elaborate engravings found in the statutes surpass those found in previous versions of the Order's customs. Unlike previous versions of the statutes, where the images and decoration depicted the daily life of the Knights and their Hospitaller and pastoral work, the 1588 *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* included powerful images of the Great Siege. One engraving depicted the arrival of the Ottoman armada and the progress of the siege, while another showed the construction of the new capital Valletta. Martial symbols appeared throughout the work, emphasizing both loyalty and unity, as seen in the full-page engraving entitled "Towards Friends and Against the Enemies of God." The printer used illustrated borders showing captured and enslaved Turks, whose weapons and armor had become the booty of the victors, while in the center of the page members of the Order nurse the sick and remain prepared for war with the fleet standing ready in the harbor.



*The Malta Study Center Collection.  
Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.*



ERGA AMICOS ET CONTRA INIMICOS  
DEI.



## List of Images

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L'ARMATA TURCHESCA A DI XVIII DI MAGGIO M D LXVI  
 can le loro robbe siconducano in sicuro uedendo uenire l'Armata dell' Turco la quale  
 ondo al Mugiaro in uenardi a di 13 di Maggio et ui stette il sabato iscaramuciado



