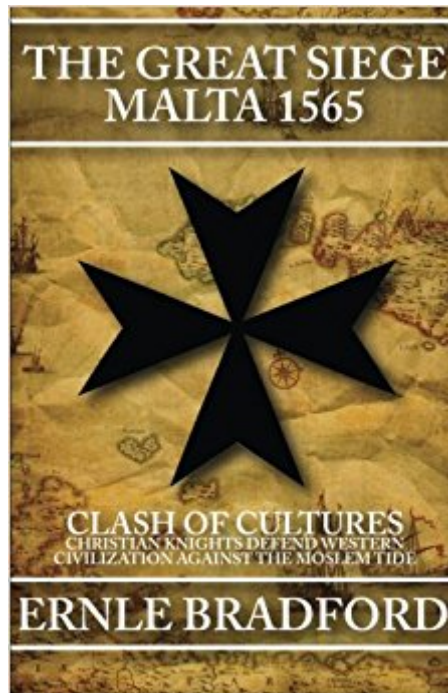




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# The Great Siege: Malta 1565



## Synopsis

A thrilling, cinematic account of the siege of Malta as it's never been told before Suleiman the Magnificent, the most powerful ruler in the world, was determined to conquer Europe. Only one thing stood in his way: a dot of an island in the Mediterranean called Malta, occupied by the Knights of St. John, the cream of the warriors of the Holy Roman Empire. A clash of civilizations the likes of which had not been seen since Persia invaded Greece was shaping up. Determined to capture Malta and use its port to launch operations against Europe, Suleiman sent an armada and an overwhelming army. A few thousand defenders in Fort St. Elmo fought to the last man, enduring cruel hardships. When they captured the fort, the Turks took no prisoners and mutilated the defenders's bodies. Grand Master La Vallette of the Knights reciprocated by decapitating his Turkish prisoners and using their heads to cannonade the enemy. Then the battle for Malta began in earnest: no quarter asked, none given. The Great Siege recalls a clash of civilizations, the likes of which had not been seen since the time of Alexander the Great. This detailed and accessible narrative will delight readers of history as well as fans of films such as Braveheart and Ben Hur.

## Book Information

Paperback: 260 pages

Publisher: Open Road Media (August 19, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1497637864

ISBN-13: 978-1497637863

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 329 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #137,891 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #41 in Books > History > Africa > North Africa #42 in Books > History > Middle East > Turkey #127 in Books > History > Europe > Italy

## Customer Reviews

"A superior, readable treatment of an important but little-discussed epic from the Renaissance past . . . An astonishing tale." --Kirkus Reviews --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ernle Bradford was born in 1922 and died in 1986. He was a noted British historian specializing in

the Mediterranean world and naval topics. Bradford was an enthusiastic sailor himself and spent almost thirty years sailing the Mediterranean, where many of his books are set. He served in the Royal Navy during World War II, finishing as the first lieutenant of a destroyer. Bradford lived in Malta for a number of years. He did occasional broadcast work for the BBC, was a magazine editor, and wrote many books, including *Hannibal*, *Paul the Traveller*, *Julius Caesar: The Pursuit of Power*, *Christopher Columbus*, and *The Mighty Hood*.

The Great Siege -- Malta 1565 by Ernle Bradford    © 1961 (Open Road: New York, NY) Chapter 1: The Sultan of the Ottomans In 1565, Suleiman the Magnificent was 71 years old. He had made Turkey the greatest military state in the world. His kingdom stretched from Austria to the Persian Gulf. Forty-three years ago Suleiman had driven the Knights of St. John from their island fortress of Rhodes. Now Malta posed a greater challenge. The Mediterranean island gave it command of the east-west Moslem shipping routes. Everything passing through the channel between Sicily and North Africa was at the mercy of the Maltese galleys. Suleiman put Admiral Pali in charge of the navy. He was married to the daughter of Suleiman's son. Mustapha Pasha was in charge of the army. A descendant from Ben Welid, the standard-bearer to the prophet Mohamed, he was renowned for his violence and brutality. Any Christian falling into his hands could expect no mercy. These two leaders often disagreed. Chapter 2: Malta of the Knights Malta was presented to the Order of St. John by the Emperor Charles V of Spain in 1530 "in order that they may perform in peace the duties of their Religion for the benefit of the Christian community and employ their forces and arms against the perfidious enemies of Holy Faith." The Knights had been homeless since their expulsion from Rhodes eight years before. Although the soil was unfit to grow grain and summers were blistering hot, nothing could equal the harbours of Malta from which the Knights disrupted Moslem shipping and piracy. The Order of St. John came from a Benedictine hospital for pilgrims dedicated to St. John the Baptist in the 11th century. They were primarily a nursing brotherhood which built hospitals, researched medicine, and trained doctors. Their military side emerged after Saracens and later, the Turks, attacked Christian pilgrims going to Jerusalem. In 1291, after the last Christian stronghold in Palestine fell, they emigrated to Cyprus, then to Rhodes in 1310. It was here they became the finest seamen in the Mediterranean. The eight-pointed cross they bore was symbolic of the Eight Beatitudes. Its four arms represented Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice. Chapter 3: Grand Master La Valette Jean Parisot de la Valette, whose ancestors fought in the Crusades, was a "handsome man, tall, calm, and unemotional, speaking several languages fluently, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Arabic, and Turkish." The last two he learned after he had been

captured and made a Turkish galley-slave in 1541. He survived the terrible life of a slave for one year and then released in a prisoner exchange. In 1554, Valette's own captor, Kust-Aly, was in turn taken by Valette and sent to the oars. Men like these were inured to the vicissitudes of fate and acquired great physical hardiness and endurance. As General of the Fleet, his fast, heavily-armed galleys, with their trained gunners and sharp-shooters, haunted the Moslem shipping lanes. This made the siege of Malta a battle for the control of the Mediterranean.

**Chapter 4: Defences of the Island**

Fort Saint Elmo, a star-shaped fort, commanded the entrance to Grand Harbour. It was built upon solid rock so it could not be undermined. Deep ditches were dug around it. A ravelin on the landward side provided a strong check-point against an advancing army. A cavalier on the seaward side dominated the area with cannon and musket fire. Across Grand Harbour from St Elmo was Fort Saint Angelo and the village of Birgu. Birgu was where the Knights kept their arsenals, magazines, and the Hospital. The Church of the Order was there with the relics from Rhodes. A large grain store was in the fort. In the solid rock under the fort, tunnels had been quarried where the galley slaves had their quarters. St. Angelo had two tiers of artillery-platforms commanding the entrance to Grand Harbour. Birgu was surrounded by 3 kilometres of continuous defences. The southern wall facing the land contained a high rampart wall with two bastions and two demi-bastions. Beyond this, a large ditch had been carved out of the solid rock.

La Valette did not know that two spies were in his midst disguised as fishermen. They noted every gun and battery, and assured the Sultan that Malta could be taken in a few days.

**Chapter 5: Preparations**

The Turkish army would find it impossible to live off the scanty soil of Malta. They would have to take Malta before September, when winter weather made sailing on the Mediterranean impossible. By April, La Valette had 600 Knights and servants-at-arms of a total force of 8,000 to 9,000 men. Grain from Sicily was poured into the great underground chambers. Thousands of clay water-bottles were filled from the natural springs of the Marsa and outside Mdina and stocked in the forts. Birgu had its own natural spring.

The Turks numbered between 30,000 and 40,000 trained fighting troops, including 6,300 Janissaries, all skilled arquebusiers.

**Chapter 6: Invasion Imminent**

**Chapter 7: The Attack Begins**

Chevalier Romegas, the General of the Galleys, was renowned as the finest Christian sailor in the Mediterranean. He counted over 190 Turkish ships.

**Chapter 8: The First Clash (19 May 1565)**

When La Valette learned that the Turks would attack from the south, he gave orders for the wells to be poisoned. Hemp, flax, bitter herbs, and ordure were thrown into the water holes and springs. This led to the dysentery which later afflicted the Turks. The Chevalier Melchior d'Eguaras was dispatched to Mdina with the cavalry to harass the Turkish forces and cut off their foraging parties. Across the narrow neck of water between St. Angelo and Senglea, a great iron chain more than 200 metres long barricaded

the entrance against any seaborne attacks. La Valette's strategy was defensive. His best chance of defeating a superior force was behind massive walls and bastions. In open warfare, he would have been quickly outflanked and defeated. The Turks decided to attack the post of Castille, and were repelled. Two Christian prisoners taken during the cavalry skirmish had lied about Castille being the weakest point. Only 21 Christians were killed to the hundreds of Turks left dead on the field.

**Chapter 9: Objective, St Elmo**On the morning of 24 May, twelve cannon and an enormous "basilisk" firing solid shot weighing 160 pounds began pounding Fort St Elmo. They had been dragged by oxen to the top of Mount Sciberras. La Valette countered by hastily building an additional rampart on the top of Fort St. Angelo for his artillery and siting them on Mount Sciberras. The Turks possessed an eastern fatalism, the certainty that their warriors would go to Paradise upon death in battle. "The disregard of human life among the leaders of the Ottoman Turks was almost incredible. To attain their end in war they sacrificed thousands upon thousands of men with a callous indifference. No where was this more evident than at Malta."Fort Elmo lacked underground tunnels and protective ramparts that normally allowed the besieged to move freely about. Each day's Turkish bombardment exacted a heavy toll. La Valette believed that Fort St Elmo would eventually fall, but the key was for it to hold out as long as possible. Reinforcements had been sent for from Sicily. The commander of St. Elmo informed La Valette that he could hold out as long as reinforcements from Fort St Angelo could be ferried over each night to man the guns.

**Chapter 10: The Janissaries**The Janissaries were the children of Christian parents who lived within the Ottoman Empire. Once every five years a conscription was made, and all the seven year old sons of Christians were inspected. Those excelling in physique and intelligence were taken to Constantinople where they were subjected to severe training, abstinence, privations, and the strictest discipline. Their whole life prepared them for war.

**Chapter 11: The Arrival of Dragut**The governor of Tripoli, Dragut, was the greatest Moslem seaman of his time. Dragut arranged for cannon to be placed on Tigne Point, and increased those on Gallows' Point and Mount Sciberras., bombarding Fort St Elmo from three directions.

**Chapter 12: "A volcano in eruption..."**"On most days, an average of not less than 6,000 to 7,000 cannon shots were discharged at St Elmo." St. Elmo's patron saint had long been associated with "St Elmo's fire." This bluish glow of static electricity -- which appears upon masts and yardarms, and whose hissing, fizzing sound can be heard from several yards away -- was considered a visible sign that the saint had taken a ship under his care. On St Elmo's day, the whole bastion smoked and crackled, and the fire from the defenders' guns ran like lightening along the walls, as if the saint had indeed descended upon the fort that bore his name. The ravelin on the fort's northwest side was badly damaged by cannonfire. No one knows why it was so poorly defended. Perhaps the sentry

had fallen asleep. Within minutes, the Janissaries scaled their ladders and killed the unsuspecting defenders. A plank bridge connected the ravelin with the fort. They stormed forward, trying to burst into the portcullis before it closed. They began firing through the portcullis grille at the Christians. It was then that the Christians rained down wildfire and trumps and firework hoops upon them. Wildfire, or Greek fire, was composed of saltpetre, pounded sulphur, pitch, unrefined ammoniacal salt, resin, and turpentine. It was packed into small, thin pots. The mouths of the pots were sealed with linen or thick paper, and secured by four cords soaked in sulphur, then lit. Trumps were tubes of wood or metal, secured to long poles, filled with an inflammable mixture and linseed oil or turpentine. Sometimes they fired two small cylinders of iron which discharged lead bullets. Rain of fire poured down upon the Janissaries, along with arquebus shot and blocks of stone and cauldrons of boiling pitch. Their loose robes turned them into human torches. The Turks had thrown bundles of wool, straw, and earth into the ditch between the ravelin and the fort. Now the ditch was ablaze. Wave after wave of the finest Moslem troops were repelled by fire. The worst was the firework hoop. It was composed of the lightest wood, first dipped into brandy, rubbed with oil, and covered with wool and cotton soaked in combustible liquors, and mixed with saltpetre and gunpowder. After this layer cooled, it was repeated several times. When picked up with tongs and thrown over the walls, two or three soldiers would get entangled in one of these. When the attack failed, about 2,000 Turks had died. The Christians lost 10 Knights and 70 soldiers.

Chapter 13: Sentence of Death

A Spanish Captain, de Miranda, inspected the defences: "Men all torn to pieces and pounded by hostile cannon. What with never stirring from their posts, but sleeping and eating; with all other human functions; in arms always, and prepared for combat; by day exposed to the burning sun, and by night to the cold damp; privations of all kinds, from the blasts of gunpowder, smoke, dust, wildfire, volleys of musketry, to explosions of enormous batteries, insufficient nutriment, they had gotten so disfigured. Those with smaller bones dislocated or shattered, and faces bruised with frightful sores, or extremely lame and limping; these miserably bandaged around the head, arms in slings, strange contortions."

Chapter 14: St Elmo, the 8th of June

The fort survived another attack that lasted six hours. Then 53 younger Knights sent a letter to La Valette, saying that they would rather confront the enemy than remain within the fort and be killed by cannon fire. The Knights were weary from constant bombardment. La Valette, wanting them to remain in the fort, sent 3 older Knights to inspect the fort. One of them found 600 volunteers in Birgu who said they would go over and help defend the fort in place of the young Knights. Their shame was complete. Envisioning that they would be forever be branded as the men who abandoned St Elmo, they decided to stay and fight.

Chapter 15: Embattled Fortress

On the night of 10 June, the Janissaries

attacked, throwing Sachetti (fire grenades) which when burst, clung to the armor or body. The only thing that prevented the Knights from being roasted alive was leaping into great barrels of water along the defences. When the attack ended at dawn, 1,500 of the Sultan's finest troops lay dead. The defenders lost sixty men. Although the Knights formed the backbone of the Christian defenders, five to six thousand Maltese men comprised their main defence. Even though there were deserters from both the Turks and the Christians, there was not a single instance of a Maltese crossing over to the enemy. Converted by St Paul in A.D. 60, the Maltese had endured a terrible toll of invasion and slavery by the Moslems pirates. Yet no written record exists of their heroic deeds. Men like Luqa Briffa the great horseman, and Toni Bajada the swimmer and local Robin Hood, survive in oral stories alone. At dawn on 16 June, the layalars attacked. Fueled by hashish, they were fanatics without regard for any human life. They wore the skins of wild beasts, gilded steel helmets, and were armed with round shields and scimitars. Turkish cannon pummeled the fort from three directions. Four thousand Turkish arquebusiers fired on the embrasures. Beaten back, the bodies of the layalars filled the ditch. A horde of Dervishes charged over their corpses. Then the Janissaries came, seeking revenge for the General of their Corp, Lieutenant-Aga, killed two days before by a cannon ball. The Christians countered with a battery on the southern side of their star-shaped fort, enfilading the advancing enemy with devastating fire. The gunners on the high cavalier of Fort St. Angelo swept the line of Moslems with long traversing fire. At night the attack was called off, with 1,000 Turks dead, and the Christians losing 150 men.

Chapter 16: The Territory of the Knights

Dragut advised the construction of a wall of stones, earth, and brushwork along the eastern flank of Mount Sciberras to shield Turkish troops from the guns of St Angelo. On 18 June, while supervising this construction, a cannon shot from St Angelo landed nearby, throwing up great splinters of rock. One of these struck Dragut above his right ear. He fell to the ground, gushing blood from his nose and ears, severely wounded. In 1544, he had a premonition that he would "die in the territory of the Knights."

Chapter 17: The Fall of St Elmo

For six hours on 22 June, the battle raged back and forth. Steel-clad Knights rose in hand-to-hand combat with Janissaries. Swords and pikes and battleaxes met scimitars and shields. By nightfall, two thousand Turkish troops and 200 Christian men had died. A Maltese soldier swam for long periods under water to bring the news of the battle to La Valette. When he heard that all that survived were wounded, and carried about large plates with bread soaked in wine so they did not have to move from their defensive positions, the unemotional La Valette was moved to tears. On 23 June, with less than 100 defenders, the fort fell. The Sultan's spies had said the fort could be taken in 3 to 4 days. It had held out for 31 days of continuous siege. This was to prove the keystone to the entire campaign. News of the Turkish

victory was brought to the dying Dragut, who raised his eyes to heaven, and then expired.

**Chapter 18: Bodies in the Water**On Sunday morning, 24 June, the feast of St John, the patron saint of the Order, four headless bodies of Knights nailed to cross-beams of wood in mock crucifixion floated through Grand Harbour. Mustapha had mounted their heads on stakes facing St Angelo. La Valette immediately gave order for the many Turkish prisoners to be decapitated. Their bodies were thrown into the sea. Their heads were fired from the St Angelo cannons toward St Elmo. From now until the end of the siege, every morning a new Turkish prisoner hung from the walls of Mdina.

**Chapter 19: The Little Relief**With the fall of St Elmo, the garrisons in Birgu and Senglea were provisioned for a long siege. They had 7,000 or 8,000 bushels of wheat, 3,000 bushels of barley, 40,000 casks of water and the spring in Birgu, quantities of meat, cheese, butter, olive oil, sardines, tunny, and dried cod. Under cover from a dense sea mist, a small relief force arrived from Messina. There were 42 Knights, 25 volunteers, 56 trained gunners, and 600 Spanish Imperial Infantry. At this point, Mustapha attempted a negotiation. He considered the loss of his 8,000 men out of proportion to the Christian 1,500 dead. He offered the same terms that had been given 43 years before at Rhodes -- safe passage for La Valette and all his men, upon surrender of the island. La Valette told him the only land he would get is the ditch in front of the fort, filled with the bodies of his own Janissaries.

**Chapter 20: The Attack on Senglea**Just after dawn on 15 July, the Moslems attacked Senglea from the land and seaward sides. The impertinent son-in-law of Dragut, Hassem, led the land attack. Without waiting for breaches to open up, they came on in a wild, screaming rush with their ladders. A massacre ensued. Time and again cannon blew great holes in the advancing troops. On the seaward side, a powder magazine blew up due to a spark falling into it. The Turks rushed toward the breach and raised their banner. The Commander of the point, Zanoguerra led a counter attack, along with Fra Roberto, a Brother of the Order, who flew at the enemy, rallying his fellow Christians "to die like men, and perish for their Faith."Before the battle, La Valette, knowing that the Senglea defences were not as strong as Birgu and St Angelo, had a bridge of boats built across the two peninsulas so they could be reinforced at a minute's notice. He did so now. Mustapha, sensing victory, sent boats with 1,000 Janissaries to land on the northern tip of Senglea. A concealed five-gun battery at water-level below St Angelo, manned by the Chevalier de Guiral, destroyed 9 of the 10 boats. The land side attack continued. A Turk, seeing the carnage that the Chevalier de Quinay was making, rushed at him and shot him in the head at point blank range. A Knight ran the Turk through with his sword. The Maltese defenders, including women and children, hurled down stones and fire and great cauldrons of boiling water on the attackers. After 5 hours, 3,000 Turks and 250 Christians lay dead.

**Chapter 21: Arms and the Men**Knights wore plate armor



over a leather or quilted jerkin, the latter protecting the body from bruising when hit. Their heads were guarded by an armet with a movable visor. The weight of the armor produced little inconvenience if all the joints (elbows and knees) were measured exactly to the wearer. Weapons used were the traditional sword, axe, pike, halberd and mace. The Turks had become skilled in the use of the arquebus (musket).

**Chapter 22: Death in the Marsa**A large-scale assault occurred on 2 August. Five times the Turks were driven back. Mustapha decided to give the forts 5 days of continuous bombardment. On 7 August the Turks attacked Castile and St Michael's at the same time. When the Turks swept over a breach in the main wall of Castile, they were now trapped by an inner wall and met with withering fire. The defenders leaped from their entrenchments with swords in hand. Hundreds died. However, the Turkish charge on St Michael's gained a foothold. The garrison was steadily forced backwards. Victory seemed imminent. Then the unbelievable happened. The Turks sounded their signal to retreat. A messenger from the Turkish camp in the Marsa said that a large Christian relief force had slaughtered their people, mostly sick and wounded. It was not a relief force, but the cavalry under the Chevalier de Lugny. They overwhelmed the sentries, set fire to the tents, destroyed provisions, and took their horses.

**Chapter 23: The Great Decision**Although Don Garcia de Toledo promised to send 16,000 reinforcements by the end of August, La Valette wisely told his Knights to not rely any more on broken promises. "There is no hope to be looked for except in the succour of Almighty God -- the only true help. He who has up to now not forsaken us, will not forsake us."

**Chapter 24: Into the Breach**Unlike St Elmo that was built on solid rock, the Turks began laying mines under Castile. On 18 August, the mine was exploded, and a great section of the Castille wall collapsed. The Turks charged through the breach. Brother Guillaume called for a retreat to St Angelo. But the 70 year-old La Valette seized a pike and charged toward the enemy. A wave of Knights and Maltese soldiers rallied around him. Splinters from a grenade struck his leg. Limping, La Valette kept moving toward the breach, knowing his presence had inspired their counter-attack. The Turks were driven back.

**Chapter 25: "...The world was coming to an end."**The Turks rolled a tower up to the Castile wall from which Janissary snipers began picking off the fort's defenders. It was prevented from burning by great sheets of leather soaked in water. La Valette ordered Maltese workmen to make a hole in the wall just opposite the base of the tower. When opened, a large cannon fired chain-shot (two half-cannon balls fastened together by chain). The chain-shot whirled round and round like a giant scythe, cutting down the tower supports. While this happened, Mustapha attacked Senglea with an "infernal machine." It was shaped like a long barrel, encircled by iron hoops, and filled with gunpowder, iron chains, nails, and grape-shot. A slow match was set to its fuse. The Turks dragged it up a ramp and pushed it over the

battered walls, waiting for the explosion. But the fuse was too slow. The Knights pushed it back up the ramp and over the wall. It rolled and bounced into the ditch, exploding right in the face of the Turks waiting for the assault. The Castile defenders then charged down from the wall and fell upon the enemy. In addition to these failed attacks, the Turks were dealing with dysentery, fever, and the chance of plague. But their greatest concern was the weather. It was now the 3rd week of August and Malta was still uncaptured. By mid-September the Sirocco was expected to blow, a southerly wind that made sailing on the Mediterranean too dangerous. They were nearly a thousand miles by sea from Constantinople. The Turks would either have to withdraw, or winter on the island. Even though Mustapha was in favor of spending the winter in Malta, knowing the Christian defenders would run out of provisions, the Turkish admiral Piali said he would not hazard his ships surviving a winter there.

**Chapter 26: No Withdrawal** On 20 August, a mass attack by 8,000 Turkish troops failed miserably. Another tower was brought up the Castile wall. This time its base was reinforced with earth and stonework. Janissary snipers began picking off everyone inside the fort. Again the Maltese workmen opened a hole in the wall. But this time a raiding party, led by Knight Commander Claramont of the League of Aragon and a Castilian Knight, Guevarez de Pereira, climbed up the stone base and killed the Janissaries. The Christians now turned this tower against the Turks by manning it with their own gunners and two cannon.

The Grand Council met on 23 August and proposed to abandon Birgu and to hold out in St Angelo, the strongest of all the defences. The breaches in Castile were irreparable and the enemy had placed mines under the entire wall. All were in agreement, except La Valette. He reasoned, "If we abandon Birgu, we lose Senglea, for the garrison there cannot survive without reinforcements from Birgu. We cannot abandon the loyal Maltese people (including women and children) to the enemy. Fort Angelo's water supply will not be adequate. The entire weight of the Turkish artillery would then concentrate on the one fort, instead of being divided between multiple targets. Even the strong walls of St Angelo would fall in time." To prevent a retreat to Fort St Angelo, La Valette burnt the bridge of boats and gave orders for St Angelo's drawbridge to be blown up.

**Chapter 27: Dissensions in Sicily** Mustapha's commissariat told him there was enough flour left for 25 more days. Their large supply ship had been captured by a Sicilian galley. Gunpowder and ammunition were running low. Many of their cannon were becoming unserviceable. They had arrived with enough supplies for a siege that was expected to last a few weeks. That was 3 months ago. But Suleiman was not a man to suffer defeat easily. Mustapha forced his sappers to redouble their efforts under the walls of Castile. The Maltese miners countered by tunneling back toward the enemy, listening against the sandstone for the tap-tapping of the Turkish miners, then setting off countermines. Mustapha decided to attack Mdina. He would then

use its guns, powder and shot against the Knights. The Governor of Mdina, Don Mesquita, decided that a bold appearance on the town walls might discourage the invaders. He had many of the peasants, even the women folk, dress in soldiers' uniforms and patrol the ramparts. Enemy scouts reported that the walls were heavily guarded. Mustapha came to see for himself. Then he called off the attack!

**Chapter 28: The Relief** On 25 August, unknown to La Valette, Don Garcia weighed anchor from Messina with a relief force of 10,000 men in 28 ships. On 1 September, the Turks launched another mass offensive. It failed miserably. Their morale had suffered from their great losses. Their ignorance of the elementary principles of sanitation led to dysentery, enteric, and fever. The Knights Hospitallers understood the rudiments of hygiene. Everyone ate their meals off silver plates. Meanwhile, Don Garcia's fleet ran into a heavy gale, suffering extensive damage. However, on 6 September, the fleet came round to Mellieha Bay on the north east of Malta. The troops began to stream ashore. Under command of Ascanio de la Corna, they formed up on the high ground on the east side of the island, a steep ridge surmounted by the village of Naxxar. When La Valette learned that the numbers were small, he devised a cunning deception. He gave orders for one of the Moslem galley slaves to be given his freedom. The slave was told that 16,000 Christian troops under the Viceroy of Sicily were coming ashore. When he brought this "news" to Mustapha, he ordered the immediate evacuation of the island.

**Chapter 29: The Last Engagement** On 8 September, Knights and soldiers, women and children streamed out of their defences unmolested. The Turkish fleet, having first arrived 4 months ago, was now leaving. When the bells of the Conventual church of St Lawrence rang out, the people gave thanks to the Lord their God. When Mustapha found out he had been deceived as to the numbers of the relief force, he ordered 9,000 of his troops to reform on the shore. The relief force on the high ground charged down the hill to meet them head on, while the forces from Mdina swung across the plank to outflank them. Having to disembark and fight again was too demoralizing for the Turkish troops. Most of them broke and ran.

**Chapter 30: "We shall never take you"** In the defence of Malta, nearly 250 Knights had died, and the remaining were badly wounded. Of the Spanish and foreign soldiers and Maltese inhabitants, 7,000 had perished. Out of a garrison of 9,000, the Grand Master had 600 left. The historian Balbi estimates 30,000 Turks lost their lives. This was the last great attempt of the Ottoman Empire to break into the western Mediterranean. Six years later their fleet was destroyed in 1571 at the battle of Lepanto by the navy of the Christian league and galleys from Malta. All over Europe bells rang in the cathedrals. Even in Protestant England, Matthew Parker, the Archbishop of Canterbury, appointed a form of Thanksgiving to be used thrice weekly for six weeks after the event. Malta "that obscure island" and "rock of soft sandstone" was now known as "Island of heroes" and "the Bulwark of the Faith." The

Sultan's attack had proved to Europe how important Malta's strategic position was in the trade route. Suleiman died on 5 September 1566, at the age of 72, while conducting the siege of Szigetvar, Hungary. Chapter 31: The Impregnable Fortress Honours were showered upon Grand Master La Valette by all the kingdoms of Europe. Mount Sciberras would become the new home of the Order. It was named "Humillima Civitas Valettae", the Most Humble City of Valette. Three years after the siege, in July 1568, La Valette succumbed to a stroke after a day's hawking in the hot sun. As he lingered on for several weeks, he made his final depositions and appealed to his brethren to live together in peace and unity. He died on 21 August 1568. La Valette now lies in the great crypt of the cathedral of St John's. His inscription reads: "Here lies La Valette, worthy of eternal honour. He who once was the scourge of Africa and Asia, and the shield of Europe, whence he expelled the barbarians by his holy arms, is the first to be buried in this beloved city, whose founder he was."

This is a very readable and engaging history. I recognize that experts disagree with some of the details in various histories of the siege of Malta, but I am not competent to hazard an opinion on that, not being a historian myself. However, if there are a few details in question, that is not important to me. I read this for the pure enjoyment of the story and won't remember all the details in any event. This was a page-turner all the way. I'll leave to the experts all the quibbles.

This book provides a detailed analysis of the Sultan's preparations for the Malta siege and the defense preparations of the Knights of St. John. The siege itself is presented with much suspense. It is well written with many interesting facts. The event itself was important in the sixteenth century in that it the siege marked a turning point in the Sultan's ambitions to control the western Mediterranean. A very well-written and important story. The suggestion that a map or geographical sketches would have helped is well-taken.

What an incredible story. Ernle Bradford does a wonderful job discussing the intricacies of the siege in a fascinating narrative. A few years ago I translated "The Knights of Rhodes:" by Bo Gieritz which deals with the Order of St. John of Jerusalem on the Isle of Rhodes during the siege of 1522, an event still remembered by the order during the siege of Malta just 43 years later. Ever since translating that book I've had more than a passing interest in the order and their previous work as well as later exploits. When I picked this book up I couldn't put it down. Some other reviewers criticize the author for being a bit one sided in telling the tale, but that is one of the things I love about the book. It's one of the things I like about many different British historians in general. They

are not obsessed with a politically correct retelling of the events. Drawing on source of Balbi, "a sixty year old, poet, writer and soldier of fortune" from Italy who documented the day to day fighting from Senglea where he himself fought with the Hospitallers during the siege, Bradford fills in the story with his own descriptions of the country and research concerning the battle. The effect is that you get a sense for the fighting and identify with the cause of the Hospitallers. Let the other side tell their story if they wish and justify their own assault on the island of heroes. Sure, both sides resorted to acts that we find hard to comprehend today, though the history of our own lifetime is not a stranger to similar events, yet other reviewers are wrong in saying that Bradford doesn't criticize the Grand Master of Malta, Valette, at all. He does, even if he does show charity, forgiveness and hesitancy in his criticism. Perhaps as a veteran of war himself, he understands the pressures and emotions that can cause a man to do things he might otherwise abstain from. In a day when it is popular to criticize crusaders and the crusades as being backward and uncivilized etc. This book shows another side to the people who in many ways saved civilization, something made very apparent as one considers the Islamic world of the Ottoman Empire, and soberly assesses the modern Middle East predicaments. Had these men not held out the way they did on Malta it is doubtful that we would have had the freedom to live with our cherished ideals of freedom, tolerance and charity with which so many nonchalantly criticize these men. Great book, well worth the read.

This is one gutsy and unforgivingly strategic, blunt and truly committed group of warrior monks!! Leonidas and his 300 (+/-) a few more Thebians.etc. could take a lesson from these dudes. The "history" elements are well drawn and finely paced....the outcome was known beforehand but the "how" was always in doubt. I've travelled this journey path before but sonnavabitch I found the events so moving and reflective of the world we live in today that I was moved to tears at times. I plan to try more of this author's works.

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