

The Great Siege of Malta, 1565: Lecture 2 of 3

Lecture by Joseph Borg

Mr Borg started off with a short review of the first lecture. He then read an extract from the book, *The Siege of Malta 1565*, by Francisco Balbi di Correggio, relating to the events that happened on the 16th June 1565, exactly 450 years earlier. This reading described many of the topics that Mr Borg wanted to talk about later in the evening.

In the first part of the talk Mr Borg spoke about the leaders of the antagonists during the campaign. He spoke about the strengths and weaknesses (as perceived by him) of Suleiman, Mustapha Pasha, Piali Pasha and Dragut, as well as Don Garcia de Toledo and Grand Master de La Valette.

He suggested that the antagonism that was shown between Mustapha and Piali was the main reason for their defeat. He also offered an opinion that to some extent, Suleiman was also at fault, since he knew that these two men did not get on well at all, to the extent that he made Dragut (who was not a Turk) the provisional leader of the expedition. Dragut was ten days late arriving in Malta and, rather than waiting for him, the two Pashas started the siege by firstly attacking St Elmo rather than Mdina, which would have secured the north of the island, thereby cutting all means of communication with the outside world.

On the other hand, Dragut was seen to be a good leader and a great planner, though he never overruled Piali's idea to attack St Elmo first. He too was of the opinion that Mdina should have been the first port of call. Maybe he was in awe of

Piali

because of his connection to the Sultan?

Don Garcia was seen to be at a loss as to what to do in sending relief to the island. Sure he had plenty to worry about. He did not have too many soldiers at his disposal and he was uncertain as to how he would defend his region in the event of Malta falling to the Turks. He would have been in bigger trouble had he to send his troops across to Malta to be defeated. His reticence to act can therefore be understood. That said, he did eventually allow the relief force to sail, thus saving the day.

Jean de La Valette was seen to be a great leader and a man of great discipline. The way he managed the various battle scenes was amazing. He listened and acted on the facts before him, but he also knew his enemy well. He also showed a great admiration towards the Maltese and would never abandon them. This of course meant that the people never gave up the hope that they would come out of the ordeal triumphant.

During the second part of the talk, Mr Borg spoke about various important elements which form a part of any siege and which are normally taken for-granted. These included such things as communications, supplies of food and munitions, medical stations and hospitals to take care of the wounded, biological warfare, psychological warfare, espionage and public health measures. Various types of weaponry used during the siege were also described.

Mr Borg finished his talk with a brief description of the aftermath, the fact that the island/fortifications were in ruins and that the majority of the survivors were maimed for life. This subject, The Aftermath of the Siege, will be the topic of the next lecture in the trilogy on the Great Siege of Malta of 1565.




Link to PowerPoint and Lecture recording:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xd65wocfmrwb8jq/AADUISpKZ2VhX4XfSIPx0adka?dl=0>

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MHA lecture audience 21 June 2015     Photo:  Lewis Zammit

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Joseph Borg speaking to the MHA June 2015

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