

REVIEWS

ETTORE ROSSI. — *Documenti turchi inediti dell'Ambrosiana sull'Assedio di Malta nel 1565.* (Estratto dalla Miscellanea G. Galbiati. Vol. III, 1951. — Milano. Biblioteca Ambrosiana.).

Dr. Ettore Rossi, ben noto anche fra noi fin dal 1924 come un'appassionato studioso del periodo storico in Malta dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano di cui si hanno dalla sua penna delle pregevoli pubblicazioni, ed anche come uno studioso del linguaggio Maltese dal punto di vista linguistico, ha ultimamente contribuito il suddetto interessante studio nella Miscellanea G. Galbiati riguardo la relazione ufficiale, ancora inedita, fatta da Mustafà Pascià al Sultano Solimano Magnifico, contenuta in un manoscritto turco della Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano in cui vi è descritto minutamente l'assedio e la conquista di Sant'Elmo. Il testo è copia fedele dell'originale in carattere *divani* corsivo.

Il Rossi, rilevando preliminarmente la scarsità delle informazioni turchesche sull'assedio di Malta nel 1565, che egli attribuisce, con buona ragione, all'infelice esito della spedizione turca, reputa di interesse notevole la documentazione del testo turco confermando i vari fatti già descritti in fonti europee "su relazioni di testi oculari e di protagonisti della grande impresa". Il testo non aggiunge ai fatti noti molti elementi nuovi ed alcuni brani della stessa relazione sono stati già inseriti nella storia delle guerre marittime dei Turchi di Haggi Khalifa. Non ritenendo necessario dare una traduzione letterale del testo ridondante di stile minuziosamente artificioso, il Rossi si è limitato a darne un riassunto sostanzialmente narrativo. Nella narrazione si rileva un punto storico che contraddice le asserzioni dei nostri storici i quali ritengono che dopo la caduta del forte Sant'Elmo i vincitori turchi vi trovarono circa 1.300 cadaveri Cristiani fra cui circa 150 cavalieri, nel mentre che il testo turco dice che i superstiti, in numero di 1.400, furono trucidati dai combattenti mussulmani, ciò che rifletterebbe male sull'eroismo dei difensori Cristiani. Il relatore inoltre tace completamente della perdita sofferta dalla parte musulmana che, a quanto si calcola dai nostri storici, ammontò a circa 8.000 uomini, una conquista che costò al turco una perdita di uomini ben rilevante. Sembra perciò che il relatore, per far risaltare la prodezza dei suoi, ha invertito i fatti. Vi si tace ancora della morte di Draghut Pascià cagionata da un colpo nemico. Il testo manca di data precisa, e non ne indica che l'anno 1565, presumendo che la relazione fosse spedita poco dopo la conquista di Sant'Elmo da parte dei turchi, cioè dopo il 23 giugno 1565.

Alla relazione segue una poesia che commenda la vittoriosa armata musulmana e la potenza di Solimano ed i capi dell'impresa — evidentemente composta dopo la caduta del forte Sant'Elmo. Qualche nota di disprezzo e di scherno non vi manca verso gli infedeli di Malta ed il loro capo.

Oltre che il documento non aggiunge niente di nuovo, come ben osserva Dr. Rossi, a quanto si sapeva delle vicende dell'assedio e caduta del forte (anzi a mio parere vi sarebbero delle inesattezze fatte a proposito) esso serve, secondo la conclusiva opinione del Rossi, a correggere varie inesattezze della storia delle guerre marittime di Haggi Khalifa.

Benchè finora la cronaca turca intorno all'assedio del 1565 sia scarsa di notizie, come già ebbe a rilevare lo stesso Rossi in un suo articolo "L'Assedio di Malta nel 1565 secondo gli storici ottomani" (in *Malta Letteraria*, maggio, 1926), non è improbabile "che future ricerche possano dare altre fonti turchesche oltre quelle finora note".

A. C.

Description of the Island of Malta, a brief treatise on knightly behaviour written by the noble knight Camillo Spreti in the year 1764, translated from the Italian, introduced and annotated by Averil Mackenzie-Grieve. Library Committee, Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (St. John's Gate), in the series "Historical pamphlets" no. 10.

Camillo Spreti was admitted into the Order of Malta as a minor knight of justice in 1748, and in October 1748 he came to Malta where he spent two years making his *caravans* (cruises) with the Order's fleet. During his two not very happy years here, shortly after completing his *Description*, he returned to Ravenna, where he lived until his death.

The excellent translation and the copious annotations render this booklet a very useful and welcome addition to *Melitensia*.

J. G.

GIBB, JOHN. — *The Birds of the Maltese Islands*, in "Ibis" vol. 93, 1951, pp. 109-127. Mr. Gibb, who is a member of the Edward Grey Institute Dept. of Zoological Field Studies, Oxford, was stationed in an anti-aircraft unit in Malta between August 1941 and July 1945. The learned author is of opinion that the number of breeding species on Malta is much less than in equivalent habitats in Sicily, though sometimes the ecological niche of a species is wider than that occupied by the same species in Sicily.

Mr. Gibb is also the author of three more contributions relating to Malta: *Singing of birds on Malta and Gozo*, in "British Birds" vol. 39, pp. 354-357; *Migrants through Malta and Gozo, Oct. 1941 - July 1945*, in "British Birds" vol. 40, pp. 71-78; and *Some notes on the Spectacled Warbler in the Maltese Islands*, in "British Birds" vol. 40, pp. 298-305.

J. G.

Five Naval Journals 1789 - 1817, edited by rear-admiral H. G. Thursfield. Printed for the Navy Records Society, 1951, pp. xiii - 389.

This book has been compiled from the *Journals* or rough diaries kept by the reverend Edward Mangin, Peter Cullen, Robert Mereer Wilson, Charles Abbot, and Captain W. Pryce Cumbly. There are also the Letters from the Lower Deck, dated 1794 - 1811, an exhaustive appendix, and an index; six illustrations are also included.

In the navy of the early nineteenth century the seamen expressed no grievance at being turned out time after time to weigh anchor, after they had anchored only one hour or two earlier, when they knew that there was a prize money to be earned thereby. The distribution of prize money to the ship's company was fairly frequent, for there was a Prize Court at Malta — that court of which Lord Cockrane fell foul. Proceeds, indeed, were often realized within a matter of weeks from the capture, and the adjudication was fairly rapid, as is evinced from the many documents in the Royal Malta Library.

Robert Wilson's *Journal* is of special interest to Malta, and its finest monument in Valletta, St. John's Church, figures prominently. Wilson was promoted acting second master by order of rear-admiral Sir Alexander Ball, then senior naval officer at Malta, and from *H.M.S. Alceste* he moved to the gun-brig *Confounder*. During this time he compiled the *Journal* under study. In the Public Records Office, in London, there is the Master's log of the *Confounder*, from which we can glean a good deal of information on Malta and the British navy stationed here. Sub-Lieutenant John Richardson and Mr. Ralph Willoughby Cleghorn, assistant surgeon, both serving on the *Confounder*, were tried by court martial at Malta on March 4, 1810, on the charge of being drunk.

The following is an extract from the *Journal*: entry dated Tuesday 12th January, 1808 (p. 214).

"...During the time I was on shore I visited the beautiful church of St. John's, and was struck with wonder and surprise at the noble and excellent scriptural paintings that adorned the church. The communion was grand beyond expression, the images both paintings and of marble were like life itself; you even walked on marble of a most beautiful colour. Under the church on the west side is a large vault, wherein are deposited several urns with the bodies of some great men, embalmed, such as the founder of the church, etc. You descend to this vault by a flight of stait steps, and on your entrance therein you are struck with a sudden awe, all is gloomy and silent. A wicket affords a little light to this dreary abode of the dead. On the east side inside the church is an altar of the Blessed Virgin's where a lamp is always kept burning before her picture, which is a masterpiece. The railing around is all of silver but was blackened over to avoid being taken away by Buonaparte. On the south-east part of the church is a chapel, called St. John's chapel, which is adorned with beautiful pictures and has a most superb organ, which only is played on great occasions. In short St. John's is a church well worth a stranger's notice; it is a grand place but like most of the churches up here has too much pageantry displayed."

J. G.

The Keith Papers, selected from the papers of Admiral Viscount Keith, and edited by Christopher Lloyd, 2 vols. Printed for the Navy Records Society, 1950.

Lord Keith appeared on the scene as commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean, when Alexander Ball was in command of the Maltese land forces, and Troubridge in command of

the ships. The Russians at that time failed to put in an appearance, and when their envoy at Palermo, Italinski, was instructed to occupy Valletta with Russian troops the British commanders protested strongly.

The volume contains good sources for the eventful years of the early British occupation here. It includes the correspondence exchanged between Keith and admiral Ushakoff, Troubridge, the Dey of Algiers, Lock, Paget, Martin, Ball, and many others, with special reference to Malta, which can be traced through the index at the end.

J. G.

JOSEPH GALEA: The Archives of the Hospitallers and the Records of the Commune in the Royal Malta Library. In "The Journal of Documentation" (Aslib), Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 31-37.

This useful little study divides itself into three parts: (a) an outline history of the Malta Public Records, (b) a short description of the eighteen classes into which the catalogue of the Archives, now found in the Royal Malta Library, is divided; and (c) a note on the Records of the Commune. The concluding part of the introduction contains some information not mentioned by the writers quoted in the first few paragraphs. The date mentioned at the foot of page 32, i.e. 1817 is evidently a misprint, and should read 1857. Otherwise the handy presentation of this study makes it a useful guide to the archives.

One would have liked to see Part II of the catalogue, dealing with the records of the Commune, treated as extensively as Part I. Unfortunately this second part is but briefly touched upon in a short paragraph, and the prominent place given to these records in the title seems to be hardly justified.

Students of local history look forward to the study of the hitherto unclassified Mss. at the Royal Malta Library which Mr. Galea promised in the concluding paragraph of his study.

J. C. P.

JAIME SALVA: La Orden de Malta y las Acciones Navales Espanolas contra Turcos y Berberiscos en los Siglos XVI y XVII. Madrid, Instituto Historico de Marina, 1944, pp. 447.

This richly documented book is of particular interest to the student of naval history, and recounts in considerable detail the naval exploits of the Order mentioned by Ettore Rossi on pages 32-95 of his *Storia della Marina dell'Ordine di S. Giovanni di Gerusalemme di Rodi e di Malta* (Rome, 1926). But it is something more than a mere narrative of events and sea fights. The writer sets out to illustrate a theory which presents various points worthy of deeper study.

Peculiar circumstances during the first quarter of the 16th Century brought about a policy of close collaboration between the forces of Spain and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem — a collaboration lasting more than a century during which no major action against the Infidels took place in which the Knights did not take part either at sea or on land. At no other period of its history did the maritime spirit of the Order, first witnessed in Rhodes, shine in such splendour as during the first century of its rule in Malta. The Coron expedition in 1532, the glorious conquest of Tunis and the Goletta in 1535, the campaigns in the Levant under Doria in 1537-8, the ill-fated expedition against Algiers in 1541, the two expeditions to Penon de Velez de la Gomera in 1563 and 1564, the immortal feats of the Knights at Lepanto, the Great Siege of Malta in 1565, the great sea fights with the Turkish sea wolves of the Mediterranean — these and many others make up the culminating point in the glorious history of the Order.

Now this epoch coincides with the period of the greatest Spanish influence on the Order; the grandeur of the Knights runs parallel with that of the Spanish Empire, and together with Spain the Order declines and gradually fades into obscurity. The period during which Spanish Grand Masters predominated corresponds to the 17th century, when the Spanish nation started on its decline, and goes on into the second half of the century which saw the progressive political decadence of Spain and at the same time the emergence of France and the establishment of its predominance. Around this thesis the carefully constructed fabric of the work is woven with masterly skill. The text proper takes up 326 pages, leaving 121 pages made up of appendices providing rich source material for the historian of the period. Of the 55 documents reproduced in this section Docs. 5 to 9 have a direct bearing on the Siege of Malta, while others refer to correspondence between the Grand Masters and the Spanish kings, to sea fights won against the Infidels, or to Turkish raids on Malta and Gozo.

An index of names concludes this welcome addition to the bibliography on the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

J. C. P.

Political Parties in Malta following on the Rising against the French. Public Lecture delivered by Professor W. Ganado at the Royal University of Malta Library on the 4th December, 1951.

In this lecture Professor Ganado reviewed the political scene in Malta from the 2nd September, 1798 up to the formation of the Maltese Congress in February, 1799. During these months the Maltese Islands were virtually independent, being governed by the Maltese Provisional Government centred on Imdina, and with a local governing body looking after the needs of each village.

There were various motives influencing the leaders of the Maltese in their stand against the French. There was at first a strong pro-Order party, which included among its supporters such prominent figures as Teuma-Castelletti, Depiro and Manduca. Of these, Count Manduca later on came forward with the idea of turning Valletta into an international port and raising Malta to the status of an independent country supported by the European nations.

There was also the pro-Russian party which, after the unsuccessful plot within Valletta headed by Captain Lorenzi and supported by Dun Mikiel Xerri, became more or less identified in the minds of the Maltese with the pro-Order party. This state of affairs provided ample scope for the furtherance of the aims of the pro-British party, with Canon F. S. Caruana, Antonio Parnis and Censu Borg, *Braret*, at its head. Pro-British feeling was fanned by the clever Captain Ball, culminating in the hoisting of the British flag by *Braret*. The moves and counter-moves leading to this significant event were clearly presented by the lecturer.

The wide range of the lecture may be seen from the following list of headings dealt with by the lecturer: the Constitution of the Provisional Government, the appeals to Sicily and Sicilian help, Russian and British aims on Malta, the political parties and pro-British propaganda, the work of Ball, Vincenzo Borg *Braret*, the hoisting of the British Flag and the reform of Congress.

This lecture forms part of a more extensive study on which Professor Ganado has been working for some years and it is hoped that the complete work will be published before long. The inclusion, in the form of appendices, of the various letters and documents which the lecturer has been able to bring together from printed, archive and private sources will be of inestimable value to future students, while the provision of a detailed analytical index for ease of reference will greatly enhance the practical value of the work.

J. C. P.