



BRUCE WARE ALLEN

## The Great Siege of Malta: The Epic Battle between the Ottoman Empire and the Knights of St. John

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The definitive battle in the clash of empires that has defined Europe for 500 years

## The Great Siege of Malta: The Epic Battle between the Ottoman Empire and the Knights of St. John Details

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## **From Reader Review The Great Siege of Malta: The Epic Battle between the Ottoman Empire and the Knights of St. John for online ebook**

**jane b dorning says**

**Excellent**

Well written and researched not dry but lively and told from a point of view from both sides a worthy history of the great siege .

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**James says**

A well written book about the turn of fortune between the European and Middle Eastern powers. Enough here for academics to use, well footnoted etc., but a readable history for the interested.

Although the Ottoman Empire continued to seriously threaten Europe - their last attempt to take Vienna was a century after the Malta Siege - this was the beginning of the end for the Ottomans. However this book is focused on the military challenge of the attempt ot take Malta. IF you find military history something of a bore it isn't for you.

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**David Jakab says**

**AUDIO BOOK VERSION**

This is an exceptional narrative history.

I am well acquainted with this siege and familiar with many maps and artistic representations available online. I highly recommend this account over all others. The first chapter was not narrated to my liking and was tempted to return it. However, the narrator very much improved his performance in the succeeding chapters. And better yet the story progressively became so engaging I listened to the whole thing in one sitting and will listen again.

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**Kyle Meyer says**

**Great book.**

Historians, military and religious alike, should consider this book. It is a great tale of battle between two vastly different cultures that changed the outlook of the world we live in today.

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## **Dave says**

A wonderful account of a nearly epic battle that changed the course of Western history. Incredible detail and a stirring narrative of a desperate struggle at the gates of Europe. Thoroughly researched and well written!

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## **Cheryl Lassiter says**

I received *The Great Siege of Malta* through a Goodreads giveaway. Set in the 16th century, it's non-fiction that reads like fiction, in the vein of Erik Larson, with great use of metaphor. The straightforward battle descriptions put you into the thick of the action, but are never melodramatic. Mr. Allen writes as an eyewitness and is authoritative on subjects such as the Christian-Islamic clash of cultures, the Spanish tercios (fighting formations) and other warfighting techniques and "impedimenta"; the structure, strength, and weakness of the fortresses the knights and the Ottomans continually fought over; the egotistical and cruel combatants themselves; the poor bastards caught in between.

There are maps, images of the fortresses and some of the personalities mentioned in the book. It has a great bibliography and notes section.

I enjoyed this book immensely!

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## **Ralphz says**

Such a small number of men kept the Ottoman Turks from overrunning Malta and then likely Europe.

This book is an amazing look at how the expansionist Muslims were fought off by the Christians, splitting the Mediterranean into a Christian Europe and Muslim North Africa well into modern times. And it could easily have gone the other way.

Get ready for interesting battles, tactics and atrocities on both sides. Nobody comes out clean in this tale, but it's a great read.

I received this book through a drawing at LibraryThing.

More reviews at my WordPress site, [Ralphsbooks](#).

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## **David says**

This is a good story that is largely obscured by an author who seemed intent on using an obscure, non-English word at every possible opportunity. What should have been a thrilling account of a major battle of huge importance to the future of Europe and Christianity is buried in text written apparently to demonstrate the author's knowledge of obscure terminology. While some history can be boring the battle of Malta was anything but. Unfortunately, the author of this book made every effort to turn an exciting story into a boring

one.

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## David says

Exhaustively detailed account of a conflict that most have forgotten in favor of Lepanto six years later.

If anything, there is so much detail, with day-by-day accounts of troop movements and commanders intentions. It's easy to get lost in the weeds and not see the overall picture.

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## Mark says

Suleiman the Magnificent bracketed his reign as Sultan of the Ottoman Empire with two fights against the Knights of St. John. He expelled the holy order--who were devoted to honor, medicine, faith, and piracy--from Rhodes to consolidate his empire in 1522. The Knights were given a new home in Malta in the central Mediterranean by Charles V of Spain, and near the end of Suleiman's rule their continued raids on Muslim ships, often pilgrims, combined with strategic considerations led to massive siege in 1565 to finally destroy them.

His force wore itself out over several brutal, cruel, violent months of fighting in the hot summer of 1565. Europe was experiencing a more literate age, the siege was a compelling fight of Christian against infidel, and accounts were sneaked out and retold in pamphlets as the siege took place and memoirs were written, leading to an amazingly detailed record, mostly though not exclusively from the Knights' point of view.

This is a gripping account, starting with the back and forth of the Mediterranean war and then moving into the siege in detail. The defense of a small fort in St. Elmo set the stage, as the Ottomans took weeks to overcome a small fortress before even getting to the main assault, in part because the commander of the Knights (Valette) was able to shame his men into staying in a doomed position to buy him time, ultimately losing something like a quarter of his men who could not retreat when the final assault breached it.

For most of the siege the Knights and Maltese were badly outnumbered and exhausted, and often seemed just a single assault away from being overrun. The Turks took unimaginable casualties charging into prepared positions and somehow kept finding men willing to lead a charge into certain death. Cannons filled with shrapnel were deadly enough, but innovative weapons such as hoops, covered with burning tar, were tossed on massed attackers to set alight their cotton clothing. Individual events, like reinforcements slipping through enemy lines or Maltese swimmers having a knife fight with Turkish engineers in the harbor, are strung together to form a detailed backbone of the narrative. The story captures both the bravery and the brutality. It the bravery is such that it would be a more compelling story than fiction if it were a bit sanitized--which it isn't. Indeed, the horrors are so vivid that the nearly routine, public slaughter of prisoners on both sides seems almost understandable.

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## Garnette says

This is great history, impeccably researched and compellingly written. I usually prefer social and political history to military history, so I was surprised to be so thoroughly drawn into a book that focuses on battles and military strategy. The Siege of Malta arguably marked the beginning of the end of Ottoman expansion

westward into Europe. The book does a great job of describing the different social and political groups that coalesced to form both the Ottoman and the Christian armies. It's one of the first books I've read to give me a sense of the lives of the warrior knights. I found myself eager to find out what happens next, even though the end result was never in question.

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### **A. Sacit says**

A well-researched, very detailed day-to-day account of the Great Siege of Malta by a huge Ottoman fleet and land forces, and dogged defense of the island by the Knights of St. John in 1565. The failure to conquer Malta coincided with the apogee of Ottoman Power towards the end of Suleiman the Magnificent's reign, and marked the end of Ottoman naval expansion in western Mediterranean. At the end, the author provides some musings on "what if" scenarios in case of Ottoman success to take the island, and how the fate and borders of Europe might have been effected in a big way. A very enjoyable and interesting read.

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### **Roger Taylor says**

A very interesting and informative account about the great conflict between the Christians Knights of St. John and the Ottoman Turks first at Rhodes where the Turks were successful after a siege and at Malta where the Turks failed to subdue the Christians despite having a distinct advantage in numbers.

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### **Stan Prager says**

Review of: *The Great Siege of Malta: The Epic Battle between the Ottoman Empire and the Knights of St. John*, by Bruce Ware Allen  
by Stan Prager (9-5-16)

Readers with a penchant for military history and a comfortable familiarity with the milieu of the sixteenth century Mediterranean world – often defined by the ongoing struggle for dominance between the Muslim Ottoman Turks and the (less-than-united) Christian European West – will likely relish *The Great Siege of Malta: The Epic Battle between the Ottoman Empire and the Knights of St. John*, by Bruce Ware Allen. It will nevertheless present a challenge for the uninitiated. I came to this book as part of an Early Reviewer's program, and I found it an uphill climb from the start because I am less than intimately familiar with this historical period. A similar well-written, analytical volume centered upon events in the Peloponnesian War or the American Civil War would not have tasked me so, which thus has more to say about the shortcomings of this reviewer than that of the author.

As the title foretells, this work is focused upon the celebrated "Great Siege of Malta" by Ottoman Turks in 1565, which if successful could have served as a gateway into Sicily, Italy and southern Europe beyond. The heroes were the "Knights of St. John," a multinational Roman Catholic military order dating back to the crusades which had been forcibly ejected by the Turks from their base on the isle of Rhodes some four decades previously. Allen devotes some time to setting the stage for the siege in an account that is unfortunately often dulled by passages pregnant with names, geographies and events that can be dizzying for the reader. For example, a single paragraph introducing the naval hero Don Garcia de Toledo contains the following:

"He was ... made a colonel of Spanish foot in Naples, and ... led twelve thousand imperial troops against Franco-Sienese forces at Siena. Among his fellow officers were the one-eyed condottiere from Pavia,

Ascanio Della Corgna; the Tuscan nobleman Giovan Luigi “Chiappino” (the Bear) Vitelli (a favorite of Garcia’s brother-in-law Cosimo de Medici); and Don Alvaro de Sande, all of them respected veteran commanders. He also served in Flanders and Italy. In 1560 he was slated to replace Medinaceli as viceroy of Sicily if the latter did not return from Djerba. By February of 1564 Philip had named him Captain General of the Sea (Andrea Doria’s old title), and when others (including the Djerba veteran Sancho de Leyva) had failed, ordered him to take the Moroccan pirate stronghold, the Penon de Velez de la Gomera.” [p86] Conspicuous in its absence is a biographical table of the immense cast of characters, a historical timeline, and much more detailed maps, all of which would have been very useful to interested readers who are not scholars of the era and its key players and places.

The narrative takes a dramatic turn for the better once military events occupy center stage. It is clear that Allen is an accomplished military historian who skillfully inserts the reader into the battlefield milieu. Much of the faults of the chapters leading up to the siege largely dissolve as the author adeptly explains weapons, tactics and events on the ground in the various military engagements for the extended duration of the siege and ultimate triumph of the Knights. The reader otherwise unfamiliar with this material at once finds a comfort zone as the experience of battle in the sixteenth century Mediterranean is expertly recreated by the author in careful but colorful prose.

The strength of Allen as a gifted writer and military historian clearly rescues this work from a dullness that seems to overshadow the first part of the book, although it should once again be underscored that those who are more comfortable with this era may not judge that portion of the narrative as harshly in this regard. Certainly those seeking a competent exploration of the events surrounding the Great Siege of Malta should take up this book, for Allen indeed deserves much credit for his superlative skills as a military historian.

My review of The Great Siege of Malta: The Epic Battle between the Ottoman Empire and the Knights of St. John, by Bruce Ware Allen is live on my book blog: <https://regarp.com/2016/09/05/review-...>

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## **Bill Simpson says**

### **Excellent work**

Really easy read good coverage of events of the siege and the geopolitics and military context that lead to it.

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