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Taming Mars. Customs, rituals and ceremonies in the siege operations in Dalmatia during the War for Crete (1645-1669).

1. Introduction

War with its many forms of violence - murder, rape, pillage and plunder - always inspired fear, not only in the hearts of individuals but also in a society as a whole. Break down of social order, chaos, anarchy and loss of respect for laws and property, were all far to familiar to the Europeans of the 17th century. These horrors of war were accurately summarized by famous Dutch jurist Hugo Grotious, who wrote:

> ...when arms have once been taken up there is no longer any respect for law, divine or human; it is as if, in accordance with a general decree, frenzy had openly been let loose for the committing of all crimes[1]

In order to somehow regulate the chaos and destruction, or to at least create some apparition of control over violent forces of the war, societies from the earlier days strive to define rules for proper conduct and behavior during war and to develop set of mechanisms which were meant toensure that those rules were actually applied. Over the centuries these mechanisms evolved and few became widely accepted customs. Some of them survived throughout the centuries and are even today widely recognized and used, as is for example practice of waving of the white flag. By the middle of the 17th century "siege warfare in Europe was waged within the framework of number of restraint and rules which were derived from civil and canon law, and the code of medieval chivalry."[2] These restraint and rules manifested themselves during the siege operations as collection of customs, ceremonies and rituals more or less respected throughout the European battlefields.

So far, majority of the historians dealing with the siege warfare have been more concerned with its technical and operational aspects: digging of the trenches, development of various elements of fortifications, wastage rates, hardships brought by lack of food and epidemics etc, than with these "decorative elements" of an engagement. Nevertheless, these activities, although usually without any obvious operational military value, by providing a medium for discourse between the besieger and besieged still played important role in the final outcome of the siege.

The aim of this paper is to attempt to shed some light on this so far rarely explored subject. Through

1 Hugo Grotius, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*. tr. F. W. Kelsey et.al. (Oxford, 1913) , ii, p.20.
2 Christopher Duffy, *Siege Warfare. Fortress in the Early Modern World, 1494-1660*. (London: Routledge, 1979) p.249.

the descriptive analysis of three case studies, each dealing with one siege operation in Dalmatian theater of war during the War for Crete (1645 - 1669) between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire, the paper will strive to offer a detail account of customs, rituals, ceremonies, and rules of proper conduct of the sieges which were used in order to constrain the unpredictable nature of the war. The special emphasis will be dedicated to the most critical part of the siege - the surrender. Additionally, due to the specific nature of this conflict special attention will be devoted to the question: did the fact that that participants of this confrontation belonged to different civilizations - Islam/Christendom - in any way influenced rules of engagement?

2. Cases. Or how to successfully(!) surrender a fortress?

Siege can be successfully brought to an end by attacking force, either by: storming of the fortress or by its timely surrender by defenders. Looking from the perspective of the defenders difference between the two is that of life and death. Defenders wiling to fight until the end, waiting until the last moment when fortifications are breached were usually denied any quarters and put to the sword without mercy,[3] or in the best case taken as prisoners and sent to serve as galley slaves in Venetian armada. On the other hand commander who would surrender the entrusted fortification on the first site of the enemy, risked wrath of his prince.[4] The key to the survival was timely surrender. Neither to soon, because of reasons previously mentioned, but also neither to late to avoid risk of facing even more deadlier and more imminent danger of enraged attackers.

On the other hand, looking from the perspective of the besieging force commander, capture of the fortress by its surrender was also seen as a highly favorable outcome. Not only it represented the most safest way to successfully conclude the operation, one free of hazards of the prolonged siege, but there were also long term benefits involved. Commander with good reputation, one who is known to keep his word, could expect others to follow this path and offer their surrender more easily and with less hesitation. Thus it seems that the interests of both sides were apparently the same, satisfactory conclusion of the siege in a civil and bloodless manner, but how did this actually worked in practice? This brings us to the first case, of this paper:

3 Such was for example the outcome of the Venetian capture of the fortress of *Obrovac* during this war (March, 1647), where, soldiers in rage because of prolonged resistance put everyone, old man, woman and children alike to the sword. Maybe the most well known such example of the 17th century is notorious siege of Magedburg, where tens of thousands inhabitants perished. See Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years War 1618-1648* (London: Routledge, 1988) pp. ?-?

4 Both Venetian government and the g*ran signor* of the Turks with its famous silver cord were almost equally unforgiving to the commanders judged incompetent and cowardly.

Surrender of town of Zemunik, March 1647

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Siege of Vrana, April, 1647.

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Siege of Klis, March, 1648.

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3. Preliminary conclusions

Functioning within the operational limitations of Early Modern Warfare, Venetian field commanders, at least in form, followed customary practices of a siege conduct employed all over European battlefields of the time. At the start of the siege defenders were called to surrender the fortress, than, at the later stage of siege when asked quarters were given, and if no "obstinate resistance" was meet, defenders were usually given an opportunity to surrender under favorable conditions. In most cases, but still with few exceptions, as is for example the case of Halil bey, terms of capitulation were upheld by both sides.

Furthermore, based on the presented examples, two points can be made concerning the rules of the proper conduct of the fortress surrender. The first, that process itself was composed of standardized set of rules, rituals and ceremonies with careful attention paid to the form. And the second, that ceremonies and rituals involved were not something unusual and out of ordinary, rather they represented very common and widespread behavior. At this point it would be interesting to attempt to reconstruct how an ideal case surrender would look like.

First by waving of the white flag the defenders would signal that they are ready to begin parleys. Then the delegations of both sides would meet and work out terms of the impending surrender. When both commanders have confirmed them, the general of the besieging force would send envoys bearing his ring. The ring was a symbol confirming that envoys are speaking in the general's name and also a guarantee that he would respect and hold his word. Then, hostages would be exchanged by both sides, and in cases of major military engagement where persons of highest rank were presents, such as governor-general and sandjak bey, the envoys would receive gifts. In the end an attacker would be ceremonially invested as its new lord by accepting the keys of a fortress. Finally, in case that defenders were granted freedom they would be escorted to the border, and

when all the terms of surrender were fulfilled the hostages would be released.

Two words very frequently associated with war are: honor and glory. Similar to the Early Modern diplomatic practices, where utmost attention was devoted to uphold honor and glory of a particular monarch – or a republic for that matter - in ceremonial matters, military affairs also demanded that state's honor and glory be upheld by all cost. In diplomatic ceremonial a diplomat, envoy, represented a prince, who was not present, while on the battlefield army and its commander represented the state, and for their actions, state was held either in disgrace or grace. Every early modern army commander was well aware of this fact, and special attention was paid to uphold personal honor.

Thus, as we have seen, Venetian commanders did not hesitate to impose capital punishment on their soldiers who attacked the Ottomans once they have surrendered. The prisoners were considered to be under the personal protection of a commanding general, and every harm done to them reflected on his honor. Even more striking example of act aimed for upholding of personal honor was that of *sanjak* bey from Klis who due to a dishonest flight of one of the designated Ottoman hostages, offered himself as a substitute, although, according to the initial terms of surrender, he was supposed to go freely.

Yet more remarkable was the role that the question of honor played during the negotiations. Almost in all of the cases the first set of terms put forward by the defenders included the request that they should be allowed to leave fortress bearing their arms. The value of this request was purely symbolic and psychological one, since as the case of Vrana testifies, armed or not, once out of the protection of the fortress defenders had virtually no chance to stand against the numerically superior attackers. To be allowed to leave the fortress armed was considered as an act of honor and respect, one not granted easily. Furthermore, concession of this kind made to the enemy was perceived as a decrease of the value of the achieved victory.

The case of Klis offers very good illustration of the importance the question of honor and glory played during the negotiations. By refusing to give up on his demand to leave fortress armed until the very last moment, *sandjak* bey of Klis was willing to risk failure of negotiations, All just in order to achieve this purely symbolic victory in what was otherwise clear military defeat.

So what to conclude from all of this? The Examined cases dealing with several major sieges conducted by regular Venetian forces during this war, do not offer any evidence of the excessive acts of violence or atrocities motivated solely by religious intolerance, or frontier character of this

war. Only exception being the shooting of the captured Christian renegades. However this also does not fall far from the usual contemporary practices. Persons deemed as traitors, either of religious or political causes, were almost never shown any mercy.

Furthermore, although Venetian sources almost without exception referred to the Ottomans as barbarians or infidels, nonetheless as the presented cases show, the Ottoman commanders were treated with dignity and respect, as it would be granted to any Christian commander. Moreover, social status and ranks of the Ottoman prisoners was respected and persons of higher social status were always protected and given better treatment then the others. For example, when in March 1647, fortress of Novigrad was forced on unconditional surrender, and entire garrison, 137 men in total, was sent to Venetian galleys except for the eight *agas* who were taken to Zara as prisoners.[5] A similar case repeated in 1649 when fortress of *Risan* in Venetian Albania surrendered to Foscolo after ten days of siege. While, all of the *agas* where allowed to leave with both their arms and baggage, all the others were left only with their lives.[6] Furthermore, acts of civility and courtesies common among the European commanders, as offers of personal protection, and exchange of gifts were also present.

In the end I would like to stress that this paper in no way means to imply that this was a benign war, far from it. The Dalmatian theater of operations was not lacking in atrocities. But, what this study does argue is that due to the nature of early moder warfare the acts of barbarisms in analysed operations conducted by regular forces did not fall far from the ordinary European practices of the time. Other, specific elements of tribal or ethnic warfare, such as head taking, slavery, mass civilian killing and denying of any quarters to prisoners which gave this war its infamous frontier character were not part of military operation of the main Venetian army, but rather belonged to the so called "border warfare" performed mainly by irregulars from the both sides.

5 Difnik, 127; Similar example can be found in capture of Zadvarje in February 1652 when eleven *agas* were allowed to leave bearing their arms, and to all the other defenders only their lives were spared and were forced to leave without any possessions. Difnik, p. 225; Andreis, 289.

6 Difnik, 213.