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## **'Malta of Gold': Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, and the Siege of 1565**

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'Rien n'est plus connu que le siege de Malte' - Voltaire

Marlowe's representation of the island of Malta, and in particular of the Great Siege which it suffered in the summer of 1565, has received little critical attention. Malta has been largely taken to have been chosen as a location largely because of a suitable distance from England and general air of exoticism, and to have been depicted in as cavalier a manner as Shakespeare's Vienna, peopled entirely by characters with Italian names, or his Bohemia, which he so improbably endows with a sea-coast: a recent study of the sources of Marlowe's plays asserts that 'it is obvious that *The Jew of Malta* makes no pretence to historical veracity'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps partly because of this, critics themselves have tended to be rather vague in their characterisations of sixteenth-century Malta. Harry Levin, for instance, wrote of the Maltese that:

On their island, if anywhere, East met West. The Knights Hospitallers of Saint John - formerly of Jerusalem - had settled at Malta when Rhodes fell to the Turks in 1522, and successfully held out when besieged in 1565, presumably the period of the drama. Their baroque capital, with its bastioned port, was both an outpost of Christendom and a citadel against Islam, but the spirit of the crusaders who founded it had yielded to the emergent interests of the merchant adventurers.<sup>2</sup>

There are several significant inaccuracies here. Despite their Semitic ancestry and the Arabic origins of their language, the Maltese felt no kinship with the Turks; they had suffered repeatedly from their depredations - the vast majority of the inhabitants of Malta's sister island Gozo had been taken into slavery after a corsair raid of 1551 - and during the Great Siege of 1565 they remained obstinately loyal to the Knights, even when offered opportunities to leave without molestation. As for the Knights themselves, they had taken warning from the fate of the Templars, and rigorously eschewed all contact with any form of Arabic influence - indeed they went so far as to prohibit the Maltese nobility from joining the Order because of their Semitic ancestry.

Moreover, although Rhodes had indeed fallen in 1522, this account elides the Order's eight years of exile, during which Grand Master Villiers de l'Isle Adam visited the rulers of Europe in turn (including Henry VIII) before finally persuading the Emperor Charles V to make a gift of the Maltese Islands.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Levin tacitly but significantly misrepresents the physical nature of the Malta which withstood the Great Siege. The island's 'baroque capital, with its bastioned port' can only refer to Valletta, of which it is a very accurate description; but the construction of Valletta was not begun until 1566, being in fact Grand Master La Valette's direct response to the Siege. Before that, the Knights had had their base at the

former fishing village of Birgu, rechristened Vittoriosa in honour of its successful resistance, and its adjacent town of Senglea and their principal military positions had been the three fortresses of St Elmo, St Michael and, above all, St Angelo. The only other significant settlement on the island was the old capital of Mdina, also called Notabile, to which the indigenous nobility had retreated after the advent of the Knights and which had played virtually no part in the siege. Since the one part of Levin's account which is absolutely accurate is that the play does indeed seem to offer some kind of representation of the events of 1565, Valletta has no part to play in the story.

I relay this information not from any desire to score cheap points off Levin, whose account of the play in general is extremely perceptive and who is unusual in paying any attention at all to the Maltese setting, but to suggest that ideas about Renaissance Malta are often poorly formed and patchily applied, in the belief that they are of no real importance to the examination of Marlowe's play. I wish to argue, on the contrary, that *The Jew of Malta* is radically informed by a very precise set of perceptions of the island and its role in the history of Europe and of Christendom, and that where it does actually deviate from historical truth it does so in the service of a very specifically formulated aesthetic, representational and political agenda. In order to register the extent and significance of such deviations, I propose to map very closely the extent of the fit between Marlowe's portrayal of the island and the information probably available to him about it, and then to consider the methods and purposes of his use of that information.

## The Landscape of Malta

Three notable exceptions to the general lack of interest in the particularities of the Maltese setting come in the work of Emily Bartels, Roma Gill, and David Farley-Hills. Bartels situates the play interestingly in the context of other contemporary representations of foreign settings, pointing out that *The Jew of Malta*

was being produced alongside *Mully Mollocco*, *The Spanish Comedy*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Orlando Furioso*, and *Sir John Mandeville*, all plays that center on foreign themes, characters, or interests. Marlowe's play, too, looks to the world outside and how it was being shaped by and giving shape to the European inside. Marlowe sets Barabas on an island in the middle of the Mediterranean, a key site of cross-cultural commerce and conflict, demanding that we consider what it means to be 'of Malta' while deciding what it means to be 'the Jew'.<sup>3</sup>

What it means, she concludes, is 'domination'. Roma Gill, who herself explored Malta in an attempt to establish the existence of any possible Marlovian connections, comments that:

Marlowe seems to have known a lot about the island of Malta, its geography, and its recent history. In the play's first scene Barabas, its protagonist, defines Malta's precise location. Looking out from his counting-house, he can see the weather-vanes and his 'Halcions bill', which are indicating a wind direction 'East and by-South'. From this quarter the wind will bring his 'Argosie from *Alexandria*' safely 'through our *Mediterranean* sea', passing the island of Crete ('by *Candie* shoare'), to harbour in

'*Malta Rhode*' (ll.49 ff.). When he interviews the merchant-seamen, Barabas demonstrates his knowledge of sea-lanes. 4

She concludes that 'Marlowe seems to be strangely sensitive to the peculiar political and religious tensions of contemporary Malta, and such sensitivity is unlikely to have been learned from literature'. 5 Professor Farley-Hills also feels that 'the play is set in the context of Mediterranean history and geography with a fair amount of general accuracy', 6 which in itself provides a suggestive contrast with the notorious geographical vagueness of the far more obviously historical *Edward II*; 7 and he also suggests that, more particularly, there is a strong degree of correspondence between the cynical society of Marlowe's play and the rapacity and hypocrisy to be found amongst some at least of the Knights of St John; he concludes that 'if Marlowe did not know of the condition of Malta at the time when he was writing his play then the spiritual likeness of the two communities is a most remarkable coincidence'. 8

## Marlowe and Malta

Tydeman and Thomas suggest one principal source for Marlowe's representation of Malta:

For some of the background and 'local colour' which informs his portrait of Malta under siege, Marlowe may well have been indebted to a contemporary account of a visit paid to the island in the course of a journey to Constantinople, undertaken in 1551 by the Lord of Aramont, French Ambassador to the Porte. Among those lords and knights accompanying him was the young French nobleman Nicolas de Nicolay, geographer to King Charles IX; in 1568 Nicolay published at Lyon a narrative of his journey in four books, which appeared in Thomas Washington's translation of 1585 as *The Navigations, Peregrinations and Voyages, Made Into Turkey...Passages in Tamburlaine* suggest that Marlowe knew this work, and while composing *The Jew* he might well have recalled from Nicolay...the exotic delights of Malta (which included a plethora of courtesans), the abortive Turkish assault on the island in 1551, and the subsequent siege of Tripoli at which Nicolay was present (an event which involved a stratagem to infiltrate the citadel by effecting an underground entry, a device to which Barabas has recourse in Act V Scene 1).9

Marlowe was, however, in a position to have obtained information from other sources beside this. Public interest in Malta ran high in sixteenth-century England, particularly during and immediately after its heroic stand in the Great Siege. Michael Brennan has recently established the existence of at least two English-language newsletter accounts of the siege, though they survive in so fragmentary a state that little can be deduced about their contents or Marlowe's possible awareness of them. 10 The news of the Turks' withdrawal in September 1565 prompted Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, to lay down a Form of Thanksgiving for six weeks, and Marlowe, who was later to be a Parker Scholar at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, could perhaps have known of that. And the history of Malta was in one sense already intimately interconnected with the very location of Marlowe's profession, for the Master of the Revels, whose job it was to censor plays, had his office in the palace of Clerkenwell, historic home of the Order of St John in England. 11

Roma Gill outlines various possible sources for Marlowe's knowledge of the island, but feels that none of those so far known completely account for the level of his awareness:

Most of this information was available in Marlowe's favourite atlas, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Ortelius, which he had used to map the travels and conquests of Tamburlaine. But Malta is a tiny island...and it shows as only a speck in Ortelius's Mediterranean. Marlowe must have had access to some other source for what he knows of the island's topography. The earliest of all known maps of Malta was drawn by a French knight, Jean Quintin. Its scope includes the 'other petty Iles' - Gozo, Comino, Cominotto, and Filfla - with which Malta is 'contemur'd' (V.iii.9), and it set the example for other sixteenth-century cartographers, who all give the same information (making it impossible to identify any one particular map as the one that Marlowe *must* have used). 12

In this connection, it might well be worth noting that at the very start of the Great Siege Henry, 2nd baron Paget, commended by Puttenham for his poetic achievements, 13 sent 'a plat of Malta' from Venice to the Earl of Leicester, with an accompanying message still preserved in the Calendar of State Papers, Foreign. 14 It is worth bearing in mind that this kind of source, which has left so slightly-publicised an official record of its existence, might also have been available to Marlowe. Gill also postulates a possible personal connection:

He could have read Malta's history in books - there were several in French, Italian, and Spanish, although little was written in English; and he might have acquired an appreciation of the island's geography through his skill as a map-reader. But books and maps alone cannot explain his interest...I would suggest that Marlowe's experiences as petty spy and go-between somehow equipped him with the insight he needed to create his own world in *The Jew of Malta*. 15

This may well be so. There is, however, a more direct link between Marlowe's theatre world and the events dramatised in the play. *The Jew of Malta* was written when Marlowe "'bore name to serve" Lord Strange as a play-maker', 16 and Lord Strange's uncle Sir Edward Stanley, implicated in a plot to rescue Mary, Queen of Scots in 1571 and 'listed as a recusant and a "dangerous person" in 1592, 17 is almost certainly identifiable with the Sir Edward Stanley who was one of the only two Englishmen in the relief force (known, because of its small size, as the 'piccolo siccorso') which the Chevalier de Robles brought to the aid of his beleaguered brethren in June 1565. The 'piccolo siccorso' arrived on the island at a crucial stage in the siege, immediately after the fall of Fort St Elmo, key to the harbour of Marsamxett, a small and poorly-defended fortress which, quite contrary to Turkish expectations that it would fall in five days, had with desperate gallantry resisted for almost a month. The loss of St Elmo triggered a complete change in the strategic situation and the conduct of the siege, which was now directed entirely at the peninsula towns of Senglea and Birgu and at Fort St Angelo, all on the other side of Grand Harbour. The 'piccolo siccorso' was transported in Sicilian galleys which actually had orders not to land if Fort St Elmo was not still in Maltese hands, since possession of it was considered so vital that the island was to be written off as lost if it was gone; but the Knight of St John who was sent ashore to learn the situation lied to the Sicilian commander and the force was landed anyway. In fact, Turkish brutality to the captured defenders of St Elmo had been so monstrous that the loss of the fort had, if anything, stiffened the backbone of Maltese resistance; determined to avenge their dead brethren, and heartened by the fact that this, their smallest fortress, had put up so lengthy a resistance (which had bought time for strengthening the fortifications of Senglea,

Birgu and St Angelo), the Knights were grimly resolved to defend their position to the last man, and the indigenous Maltese gave them complete support.

Sir Edward Stanley, then, arrived at a vital turning-point of the siege. Spared the lingering horrors suffered by the indomitable defenders of St Elmo, spared too the discussions attendant on the Grand Master's agonised decision to leave them to their fate, spared the sight of the decapitated bodies, their hearts gouged out of their chests, which the current wafted across to St Angelo, Sir Edward served not in the living hell of the tiny, ruined fort but in a large, well-supplied garrison fired by furious determination and, thanks to the length of the resistance offered by St Elmo, a reasonable chance of survival, which improved significantly with every extra day they could hold out. When the Turks finally did abandon the siege in September, two and a half months after he arrived, Sir Edward also witnessed the withdrawal of their humiliated army, in poor morale and devastated by the loss of some of their ablest commanders, and the ensuing jubilation and thanksgiving of the Knights, the Maltese, and the Sicilians who had brought the final relief force. There is no indication of when he left the island, but he would surely have been aware that Grand Master La Valette had immediately begun making plans for its regeneration and for the foundation of the new capital, to bear his own name of Valletta. Since Sir Edward did not die until 1609, he would presumably have been well able to give evidence of his experiences.

When Marlowe wrote his play, then, he did so in the service of a patron whose own immediate family had significant experience of both the island of Malta in general and the Great Siege in particular, and for an audience who were likely to be well aware of the strategic and historic role that Malta had played. <sup>18</sup> I have dwelt at some length on the probable experiences of Sir Edward Stanley because they seem to me to overlap in some significant respects with Marlowe's dramatisations of the siege, which, intriguingly, is represented in greater particularity towards its closing stages - precisely those which Sir Edward witnessed. Nevertheless, there is clearly no simple relationship of direct correspondence, if only because the outcome of real siege and fictional one are so radically different. It is these areas of similarity and difference between play-text and historical event which I now propose to trace.

## **Jews on Malta**

In her history of the Order of St John, Claire-Eliane Engel comments that during the Great Siege, 'les juifs de Malte avaient ete d'une loyaute au-dessus de tout eloge' [the Jews of Malta had behaved with a loyalty above all praise]. <sup>19</sup> In the last days of St Elmo, the Grand Master allowed one final volunteer force to attempt to force their way to the relief of the doomed fort. Anyone who went on such a mission faced certain death, but nevertheless two Jews of the island chose to join the relief expedition, although in the event the boats carrying the would-be volunteers were unable to get past the Turkish cannon and were forced to turn back to Birgu. However, relations between Jews and Maltese had not always been so happy: since the islands were dependencies of the Aragonese crown, Jews had been officially expelled from them in 1492, and their property confiscated:

It appears from a notarial deed of 2 June 1496, that the monastery of St Scolastica had just been founded...The monastery was then occupying what had once been the

synagogue of the Jews that had been expelled from the island only four years earlier. The monastery of St Scolastica eventually moved to Birgu. Their short stay at Mdina is fairly well documented. On several occasions they sought help from the *Universita*, as in 1516 when the city wall had collapsed, pulling down part of the monastery with it. 20

The convent installed in the literal remains of a Jewish residence seems strongly suggestive of the confiscation of Barabas' house for a nunnery. Originally situated in the old capital of Mdina, it is later moved to Birgu, which, if there is any pretence at topographical accuracy at all, would logically be the principal setting of *The Jew of Malta*, since it was the only major town involved in the Siege. The collapsing wall, too, is reminiscent of Barabas' blowing up of the house with the Turkish soldiers in, though there is also a parallel there with two other significant acts of undermining which had a telling effect on the course of Maltese history: the virtual destruction of the bastion of Castile during the Great Siege, 21 and after it La Valette's attempt to forestall a second invasion planned by the Turks for the following year by having his spies in Constantinople set the arsenal on fire by blowing up magazines. 22

Jews, however - or, at least, one Jew in particular - had featured far more prominently than this in the history of Malta. Malta owes much of its fame, some of its place-names, its distinguished Christian ancestry and, legend avers, its freedom from snakes, all to one very famous Jew: St Paul. 'Paul could as yet perhaps still be reckoned as a Jew', 23 comments Cecil Roth, referring to the future saint and his party as 'the first Hebrew visitors of whom we have record'. 24 This particular Jew of Malta is, however, far more famous for his status as perhaps the most celebrated convert in recorded history from ultra-orthodox Judaism to Christianity. As such, he might well serve as an interesting comparator for the analogous conversion of Abigail; moreover, anyone familiar with accounts of the Siege would be aware that the final engagement was fought in St Paul's Bay, legendary scene of the saint's shipwreck, where the Turks suffered a decisive defeat and left the beach and waters clogged with their dead.

It fits well with the ironic, ambiguous tone of Marlowe's play to remember this story of a Jew distinguished by adherence to Christianity, and the same kinds of complexities of association play over the name of the Knights' patron saint. As Knights Hospitaller of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, they brought the island, argues Cecil Roth, 'into a sort of sentimental dependence upon the Holy Land', 25 even though, by a particularly savage irony, 'it was expressly forbidden for any person of Jewish blood to be received into the Maltese Order'. 26 To be aware of these two associations would work to remind Marlowe's readers of what they, like the woman who threatened to sue the BBC for calling Jesus Jewish, might very often tend to forget: all Christianity has its origins in Judaism; Barabas was Christ's contemporary, and indeed his co-religionist; Abigail's status as convert from Judaism to Christianity is no more than emblematic of the spiritual history of the faith itself. Even as it excludes Jews from its ranks, the Order of St John of Jerusalem proclaims its own Hebraic affinities. Rather than seeing the Jew as the Other, in short, this network of associations forces us instead to see him as essentially the Self. Indeed the play in one sense at least engineers precisely such an identity of viewpoint, since, as David Farley-Hills points out, 'Marlowe's use of the term "City of Malta" is incidentally paralleled in contemporary Jewish references'. 27

Another Jew associated with the history of the Maltese islands would also have been a figure of considerable interest to Marlowe. Abraham Abulafia of Saragossa, born in 1240 and 'founder of the practical Cabbala', 28 was exiled to Comino in around 1288, and composed

one of his works there. There is ample evidence that members of Marlowe's circle were interested in the Cabbala: Giordano Bruno, who seems to be represented in *Doctor Faustus* 29 and whose influence on *Tamburlaine* David Farley-Hills has recently pointed out, 30 showed much interest in occult writing and wrote a work called *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*; 31 John Dee, who seems overwhelmingly likely to have had links with Marlowe, 32 was 'a practical cabalist'. 33 (Dee, too, seems a likely comparator for Faustus).

Despite their official departure in 1492, there were Jews on the island during the Siege. Indeed Roma Gill sees a possible parallel between the circumstances of their continued residence and the offer put to Barabas: 'could Marlowe have known that after the expulsion of the Jews from Malta in 1492 some were allowed to stay on the island on condition that they purchased the privilege of baptism by forfeiture of 45% of all their possessions?' 34 Jews had also played a part in the earlier history of the Order of St John: the French chronicler Brantome reported 'Monsieur le chancelier de l'Hospital' as claiming that Grand Master l'Isle Adam would never have been forced to leave Rhodes but for a Portuguese traitor and 'un medecin juif renie'. 35 There were, too, rumours that a similar sort of collusion was at work in 1565:

The repulsed siege of Malta was not only known as a Christian victory over Islam, but it was also the subject of contemporary rumours about financial complicity between the Jews and the Turks, who were said to have joined forces because the aggressive raids of Malta's Knights had turned it into an infamous market for enslaved captives. 36

Cecil Roth comments that:

the Knights on their side professed to regard the Jew as more dangerous enemies even than the Turks, accusing them of espionage and worse...The great Turkish attempt on the island in 1565 (which, according to contemporary rumour, the Jews actually financed) was certainly watched by them with eager eyes, and their disappointment at its failure must have been extreme. 'The monks of Malta are still to-day a snare and trap for the Jews', records the chronicler sadly, at the end of his account of the siege. 37

The reason for this lay not only in the Jews' earlier dispossession from the island, but specifically in the nature of the sufferings at the hands of the Knights, who took considerable quantity of Jews prisoner, so that:

the island continued to occupy in Jewish eyes a disproportionate importance, becoming a symbol for all that was cruel and hateful in the Christian world. Jewish scholars referred to it with an unwonted maledictory formula. A Messianic prophecy current at the beginning of the seventeenth century detailed how the Redemption would begin with the fall of the four kingdoms of unrighteousness, first among which would be Malta. 38

Roth further suggests that by far the greater part of the Jews expelled from the island in 1492 found refuge in Turkey, 39 which would further have inclined the Jewish populations of the Mediterranean to support the attackers rather than the defenders.



There were, then, essentially three basic patterns of Jewish behaviour on Malta that might have been available for Marlowe to draw on: the Jew as treacherous collaborator with the Turk, the Jew as dispossessed landowner and victim, maltreated by Christians, and the Jew as selfless hero, prepared to die alongside the Christian defenders of St Elmo. I would like to suggest that he actually makes use of elements of all of them, although, in typically Marlovian manner, with additional twists and complications.

The most obvious correlation is between Barabas' expulsion from his house and the requisitioning of the former Synagogue for a convent in Mdina. There is a more or less direct parallel here, to the extent that one might even regard the historical episode as a possible source for this aspect of the play - had Marlowe known of the event, he would surely have savoured the irony of Christians inhabiting a building already sacred to another faith. However, he has also used the episode in a very different way from that in which its historical analogue functioned. The actual nunnery of St Scolastica was founded in or shortly before 1496, sixty years before the Siege and thirty before even the loss of Rhodes. It stands as an isolated incident, with no motivational or structural connections with the successive engagements with the Turks; it represents merely a clash between Christianity and Judaism. Marlowe, however, has turned it into a three-cornered affair, focusing not binary oppositions but a complex and shifting pattern of racial and religious allegiances, personal qualities and political implications. His chronological dislocation of the event makes it into the immediate stimulus for Barabas' vengeance as well as an apt symbol for the Christians' opportunism and rapacity. The 'medecin juif renie' of the fall of Rhodes and the Jewish moneylenders alleged to have collaborated with the Turkish besiegers do so, in the historical accounts, out of mere malice. This is a stereotypical reading of Jewish behaviour which Barabas in fact invokes in his extravagantly virtuoso introduction of himself to Ithamore:

As for myself, I walk abroad a-nights  
And kill sick people groaning under walls:  
Sometimes I go about and poison wells;  
(II.iii.176-8)

Ironically, however, any member of the audience familiar with the events of the siege of Malta would have an alternative framework available within which to read this confession. Poisoning of water was a repeated feature of the knights' defence - a very wise precaution on so barren and hot an island. Before the Turkish invaders arrived La Valette gave orders for the poisoning of all the wells in the Marsa, the area of low-lying ground at the head of Grand Harbour; <sup>40</sup> when the Knights defending St Elmo unsuccessfully begged permission to make a final sally, the contemporary observer Balbi records that they wrote in their letter to the Grand Master that 'should they fail, they would at least die happy, and they would leave instructions that, in case of disaster, the water in the fort should be poisoned and the guns spiked'. <sup>41</sup> To present Barabas as a poisoner of water, then, could be used to invoke the twin perspectives of the irrationally malevolent Jew and the rational action of heroic, Christian resistance. And it is of course doubly ironic that Barabas' very evil is, in one sense, an essential element for the proper functioning of the contrasting charitable activity of the Knights. 'In Marlowe's black humor, Barabas's cruelty is even shown to act as a necessary prop to the Church, enriching "the priests with burials" (II.iii.185); <sup>42</sup> similarly, his claim that he 'with young orphans planted hospitals' (II.iii.96) can suggest an equally symbiotic relationship with the Knights if we read it in the light of their primary function as Hospitallers, and recall in particular that 'the Hospital of *Santo Spirito* at Rabat, near Mdina, besides treating the sick also received unwanted babies or foundlings and catered for their upbringing and well being'. <sup>43</sup> If read with close attention to the history of Malta, there are

few actions of Barabas' which cannot be seen at least to have a place in the overall functioning of the social order. And even his most gratuitous act of cruelty, the poisoning of the entire convent of nuns, was actually a scheme proposed in the name of true belief and statecraft, when a plan was drawn up to eliminate all the students of the English College at Rheims by poisoning their well - a plan of which Marlowe would have had good reason to know, since the man responsible for it was his posthumous accuser, Richard Baines. 44

A similar duality plays over Barabas' actual role in the Siege. Whatever his intentions, the actual effect of his actions is to work towards the Knights' complete victory. Of course, this is not the immediate result of his interference in events: in Marlowe's single biggest divergence from the events of recorded history, Barabas initially triggers a defeat for the Knights and an apparently unequivocal triumph for the Turks. With extraordinary abruptness, however, Barabas performs a complete volte-face:

I now am Governor of Malta; true,  
But Malta hates me, and in hating me  
My life's in danger, and what boots it thee,  
Poor Barabas, to be the governor,  
Whenas thy life shall be at their command?  
No, Barabas, this must be looked into;  
And since by wrong thou got'st authority,  
Maintain it bravely by firm policy,  
At least unprofitably lose it not  
(V.ii.29-37)

This may seem an improbably and poorly-motivated transition, but it is in fact perfectly in line with the principles of Machiavelli, who has appeared at the outset of the play as Barabas' sponsor. Speaking of 'new principalities acquired with the help of fortune and foreign arms', Machiavelli recommends the example of Cesare Borgia:

a new prince cannot find more recent examples than those set by the duke, if he thinks it necessary to secure himself against his enemies, win friends, conquer either by force or by stratagem, make himself both loved and feared by his subjects, followed and respected by his soldiers, if he determines to destroy those who can and will injure him, to reform ancient institutions, be severe yet loved, magnanimous and generous, and if he decides to destroy disloyal troops and create a new standing army, maintaining such relations with kings and princes that they have either to help him graciously or go carefully in doing him harm. 45

Machiavelli's precepts - which, Luc Borot has recently argued, have been very thoroughly absorbed by Marlowe in this play 46 - serve effectively as a blueprint for Barabas' actions. Completely disregarding the alternative model of *oderintdum metuant* [let them hate me as long as they fear me], Machiavelli elsewhere explicitly advises that 'a prince should want to have a reputation for compassion rather than cruelty'. 47

There is also, however, another possible model for Barabas' thought processes here, if not for his actions. It might well be profitable to compare his pinpointing of the weak spot in the defences with a parallel action by two captured Knights, and perhaps even to relate his psychologising approach to that of Grand Master La Valette himself.

## **Knights on Malta**

When the Knights of Malta first arrived on the island in 1530 there was uneasiness at their presence, and of the breaking by the Emperor Charles of an earlier promise that the islands would never again be alienated from the Aragonese crown. The indigenous Maltese nobility never in fact came to terms with their presence; excluded from membership of the Order, they sat out the Siege in Mdina. The other inhabitants, however, seem to have found among the shared stress of the Siege a strong bond with the Knights, and particularly with the Grand Master, Jean Parisot de la Valette, whose personal presence served as an infallible rallying point and who also refused to retreat to the safety of St Angelo when that meant abandoning the Maltese in Birgu and Senglea to the mercy of the Turks. Accounts of the Siege unfailingly stress the heroism and indomitability of La Valette, who, at the age of seventy, untiringly directed operations. Equally, however, they stress the fact that he was not engaged in physical warfare alone, but in an unremitting psychological battle both with the Turks and also, especially in the earlier stages of the Siege, with his own men.

La Valette's age meant that he was one of the few Knights to have had personal experience of the loss of Rhodes and the peregrinations thereafter; he had also served as a galley slave, and so was accustomed to appalling hard ship. At the outset of the Siege, he experienced some difficulty in holding in check the younger Knights, who, with little direct experience of combat, were spoiling for a fight rather than being prepared to husband their resources and endure the prolonged attrition of siege warfare. Knowing that pitched battle against the vast numerical superiority of the Turkish troops was simply not a viable option, La Valette had his work cut out to restrain them. His task became even more difficult during the dreadful last days of St Elmo, when the Knights in the doomed fort clamoured insistently to be allowed an open sally against the enemy rather than being slowly picked off. Faced with what amounted effectively to a revolt, the Grand Master lashed the dissenters with scorn:

A volunteer force has been raised under the command of Chevalier Costantino Castriota. Your petition to leave St Elmo for the safety of Birgu is now granted. This evening, as soon as the relieving force has landed, you may take the boats back. Return, my Brethren, to the Convent and to Birgu, where you will be in more security. For my part, I shall feel more confident when I know that the fort - upon which the safety of the island so greatly depends - is held by men whom I can trust implicitly. 48

Later, the Grand Master's unshakeable resolve was to refuse to bow to sentiment when he determined that St Elmo should not be evacuated, since every day it could hold out bought invaluable time for the further fortification of Birgu, St Angelo and Senglea.

The Grand Master has been universally acclaimed as heroic, but it is still possible to argue that there are pronounced similarities between his reliance on psychology rather than force in the enforcement of his authority, and Barabas' decision to opt for a power based on placing the island in his debt. The Grand Master was, moreover, capable of ruthlessness. His action of poisoning wells, so closely parallel to Barabas' alleged activities, was of course fully justified by the necessities of war, but it is hard to say the same for his decision to imprison the Spanish knight La Cerda, who had himself evacuated from St Elmo when La Valette felt that his wounds were insufficiently serious to justify such an action. He has also been much criticised for his retaliation to the Turks' mutilation of those who had defended St Elmo: as one commentator scathingly remarks, 'he commanded the heads of his Turkish prisoners to be

struck off and shot from the large guns into the enemy lines - by way of teaching the Moslem a lesson in humanity.' 49

Far more suspect than those of La Valette, however, were the actions of other Knights and Christians connected with the Siege and its immediate aftermath. Even La Vallette's faithful friend Sir Oliver Starkey, finding the heat and conditions of life on Malta intolerable, 'a few months before the Siege...let it be known that he was prepared to renounce the Catholic faith if allowed to return to his homeland' . 50 France had allied with the Turks; 51 indeed it was rumoured that a decade or so before the Siege Suleiman, mistakenly supposing it to be possible, had simply requested the French to hand Malta over to him. 52 The Viceroy of Sicily, Don Garcia de Toledo, came in for particular criticism, though Brian Blouet has recently defended him on the grounds that 'The knights never appreciated the point but the viceroy had to look on Malta in just the same way as they had looked on St Elmo: the small fortress bloodily sacrificed to give the main positions more time'. 53 Marlowe, however, may well, as Emily Bartels suggests, have known better than his editors when he implied considerable tension between the Knights and the Spanish, who go so far as to threaten them with expulsion; 54 indeed Roma Gill posits a connection between the composition of the play and a diplomatic incident of 1581, when an English ship, the *Roe*, landed on the island, and the Inquisitor at once reported to his superiors that:

It is a well-known fact that the friendship between the English and the Prince of this island and the ambitions and desires of the Knights would impel them to do all kind of harm to the Catholic Commonwealth and to the King of Spain. For this purpose there cannot be an easier place from where to assault and cause havoc than from Malta, because of its strategic position. 55

(There was, indeed, even 'a persistent rumour that the English intended to capture Malta', 56 which, to Marlowe's audience, would have made the play very much 'a tragic glass', as the Prologue terms *Tamburlaine*). Since the Maltese islands had been the gift of Spain, and since his own territory of Sicily would be so directly threatened if Malta was lost, the Knights looked repeatedly to Don Garcia for support, but the help he provided was minimal. He hedged around every offer of help with ludicrous conditions - he would send relief only if the Grand Master would despatch to him the galleys of the Order, which were , as he must have realised, inescapably hemmed into Grand Harbour by the Turkish blockade - and when he finally allowed the Piccolo Siccorsio to leave Sicily it was only with express orders that it was not to land unless St Elmo were still in the Knights' hands. He did, however, leave his son, Frederic, as a pledge of his goodwill; the boy fought gallantly and was eventually killed in action during the siege of Birgu.

The stark contrast between the heroism of young Frederic and the dilatoriness of his father - the English agent in Spain commented that Toledo 's'etait completement deshonore' [had completely dishonoured himself] 57 - may well seem quite closely analogous to the distance which separates Abigail's loving commitment, dying alongside the nuns in the community which her father has destroyed, and Barabas' opportunism. The latter is a quality he also shares with Don Garcia, who, despite the pitifully small part he had played in events, was not slow to be publicly associated with the Grand Master after the Turks' eventual withdrawal. Don Garcia arrived on the island with the final Sicilian relief force, and shared in a celebration banquet. Since provisions were naturally scarce, however, he brought his own food to it: 'Don Garcia and the other captains of the fleet provided stores for the occasion'. 58

Again there is a parallel here with *The Jew of Malta*, this time with the rather unexpected reaction of Calymath to Barabas' invitation to a similar occasion:

To banquet with him in his citadel?  
I fear me, messenger, to feast my train  
Within a town of war so lately pillag'd  
Will be too costly and too troublesome  
(V.iii.20-3)

This seems an odd detail to include; but it, like the mining of the monastery, does offer a very close echo of the events of the later part of the Siege, after the theatre of war moved from St Elmo to Birgu - the period, suggestively, for which Sir Edward Stanley had been an eye-witness.

Another possible influence on Marlowe's portrayal of Barabas comes from a rather later stage in the Knights' history. If *The Jew of Malta* is clearly related primarily to the events of the Great Siege, other details work to situate it also within the Malta of Marlowe's own maturity. Thomas and Tydeman point to the often poor fit between the events of the play and those of documented history: 'in neither 1551 nor 1565 did Malta succumb to Turkish arms; at no time did its inhabitants pay tribute-money to the Turks or boast a governor called Ferneze, the name in fact deriving from a Governor of Tripoli'. <sup>59</sup> The name Ferneze, however, does also impinge on Maltese history, although at a date slightly later than the Great Siege: Laparelli, the architect of Valletta, who arrived on the island in December 1565, had gained his previous experience working with Michelangelo on the Farnese Palace, and used the Palace as a model for some of his Maltese building. <sup>60</sup> Farnese, a name which is also alluded to in *Doctor Faustus* as the family name of the Prince of Parma, <sup>61</sup> could perhaps lie behind Marlowe's choice of Ferneze as the name of his Governor.

As for the character of the Governor, the history of the Knights after the Great Siege could again have provided a model. Grand Master Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle, known as Verdala, who accepted the Cardinal's hat which La Valette had declined, has been described by a recent commentator as 'the Cardinal Prince Verdala who could bamboozle friend and foe alike where his worldly nature and lust for money were concerned'; <sup>62</sup> his possession of a private corsairing fleet is one of the points of similarity suggested by David Farley-Hills between the real island and the corruption of the fictional community. <sup>63</sup> The Cardinalate seems in fact to have been offered to him as a bribe, in return for bringing his influence to bear on his close friend Henri of Navarre; the Pope appears to have hoped that Verdala could persuade Navarre to forsake his Huguenot followers and return to the Catholic fold. In view of the immense importance of Navarre's religious affiliation for English foreign policy, Marlowe, with his government involvement, could well be expected to have been aware of all the possible ramifications of the situation; moreover, Navarre himself was a character in his own *The Massacre at Paris*. Certainly the slippery Verdala, with his uneasy relationship with the Spanish, <sup>64</sup> seems in many ways close to Marlowe's Ferneze.

One further aspect of the representation of Ferneze also deserves to be compared with other available views of Malta and its affairs. At III.v.7, Ferneze assures the Turks, in response to the Basso's assertion that what has brought him to Malta is 'desire of gold' (III.v.4), that 'In Malta are no golden minerals'. The song that rapidly spread as a commemoration of the Siege, 'famous in the Mediterranean', <sup>65</sup> offers a direct contradiction of this:

*Malta of gold, Malta of silver, Malta of precious metal, We shall never take you!* 66 Quite apart from this unequivocal assertion, anyone with the slightest knowledge of the island would be aware of its tradition of jewellery manufacture and the abundant supply of gold and silver; gold was among the items whose export was expressly forbidden to the Jews expelled in 1492. 67 If, as seems highly likely, Marlowe too had access to this commonplace information, then he is representing Ferneze as telling a deliberate, barefaced lie. Such an action would certainly be well in accord with Marlowe's overall characterisation of Ferneze, and in that sense an uncovering of it may seem to add little to a conventional reading of the play, though it would certainly sit well with Coburn Freer's brilliant exploration of the significance of lying in general in the play; 68 but knowledge of such a dynamic nevertheless subtly shifts our understanding of the politics of the scene, and implies decisively that the key to decoding such exchanges must lie in understated irony rather than in any overt authorial guideline.

One other small incident, this time dating from the early part of the Siege, may find an echo in Marlowe's treatment of events. On their initial reconnaissance the Turks captured two Knights of the Order, the French Adrian de la Riviere and the Portuguese Bartolomeo Faraone, who under torture informed them that the weakest point of the defences was the post of Castile. The standard account of events is that when this later proved to be untrue, the two were bastinadoed to death; but the post of Castile did, nevertheless, later prove a considerable liability to the defenders after it had been mined, and Henry Paget, in his letters home, offered an alternative version in which the Knights' information had actually been correct, writing that 'some of the Maltese begin to fly to their enemies, and a French deserter having given information of their weakness, the Turks gave a general assault both to the Burgo and St Michael'. 69 The offer to reveal the weak spot parallels Barabas's, as does the use of mining. Once again, Marlowe seems to have twisted truth into a complex web of representation which precludes easy categorisation. Barabas gives information to the enemy; but so did the two Knights, and in their case it is usually accepted a brave and praiseworthy action, but is capable of directly contrary interpretation. Barabas mines the monastery - but this leads to the triumph, rather than the defeat, of the Knights and their governor. The oppositions which seem so firm in the accounts of the Great Siege shift and dissolve under the pressure of Marlowe's dramatic reworking of events. 70

## **Friars on Malta**

As well as accepting the Cardinalate for himself, Grand Master Verdala was also instrumental in the foundation of the Capuchin Order in Malta, and in the promotion of a Jesuit College. 71 The situation in Marlowe's play, where representatives of two different orders of friars are at odds, corresponds to the proliferation of religious foundations on the island, as does the presentation of the nuns as belonging to strictly enclosed orders. 'Friars played...an important role in the life of Christian Malta'; 72 as well as the Capuchins, there were convents of Dominicans and of Discalced Carmelites in Birgu. 73 Barabas refers to Jacomo's order as the Dominicans (IV.i.107 and note); one of the friars also alludes explicitly to the Discalced Carmelites when he stigmatises his competitor's Order with 'They wear no shirts, and they go barefoot too' (IV.i.84). Siemon's edition gives this speech to Bernardine, but comments in a note that 'the assignment of the friars' speeches has long been a problem', and that Q allotted it to Jacomo. Logic surely dictates that it must indeed be Jacomo's, and represents his

Dominican eyes viewing the practices of the Discalced Carmelites. It would seem more than coincidence that Marlowe's choice of Orders for his two friars corresponds so exactly with the actual religious houses represented in Birgu.

As for the nuns, there is a similar sharpness of correspondence between Marlowe's portrayal and practice on the island. When the Abbess first enters, she says,

we love not to be seen:  
'Tis thirty winters long since some of us  
Did stray so far amongs the multitude.  
(I.ii.305-7)

'The nuns who lived in Malta during the rule of the Hospitallers belonged to closed orders who lived in strict seclusion', 74 though after Grand Master Verdala's introduction of the Inquisition there were complaints that the rules were not being observed strictly enough: 'though the nuns never left the precincts, Knights, priests and friars were known to go themselves to the monasteries to talk to the inmates on various occasions'. 75 Here, along with the detail that one of the convents was housed in a converted synagogue, the portrayal offered in Marlowe's play again proves to be very close to observed reality.

## **Slaves and Prostitutes on Malta**

The remarkable prevalence of both slaves and prostitutes on Malta was often remarked. 76 In 1596 Inquisitor Innocenzo del Bufalo commented that 'on this island of Malta, and especially in Valletta, there is a great number of prostitutes', 77 while 'the continuous presence on the island of a large number of Muslim slaves implied an inevitable point of contact between Maltese society and a people of a foreign culture'.78 Their presence was particularly prominent in Birgu: 'Birgu was always associated with the slaves since it was there that they were landed when brought over by the galleys. Then they would be taken to the dungeons hollowed out of the rocky foundations of the adjacent Fort St Angelo'. 79 In many ways, slaves represented the enemy within, and this was never more obvious than at the time of the Great Siege: 'all...slaves had to be continually guarded since, given the opportunity, they would naturally have risen against their Christian masters'. 80 Even at other times, however, their alien status was deeply felt, and although 'good relations often existed between the slaves and their masters', 81 they 'were considered at law hardly better than animals'. 82 This certainly squares with Barabas' assumption:

You men of Malta, hear me speak;  
She is a courtesan and he a thief,  
And he my bondman, let me have law,  
For none of this can prejudice my life.  
(V.i.36-9)

There are of course strong dramatic reasons for Marlowe to include both slave and prostitute in his play. As Harry Levin points out, 'it is not merely in the slave-market, but in the counting-house and the senate chamber, that men are bought and sold. As for the traffic in women, Ithamore becomes ensnared in it'. 83 Nevertheless, there is insistent emphasis on the fact that Ithamore is not merely a Turk, but a slave, and there is also considerable dwelling on

the practicalities of slavery - the location in the market-place (II.iii.1), the price on the back (II.iii.3), and the Jew's habit of buying up the whole consignment (II.iii.5-6)- an interesting touch in view of the Knights' habitual complaint that 'they never had access to the number of slaves they desired'. 84 Once again, all these offer not only consistency within the imagined world of the play but direct correspondences to the known conditions of the world to which it referred. So, too, does one more detail: Ithamore arrives at Bellamira's house on his way back from witnessing an execution at the gallows (IV.ii.41) and en route to see 'a ship discharged'. Such a journey precisely mirrors the actual passage from Gallows Point through the prostitutes' quarter to the dockyard in Grand Harbour.

Roma Gill suggests that the presence of prostitutes in such quantity may have been a particularly sensitive issue in the years immediately before the composition of *The Jew of Malta*:

In the late 1580s, when I think this play was written, Malta was very much in the news in England...in 1581, there was the great scandal when Grand Master La Cassiere ordered the expulsion of prostitutes from the Island to the great anger and distress of the Knights; according to Alexander Sutherland in his *Achievements of the Knights of Malta* (1830) it was from that date that 'the efficiency and renown of the Order may be said to have rapidly declined'...I can hardly believe that such a scandal would not have been known - and rejoiced over - in Elizabeth's England, and especially by such spirits as Marlowe. 85

Farley-Hills, too, sees the emphasis on prostitution as a significant point of correspondence between play and island; 86 and any episode of protection of prostitutes was likely to have been of interest to Marlowe, since it paralleled so closely the incident in *2 Tamburlaine* where the captive kings seem more horrified at Tamburlaine's harshness to the concubines than at his murder of his own son. Such telling juxtapositions of clashing values lie close to the essence of his art.

## Phoenicians on Malta

Until this century, 'Malta's rich prehistoric legacy was all wrongly attributed to the Phoenicians by scholars and travellers'; 87 and the Phoenicians certainly did settle the island, leaving rock-cut tombs as evidence of their stay, 88 as well as the Maltese language, still easily intelligible in Tunis 89 (though the name Malta itself is suggested to derive from the Hebrew *malat*, to escape). 90 There is almost no evidence that Marlowe was aware of Malta's extraordinary wealth of temples - about thirty survive in the small archipelago 91 - and other prehistoric structures, but there is one shadow of a suggestion, when Ferneze, facing the threat of a Turkish invasion and refusing to capitulate, declares:

First will we race the city walls ourselves,  
Lay waste the island, hew the temples down,  
And, shipping of our goods to Sicily,  
Open an entrance for the wasteful sea,  
Whose billows beating the resistless banks,  
Shall overflow it with their refluence.

(III.v.13-18)



Obviously the most likely meaning for 'temples' here is 'churches'; and in the context of my project this might be in itself an attractive reading, since Malta is famous for its churches. Certainly it would make sense for Christians faced with a Turkish invasion to destroy their places of worship themselves rather than leave them to face desecration. But that word 'hew', with its connotations of rough stonework and great blows, might just suggest the more massive architecture of monumental ruins like Hagar'Qim or Ggantija; and such structures would surely have been of interest to a dramatist credited by Richard Baines' note with a distinct interest in alternative belief systems (this is a point to which I will return later in considering Marlowe's possible areas of interest in the story of Malta). The suggestion cannot, though, ever be more than a highly tentative and speculative one.

Nevertheless, even without any direct reference to Malta's impressive legacy of prehistoric architecture, anyone with more than a passing acquaintance with the island must surely have been aware of the obviously non-European origins of much of its architecture, language and population. The reason given by the Knights for excluding the indigenous nobility from their number was explicitly the fear that their ancestry might be tainted by Arab elements; and Maltese as a language - lyrically described in a modern historical novel as 'the soft, slurring dialect that Dido and Hannibal spoke' -<sup>92</sup> clearly proclaims its affiliation with Arabic, as is obviously demonstrated in the very place-names that were to play so marked a part in the siege: the fortified town of Birgu, the old capital of Mdina with its Rabat, the harbours of Marsamxett and Marsaxlokk. The most cursory investigation into the history and geography of Malta (and I hope to have shown that Marlowe's researches seem to have been far from cursory) would have revealed it as a place once colonised by a people of Semitic origin, who were universally believed to have been those identified in the classical world view as the Phoenicians.

Marlowe had already written about the Phoenicians in what seems likely to have been his first play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. Marlowe's plays are often notable for their intertextuality - to name only a few examples, Ithamore parodies Marlowe's own 'Passionate Shepherd to his Love'; there are characters named Farnese / Ferneze in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta*; the Guise, referred to in the prologue to *The Jew of Malta*, is one of the principal characters of *The Massacre at Paris*; and, as Emily Bartels points out, the name of Callapine in *The Jew of Malta* 'recalls the aggressive son of Bajazeth in *Tamburlaine*'.<sup>93</sup> Roma Gill posits a direct link between *The Jew of Malta* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage* when she writes of Barabas hammering:

At this point he reminds me very much of Aeneas in Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage*, when he has decided to disobey the gods and make a new home in Carthage. He too comes in with, as it were, the tools of the trade: the original stage direction has 'Enter Aeneas with a paper in his hand, drawing the platform [plan] of the city'. Marlowe delights in humiliating his heroes - not humiliating them, so much as cutting them down to size. *Dido Queen of Carthage* and *The Jew of Malta* are very different plays - but they have this in common: the hero appears at a crucial moment in his careers looking like a not very skilled do-it-yourself builder or carpenter.<sup>94</sup>

A less direct but equally tantalising point of comparison may perhaps be present in one of Barabas' most famous lines:

BERNARDINE  
Thou hast committed -

## BARABAS

Fornication?

But that was in another country:

And besides, the wench is dead.

(IV.i.40-2)

There is no other reference to this episode in the play, and it squares with nothing else that we know of the character and behaviour of Barabas. But it is, above all, the sin of the roving Aeneas, loving and leaving behind him the suicidal Dido. The echo is hardly a strong one, but it may perhaps serve to remind us of the ways in which Mediterranean settings with Phoenician connections had already proved of interest to Marlowe the dramatist.

## Faith, Psychology, and Fortifications on Malta

There were also elements of Malta's more recent past that were likely to have been of profound interest to Marlowe. When writing *Tamburlaine the Great*, Marlowe seems to have had access to a manuscript version of Paul Ive's treatise *Practise of Fortification*, [95](#) which suggests a serious concern with the subject; and Paul H. Kocher has argued that in *Tamburlaine* in particular, but in others of the plays as well, 'all the action and much of the characterization...leap into full significance against a background of sixteenth century warfare and military usage', and that Marlowe's particular interest was in fortifications and sieges. [96](#) He could, therefore, hardly have failed to respond with intelligent interest to whatever information he came across on the technical aspects of the design of St Angelo and St Elmo which had enabled them to withstand the Siege so successfully, not to mention the Knights' response to the Siege in the shape of the new fortifications of Valletta, which were given such prominence in the construction of the town; [97](#) Farley-Hills points out that 'several times the "City of Malta's" walls are mentioned and this might well reflect Marlowe's knowledge of the spectacular fortifications built after the Great Siege'. [98](#) He may also have noted that during the Siege of St Elmo the Knights experimented with a new missile which involved the use of boiling tar, [99](#) which may perhaps have suggested an element of the novel method of Barabas' death; and Luc Borot has pointed out the intersection between the comments on fortification in the play and Machiavelli's concern with the problem of 'whether citadels are a help or a hinderance [sic] to a ruler'. [100](#)

One noteworthy aspect of Marlowe's representation of Malta in this respect is his insistent characterisation of it as a 'town'. The word occurs sixteen times, at I.i.184, I.i.189, II.iii.105, II.iii.202, III.i.1, IV.i.69, V.i.5, V.i.60, V.i.62, V.i.71, V.i.92, V.ii.105, V.iii.10, V.iii.22, V.iii.37, and V.v.47, along with 'city' at III.v.13 and V.ii.69. In the context of the Great Siege, the primary referent of 'town' must be Birgu, but Marlowe's 'town' also contains clear references to other cities: 'the dark entry', for instance, through which alms are conveyed (III.iv.79-81), transports us straight back to Marlowe's own native Canterbury and the Dark Entry of his alma mater the King's School, [101](#) while the 'Two lofty turrets that command the town' (V.iii.5) have been repeatedly identified as the twin fortresses of St Angelo and St Elmo, the principal seaward defences of Valletta, [102](#) which at the time when Marlowe was writing (as opposed to the time *of which* he was writing) was by far the largest centre of habitation in the islands. [103](#) Additionally, Roma Gill sees in Marlowe's town some at least of 'the facilities of the walled city of Mdina', [104](#) also referred to by the Maltese as 'Notabile', which was marked prominently on the maps which Marlowe is likely to have used. Mdina played almost no part in the Siege, but it did feature in one episode of the kind which, if

Marlowe was aware of it, would surely have caught his interest. When, at a late stage of the Siege, the Turks abruptly decided to invest it, the Governor, Don Mesquita, found himself with far too small a garrison, and turned to bluff:

he had many of the peasants, and even their women folk, dressed in soldiers' uniforms, and set them to patrol the ramparts in company with the real garrison troops. All his available cannon were also brought to the ready and taken round to the side from which the Turkish troops were certain to approach. 105

The ploy worked, and the Turks retreated as quickly as they had arrived. This was in fact the second time that the Chevalier Mesquita had saved the day; the Turks' most determined assault on Birgu had been deflected only when the Chevalier despatched a lightning raid from Mdina on the Turkish base at the Marsa, killing the sick and destroying the baggage. Thinking they faced a full-scale assault from the rear, the Turkish troops fell back and Birgu was relieved.

The audacious tactics of the Chevalier Mesquita, complementing the psychological warfare exerted by La Valette on his own side, provide precisely the kind of method of gaining ascendancy over others that Marlowe showed himself so fascinated to explore in his account of the career of Tamburlaine. In their deployment of deceit authorised by religion, moreover, they touch at the heart of some of the issues with which *The Jew of Malta* is so centrally concerned.

Not the least remarkable feature of Barabas is the strength of his attachment to his Jewishness. Roma Gill comments that 'Marlowe has thoroughly researched a Jewish identity for Barabas, creating from the Old Testament a character far richer than any of the stereotypes that he could have inherited from popular tradition (which would only have given him the features that Ithimore can describe'; 106 even Stephen Greenblatt, who sees Barabas' identity as 'to a great extent the product of the Christian conception of a Jew's identity', nevertheless notes that 'Marlowe invokes an "indigenous" Judaism'. 107 Barabas is scornful of Christians:

Rather had I a Jew be hated thus,  
Than pitied in a Christian poverty:  
For I can see no fruits in all their faith,  
But malice, falsehood and excessive pride,  
Which me thinks fits not their profession.  
Happily some hapless man hath conscience,  
And for his conscience lives in beggary.  
They say we are a scattered nation:  
I cannot tell, but we have scrambled up  
More wealth by far than those that brag of faith.

(I.i.113-122)

The underlying assumptions that pattern the logic and progression of this speech are revealing ones. Barabas seems to take the term 'Jew' as synonymous with 'wealthy', and to have little sense of other possible connotations of Jewishness, since he denies knowledge of the very diaspora which has, presumably, brought him to Malta, and associates the concept of 'faith' with Christianity alone. He also uses the term 'profession' of Christianity, and this word

recurs when, like Tamburlaine the destroyer musing on beauty, Barabas the faithless contemplates faith:

As good dissemble that thou never mean'st  
As first mean truth and then dissemble it;  
A counterfeit profession is better  
Than unseen hypocrisy.  
(I.ii.290-3)

Whatever the precise meaning of this extraordinarily difficult passage, 108 it clearly invites us to consider the complexities of the relationship between external avowals, interiorised belief, and action - a network of factors which structure so much of the action of this play, with its cast of Christians, Jews, Turks, and Jewess-turned-Christian convert, and where a war is won and lost by first the prowess and then the destruction of the Janissaries (V.ii.16), the feared Turkish troops who were originally the children of Christian parents. 109 If Marlowe came across the story of the Jews who volunteered to die in St Elmo for a faith not their own, or considered the indomitable gallantry of the defence of the tiny fortress, he must surely have felt that Malta and its history afforded a spectacularly suitable setting for an exploration of the psychology of faith, and the ways, too, in which faith is both vulnerable to exploitation by those with more pragmatic agendas, and yet can only be partially touched by them. Marlowe's Malta may be introduced by Machiavelli and peopled by men like Ferneze and Barabas, but it does also contain 'Abigail, the single disinterested character in the play, who is characterised by the first four words she speaks: "Not for my self...". 110 Like so many of Marlowe's women, 111 Abigail keeps alight the lamp of faith and love, though she does so, ironically, by apostasy, inviting the audience to consider whether their (presumed) prejudice in favour of her adoptive religion overcomes any sense that she has deserted her original one. She dies, but the last we see of her is, nevertheless, a curiously positive image, as even in death her body offers passive but effective resistance to the frustrated concupiscence of the friar. It is in this radically ambivalent portrait of Abigail that we find echoes both of the typically Marlovian scepticism perhaps best exemplified in *Doctor Faustus*, and also of the combination of terrible death and of the willing hope of martyrdom which Ernle Bradford has powerfully described as the fundamental condition of the Great Siege of Malta, and which made it so appropriate a setting for the Marlovian theatre of cruelty: 'if both sides believed that they saw Paradise in the bright sky above them, they had a close and very intimate knowledge of Hell'. 112

## Notes

1. Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman, eds, *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and their Sources* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.297.
2. Harry Levin, 'More of the Serpent', in *Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher* [1952], reprinted in *Marlowe: Tamburlaine the Great, Edward the Second and The Jew of Malta: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by John Russell Brown (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), pp.178-204.
3. Emily C. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p.83.

4. Roma Gill, ed. *The Jew of Malta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), introduction, p.x. I am deeply grateful to Roma Gill for kindly giving me a copy of her introduction before publication and for her help and support in the project in general.
5. Gill, *The Jew of Malta*, introduction, p.xv.
6. David Farley-Hills, 'Was Marlowe's "Malta" Malta?', *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Royal University of Malta, Vol. III, no. 1* (1965), pp.22-28, p.23. I am very grateful to Professor Farley-Hills and to Dr Paul Xuereb, Librarian of the University of Malta, for their assistance in obtaining a copy of this. The University of Malta Library also contains an M.A. dissertation by Peter Paul Grech on Background to The Jew of Malta. For copyright reasons it has been impossible for me to consult this, but I am grateful for the courtesy and helpfulness of the library staff in correspondence about it.
7. See David Bevington and James Shapiro, "'What are kings, when regiment is gone?': The Decay of Ceremony in Edward II', in 'A Poet and a filthy Playmaker': *New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, edited by Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill and Constance B. Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, 1988), pp. 263-278, p.265.
8. Farley-Hills, 'Marlowe's "Malta"', p.28. Leon Kellner ('Die Quelle von Marlowes Jew of Malta', *English Studies* 10 [1886], p.101) asserts at one point that Marlowe knew Malta better than any other Mediterranean island, but never provides evidence for this statement. I am grateful to my mother for translating this article for me.
9. Thomas and Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe*, p.301.
10. Michael G. Brennan, 'Christopher Marlowe's The Jew of Malta and Two Newsletter Accounts of the Siege of Malta (1565)', *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 238 (New Series, Vol. 40), no. 2 (June, 1993), pp.157-60.
11. H.J.A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p.187.
12. Gill, *The Jew of Malta*, introduction, p.xi.
13. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker, eds, *The Arte of English Poesie* by George Puttenham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p.61. I am indebted for all my information on Paget to the painstaking researches of Martin Wright.
14. Calendar of State Papers, *Foreign*, 1564-1565, 1234, p.391.
15. Gill, *The Jew of Malta*, introduction, pp.xiv-xv.
16. Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p.227
17. Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, p.227.
18. I am indebted to Roma Gill for telling me that when she visited Malta some years ago she was told of a story that Marlowe himself had visited the island, but that she was able to find no proof of this.
19. Claire-Eliane Engel, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Malte* (Geneva: Nagel, 1968), p.197.

20. Stanley Fiorini, 'Malta in 1530', in *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798*, edited by Victor Mallia-Milanes (Msida, Malta: Mireva Publications, 1993), pp.111-198, pp.141-2.
21. Ernle Bradford, *The Great Siege: Malta 1565* [1961] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp.180-1.
22. Joseph Attard, *The Knights of Malta* (Marsa, Malta: Publishers Enterprise Group, 1992), p.69.
23. Cecil Roth, 'The Jews of Malta', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 12 (1928-31), pp.187-251, p.189.
24. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', p.188.
25. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', p.212.
26. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', p.213.
27. Farley-Hills, 'Marlowe's "Malta"', p.24.
28. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', p.191.
29. Richard Dutton, 'Shakespeare and Marlowe: Censorship and Construction', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 23 (1993), pp.1-29, pp.22-3.
30. See David Farley-Hills, 'Tamburlaine and the Mad Priest of the Sun', *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies*, 2 (1992), pp.36-49. Also of interest on this subject is Valerio Viviani, 'Marlowe's Edward II and Giordano Bruno', forthcoming in *The Italian World of English Renaissance Drama*, edited by Michele Marrapodi.
31. See John Bossy, *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair* [1991] (London: Vintage, 1992), for Bruno's interest in the occult.
32. Peter French, John Dee [1972] (London: Ark, 1987), p.171; see also A.D. Wraight and Virginia F. Stern, *In Search of Christopher Marlowe*, second edition (Chichester: Adam Hart, 1993), p.154.
33. French, Dee, p.49.
34. Roma Gill, 'The Jew of Malta', *Scientia*, p.84.
35. Engel, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Malte*, p.207.
36. James R. Siemon, ed., *The Jew of Malta*, second edition (London: A & C Black, 1994), introduction, p.xii. All quotations from the text of the play will be taken from this edition.
37. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', p.216.
38. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', pp.216-7.
39. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', p.211.
40. Attard, *The Knights of Malta*, p.29.
41. Francesco Balbo di Correggio, *The Great Siege of Malta*, trans. Major Henry Alexander Balbi (Copenhagen: Capt O.F. Gollcher and Dr Ole Rostock, 1961), p.70
42. Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.162.
43. Paul Cassar, 'Malta's Medical and Social Services under the Knights Hospitallers', in *Hospitaller Malta*, pp.475-482, p.480.
44. Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, p.124.

45. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), pp.60-1.
46. Luc Borot, 'Machiavellian Diplomacy and Dramatic Developments in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*', *Cahiers Elisabethains*, 33 (1988), pp.1-11, p.2.
47. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p.95.
48. Quoted in Bradford, *The Great Siege*, p.112.
49. W.H. Prescott, quoted in Bradford, *The Great Siege*, p.140. See also Brian Blouet, *The Story of Malta* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp.69-70, for the suggestion that the recounting of the story has perhaps over-polarised the villains and heroes.
50. Blouet, *Story of Malta*, p.64.
51. Blouet, *Story of Malta*, p.150.
52. Blouet, *Story of Malta*, p.66.
53. Blouet, *Story of Malta*, pp.80-1. Sire, in *The Knights of Malta*, p.71, note, also defends Garcia de Toledo, speaking of 'the extraordinary skillful operation by which [he] brought the siege to an end.'
54. 54 Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness*, p.90.
55. Quoted in Gill, *The Jew of Malta*, introduction, p.xv.
56. Blouet, *Story of Malta*, p.150.
57. Engel, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Malte*, p.206.
58. Bradford, *The Great Siege*, p.222.
59. Thomas and Tydeman, *Christopher Marlowe*, p.297.
60. Quentin Hughes, 'The Architectural Development of Hospitaller Malta', in Mallia-Milanes, ed., *Hospitaller Malta*, pp.483-507, pp. 491 and 494.
61. This is pointed out by Simon Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1986), p. 171.
62. Attard, *The Knights of Malta*, p.88.
63. Farley-Hills, 'Marlowe's "Malta"', p.28.
64. See Attard, *The Knights of Malta*, pp.83-4.
65. Bradford, *The Great Siege*, p.219.
66. Bradford, *The Great Siege*, p.219.
67. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', p.208.
68. Coburn Freer, 'Lies and Lying in The Jew of Malta', in *A Poet and a Filthy Playmaker*, pp.143-165.
69. HMC *The Pepys MSS* at Magdalene College, Cambridge, p.65, I.423.
70. There is an interesting parallel to this to be found in the play-within-the-play with which Marlowe's room-mate, Kyd, concluded *The Spanish Tragedy*, in which a Knight of Malta, after the loss of Rhodes, is rather unexpectedly discovered to be a close personal friend of the Emperor Soliman.
71. Attard, *The Knights of Malta*, p.88. Soliman.
72. Alexander Bonnici, 'Maltese Society under the Hospitallers in the light of Inquisition Documents', in Mallia-Milanes, ed., *Hospitaller Malta*, pp.311-349, p.322.

73. Bonnici, 'Maltese Society', p.323.
74. Bonnici, 'Maltese Society', p.326.
75. Bonnici, 'Maltese Society', p.326.
76. See for instance Fiorini, 'Malta in 1530', p.144.
77. Quoted in Bonnici, 'Maltese Society', p.331.
78. Bonnici, 'Maltese Society', p.342.
79. Attard, *The Knights of Malta*, p.19.
80. Bradford, *The Great Siege*, p.44.
81. Fiorini, 'Malta in 1530', p.145.
82. Fiorini, 'Malta in 1530', p.144.
83. Levin, 'More of the Serpent', p.190.
84. Bonnici, 'Maltese Society', p.328.
85. Roma Gill, 'The Jew of Malta', *Scientia*, Vol. XXXVIII (1975-76-77) pp.74-86, pp.85-6. I am very grateful to Roma Gill for sending me a copy of this article.
86. Farley-Hills, 'Marlowe's "Malta"', pp.24-5.
87. Donald Sultana, *The Journey of Sir Walter Scott to Malta* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1986), p.87
88. D.H. Trump, *Malta: An Archaeological Guide* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp.22-3.
89. Blouet, *Story of Malta*, p.42.
90. Roth, 'Jews of Malta', p.188.
91. Blouet, *Story of Malta*, p.33.
92. Dorothy Dunnett, *The Disorderly Knights* [1966] (London: Century, 1984), p.63.
93. Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness*, p.90.
94. Roma Gill, 'The Jew of Malta', *Scientia*, pp.82-3. There is again an echo of The Spanish Tragedy, where Hieronimo is seen fixing up the stage curtain.
95. See *Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine the Great*, edited by J.S. Cunningham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), introduction, p.19.
96. Paul H. Kocher, 'Marlowe's Art of War', *Studies in Philology* 39 (1942), pp.207-45, pp.207 and 212.
97. See Stanley Fiorini, 'Demographic Growth and the Urbanization of the Maltese Countryside to 1798', in *Hospitaller Malta*, pp.297-310, p.303; on the fortifications in general, see Alison Hoppen, 'Military Priorities and Social Realities in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Malta and its Fortifications', in *Hospitaller Malta*, pp.399-428.
98. Farley-Hills, 'Marlowe's "Malta"', p.24.
99. See Balbi di Correggio, *The Great Siege of Malta*, p.75.
100. Borot, 'Machiavellian Diplomacy', p.3.
101. See Wraight and Stern, *In Search of Christopher Marlowe*, p.39.
102. See Siemon's edition, note on V.iii.10, and Gill's, introduction, p.xi.



103. On the prominence of Valletta, see Victor Mallia-Milanes, 'Introduction to Hospitaller Malta', in *Hospitaller Malta*, pp.1-42, pp.18-19, and Fiorini, 'Demographic Growth', p.303.
104. *The Jew of Malta*, ed. Gill, introduction, p.xi.
105. Bradford, *The Great Siege*, p.198.
106. *The Jew of Malta*, ed. Gill, introduction, p.xiii. For a less convinced view of the authenticity of Barabas' Jewishness, however, see Bartels *Spectacles of Strangeness*, p. 97. For Barabas as subversion of the stereotypical Jew-figure, see Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, p.162.
107. On the complexities of this passage, see William M. Hamlin, 'A Note on Teaching Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*', *Marlowe Society of America Newsletter*, Vol. XI, no. 2 (Fall, 1991), pp.3-4; on the particular Elizabethan resonances of the word 'profession', see Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness*, p.94.
108. Stephen Greenblatt, 'The Will to Absolute Play: The Jew of Malta', reprinted in *Staging the Renaissance*, edited by David Scott Kastan and Peter Sallibrass (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.114-21, p.118.
109. On the possible relevance to this of Machiavelli's comments on Janissaries, see *The Jew of Malta*, ed. Siemon, note on V.ii.16.
110. Levin, 'More of the Serpent', p.193.
111. For an extended development of this argument, see my 'Marlowe, Shakespeare and Women', forthcoming in the monograph series of the King's School, Canterbury.
112. Bradford, *The Great Siege*, p.163.