

## CRUSADE, CHIVALRY, MILLENNIUM AND UTOPIA: THE VISION OF DOMENICO MORA (ca. 1540 – ca. 1595)

Donald WEINSTEIN

University of Arizona, Department of History, Tucson, Arizona 85721, USA

e-mail: einstein@dakotacom.net

### ABSTRACT

*Domenico Mora (ca. 1540 – ca. 1595) was a Bolognese soldier who served Kings Sigismund II and Stephen Báthory of Poland. His treatises on warfare form a chapter in the perennial debate between letters and the military arts. The exaggerated value placed upon literature and science, he argued, was responsible for the decline of chivalry and for Italy's loss of liberty, while deference to classical antiquity undermined confidence in present capabilities. Praising the chivalrous spirit of the Poles with whom he served, he contrasted their military vigor with the West's lethargy in facing the Infidel threat.*

*Key words: chivalry, military arts, warfare, Domenico Mora, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries*

## CROCIATE, CAVALLERIA, MILLENARISMO E UTOPIA: LA VISIONE DI DOMENICO MORA (cca. 1540 – cca. 1595)

### SINTESI

*Domenico Mora (cca. 1540 – cca. 1595) era un soldato bolognese al servizio di re Sigismondo II e di re Stephen Báthory di Polonia. I suoi trattati sulle operazioni di guerra costituiscono un capitolo importante nell'ambito del perenne dibattito tra letteratura e arti militari. Egli sosteneva che l'eccessivo valore attribuito alla letteratura ed alla scienza era la causa del declino della cavalleria e della mancanza di libertà in Italia, mentre la deferenza verso l'antichità classica minava la fiducia nelle capacità attuali. Egli lodava lo spirito di cavalleria dei polacchi, al cui servizio egli si trovava, e confrontava il loro vigore militare con la letargia dimostrata dall'Occidente nell'opporli alla minaccia degli infedeli.*

*Parole chiave: cavalleria, arti marziali, guerreggiamento, Domenico Mora, XVI-XVII sec.*

To go on crusade -to make war against the Infidel in the name of Christ- was one of the most characteristic impulses of medieval European society (Setton, 1955-1962; Dupront, 1987; Cardini, 1993). Indeed, so central are the Crusades to our image of the Middle Ages that the fading of crusading zeal, together with the decay of chivalry, have been commonly cited as evidence for the waning of the Middle Ages *tout court*. Johan Huizinga's *Waning, or Autumn, of the Middle Ages*, is the classic statement of this view.<sup>1</sup> Apart from its controversial application of biological metaphor to social and cultural history, Huizinga's formulation may be faulted on empirical grounds, for there is considerable evidence of the continued vitality of both chivalry and the Crusades well beyond their alleged expiration dates (Keen, 1984; Morgan, 1990; Flori, 1995). In the case of the Crusades, revisionist historians have more recently argued that by broadening our definition of crusade to take into account changing circumstances, sponsorship and objectives, we can follow the crusading impulse into the sixteenth century (Atiya, 1938; Mayer, 1988). Between the late eleventh and early thirteenth centuries crusades were multi-national expeditions sponsored by the Papacy and largely led and fought by knights bent on liberating the Holy Places in Jerusalem. Although political and material motives were present from the beginning, they became more prominent in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the crusading enterprise came to be dominated by princes and governments. As hopes faded for loosening the Muslim grip on Palestine and Syria, crusading energies were diffused in various directions. New enemies of Christendom were identified, new threats perceived and new opportunities for conquest, conversion and commerce marked out. The Ottoman Turks were pushing further west into the lands of the Byzantine empire and Europe's north-east frontiers were threatened by the consolidation of new, powerful, non-Christian states. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries expeditions were proposed and mounted against infidel peoples in Hungary, Bohemia, Prussia, Poland, Lithuania, while in the Iberian peninsula Christian kings pressed forward with their Reconquista of lands still held by the Moors.<sup>2</sup> In the course of the sixteenth century the impulse to wage holy war on the infidel Turks weakened. There were a number of reasons for this, including a growing reluctance to throw good money after bad in what was coming to be seen as a futile enterprise, while the Reformation divided Europe over the religious significance

- 1 The titles of the first English edition, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924), and the French, *Le déclin du Moyen Age* (1948) do not convey the organic metaphor of the original as accurately as does the German, *Herbst des mittelalters* (1938), and the more recent English edition, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (1996). Huizinga did not posit a simple decline of knighthood and chivalry but rather a kind of hollowing out of forms that no longer corresponded to changing social and political realities. Cf. Huizinga (1996) chap.3: "The Heroic Dream."
- 2 For a comprehensive statement of the revisionist approach summarizing recent findings and an extensive biography of all aspects of crusade history, see Housley, 1992. Housley regards Atiya's *Crusade in the Late Middle Ages* as "almost wholly unsatisfactory" (Housley, 1992, 464).

of crusading objectives. According to a leading revisionist historian, it was the division of the Catholic world by the Reformation that brought the Baltic crusade to a close (Housley, 1992, 375). From this perspective what follows is the case study of an anachronism, a proposal for crusade emanating from north eastern Europe in the late sixteenth century. Anachronism or not, the proposal incorporates some of the familiar features of a Christian war against the Infidel within a grandiose vision of a new society that reflects some of the social and cultural tensions of the time.

Domenico Mora was born in Bologna around 1540 and died some time after 1595. (Fantuzzi, 1781-1784; Bongi, 1890, 1895) He called himself *gentil'uomo* and was apparently of genteel birth. Mora embarked early on a military career, serving in the armies of Florence and Parma among others. From 1569 he was captain of a company of guard for the Republic of Venice, becoming governor of the Venetian-held island of Zama in the Morea. Some time afterward he fought with Papal troops against the Huguenots in France. From 1579 and at least until 1595, the last date we have for him, Mora's military career took him to Poland and Livonia as a colonel of infantry under Kings Sigismund Augustus and Stephan Bathory and fought the Tatars as well as in the Nordic Wars between the Poles and the Dukes of Muscovy. One assignment for Stephen Batory took him to Transylvania as a master of fortifications. It seems that it was while Mora was in Bathory's service that he met Father Antonio Possevino, SJ. Pope Gregory XIII had sent Possevino as special envoy to Moscow to induce Tsar Ivan IV and Bathory to make peace and join in a league against the Turks and indeed, he succeeded in the first objective of his mission, the two princes signing a treaty in January 1582. Possevino hoped the league would mount a crusade that would re-conquer Byzantium, plant the cross in Santa Sophia and establish the conditions for Christian evangelization of the world (Donnelly, 1988; Pierling, 1887). Mora reported that he had attended a mass celebrated by Possevino in a convent in Riga, a city dominated by Lutherans to which King Bathory had dispatched some Jesuits. He praised Possevino for his diplomatic success, calling him "a man truly born to deal with every very difficult and important matter" (Mora, 1589, 51). He also refers to "un picciolo volume" in which Possevino related "cosse miraculose, che da Demonii sono visibilmente operate, per essere questa parte Settentrionale, nel estremo la sedia d'un gran Principe di Demonii" (Mora, 1589, 50, 147-148, 265). Did Possevino influence Mora's blueprint for the future? Possibly, although Mora's vision is heavily stamped with the very different values and concerns of a military man at the brink of social and professional marginalization.

Mora wrote a series of treatises expounding on such practical aspects of soldiering as the placement of siege artillery, the use and merits of the arquebus, the construction of fortifications, the use of military maps and other related matters.<sup>3</sup> He also

3 He apparently also wrote sonnets and a treatise on ancient weapons, although I have not been able to find these and am unclear as to whether they were published.

held forth on the proper organization of military companies and the responsibilities of officers of different grades. Moreover, he enlivened his professional advice with autobiographical detail and passionately expounded his ideas about society, past, present and future, particularly in *Tre Quesiti...sopra il fare batterie...* (1567), *Il Soldato* (1569/1570) dedicated to the Duke of Parma, Grand Standard-Bearer of the Church, and *Il Cavaliere*, dedicated to Jan Zamoyski, Captain General and Grand Chancellor of Poland (1589). In them he expressed strong views on politics, the failings of Italy and Europe, the need for reform in the Church and the role of chivalry in society. Various scholars of Italian literature and thought have referred to these works and some have given a sketchy account of his life, but very few, with the notable exception of Giancarlo Angelozzi, have treated him as other than an idiosyncratic curiosity. (Angelozzi, 1982, 305-324; Holme, 1910, 145-166; Cian, 1929, 394-395; Donati, 1988, 228-230, 243). So far as I know there is no adequate study of either the man or his ideas.

To what degree Mora's views were typical for his profession and social class, I am not yet prepared to say, although he claimed that "many" cavaliers had asked him to write in defense of their profession. His writings give us a precious glimpse into the mind and career of at least one of those numerous Italians of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who found employment abroad in soldiering, trade or diplomacy, or in the counsels of foreign princes and governments -sometimes in a combination of these- while career opportunities at home were shrinking. Late sixteenth century Italy was no longer the vigorous community of proudly self-governing city states nor the economic and cultural capital of Europe it had been in the heyday of the Renaissance. Mora's acute consciousness of Italy's troubles forms the explicit backdrop of his writings, and much of his argument for the necessity of a new order is based upon his observation of the weaknesses and failures of Italy's governing elite which he contrasted with the energy and virtues of his Polish royal masters. A strong sense of personal grievance fed into this criticism of Italian society as well, for Mora believed that in Bologna his family had been done out of its wealth and that the city's magistracies were at least partly responsible for a miscarriage of justice .

The code of chivalry had been a central feature of both crusading ideology and practice from the beginning, and Mora's proposal is no exception. It is a major theme in *Il Cavaliere*, for example. At the same time, as we shall see, he sometimes treated knighthood as if were interchangeable with mercenary soldiering, perhaps reflecting the vagaries of his own career. Mora was convinced that Italy's ills stemmed from its neglect of the military profession. He complained that soldiers were poorly paid and ill-regarded and that the knightly order no longer enjoyed the dignity and the authority of earlier days. Without the leadership of its warriors Italy had lost its preeminence and its independence. The ruinous demilitarization of Italian society, Mora, believed was the work of the *literati* and *scienziati* who trumpeted the superiority of

literature and book learning over the military arts, thus undermining the manly virtues and betraying the chivalric code of honor which fused Christian piety and social duty.

An emblematic target of Mora was Girolamo Muzio, or, as he called himself, Mutio Giustinopolitano, to indicate his paternal origins in Capodistria. Muzio was a famous man of letters, social theorist, diplomat and advisor of Italian princes until his death in 1576 (Giachich, 1847). Although his fame rested partly upon his writings on honor and duelling, in the perennial debate between letters and arms, Muzio had taken the side of the former, arguing that letters were necessary both in war and peace and therefore of greater benefit to society than arms, which were indispensable only for war. In fact he deplored war and the havoc wreaked on civilian populations by marauding troops. Frequently consulted by princes and nobles as an expert on duel protocol, Muzio generally contrived an argument that discouraged the parties from actually fighting. Domenico Mora, on the contrary, idealized warriors and warfare and even insisted that soldiers had a right to live off the land. The damage done by armies is brief in duration, he said, while the damage done by letters is long lasting. Mora went so far as to defend *bravi*, the widely feared and despised mercenaries retained by princes and men of substance. *Bravi* were not common robbers and murders, he insisted; they killed only when they had good reason. Popes and princes were quick to ban them, he observed, but kept them on hand to fight their battles.

Mora attacked Girolamo Muzio for taking the side of "empty-winded" *literati* and *scienziati* and for criticizing Machiavelli who treated war as a legitimate arm of politics and religion as a social instrument. But, while he thought Machiavelli had been right on both these counts, Mora had little regard for the Florentine secretary either, dismissing him as one of those writers who talked about war without knowing anything about it. Furthermore, he said, linking the Florentine with the Renaissance faith in the superiority of classical culture, Machiavelli wrongly believed that the Ancients knew more about warfare than did moderns.

Mora's advocacy of war was based on his personal anthropology as well as his pragmatism. Man is a wolf to man; he declared, and war a natural form of self-protection. Knights are to deeds, masculinity, daylight and command as *literati* are to words, femininity, the dark of night and obedience. Nor is war merely a human invention. The angels conducted war against each other in their struggle for precedence. Thus war originates in God just as peace does, and soldiering finds legitimacy in both nature and in grace. Honor he defined as "an uncorrupt state of nature" which is acquired through good birth and confirmed and nourished through the exercise of virtue. The true knight prefers to die rather than to live without honor. Nothing is more virtuous than the performance of duty under the aegis of true religion, identified in this world by the Roman Church.

For Mora, soldiering was a higher moral calling and the cornerstone of a healthy

society. Rightly motivated by a sense of virtue, Christian faith and a commitment to justice, he wrote, the *cavaliere* was *the* instrument of redemption. He warned that European society was in danger of going the way of Italy with declining military virtue, irreligion, heresy and schism and poverty. Having fought the Huguenots in France and the Tatars and other infidels and heretics in eastern Europe, Mora was convinced that Christian Europe was on the brink of disaster because of its own decadence, the attacks of the Protestant heretics at home and the heathen and infidel abroad. If Christendom was to save itself it must first take steps to restore the military profession to the respect and dignity it had enjoyed in the past. This meant first eliminating the corrupting influence of the men of literature and science with their excessive regard for the Ancients, their continual squabbling and their emasculating sophistication.

Cavaliers were to be trained for six or seven years in jousting, jumping, spear-throwing and similar exercises, and develop their chivalric attributes by performing "virtuous undertakings" and hard and laborious assignments. Military companies or *religioni*, miniature versions of the Knights of Malta and the Order of Santo Stefano, were to be established in the various regions of Europe, each with 300 knights, and each named after a saint or the Blessed Virgin as a sign of their militant dedication to the Catholic faith. The financial support of these *religioni* was to come not from private endowments, or commendas, for that system, as the existing orders demonstrated, opened the door to many men who were unworthy of the title and privileges of knighthood. Instead they should be supported by ecclesiastical revenues as well as by liberal access to the goods and property of civilian populations. True knights, moreover, were not to be subject to the ordinary civil law but allowed to live according to the laws of honor.

Mora adopts both the terminology and the features of Christian millenarian tradition (McGinn, 1979; Amanal, Bernhardsson, 2002). Millenarianism, the idea that a Last Emperor or Angelic Pope would defeat Antichrist and usher in a period of earthly glory in which all peoples of the earth would live in peace and spiritual perfection united in Christ for a thousand years, was like chivalry, a familiar feature of crusading thought. Mora's combination of the spiritual and the military into an ideal society is unusual if not unique. Once Christian Europe was prepared militarily and morally, he says, the knightly companies, led by legitimate princes and the Emperor, would crush the Protestant heretics, then conduct a crusade in Asia, in Africa and in many parts of Europe against 'the enemies of God. It would be a very long war, but would end with the conquest and conversion of the Muslim infidel. With the Muslim conversion the world will be united, *un ovile e uno pastore*, one shepherd presiding over a single sheepfold, and there will be perpetual peace. Catholicism will triumph, but it would be purged of its wordy preaching and theological complexities: a simple evangelicalism would suffice. Other than the Bible, however, books had a dim future

in Mora's vision. He proposed to begin the work of restitution by burning all books of philosophy, for philosophy had been 'the ruin of humanity' -and into the fire would go all theological works as well. With book learning abolished, he said, men would no longer drown in *astutie* by their studies, the pestilential air caused by the wind and smoke of the literati would be dissipated, and peace and quiet prevail. Where letters are not in command, there there will be a golden age (*secolo d'oro*). A kind of republic of chivalry will replace the ruinous republic of letters. Natural goodness will prevail, and men will live in loyalty, honor and faith. Knights will be subject only to a chivalric law, enjoying the special privileges and revenues due to them as the rightful leaders of society. Unlike the exclusively spiritual aspirations of medieval millenarianism, Mora's version is more in line with the secularizing trend of Renaissance culture, particularly with utopianism, the kind of rational and naturalistic futurism that takes its name from Thomas More's *Utopia* published seventy years earlier.

Anti-intellectual, crude polemicist, self-styled Christian knight and career mercenary, Domenico Mora could scarcely be called a major or even a serious thinker. Nevertheless his writings exhibit some important features of late sixteenth century society. As Angelozzi has pointed out, he was a voice of the traditional nobility in its resistance to the extension of state sovereignty and the values of the Counter Reformation (Angelozzi, 1982, 323). Moreover, his opposition between literature and arms was an attempt to cope with two stark realities of his day: Italy's decline and the West's sense of peril in the face of renewed Muslim expansion westward. His attack on rhetoric and literature was an extreme reaction against the Renaissance, while in defending experience against the authority of the Ancients, he could be seen as a militant champion of the movement that has been called the 'Counter Renaissance' (Haydn, 1950; Battisti, 1962) as well as an early partisan in the coming Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns (Baron, 1988).

# KRIŽARSKA VOJNA, VITEŠTVO, MILENARIZEM IN UTOPIJA: VIZIJA DOMENICA MORE (c. 1540 – c. 1595)

Donald WEINSTEIN

Univerza Arizone, Oddelek za zgodovino, Tucson, Arizona 85721, USA

e-mail: einstein@dakotacom.net

## POVZETEK

*Domenico Mora (c. 1540 – c. 1600) je bil bolonjski vojak, ki je služil poljskima kraljema Sigismundu II. and Stephenu Báthoryju. Njegovi zapisi o vojskovanju so posebno poglavje v dolgotrajni debati med književnostjo in vojaškimi veščinami. Mora je trdil, da je bilo pretirano poveličevanje literature in znanosti razlog za pojenjajoče viteštvo in izgubo italijanske svobode, medtem ko je spoštovanje klasične antike spodkopavalo zaupanje v njihove tedanje sposobnosti. Hvalil je viteškega duha Poljakov, ki jim je služil, in primerjal njihovo vojaško zagnanost z letargijo zahodnjakov v boju z neverniki.*

*Mora se je zavzemal za vojaško, versko in družbeno preobrazbo, začeni s sežiganjem vseh filozofskih in teoloških knjig. Križarsko vojno proti Turkom naj bi po njegovem vodile regionalne vojaške enote s po 300 visoko izurjenimi vitezi, prežetimi z viteškimi krepostmi. Tako naj bi nazadnje zavzeli in ustanovili unum ovile et unus pastor, kjer naj bi prevladovala večni mir in pravica, medtem ko naj bi vitezi vnovič zasedli svoja mesta na vrhu družbene hierarhije.*

*Morovi rokopisi nam dajejo vpogled v miselnost nekaterih izmed tistih številnih Italijanov iz 16. in 17. stoletja, ki so svoje priložnosti iskali v bojevanju, trgovanju in diplomaciji onkraj meja in v svetovanju tujim princem. Ob zavračanju renesančne estetike in humanizma si je zamišljal nov red kot mešanico biblijskega milenarizma in posvetnega utopizma, prežetega s tradicionalnimi vrednotami krščanskega viteštva.*

*Ključne besede: viteštvo, vojne veščine, vojskovanje, Domenico Mora, 16.-17. stoletje*



# LITERATURE

- Amanat, A., Bernhardsson, M. (eds.) (2002):** *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*. London, I.B. Tauris.
- Angelozzi, G. (1982):** *Cultura dell'onore, codici di comportamento nobiliari e stato nella Bologna pontificia: un' ipotesi di lavoro*. *Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento*, VII. Bologna, Il Mulino, 305-324.
- Atiya, A. S. (1970):** *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages*. 2d. ed. New York, Kraus Reprint Co.
- Baron, H. (1988):** *The Querelle of the Ancients and Moderns as a Problem for Present Renaissance Scholarship*. In *Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*. 2 vols. Princeton, Princeton University Press, II, 72-100.
- Battisti, E. (1962):** *L'antirinascimento*. Milan, Feltrinelli.
- Bongi, S. (ed.) (1890-1897):** *Annali di Gabriel Giolito de'Ferrari*. 2 vols. Rome, Bibliopola Vivarelli & Gulla.
- Cardini, F. (1993):** *Studi sulla storia e sull'idea di crociata*. 2d ed. Rome, Jouvence.
- Cian, V. (1929):** *Ira d'un guerriero cinquecentesco, lettere e postillatore del 'Gentiluomo' di Girolamo Muzio*. *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XCIV. Torino, Loescher, 394-395.
- Donati, C. (1988):** *L'idea di nobiltà in Italia secoli XIX-XVII*. Bari, Laterza.
- Donnelly, J. P. (1988):** *Antonio Possevino's Plan for World Evangelization*. *The Catholic Historical Review*, LXXIV. Washington, Catholic University of America Press.
- Dupr nt, A. (1987):** *Du sacr : croisades et p lerinages: images et langues*. Paris, Gallimard.
- Fantuzzi, G. (1781-1784):** *Notizie degli scrittori Bolognesi*. 9 vols. Bologna, Stamperia di S.Tommaso d'Aquino, 1784, VI, 99-106.
- Flori, J. (1998):** *Croisade et chevalrie: XI -XII  si cles*. Brussels, De Boeck Universit .
- Giaxich, P. (1847):** *Vita di Girolamo Muzio Giustinopolitano*. Trieste, Lloyd Austriaco.
- Hayden, H. (1950):** *The Counter-Renaissance*. New York, Grove Press.
- Holme, J. W. (1910):** *Italian Courtesy Books of the Sixteenth Century*. *Modern Language Review*, V. London, Modern Humanities Research Association, 145-166.
- Housley, N. (1992):** *The Later Crusades, 1274-1580 From Lyons to Alcazar*. Oxford, University Press.
- Huizinga, J. (1919):** *Herfsttij der middeleeuwen: studie over levensen gedachten-vormen der veertiende en vijftiende eeuw in Frankrijk en den Nederlanden*. Repr. 1950. Haarlem, H. D. Tjeenk Willink.

- Huizinga, J. (1924):** *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (trans. F. Hopman, 1924). London, E. Arnold & Co.
- Huizinga, J. (1938):** *Herbst des mittelalters*. Stuttgart, A. Kroner.
- Huizinga, J. (1948):** *Le déclin du Moyen Age* (trans. J. Bastin, 1948). Paris, Payot.
- Huizinga, J. (1996):** *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (trans. R.J. Payton and U. Mammitzsch, 1996). Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Keen, M. (1984):** *Chivalry*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Mayer, H. E. (1988):** *The Crusades*. 2d ed. Oxford, University Press.
- Mazzei, R. (1983):** *Traffici e uomini d'affari italiani in Polonia nel Seicento*. Milan, F. Angeli.
- McGinn, B. (1979):** *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic traditions in the Middle Ages*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Mora, D. (1567):** *Tre Quesiti in dialogo sopra il fare batterie, fortificare una città, et ordinar battaglie quadrate, con una disputa di precedenza tra l'arme & le lettere*. Venice.
- Mora, D. (1569):** *Il Soldato*. Venice, Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari.
- Mora, D. (1589):** *Il Cavaliere in risposta del gentilhuomo del Signore Mutio Giustignapolitano, nella precedenza del armi et delle lettere*. Vilna, Daniello Lanciense.
- More, T. (1965):** *Utopia*. In: Surtz, E., Hexter, J.H. (eds.). New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Morgan, D. (1990):** *From Death to a View: Louis Robessart, Johan Huizinga and the Political Significance of Chivalry*. In: *Chivalry in the Renaissance*. Woodbridge, Sidney Anglo Woodbridge, UK.
- Pierling, P. (ed.) (1887):** *Bathory et Possevino Documents inédits sur les rapports du Saint-Siege avec les Slaves*. Paris, E. Leroux.
- Setton, K. et al. (eds.) (1955-1962):** *A History of the Crusades* (2d ed. 6 vols.). Madison, University of Wisconsin Press.