

**La res publica di Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato (1606-1678)**  
Storiografia, notizie, letteratura  
a cura di Alessandro Metlica, Enrico Zucchi

# Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato and the Politics of Information

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**Abstract** As a historian of recent events, Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato relied on numerous types of sources for information. His particular relation to these sources is the subject of this article. After a rapid survey of what was available, we consider how his choices and his handling of them were affected by, and affected in turn, his relations to his patrons. News reports in manuscript and print were growing in importance. We focus on the *Historia delle guerre* (1640-51) and link it to contemporary news reports of various kinds, taking stylistic aspects and strategic compositional techniques into account, to show how sources are interpreted and for which ends.

**Keywords** Gualdo Priorato. War. News. Historiography. Politics. Leadership. Violence. Narrative.




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Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato was well aware of the challenges of putting words on paper to convince readers about the reliability of his information. Introducing the first part of his *Historia delle guerre di Ferdinando II e Ferdinando III imperatori e del re Filippo IV di Spagna*, published in 1640 (and consulted by us in the 1646 edition) he therefore explained his data collection procedures in some detail:

In tutto lo spazio che sono dimorato fuori della mia patria, così tra l'armi, come fra le Corti de' Principi e altri Soggetti Grandi, sempre procurai, e ne' fatti, e ne' detti altrui apprendere la cognizione del governo politico, e dell'osservanza militare. In ogni occasione, in ogni tempo e in ogni luogo esaminai le ragioni, per le quali più ad uno, che ad un altro modo s'operava. Con diligenza m'affaticai di penetrar i negoziati de' Ministri, le difficoltà de' maneggi, e le conclusioni de' trattati. (Gualdo Priorato 1646, a4r)

To reinforce the argument, while taking account of current conventions about appropriately abundant cases, he provided lists of the relevant topic areas, while still remaining in the realm of generality:

Stimai profittevole osservare la condizione de' capi, il consiglio degli esperimentati, i concetti de' Popoli, i pensieri della Nobiltà e gl'interessi de' Grandi. Affissai l'occhio a' successi de' tentativi, alla riuscita dell'impresie, alla qualità dei paesi, alla varietà de' costumi, alle conseguenze de' siti, all'importanza delle fortezze, al considerabile de' fiumi, al difficoltoso de' passaggi, all'esperienza de' soldati, al tempo, al luogo e alle cause. (a4r)

Much of this research activity would have been carried out while Gualdo was actually on military assignments or moving between them or recovering from injuries, or exploring the coast of Africa with Maurice of Nassau in search for new directions for the Dutch West India Company, before managing to set aside some serious writing at the family property in Vicenza (Sodini 2004), where even he himself appeared to be amazed by the quantity of details:

col lapis, et coll'inchiostro ne conservai memoria distinta, nel miglior modo che mi concedeva la mia cognizione, il tempo, che ora breve, ora opportuno si presentava. (Gualdo Priorato 1646, a4v)

From rough draft to final version, he insisted on the same standards (subject to the same limitations), so the reader could expect a faithful record of the facts. Yet in framing his choices regarding mode of expression, he was as cognizant as Guicciardini had been of the stylistic features imposed by a life of action not contemplation, and the responsibility to readers and posterity:

Son condesceso a scrivere senza la barba imbiancata, e senza le regole d’Orazio, confidato che quest’era Poeta e che intese di dar precetti a poesie, orazioni e altri vaghi componimenti, diversi dall’istoria, che dovendo essere il ritratto della verità sempre è più bella nuda, e cavata dal naturale, che vestita di vaghi adornamenti. (a4v)

Not everyone would be amused, or so he feared, given the spirit of the age:

Quest’invito confesso che mi parve un sogno, perché il portar alla lauta mensa (che di straordinario oggidì s’imbadisce) un piatto senza il regalo dell’inventiva e senza le fiorite ghirlande dello stile è un dar nausea a convitati. (a4v)

But his message regarding the military events of the last decade seemed urgent enough to make the risk worthwhile. Speaking from experience he could aver that these were special times. New actors with vast ambitions – Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, Louis XIII of France – were moving the ongoing European wars in new directions. How to convey the dangers and the opportunities? In the same year as the first installment of this work, he issued the collection of aphorisms called *Il guerriero prudente e politico* (Gualdo Priorato 1640b; Comparato 2008). In the *Historia* he gave more concrete examples for many of the behavioural propositions in this other work.

Whether his chosen patron for this occasion, Venetian senator, diplomat and future doge Bertuccio Valier, whom he addressed in the dedication, actually encouraged the writing of the *Historia*, more than whatever support might be implied in the flatteringly promised “gl’ossequi della mia devozione”, cannot yet be determined; nor can we be sure that Valier’s or Venice’s interests were being served in any obvious way other than by shedding light on a distant conflict with long-term repercussions for both.

Methodological protestations aside, the work is both less and more than a field report or campaign journal. The finely crafted prose places us squarely in the mainstream of literary narrative in this period; and a somewhat superficial comparison between Gualdo’s work and, say, Bisaccioni’s short story collection *Il Porto* [table 1] reveals a certain similarity in terms of the length of the periods, somewhat in contrast to the shorter more utilitarian, news-like prose of Giovanni Capriata’s *Historia* published four years later.

**Table 1** Sentence lengths in three authors

	<b>Average Sentence Length (words)</b>	<b>Median Sentence Length (words)</b>
<i>Historia</i> (Gualdo Priorato 1640a, 1-10)	633	60
<i>Il Porto</i> (Bisaccioni 1664, 397-406)	77.6	58
<i>Dell'istoria [...] dal MDCXIII fino al MDCXXXIV</i> (Capriata 1644, 1: 143-54)	46.7	39

A careful semantic study by Giovanni Pellizzari (1987, 58-67) even suggests a certain literary self-consciousness in spite of the protestations of simplicity. From the first pages of the *Historia delle guerre*, the king of Sweden is presented in the most heroic terms, with reference to valor, greatness of soul (“grandezza d’animo”), ardor, desire to be put to the test, ambition, and so forth, along with leadership qualities such as knowledge, experience, reflection, prudence, foresight, learning from past mistakes, etc. Such qualities, applied against an enemy territory, namely, the Holy Roman Empire especially in the northwestern region, characterised by division, various forms of government, resistance by the oppressed, disaffection, disloyalty, and the like, all set the stage for the decisions made and the events recounted.

We see the writer gesturing toward prominence in a field already crowded by a bewildering array of more hurried types of publication (Boys 2011). Indeed, if the amount of attention devoted to communicating the Thirty Years War (as it would later be called) on multiple platforms as the episodes occurred was regarded as noteworthy at the time, the same phenomenon has directed current scholarship toward explanatory models associated with the notion of ‘media event’ or *Medienereignis* (Bösch 2010; Körber 2015; Wilson et al. 2018). According to this concept, the communication of information on numerous platforms to a broad audience tends to structure the perception of what happens, in this case, an event of European dimensions, whose single episodes, from the Defenestration of Prague to the battle of White Mountain (1620), from the siege of Magdeburg (1631) to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), were raised by the media to the level of European consciousness, imparting a shared dimension to the ensemble.

The connection between the war on the ground and the war in the news is complex; and here is not the place to examine how particular genres of publication developed basically in response to the now-emerging needs (Weber 1999). Suffice to say that from the battlefield to the printed history book there existed a vast gamut of genres, ranging from eyewitness accounts conveyed in epistolary correspondence or diplomatic dispatches to the copied and recopied handwritten newsletters, and from the multiple handwritten types to the various forms of print, including one-off battle reports in broadside or pamphlet and at least in Northern Europe, the newly invent-

ed printed newspapers, in existence since 1605 (Weber 2006). Each form represented a different distance from, and a different relation to, actual events that occurred, and writers of each took pains to defend the authenticity and veracity of their accounts, even while choosing and interpreting available elements, or correcting and contradicting what was said in different times and places (Adrians 1999).

Scholars on media history have long debated the ultimate impact of this emerging media landscape, from the standpoint of the reader as well as of actors in the events. The more widespread possibility of mediatically experiencing distant events, in the words of one historian, effectively shifted the time-space relation (Behringer 1999), placing individuals for the first time in the midst of quotidian concerns far away. Furthermore, the publication of real and purported documents, including letters, lists of personnel dead or alive, maps of cities, battles and sieges, testimonies of all kinds about the thoughts and actions of major figures, presented readers with unprecedented opportunities to examine causes and effects. The new view into the private chambers of the powerful exposed the flaws and foibles as never before, introducing political topics into daily interactions among a wider public.

Actions and actors, according to other scholarship, were deeply affected. With events and narratives proceeding *pari passu* from beginning, to development to final closure, what could be done on the field became inseparable from what could be described, whereas things described formed templates and models for future actions. Field commanders played, to a certain extent, to the media, knowing their actions today, in various versions, would be the chatter of tomorrow; and multiple sources of information informed their strategies and tactics. The associated coverage, we are told, may indeed have resulted in tougher battles and longer sieges (Burkhardt 1992, 230).

Historians took notice, not only because the long shadow of humanist historiography still discouraged efforts to rewrite ancient history, but because events more or less within their own lifetimes appeared to offer subjects of equal moment to the great battles of old, while actors and observers alike demanded clarity and understanding, of the facts or the interpretations or both (Cochrane 1981; Burke 2012). The new availability of a host of sources from which to draw information created new obligations to take advantage of the emerging media landscape. Agendas for topics to write about were being set by coverage as well as by events. The famous Mercuries consisted of nothing more nor less than vast compilations drawn from prior published matter in print and manuscript form (Dooley 2000). Contemporary and near-contemporary historiography now involved textual interpretation as much as upon the memories of those involved.

This context of mediality sets a formidable agenda for our analysis of the works. When is Gualdo drawing upon others, and vice ver-

sa? What is the relation between these writings and still other narratives? How reliable are all these accounts, including his? This study seeks to draw some preliminary conclusions and suggest some new lines of research.

To assess the intertextuality of the *Historia* and the other available narratives, we choose a particular event, namely the siege and destruction of Frankfurt on the Oder in April 1631, which exemplifies the problems on the ground experienced by soldier and civilian, while revealing the difficulties of interpretation experienced by historian and media specialist. The event is of such importance as to boast a specific Wikipedia entry elaborated in five languages, although the standard modern scholarly works refer to it mainly in passing, as an early episode in the Swedish king's advance past the Baltic Sea's southern shores (Wilson 2010, 468). Apparently foreign mercenaries were heavily involved (Manning 2006, 85).

Before the war, the city, apart from its defection from the Hanseatic League, was largely renowned for a bitter academic disputation centered on Luther's Wittenberg Theses early in the previous century, which provoked a transfer of numerous students out of the local university. Describing the city, Professor Wolfgang Jobst (1561) pointed to its situation "an einem lustigen ort gelegen von Mittag und Mitternacht zwischen Weinbergen und Obsgarten beschlossen von aussgang der Sonnen mit dem fischreichen wasser der Oder" (on a pleasant site bounded on south and north by vine-planted hills and vegetable gardens and on the east by the fish-filled waters of the Oder), adding that "vielen schönen Wiesen leit in seinen vier örtern und Grenzen" (many beautiful meadows lead to its four localities and boundaries), to the south, the Guben Door, facing Laußnitz and Bohemia, 'especially rich in vineyards', to the west by the Lübisch door, and to the northeast by Silesia. As a major cultural center of the Margraviate of Brandenburg (which also included the eponymous city as well as Berlin and Potsdam), any threat was regarded as a personal attack on the Imperial Elector, Georg Wilhelm of Hollenzollern, or even as a message implying much worse consequences in case of insufficient compliance with demands.

At the point in the war that interests us here, Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II, seeming to have come close to completing the defeat of the Protestant rebellion within the Empire, has taken the initiative to order restitution of Catholic territorial losses dating since the period following the Defenestration of Prague. Jealousies have reemerged among the various potentates involved, fomented and instrumentalized by their allies around Europe. Seeing an opportunity in the general disorder, the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus begins to set his sights on imperial territories within Germany; whereupon Cardinal Richelieu, on behalf of French King Louis XIII, seeing an opportunity to gain more traction for his drive against Spain, helps finance the Swedish king's advance (Roberts 1992; Parker 1997; Osborne 2016).

Gualdo's account begins with the Imperial forces digging in for the siege of Magdeburg, and Gustavus Adolphus reasoning about possible ways to bring relief by way of Frankfurt on the Oder and Landsberg on the Warta:

Il Re vedendo l'esercito Cattolico impegnato colà, né conoscendo modo da portarvi il necessario soccorso, se prima non si rendeva padrone di que' luoghi, che riuscivano d'impedimento alla sua armata, incamminossi circa la fine di Marzo, all'impresa di Francofort all'Oder, si spinse sotto Zenedich, luogo presidiato dagl'Imperiali, e approssimossi a Francofort; il 2 d'Aprile, dove benché trovasse grosso nervo di soldati Imperiali sotto il commando del Maresciallo di Tieffembach, Cavalier Tedesco, che non mancò à gli avvisi della mossa del Re, di prepararsi alla difesa, investilla da tre parti, con tre attacchi e tre battarie. (Gualdo Priorato 1646, 25)

Gualdo the writer of aphorisms steps in for a moment to make sense of subsequent events. "L'impresе audaci sogliono esser protette dalla fortuna", we are told; which calls to mind, from the *Guerriero prudente*, "l'ardire, il quale sovente sposato dalla Fortuna, suol generare felicissimi parti" (38). In the case at hand, the Frankfurt population (he goes on)

parve [...] quasi che fossero ammaliare, cominciarono a declinar, e perdere l'ardire, e ne' primi assalti abbandonarono, con poco onore, una gran tenaglia, che per difesa della porta di Guben, era guardato da 400 fanti. (25)

This collapse in morale, he suggests, "fu una delle principali cause della perdita" of the city. The explanation leads him deep into the heart of battle, with rich descriptions of town fortifications and how to break them:

gli Svezzesi nella ritirata de Cesarei montando i ripari si cacciarono fino sotto al ponte levatoio, della porta dove alle cinque ore di notte, fatti giocar due petardi, e ricevutone lo effetto desiderato, entrarono. (25)

Unexpected occurrences are a test for inventiveness, as the narrative takes an adventurous turn:

E perché ostinatamente era difesa l'entrata della seconda porta, che chiusa da una grossa trincera e guarnita di molte perriere, rendeva lo sforzo d'essa insuperabile, il Re in tali azioni sopra modo diligente e fortunato, gettato l'occhio alla muraglia, che dentro alla porta sosteneva il terrapieno de' ripari, prestamente fecela

traforare, e mentre gl'Imperiali si occupavano nella difesa della seconda porta, senza preveder il disegno dall'altra parte del Re, fece entrare un Luogotenente con cinquanta Fanti de' migliori per il foro della muraglia sopra i ripari. (25)

The tiniest details will stand as markers for our attempts to understand the information landscape:

Acquistati due Cavalieri, alla man sinistra di detta porta, voltò il cannone contro la Città, e con questa inaspettata sorpresa, rese tanto confusi gl'assedati, che non sapendo fin a qual partito rivolgersi, pensarono alla salute delle vite loro, abbandonata perciò la difesa, precipitosamente si portarono verso il ponte dell'Oder per passarlo, e ritirarsi in salvo a Landdsperg. (25)

The sheer destructiveness could not fail to impress:

Ma gli svezzesi caricandoli con grand'empito, e non potendo gl'Imperiali aver libero il passo del ponte imbarazzato da carri, fu causa che la maggior parte de gli soldati precipitasse nell'acqua, o restasse alla discrezione dell'armi nemiche, le quali riscaldate, come è il solito in simili incontri senza Pietà, ricusavano la vita ad ognuno ch'avea sembianza di soldato, e manumisero tutta quella Città, per le strade della quale erano così spessi li cadaveri che non si poteva camminare senza calpestarli. (25-6)

The toll is registered in stark figures, as Gualdo continues:

Perderono gl'Imperiali circa per due mille foldati, oltre molti ufficiali e abitanti, gli Svezzesi ve ne lasciarono da 300 con un Sargente Maggiore, tre Capitani e due Luogotenenti, il Colonnello Teuffel fu ferito nel braccio sinistro e 'l Colonnello Dargits nel fianco destro. (26)

Thus concludes a particularly impressive account of early modern warfare; rich in detail and straining for significance; all that Gualdo's readers could have hoped. There will be long-term consequences for the events in question, he notes:

La caduta di Francofort, alla cui custodia stavano seimila Soldati [...] fu di gran pregiudizio a gl'interessi Austriaci, e [...] per questo colpo gli animi e le speranze de' Cattolici piegarono. (26)

But his is only one account among many; and the self-appointed narrators, earlier or later, do not speak in unison. Nor is it, for the twenty-first century historian, an easy task to find a pattern in the flow

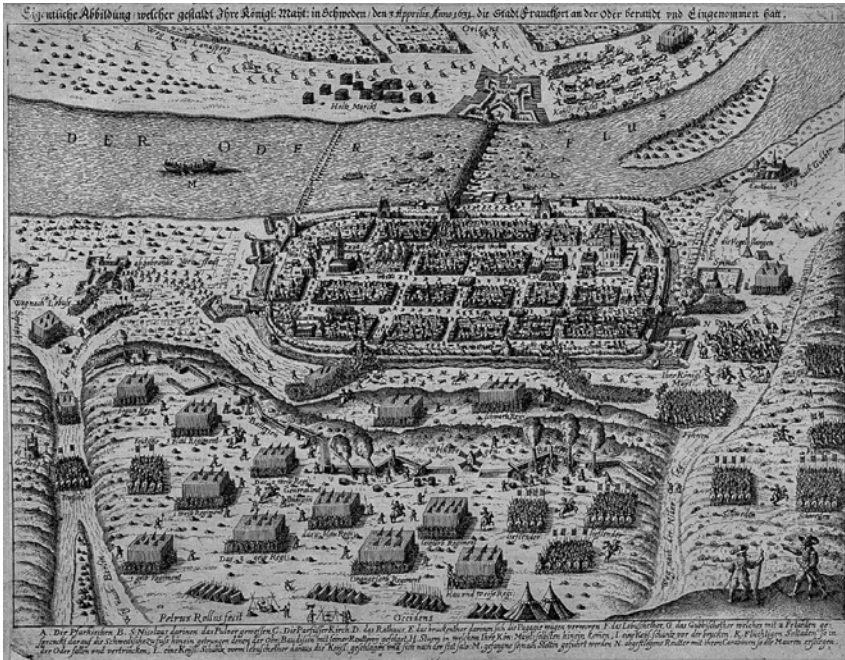


of words. Initial reactions register surprise and concern, although much depends on the occasion of the writing. ‘Telegraphic’ best describes the account posted in an epistolary insert by Albrecht Christoph von Krosigk, Hofmarschall of Dessau to Louis I of Anhalt-Köthen, lord of the principality of Anhalt published by G. Krause (1862, 166). The ‘bloody and fiery conquest’, it said, had just occurred. The news had just arrived from Wittenberg, some thirty kilometers away from the writer; and if the latter city’s Martin Luther connection affected feelings about a presumed Protestant triumph over the imperial forces, none of that comes through here. Instead, we are told, in a short time the batteries made a breach in the wall ‘as wide as two horse carts’, through which the Swedes rushed in and thereupon sacked and torched the town. The day of the attack on the city is given as Tuesday, due (the nineteenth-century editor suggests) to having mistaken the third for the fifth of the month, which cannot be accounted for by the difference between Julian and Gregorian calendar dating, which latter form would give the thirteenth and the fifteenth. Much is missing here that appears elsewhere.

A dispatch from the grand ducal Medici representative in Vienna, Niccolò Sacchetti, dated 19 April and addressed to grand ducal secretary Balì Cioli, contained the following postscript: “Hoggi mentre stavamo alla Cappella è venuto avviso che Svezia si sia reso padrone di Francofort all’Odra”. Details again are the bare minimum: “Vi era dentro il Colonello Sciamburgh et il Tiffenpoch, et il Montecucoli, e gli forzati hanno lasciato il posto per non restar tutti prigionii o tagliati a pezzi” (Florence, Archivio di Stato, Mediceo del Principato, MS 4384). The writer goes on, explaining the wider ramifications of the capture of a “piazza di gran conseguenza, perché adesso che le resta alle spalle la Pomerania et la Marcha, ha libero il transito nella Slesia ogni volta che vuole”. Moreover, “con l’occasione di questa perdita, dicesi che molte compagnie di Fanteria et di Cavalleria siano restati disfatti”. He signs off with a vaguely ominous forecast: “Questa mala nuova perfezionerà del tutto, per quello che dipenderà di qua, l’accomodamento delle cose d’Italia”.

Over the days and weeks, there is agreement on basic elements. The arrival of the Swedish forces into the vicinity, the destruction of the suburbs, the initial volleys of cannon fire, the flight of the garrison to the opposite side of the city, the smashing of the Guben Door, the attempt of troops and inhabitants to escape across the Oder, the failure to access the blocked bridge, the drowning en masse in the river, the sacking of the city. Indeed, most of these elements appear in the numerous relevant prints, which add explanatory or narrative elements all their own.

For instance, the engraving by Peter Rollos the Elder [fig. 1] presumably came out shortly after the event, showing a bird’s eye view of the city and surrounding territory, with the orientation shifted,



**Figure 1** Engraving of the city of Frankfurt an der Oder, entitled *Eigentliche Abbildung welcher gefalst ihre Königl. Mayt: in Schweden den 3. Aprilis Anno 1631 die Stadt Franckfort an der Oder berandt und Eingenommen hatt*, by Peter Rollos the Elder, located at the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel

relative to geographical coordinates; so the river is above, not to the east. The Swedish regiments outside are arranged separately in neat blocks and labeled according to their distinctive colors – Orange, Blue, Yellow, Blue/White, etc. – with separate sections of “Lief-lander”, i.e. Swedish Livonians, and of Finns. Near the latter we find a figure designated as ‘His Royal Highness’, with sword raised, and horse rearing up for easy recognition, charging with the cavalry from the right. The sequence of events is of course adjusted to the format. While the Guben Door is being blasted on the right-hand (i.e. South) side, troops are swarming in through the Lebisch Door in the left-hand, i.e. Northern wall, and at the top (East), people in flight are gathering at the bridge and dot the surface of the river. Not all is aggression and combat. Here and there we perceive moments of relaxation, where cooks are turning roasts on spits over fires. In the foreground, on a cliff high above the action two officers look on, one pointing to the action at the city doors.

Slightly later is an image showing the same scene in a more dramatic light [fig. 2], with finer artistic qualities but conveying basically



Figure 2 Engraving of the city of Frankfurt an der Oder, by Matthäus Merian the Elder, from M. Merian, *Theatrum Europaeum* (Frankfurt am Main: M. Merian, 1633), vol. 2, facing p. 350

the same ideas, including the layout with the river at the top. The engraver is Matthäus Merian the Elder, and a first version of the print we find in vol. 2 of the *Theatrum Europaeum* published in Frankfurt am Main (i.e. the other Frankfurt, no relation) by the same Merian in 1633. What a difference two years make! We leave to the auctioneers a discussion of the value added by hand coloring in some extant copies, and to the geographers a verification of whether the city actually lies on a slight incline as shown here. The gently undulating landscape certainly contributes to the sensation of movement we get from the action-filled foreground, where a group of outsized cavalry is charging down upon a city already surrounded by thousands of invading troops.

Narrations produced relatively close to the events emphasise or characterise different elements, depending on the available information and point of view. Discrepancies in the various accounts may derive either from printers' errors or from the use of different sources. To be sure, there is no telling which of these explanations best fits the use of the expression "Gulisch Door" in the *Außführlicher Bericht*

*und Gründliche Beschreibung* (1631) instead of the correct terms Guben or Gubenisch door. And contrasting numbers and quantities can be important indicators, but only when traceable. For instance, Friedrich Spanheim's *Soldat Suedois* (1633, 36) recounts how the entry of troops following destruction of the door was facilitated by the Swedes swivelling around three outward-facing culvers guarding the door, in order to point inward to the city. We would therefore probably have to look further to find the source for Gualdo's mention of only two. Again the *Historische Chronick Oder Warhaffste Beschreibung* (Abelinus 1633) gives 7,000 Imperials guarding the city, whereas Gualdo gives 6,000, which is more like the 5,000-6,000 counted by the *Außführlicher Bericht*. Enseigns seized by the Swedes are given in the *Warhafftige und auszufehrliche Relation* (1631), as 41 and in the periodical *Relation oder Bericht aus Pommern* (1631) as only 40, a detail not mentioned in Gualdo at all.

Most of this writing, including Gualdo's, remained, one might say, more or less in alignment with the basic trend of the age, eventually criticised so sharply by Gino Benzoni and Sergio Bertelli, of contemporary histories being written by the victors, or at least, by the victors' minions, or those seeking to become such, or even those following the general flow of battle reporting from the viewpoint of captains and kings who prefer winners to losers (Bertelli 1973; Benzoni 1996). Deprecations of war and strife are no more absent in Gualdo than they were, say, in Guicciardini. But the criticism usually falls on specific characters for having waged war incompetently or failed to defend their people sufficiently.

Contrary voices did indeed occur, and the century's catastrophes inspired a powerful critique of warfare, not only regarding the single occurrences but regarding war per se (Paret 1997; Wintersteiner 2019), in the visual realm (think of Rubens and Callot) as well as in the literary - for instance Grimmelshausen. The human propensity for violence and destruction, Erich Maria Remarque once implied, forever runs up against the opposite tendency to quiet and compassion; and if the former propensity claims a throng of enthusiastic votaries, so also does the latter. Meanwhile, in the thinking of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), war can no more be eliminated than can the state, its primary *raison d'être*.

A particular preoccupation of the earlier accounts, conveyed in different ways, was the story of a dead goose. The most detailed version comes from the *Kurtze und in Particulari einkommene Relation* (1631, 7 of 13), and takes the following form. Among the Swedish troops preparing to dig in their positions around the town, some 150 are killed by gunfire and flaming objects from the town's defenses. Instead of responding in kind, the Swedish batteries for the moment remain silent. From this the inhabitants conclude that the 'pieces' of artillery are fewer and less dangerous than anticipated. So,

Sintemahl Ihrer Königliche Majestät nach der in freien Felde gehörten predigt, (dergleichen wegen grossen Sermens in der Stadt nicht geschehen), sondern dafür Ihrer Majestät zum despect eine Gans uber den Wall mit nachfolgenden auszuglichen Worten ausgehenktet worden: Ihr Strunkenfresser wo habt ihr die Stucke gelassen? Habt Sie gewiss in der Comiss verfressen.

Just after His Majesty was hearing a sermon in the field (of the kind not being held in town due to big speeches there), to spite him a goose was hung over the wall and they shouted these exact words: You drunkard where did you leave the pieces? Surely you ate them up with the rations.

The double-entendre makes the phrase a cutting reference to Gustavus's tactics. We are reminded of a picture shown by the inhabitants of the city of Ostende during the Eighty Years' War by the Walloon and Burgundian soldiers, showing a fat porcupine (recalling the nickname of the ravelin) being fed abundant lettuce, intended to annoy the famished pro-Spanish besiegers (MdP 4256, 1604).

The Frankfurt goose of course is more than a goose. There are wider ramifications. As used in the relevant accounts, the story serves to suggest that some kind of provocation came from the town, thus explaining the remarkable ferocity of the siege and sack. Gualdo does not go this far, and leaves out the whole episode, but his admiration for Gustavus is palpable, and his orientation is to explain what he sees as a heroic action. Against such an interpretation and the various cognates placing more or less blame on the town, another set of writings, already in the weeks following the siege, seek to bare the open wounds of war, so to speak, for all to see. A case in point is the pamphlet, called *Rettunge der Warheit Auß Historischer Relation deß Vorlauffs bey Beläger* (The Rescue of Truth by a Historical Account of the Course of the Siege and Conquest), which attempts to set the record straight. Penned by Cyriacus Herdesianus (1631), a law professor in the university of Frankfurt an der Oder, the printing appears to have taken place in the aftermath of the events, using whatever equipment still remained intact under the urban rubble.

Herdesianus, among his many scholarly works, had also contributed an oration on *Icon Animorum* (The Image of Souls) asking about how the different mentalities of different sorts of people might be reconciled for the public good. When considering the values to be cherished or scorned, and the relevant courses of action to be taken or ignored, he remonstrated, "in summa felicitatis ac gloriae parte ponimus, hostes stravisse nostros, moenia demoliri, arces vel urbes occupare, partamque armis famam et potentiae incrementum ad posteros trastulisse, sed parum studiosi" (we place the greatest emphasis on our people crushing the enemy, destroying city walls, occupying ca-

stles and cities, taking possession of towers, and being able to transmit to posterity the renown of our military exploits, but we pay little attention to those who study) (Herdesianus 1619, fol. A3v), in spite of the sacrifices and self-abnegation.

The siege of Frankfurt offered a suggestive example – not only because of the role as a haven for scholars, at least since the university's founding in 1506. In present times the human propensity for violence seemed to be hideously on view here. Cyriacus takes aim against prior accounts that seemed to blame the victims not the victors. No possible taunts or insults hurled at the invading force could justify the experiences imposed on an innocent population. "Mit was für Furcht! Ja mit was für Schrecken, Tumult unnd geschrey beydes der Sieghaften Schweden als der uber-rundenen Käyserlichen alle Platze, Gaffen unnd Winkel der Stadt durch unnd durch erfüllet, ist unmöglich zu erzehlen" (The fear! The terror, tumult and cries, are impossible to recount, as the advancing Swedes as well as the Imperials filled all the squares, streets and alleyways, through and throughout the city) (fol. B3v). Extraction of booty was only an excuse for wanton aggression against the weak and meek, with

die blosse Degen und Musqueten den Einwhonern auf die Brust gesetzt, und also Geld herauß zwingen und dringen wollen die gemächter Kisten, Kasten, Gewelber, Keller, Stälte, Kammern, Apoteken, etc. durchsuchet, zerschlagen, zerhawen, ausgelähret, was vergraben auß der Erden herfür gesucht, den Haußrath zerschmissen und zerbrochen [...] und sonsten viel ehrlich Mann und ehrliebende Matronen gestossen und heftig geschlagen.

swords and muskets pressed to the breasts of the villagers to force money out; crates, boxes, vaults, cellars, stables, chambers, cabinets, etc., being forced open, searched, smashed, cut, emptied, whatever might be buried in the earth was sought out; household furniture smashed and broken [...] and many honest men and loving matrons struck and beaten. (Fol. B4v)

Gualdo never buys into the culpability narrative, but townsmen appear to exist for him mainly as objects to be handled or exchanged by the major players in his story, because he has a much bigger point to make. As quoted above, his intention is 'to gain an understanding of political behaviour and military matters, through deeds and words'. And in this period there seemed few things more urgent. As a soldier he intuitively grasped what Clausewitz would say in book 1, chapter 6 of his work *Vom Kriege* (On War) (1832-34), namely, that information was the basis on which success or failure depends, and failure to wage war well was a catastrophe for all concerned. With the entire world at war, and states being made and broken as rare-

ly in recent memory, finding a key to unlock the past and somehow save the future seemed more important than any other more immediate concerns.

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