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Studies in Ottoman Naval History and Maritime Geography

Svat Soucek



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the introduction is to briefly sketch the background of the events discussed in greater detail in the articles included in this collection. The Ottoman Empire became a naval power in the course of the 15th century, by virtue of both geographical and historical circumstances. Its political center of gravity was in an eminently maritime area – at the juncture of the Mediterranean and Black Seas, with an expanding territory lined by long coasts studded with harbors and anchorages. It also fell heir to a reservoir of seafaring populations, an amalgam of earlier autochthonous mariners and the more recently arrived pre-Ottoman Turks who during the 14th century had engaged the sea with their coastal conquests and *gazi*-corsair¹ forays throughout the Aegean.² The Ottomans were the first Turks to cross the Dardanelles and start expanding their territory on the European side of the Straits. After its transitory possession in 1354 they definitively seized Gallipoli in 1376 and began to develop it as their premier naval base. Gallipoli retained this status for the duration of the Ottoman Empire, although in terms of size and importance it was overshadowed by the imperial arsenal founded by Selim I at Kasımpaşa in 1518.

The first naval war fought by the Ottoman Turks was with Venice in 1415-1416. It took place off Gallipoli in the Dardanelles, and Venetians were the winners. The clash had occurred through a misunderstanding, and the Turkish defeat was not catastrophic. The goals of the Serenissima were moderate: a return to peace and restoration of the *status quo* rather any conquests or drastic concessions was what she wanted. Barring a few exceptions, this attitude was to persist throughout the long history of the Republic's relations with the Ottoman Empire. The 1415-1416 war with Venice was also the only one which the Ottoman Empire lost; all the others, with a few partial exceptions, ended with peace treaties which whittled away the Republic's once extensive maritime empire in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean.

The second Turco-Venetian war lasted from 1463 to 1479 and ended with the session of the Republic's several insular possessions in the Aegean to the Ottoman Empire.

¹ *Gazi* is the Turkish form of the Arabic *ghazi*, a Muslim engaged in the holy war, *gaza*.

² Already at the end of the 11th century there had been a brief precedent when the Seljuk prince Çaka Bey and his *gazis* established a short-lived principality on the Aegean coast and the island of Lesbos (Midilli).

In 1499, the third Turco-Venetian war broke out, and by the time of its conclusion in 1502 victorious Turkey had gained the status of a major naval power. The Ottoman sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512) launched this war because he knew the time was right for completing the conquest of Greece which his father, Mehmet II, had achieved three decades earlier. The conqueror of Constantinople had overwhelmed that country in 1460-1461, and had followed this up in 1470 by adding the Venetian-held island of Euboea to his expanding empire. Several ports and coastal fortifications, however, escaped the Turkish conquest, and these all formed part of the Venetian maritime domains; the most important were Lepanto, Navarino, Modon, Koron, and Nauplia. Bayezid's campaign gained the first four for the Ottomans; only Nauplia had to wait until its turn came in 1540.

It does not appear that Venice expected to be attacked when a large Turkish fleet under Küçük Davud Paşa sailed from Gallipoli in May 1499. Since her defeat in the 1463-1479 war, the republic had refrained from initiating any conflict with the Ottoman Empire; for trade, not territorial expansion, was what she wished to pursue in her relations with the mighty Muslim neighbor. Instead, it was the Knights of St. John at Rhodes who feared they might be the target, and thus appealed for help to France, their strongest link in Europe. On the other hand, Venice's policy was different in Italy; there, she participated in what was becoming a prolonged and shifting mosaic of European alliances and wars over territory and influence. This reflected the disunity of Christian Europe in the face of Muslim expansion, a disunity that was gaining dramatic proportions. Venice and France were momentary allies who divided the conquered Duchy of Milan between them, with the tacit approval of Pope Alexander VI Borgia. The opposition this provoked on the part of others, including the Habsburg emperor Maximilian I and the King of Naples Frederick IV, generated a string of envoys to the Ottoman sultan with suggestions that an attack on Venice would not be unwelcome; some even offered financial support. Bayezid II was willing to oblige, both on account of this opportune political configuration and because of a lingering apprehension: the king of France Charles VIII had been known to be planning a crusade, and Bayezid feared that Louis XII might do likewise, especially if he continued his predecessor's designs on the kingdom of Naples as a step toward that goal.¹

Venice wished to preserve peace with the Ottoman Empire, and then to quickly restore it once war had broken out. She had an additional reason for accommodation or even cooperation with the Porte. Their common interests

¹ Louis may have been using the crusade as a convenient pretext for dividing up this kingdom, with Ferdinand II of Aragon, as many suspected and as happened in 1501-1504.

were threatened by the Portuguese irruption into the Indian Ocean and the looming deflection of the spice trade from the Near Eastern-Mediterranean route to the all-maritime Cape of Good Hope-Atlantic route, and the Serenissima was sending messages of alarm on this matter to the Sublime Porte. Thus after the surrender of Lepanto to the Turks, Venice dispatched an envoy, Luigi Maventi, to Istanbul in the hope that by acknowledging this loss she might persuade the sultan to end the hostilities, but Bayezid replied: "If you wish to make peace with me, you must surrender Modon, Koron, and Nauplion in the Morea, and send us an annual tribute".

The war lasted three years, but the principal events occurred in 1499 and 1500. In 1499, Lepanto was conquered; the next year, the same fate befell Modon, Koron, and Navarino; several points on the Dalmatian coast, with Durazzo as the most valuable prize, were also seized from Venice. While in the first two years the republic faced her adversary alone, in 1501 and 1502 a crusade was organized by the Pope. Besides the papal states and Venice herself, Spain and France joined the campaign. The crusade achieved little. The only noteworthy effort made by Venice's allies was an ultimately unsuccessful French siege of Mytilene, the fortified chief town and port of the island of Lesbos, in 1501. The choice of this target was characteristic of the divergence of interests plaguing such alliances: the Venetians had suggested, as the target, the strategically important harbor of Valona, an Ottoman possession since 1417, but the French preferred Mytilene, a port and island "moult riche, fertile et prenable".¹ The peace treaty that the two original adversaries signed on 14 December 1502 ratified all the gains made by the Turks, with one concession to Venice, namely the recovery of the island of Cephalonia in the Ionian Sea (Venetian possession, 1350-1479, 1502-1797).

The war of 1499-1502 demonstrated the growing strength of the Ottoman navy. The Turks won their first major battle against the great naval power that was Venice when the two opponents clashed off the island of Prodano/Proti (named Burak adası by the Turks, after Burak Reis, the heroic *gazi*-corsair who perished in this battle) in August 1499. It was this victory that enabled the Ottoman fleet to proceed north toward Lepanto, already besieged from the landward side; once he saw the approaching fleet, the Venetian governor surrendered. Noteworthy also was the participation of Turkish *gazi*-corsairs, with Kemal Reis as the most prominent among these. In 1495 Sultan Bayezid had summoned him to assume an official position in government service, creating a precedent that would have beneficial and lasting

¹ Jean d'Auton, *Chroniques de Louis XII*, ed. R. de Maulde La Clavière, v. 2, Paris 1981, p. 156, cited by N. Vatin, "Le Siège de Mitilène (1501)", in *Turcica* 21-23 (1992), p. 437, and reprinted in *Analecta Isistiana*, no. 51, N. Vatin, *Les Ottomans et l'occident (XVe-XVIIe siècles)*, Istanbul 2001, p. 9.

consequences for the Ottoman navy. Although Davud Paşa, a man of the palace establishment, had the overall command of the Ottoman fleet in this campaign, Kemal Reis was not only the most effective commander in the battle, but as a *gazi*-corsair he was one of those leading figures in the Ottoman maritime expansion and naval history whose contributions were marked by their initiative and strategic vision. The role of Kemal Reis indeed went beyond the actual fighting role, for he acted as a kind of consultant to the sultan, advising him which places to conquer. Koron and Modon, called by him the “two eyes of Venice”, were at the top of a list that also included places like Rhodes and Corfu. Another aspect of this role, invisible on the official level but perhaps even more crucial, was the fact that in the three decades of their careers as seafaring *gazis*, Kemal Reis and his Turkish companions ventured farther west into the central and western Mediterranean, familiarizing themselves with the conditions and opportunities there. The growing presence of the Turkish maritime *gazis* along the coasts of North Africa, especially those of Tunisia and Algeria, prepared the ground for the next generation of Turks who, led by Hayreddin Barbarossa, would in the reigns of Selim I (1512-1520) and Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) stave off the extension of the *reconquista* into North Africa, and instead play a catalytic role in incorporating this territory into the Ottoman Empire. Finally, among the Turkish maritime *gazis* led by Kemal Reis was his nephew Piri Reis, who on the basis of this experience later produced invaluable cartographic and hydrographic works (the *Kitab-i Bahriye* and two world maps) that gave the Ottoman maritime and naval achievements a special stature and international acclaim.

After the 1499-1502 war with Venice, the Ottoman sultan’s attention turned eastward and southward. The war with Egypt over the possession of Çukurova (Cilicia) had ended in 1491, and now their relationship took a totally different tack: the Mamluks were grappling with a new adversary, Portugal, and Bayezid was sending logistical help to them – both shipbuilding materials and expert seamen – to found and staff an arsenal at Suez, and to lead their fledgling fleet in war against the European intruders. Meanwhile Kemal Reis and his nephew Piri Reis with their companions did not wholly abandon their original pursuit of maritime *gaza* (holy war) in the Mediterranean, as indirect evidence in the *Kitabi Bahriye* suggests.

Bayezid died in 1512, one year after the death of Kemal Reis. On the military level, although land wars in the Balkans, on the frontier with the Ottoman Empire’s main target, Christian Europe, remained the *leitmotif* of the imperial and religious expansion of the sultans in their empire’s prime period, Bayezid is remembered chiefly for extending or consolidating the

empire's maritime frontier in campaigns in which the fleet played a critical role – the 1484 conquest of Kilia and Akkerman on the northwestern coast of the Black Sea, and that of Lepanto, Navarino, Modon and Koron in 1499-1502. These victories had great economic as well as strategic significance. Customs duties on trade passing through these ports brought the sultan welcome revenues, and the ports could also function as naval bases. The conquest of Kilia and Akkerman reinforced the process of turning the Black Sea into an Ottoman lake, while that of Lepanto and the other three placed the empire not only on the coasts of the Ionian and Adriatic Seas, but also closer to the critical passage between the eastern and western Mediterranean. These victories were made possible by the energetic expansion of the Turkish navy undertaken by Bayezid II. The resources of the empire dwarfed those of Venice and continued to grow with its expanding coastline in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, multiplying the number of shipbuilding sites, some backed by timber-rich hinterland. Thus in terms of geo-strategic, material and human resources, the Ottoman Empire would soon surpass any other Mediterranean power. By 1512, the terminal year of Bayezid's reign's, the empire's coastal frontage was longer than that of this sea's any other riparian state.

Leaving aside these gains, it may be worthwhile to examine the nature of the Turco-Venetian war of 1499-1502 in terms of its purpose and ultimate effects. A striking and many-faceted imbalance between the two adversaries faces us here. An already huge, primarily land-focused warrior empire challenges a small, essentially maritime and commercial republic, in a dispute over what at first looks like almost no territory at all – just a few fortified ports. Their economic and strategic value was considerable, however, and was the main reason why the Serenissima wanted to retain them. Venice needed them and used them as vital stations in her commerce spanning much of the eastern Mediterranean, and as bases for her fleets protecting this seaborne trade that was the economic lifeblood of the republic. By 1499, she had learned the lesson gained from the 1463-1479 war that it was wiser not to provoke her mighty neighbor, and peace with Turkey was henceforth her lasting preference. In contrast, the Ottoman sultan had no need for peace if the circumstances allowed him to resume the empire's march forward, and his father's conquest of Greece remained unfinished as long as Venice still possessed those valuable ports. The war was a completion of the land conquests that had taken place four decades previously, and the Turkish victory gave the Ottoman navy a chance to strengthen its position near a crucial intersection of the Mediterranean. So what about Bayezid's wish to develop the splendid strategic sites won in 1499 and 1500 as permanent bases for effective naval control of

the Adriatic, to use them as launching pads for penetration into the central Mediterranean, and to turn the eastern half of this sea into an Ottoman lake? To have his realm replace Venice also as a commercial seaborne empire? There is no evidence of such a policy. The strategic and economic dimension went as far as a desire to complete territorial conquests and to benefit from the lucrative nature of the conquered ports, but the Ottoman sultan did not take the extra steps that would have turned his realm into a seaborne merchant empire – nor did any of his successors.

A glance at a historical map shows that by 1537 the size of the tri-continental Ottoman Empire, as well as the length of its maritime frontier, had doubled within one-and-a-half generations, since the end of the last Venetian war in 1502. The sultans Selim I and Süleyman the Magnificent conquered Syria and Egypt (1517), Belgrade (1521), Rhodes (1522), the greater part of Hungary (1526), and Iraq (1535), and the *gazi*-corsair Hayreddin Barbarossa established Ottoman control over Algiers between 1518 and 1529. This phenomenal expansion also meant that with the exception of south-easternmost Spain and Morocco, and a transitory loss of Tunisia (1535-1574), almost the totality of Mediterranean coasts inhabited by Muslims came under Ottoman rule. The empire's naval power had grown exponentially with further integration of *gazi* corsairs into the sultan's navy, the generation of those corsairs following Kemal Reis who took the center stage of the imperial fleet with Hayreddin Barbarossa. This corsair-turned-statesman and admiral rendered the empire invaluable service on two levels. Seizing power in Algiers and installing his own rule there, he presented it to Sultan Selim in 1518 as a new province of the empire; and becoming *kaptanpaşa* or commander of the Ottoman navy under Süleyman the Magnificent in 1533, he brought Ottoman sea power to a dominant position in the entire Mediterranean, a position that would last until the battle of Lepanto in 1571.¹ There were several reasons for this success: in the first place, the quality of seamen of Hayreddin's mold, men hardened in the searing adventure of the maritime *gaza*; secondly, the material and human resources of the Ottoman Empire, unmatched by any single European power; and lastly, the priceless advantage of unified command along the empire's maritime frontier, stretching from the Crimea to western Algeria. These assets should be projected against their reverse, the disunity of Christian Europe. Not only did it lack unity; the recurrent wars between the Habsburg Empire and France meant that even the third of the Mediterranean front that remained Christian was paralyzed by this internecine struggle, relegating defense against Muslim expansion to an uncertain and shifting place

¹ Or well beyond it, some historians would say, basing their view on the re-conquest of Tunis in 1574.

on this baffling chessboard. Nevertheless, when in 1537 the efforts of Pope Pius III (1534-1549) to effect what should have been a ten-year truce between Charles V and François I seemed to have succeeded, he managed to cobble together an alliance against the Turks. Its members were, besides the Papal States, the Hispano-Sicilian segment of the Habsburg Empire, Portugal, Genoa, and a reluctant Venice, while France was of course absent.

On the Turkish side, Hayreddin advised the sultan to seize the initiative by conquering the island of Corfu, thereby completing the Ottoman hold on the eastern side of the strategically vital Strait of Otranto. In September 1537 the moment was propitious, for the allied fleet under Andrea Doria had withdrawn to Messina and other bases farther west, leaving Venice to face the assault alone. The siege was graced by the presence of Süleyman the Magnificent, who camped with his land troops on the shore facing the island. The island was easily occupied, but the fortified chief city and port put up a stiff resistance. The Venetian navy did not dare to engage the Turkish fleet, which was commanded by the best seaman of the age. After a siege of some three weeks, the enterprise had come close to succeeding, when the sultan ordered withdrawal despite the protestations of his admiral that the fortress was on the verge of falling.

The first stage of the 1537-1538 war thus concluded with a Venetian success, albeit a defensive one. The real naval confrontation with the alliance occurred in 1538, when between 25 and 28 September a Christian fleet composed of Spanish, Portuguese, Papal, Genoese, and Venetian units, under the command of Andrea Doria, clashed with the Turkish fleet led by Hayreddin Barbarossa. It happened between Prevesa, a fortress on the Greek coast, and the island of Lefkas (Santa Maura) some six kilometers farther south. The Turkish fleet, although smaller, won. The victory should be attributed to Hayreddin's brilliant leadership and the quality of the Turkish mariners, but also to the chronic ailment of Christian alliances – in this case the uncertain cooperation between Andrea Doria, commander of the Spanish contingent, and Grimani, captain of the Venetian ships.

In 1570, the Ottoman Empire was basking in the conviction, largely shared by friend and foe alike, that it was the strongest naval power in the Mediterranean. Three conquests and several spectacular cruises of the imperial fleet as a player in Catholic Europe's power politics instilled respect for the

Turks and fear of them throughout the Christian community.¹ The Turkish success continued to be abetted by the chronic ailment of European Christendom: not only was Catholic Europe divided as ever, but France had even become, since the 1530s, Turkey's ally, and would remain so for a long time. The French sovereign may have flattered himself with the title "The Most Christian King", but this did not prevent François I from seeking Süleyman the Magnificent's alliance in his quarrels with the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. The alliance led in 1543 to the unprecedented appearance of the *donanma-yi hümayun*, the Ottoman imperial fleet led by its *kaptanpaşa* Hayreddin Barbarossa, along the coasts of western Italy and southern France with demonstrations off Genoa and Nice as an ally of France; this fleet would then spend the winter of 1543-1544 in the harbor of Toulon. The Franco-Turkish friendship continued under France's next monarch, Henry III, when in 1558 the Ottoman fleet under Piyale Paşa cruised through the whole expanse of the western Mediterranean, with a descent on the Balearic island of Minorca as the most conspicuous of the raids undertaken during the cruise.

Throughout these three decades Venice and Turkey lived in mutual peace. Both appreciated the lively trade between them; the republic, although deprived by the last war of several valuable key outposts of her maritime empire, still owned part of it – Corfu, Crete and Cyprus being the most prominent components; but what she valued most were agreements with the Porte that allowed her to carry on trade throughout the Ottoman possessions. Venice had accepted the dominant position of the Turkish navy in the eastern Mediterranean as a fact she had to live with. The one persistent trouble was piracy, both Muslim and Christian – and of several hues, each of which demanded a special approach on the part of peaceful traders and travelers. By 1570, the Muslim corsairs of Algiers and their Christian counterparts of Malta had gained fame (or notoriety) as the most efficient and dangerous. Each side claimed a lofty religious cause to legitimate its livelihood, and in each case a premier Mediterranean power made an attempt to eliminate it. The Emperor Charles V attacked Algiers with a large fleet as early as 1541, but failed;

¹ The reader may point out a contradiction in this argument, and it is a glaring one. If there was fear of the Turks throughout the Christian community, how could the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor and lesser princes send hints to the Porte that an attack against their Christian rivals would be welcome? How could the Catholic King of France become Turkey's ally against the great champion of the Catholic religion, Charles V? The answer is that there was fear on the popular level, and a latent commitment to unite and fight the Turk; this, however, was virtually paralyzed by two factors: the elites were far more committed to fighting each other in their dynastic and feudal wars, and concurrently with the apogee of the Ottoman expansion during the 16th and 17th centuries, the Catholic – Protestant split took center stage on the ideological level. Both factors combined to relegate war with the Ottoman Empire to a place of secondary importance.

Süleyman the Magnificent's fleet under Piyale Paşa besieged Malta in 1565 and failed as well. Both sovereigns, the Habsburg and the Ottoman, may have considered these Mediterranean targets important, but none the less secondary. For Charles, the feudal and dynastic war with France, and for Philip II – his son and successor on the Spanish throne – suppression of the heretical Protestants in Germany, the Netherlands and France (and, eventually, the “Great Enterprise” against Elizabeth I of England), took center stage, absorbing their kingdoms' major resources; for Süleyman, the holy war in Hungary against Charles's brother Ferdinand I, and curbing the schismatic Safavids in Iran had a similar priority.

In this welter of multifaceted conflicts and preoccupations, Venice endeavored to preserve peace with the Ottoman Empire and carry on her business of overseas trade and ownership of two colonies, Crete and Cyprus. It was thus an unpleasant though not quite unexpected surprise when in April 1570 she received a formal demand from the Porte that the latter island be ceded to the Ottoman Empire. The Signoria refused, and a war broke out that passed through two phases: Cyprus itself, whose conquest was achieved with the surrender of Famagusta in August 1571; and the war of the Holy League, which led to the defeat of the Turkish fleet by that of the Christian alliance a month later at Lepanto. The alliance undertook further campaigns in the following year, but disunity thwarted their effective realization, so that in the end Venice was facing the Ottoman Empire alone and had to accept a peace treaty which acknowledged the loss of Cyprus and “looked as if the Turks had won the battle of Lepanto”. A large segment of modern historiography concurs, and views the Christian victory as an event without importance. This opinion appears to be supported by the astoundingly fast rebuilding of the Ottoman fleet after its destruction at Lepanto, and the recovery of Tunis, occupied by the Spaniards under Don Juan of Austria in 1573, in the course of the following year when the new fleet under Sinan Paşa expelled them and reestablished Ottoman rule over this strategically important North African country. In other words, the Battle of Lepanto notwithstanding, the dominant position of the Ottoman Empire as a naval power in the Mediterranean would seem to have been reestablished or even enhanced during the reign of Selim II (1566-74), thanks to the conquest of Cyprus and the re-conquest of Tunis.

The reality may have been more complex and quite different, however. The rebuilding of the Turkish fleet within a year after Lepanto demonstrated the vast resources and organizational genius of the Ottoman Empire, but not the fleet's effectiveness, for it was never again tested in full-fledged naval battles with major opponents. New confrontations with an allied fleet did not occur, because the Christian adversaries' disunity led to the virtual

abandonment of the eastern Mediterranean to the Ottomans. Similarly, the reconquest of Tunis took place without any real clash, for Don Juan had by then left with the major part of the Spanish fleet, so that the Turks easily reduced the Spanish garrison in Goletta and occupied the city. Tunis had the potential to be developed as a first-rate naval base and a lucrative emporium at the strategic crossroads of the Mediterranean, but again the Porte showed no interest in using this unique site for such purposes. 1574, the year of the reconquest, while seemingly marking Ottoman naval mastery of the Mediterranean, was in fact the closing date of its effective presence west of the Sicilian Narrows. A special and equally revealing significance in this context can be seen in the failure of the 1565 siege of Malta, home of the militant corsair knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, who, as Maltese Knights, became a scourge of Muslim shipping in the central and eastern Mediterranean. The island's conquest could have turned Malta from being a thorn in the Ottoman Empire's flank into a priceless link in a string of naval bases, from Navarino to Tunis, guarding the eastern Mediterranean and turning it into an Ottoman lake. Its conquest admittedly would have been arduous, but should have been possible if the empire had mounted an effort comparable to that made in the case of Cyprus. The fact that the attempt was never repeated is symptomatic of the Porte's lack of interest in this projection of imperial strategy.

The peace that marked Ottoman-Venetian relations between 1573 and 1645 coincided with the irruption of the North Atlantic maritime powers – chiefly England, Holland, and France – into what had previously been the two states' almost exclusive maritime domain. This was a complex phenomenon, with implications on several levels. Much was new: the types of ship, their armaments, naval strategy, and commercial policy. In all these respects, the Europeans from the North Atlantic overshadowed the Venetians and the Turks, and their superiority would only grow. Venice saw her commercial dominance in the eastern Mediterranean surpassed by that of the newcomers, and the Ottoman Empire recognized them as commercial partners and mariners whose naval power would make them both unbeatable and exploitable in the 18th century.

Nevertheless, in the 17th century Venice and Turkey still pursued their time-honored goals: seaborne trade and retention of the remnants of her colonial empire in the case of the former, expansion of Ottoman territory in the case of the latter. When in 1645 preparations in Istanbul for a major naval campaign were reported by the republic's *bailo*, the Serenissima's government hoped that some other place was to be the target, preferably Malta. Crete, however, was the Porte's choice. The island was easily overrun by the Turkish

troops, but the fortified capital, Candia (Heraklion) offered a resistance that lasted until 1669. This 25-year defense, which amazed Europe and elicited her grudging admiration, could not have persisted if the Turkish navy had retained at least some of its erstwhile prowess. Instead, the war of 1645-1669 demonstrated the opposite of what the war of 1499-1502 had done: it signaled the end of the Ottoman Empire's status as a major naval power.

The war was also significant in other respects. While the Cyprus campaign had goaded even a truncated part of Catholic Europe to form a Holy League, and thus still appeared as a confrontation between Christendom and Islam, no such thing happened this time. The religious dimension on the European side had shifted its emphasis toward the struggle between Reformation and Counterreformation, and the impact of the Thirty Years' War, still raging in 1645, vastly overshadowed the image of Venice as a Christian nation under attack by the Turk. Moreover, pragmatic considerations with respect to Turkey began to dominate the policies of the Atlantic powers, especially the Protestant ones. Trade took precedence over religion, and, like Venice, these new Europeans wanted to do business with the Ottoman Empire, not to fight it. It is significant that none of the Turkish wars that included naval confrontations involved any of the Atlantic powers, and that commercial shipping between them and Turkey continued even during the empire's wars with Venice or, later, with Russia. The following exception confirms this rule. The sympathy that Venice's heroic defense inspired in England made Oliver Cromwell allow Admiral Blake to destroy the Tunisian squadron, summoned by the Porte to join the war, at its anchorage in Porto Farina (Ghār al-Milh) in 1655; the Protector forbade Blake, however, to proceed farther east to the Ottoman home waters, lest the trading privileges of the Levant Company be harmed.

The laborious nature of Crete's conquest notwithstanding, the outcome raised the gigantic dimensions of the Ottoman Empire still one notch higher, and in theory at least, completed its mastery of the eastern Mediterranean. Had the Porte in 1669 decided not only to modernize its navy but also to expand and protect its mercantile marine, to invest the empire's resources in the commercial arena and emulate the western powers by supporting Turkish merchants engaged in seaborne trade, the history of the Mediterranean – and of the Ottoman Empire – might have taken a different course. The potential was, indeed, enormous. The maritime frontier extended over a vast expanse from the Crimea in the east to Egypt in the south and Algeria in the west. Moreover, the Porte, with its control of the Red Sea all the way to Yemen and Habeş (northeastern Ethiopia), might have deemed the time right for re-engaging the Indian Ocean. A re-conquest of Aden (evacuated in 1630) would have been a

good way to start: if it had been accompanied by a reaffirmation of the Ottoman hold on Basra and the Lahsa coastline of the Persian Gulf, the Ottoman Empire should have been in a position to do what Europe (now chiefly Holland and England) was doing – fight for a share of the lucrative Orient trade, and found factories that in due course could have expanded into colonies. An extra dimension even favored the Turks there – they were Muslims, like the majority of the coastal populations of western India and Indonesia.

None of that happened, however. Instead of trying to re-conquer Aden, the Porte set its mind on making one more attempt to conquer Vienna. The 1683 effort was spearheaded by the grand vizier Kara Mustafa Paşa, burning with ambition to achieve what the great Süleyman the Magnificent had failed to do, and perhaps even to push through the infidel continent all the way to the Rhine.¹ In the midst of the commercial revolution and expansion of the 17th century spearheaded by Europe's North Atlantic powers, the *gaza* thus remained the Ottoman elite's guiding goal. Internecine warfare of course kept racking Christendom itself, divided as it was by religious schisms, dynastic quarrels, and the concomitant territorial wars. Yet this nightmare did not prevent Europe from becoming the center of intellectual and scientific progress, and from evolving into a continent of nation-states that were fiercely competitive on the economic and commercial levels. Competition included the domain of seaborne trade and overseas colonization. Against the background of the rise of modern Europe, the Ottoman policy was that of the odd man out, intent on pursuing a lost cause: the medieval *gaza*, and the preservation or expansion of a religious empire no longer viable in the modern world.

The Ottoman enterprise facilitated Pope Innocent XI's efforts to organize a Holy League against the Turks, and the war lasted sixteen years – from 1683 to 1699. The league, formed in 1684, consisted of the Holy See, the Habsburg Empire, Poland and Venice (noteworthy is the fact that within the chronological frame under discussion, this was the first and only time when the Signoria declared war on the Ottoman Empire – all the previous wars, as well as the final one that would take place in 1714-1718, were started by the Porte); in 1686 it was joined by Russia. The principal war theater was on land, and the defeat at the gates of Vienna led to the first massive Turkish retreat on European soil, for the Ottoman Empire lost the greater part of its Hungarian territory. Venice occupied the Peloponnese, while two dramatic battles were fought at sea for the possession of Chios. The Venetians seized

¹ Dorothy M. Vaughan, *Europe and the Turk: A Pattern of Alliances, 1350-1700*. Liverpool 1954, p. 268. "...He was said not only to have repeated Bayezid I's threat, that he would one day stable his horses in St. Peter's, but to intend, after capturing Vienna, to march on to the Rhine and match himself against the armies of Louis XIV."

this valuable island in late 1694, but its loss provoked a vigorous reaction in Istanbul, and the Porte made a strenuous effort to marshal its navy to confront the enemy. Naval victory reestablished Ottoman rule there, the only bright spot in the otherwise sorry course of the long war that wound up with the Peace of Karlowitz (1699). Several factors contributed to the Turkish success. One was the modernization of the fleet itself, which took place shortly before the outbreak of the war; another was the presence of a former Algerian corsair, Mezemorta Hüseyin (later *kaptanpaşa* of the imperial navy), who as commander of the newly formed squadron of the sailing warship class outmaneuvered and defeated his Venetian opponent; and lastly the geo-strategic nature of the whole enterprise: again, the Venetians were at a considerable disadvantage, for Chios was even closer than Crete to Ottoman home bases on the Anatolian coast and the two arsenals of Gallipoli and Kasımpaşa.

Despite the Turkish success at Chios, however, the overall naval confrontation between the two powers ended up in a draw, for the Turks failed to impose their mastery over the Aegean Sea and lost the Peloponnese with the valuable bases of Koron, Modon and Navarino, so triumphantly conquered two centuries earlier. Thus even the modernization of the Turkish navy and the presence of a very able North African captain did not manage to fully curb the navy of a weakening Venice in the Ottoman home waters. The elation at recovering Chios was dimmed by the Venetian conquest of the Peloponnese, whose loss might have been prevented had the Turkish navy passed from defense to offense. The best strategy would have been to shift the site of the confrontation to the Ionian and Adriatic Seas, where the Turks still possessed several excellent bases such as Lepanto, Prevesa, and Valona, but the Porte stopped short of using its navy in any such strategic way. In the contest with Venice, the main success consisted of recovering Chios as Ottoman territory, and the main grievance was the loss of the Peloponnese, which had similar status. Meanwhile the Porte paid only marginal attention to the latest spin-off of the Viennese enterprise, namely, war with Russia. The young tsar Peter joined the Holy League in 1686, for he saw here an opportunity to tackle a long-standing problem plaguing Russia on her southern frontier, the slave raids and exactions of the Crimean Tatars. The vision of this extraordinary monarch went farther, however. His goal was to reach the Black Sea and make Russia reap the dividends that would accrue from entering this channel, figuratively speaking, to the Mediterranean. The creation of a navy, conquest of the fortified port of Azov on the estuary of the Don River, and construction of a port and naval base on the waterfront of the Sea of Azov were the logical though modest first steps. In his time, they could not but be so, but they had validity as the foundations of things to come. A fleet was built in the wharves

of Voronezh on the Don: Azov was seized in a combined naval and land operation in 1697; and Taganrog on the Sea of Azov was founded as the first Russian naval base on the southern frontier. These developments may have aggrieved the Turks, but the degree of importance the Porte assigned them stayed well below the loss of Hungary to the Habsburgs and of the Peloponnese to the Venetians; more specifically, the recovery of Chios from Venice may have far outweighed, in the Porte's eyes, the loss of Azov to Russia.

The war of 1683-99, disastrous for the Ottoman Empire on land, thus also brought about the first breaches in its maritime frontier on the north. A decade later a new war with Russia broke out, in which the tsar himself took the command of his army. Peter crushed his opponent and Turkey's ally, the Swedish king Charles XII, at the battle of Poltava in 1709, and two years later he advanced through the Ukraine into Ottoman territory along the northwestern rim of the Black Sea. The tsar had overreached himself, however, and was surrounded by Turkish troops on the banks of the river Prut in Moldavia. He had to accept the return of Azov to the Ottoman Empire as the price of regaining his freedom. The situation was formalized by the Treaty of Edirne in 1713.

At that point a new grand vizier, Damad Ali Pasa, came to power, and his first ambition was to recover the Peloponnese, so that in December 1714 the Porte declared war on Venice. While Ottoman troops, invading the peninsula from mainland Greece, laid siege to the coastal sites from the landward side, the role of the navy was essential for the recovery of fortified coastal points. It was the last war to be fought between the Empire and the Republic, and as a fitting finale it included battles between large fleets entirely composed of ships of the line. The sum total of these battles fought from 1715 to 1718 could be considered a draw, but that alone brought the Turks positive dividends by hamstringing Venetian efforts to supply and support the beleaguered ports of the Peloponnese. Aside from the occupation of the hinterland that began with the seizure of the isthmus fortress of Corinth, the principal ports from Nauplion to Navarino were all taken in the summer of 1715. Had Venice fought the Ottoman Empire alone, she might have soon demonstrated her characteristic pragmatism and conceded defeat, resuming the seaborne trade that still was her primary pursuit. In 1716, however, the Habsburg Empire, fearing that the outcome might lead to Ottoman gains in Dalmatia, joined the war as the republic's ally, and Venice felt encouraged to fight on, but to little avail. With respect to regaining from Venice what had been given up at the Peace of Karlowitz, Turkey attained her goal: the Peace of Passarowitz, signed on 21 July 1718, reintegrated the peninsula into the Ottoman Empire.

The 1684-1699 and 1714-1718 wars are revealing in several respects. The modernization of the navy begun since the 1680s finally bore fruit, for the Turks proved able to face the Venetians no more as the underdogs they had been during the Cretan campaign; the reforms carried out by Mezemorta Hüseyin Paşa since the Chios campaign had further beneficial effects; and the participation of commanders and units from the North African regencies, when summoned to join the imperial fleet, continued to be invaluable. Although the Turks lost more ground on the Balkan front to the Austrians, their maritime frontier was restored to its peak length, and with the vibrant caravan trade to back it up, Ottoman seaborne trade should once again have had a chance to develop and grow, in partnership or competition with the European powers, from Venice to England. There is no evidence, however, that this kind of vision played a role in the Porte's decision to re-conquer the Peloponnese. Far from venturing into the maritime world beyond the range of the the imperial navy covering the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean, the government as well as private commerce stayed inward-focused, and increasingly availed themselves of the more reliable and safer shipping offered by the Atlantic powers, especially the French, even in their home waters.¹ This could not but have an adverse effect on the naval dimension of Turkish military strength, which, despite repeated efforts at modernization, would keep relapsing into stagnation or decline.

The return of Azov to the Ottoman Empire with the Peace Treaty of Edirne (1713) was accompanied by Peter the Great's abandonment of his efforts to establish a Russian naval presence on the Sea of Azov, and for the rest of his life he concentrated on the Baltic front. In spring 1736, however, Russia declared war on Turkey, or provoked her to take that step first (a matter of interpretation). The fact that this happened during the relatively placid reign of Anna (1730-1740), in contrast to the expansive reigns of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, shows that Russia's push southward went beyond the question of personalities and was due to the inner energy of a state aware of geo-strategic challenges and possibilities. Azov was quickly seized, and Russian troops even took the Ottoman-held Özi (Ochakov), stormed Orkapı (Perekop) and invaded the Crimean peninsula. Like Peter the Great in 1711, however, they had overreached themselves: problems of logistics compounded by long supply lines, Tatar harassment by means of a scorched earth policy, and outbreaks of plague forced the Russians to retreat; the only gain they retained was Azov, this time definitively. Meanwhile Austria joined the fray, but fared even less well than Russia. The Turks scored several victories, which

¹See Edhem Eldem, "Kontrolü kaybetmek: 18. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında doğu Akdeniz'de Osmanlı varlığı", in Özlem Kumrular, ed., *Türkler ve Deniz*, Istanbul 2007, pp. 63-78.

were then crowned by the recovery of Belgrade (Treaty of Belgrade, 1739). The return of this historic city, conquered by Süleyman the Magnificent in 1521, to the Ottoman fold may have seemed more important than the loss of Azov.

There followed a generation-long peace, during which the Ottoman Empire came a notch closer to acquiring the unique status of a great Muslim power that was also a respected and powerful member of the Christian European community. Although it did not emulate its European neighbors to become a seaborne trading and colonial empire, and though it still remained too alien to the other side's civilization to take part in its scientific, technological and, eventually, its industrial progress, the Ottoman state continued to demonstrate resilience and an ability to reform and improve its bureaucratic and social structure. This in turn enhanced the empire's economy and was one of the factors that would ultimately contribute to its phenomenal longevity. Moreover, a special advantage of the Ottoman Empire, repeatedly mentioned in my argument, was the internal unity within its huge area whose size rivaled that of western Europe. While France, Austria, Spain, Germany, England, Poland, Sweden, Russia and other members of that fierce playground fought each other in interminable wars, relative peace reigned within the Ottoman confines.¹ The wars the empire waged were external: against Shiite Iran on the east, Habsburg Austria on the west, and tsarist Russia on the north. The eastern front, on Muslim home ground, was heading toward a stalemate and ultimately a stabilization of relations between two Islamic powers, albeit separated by schism. In the west, the greater part of Ottoman territory was in the multi-denominational Christian Balkans, and the neighbor was the multiethnic Habsburg Empire of Austria. As a rule, the emperors were too busy fighting the kings of France, or getting embroiled in the quarrelsome community's power politics over such questions as the fate of Poland, for to wish a confrontation with the Turks. In the north, the Tatar khanate of Crimea, an Ottoman vassal, lay between the Turkish and Russian empires. With their slave raids in Slavic territories, the Tatars used to be a thorn in Russia's flank, but Peter the Great had succeeded in making the Porte persuade its vassals to scale down this activity. The khans, put to better use, rendered the sultans good service by lending their cavalry as auxiliaries in war; but the main value of the khanate, occupying not only the Crimean peninsula but also an extended swath of steppe land along the Black Sea's northern coast, was that it blocked Russia's access to the sea – or, to express it in more positive terms, that it played an important role in the preservation of the

¹ This political and administrative uniformity was not an unmixed blessing, however. The mutual competitiveness of Europe's new nation-states may have been one of the stimulating factors in the continent's rise toward its multi-faceted modernity.

Black Sea as an Ottoman lake. Moreover, the Pontic steppe was still virgin land, sparsely populated by mostly Muslim Tatar nomads. It thus beckoned to the Porte to be colonized and settled by Turkish agriculturists, craftsmen and merchants, consolidating Ottoman rule there. The benefits would have been great, for the empire could have expanded in the only truly realistic direction (as opposed, for example, to expansion in the Christian Balkans), permanently acquiring a territory that had great economic as well as strategic promise. As in the case of maritime strategy, however, such factors played a little or no role in the Porte's policy; instead, the tide of colonization and settlement would come from the north, and it would overwhelm this critical area.

In the two decades before 1768 Austria, Prussia and Russia were embroiled in the continent's usual power politics, which increasingly included the Polish question, and would eventually (in 1772) lead to the first of the three partitions of Poland. In Istanbul, Koca Mehmet Ragip Paşa (grand vizier 1757-1763) made the Porte avoid getting involved in unnecessary conflicts. Under his wise stewardship the empire thrived internally, improving the citizenry's standard of living and quality of life. His death followed by one year and preceded by another two fateful events: the accession of Catherine II (1762-1796) to the throne of Russia, and that of Catherine's former lover, Stanislaw Poniatowski, to that of Poland (1764-1795). This signaled the beginning of Russia's domination of the greater part of that country, a situation which Sultan Mustafa III (1757-1774) and a number of his advisers deemed unacceptable. The new grand vizier, Muhsinzade Mehmet Paşa, although pursuing Ragip Paşa's policy, lacked the clout that had enabled his predecessor to prevent the war faction from starting a conflict that would last six years and end with the Peace of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. While thwarting Russian designs on Poland had been the Porte's goal in this war, Russia's conquering the Black Sea's northern littoral and the Crimea.

The destruction of the Turkish fleet by the Russians at Çeşme in 1770 is the war's best-known and most spectacular event, but equally significant is the subsequent domination of the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean seas by the Russian navy, to the exclusion of that of the Turks, for the duration of the war. This happened despite the reforms repeatedly carried out since almost a century back. Moreover, we see here a replay on a grander scale of the paradox of the Cretan War: while the Venetian fleet had to cover a long distance from the Adriatic to face the Turkish fleet in the Ottoman home waters of the Aegean, the Russian fleet had to do so from the Baltic; and while Venice *limited her action* to the Aegean, the Russians ended up dominating much of the eastern Mediterranean. The perennial question thus begs for an answer here. Why again, after the repeated reforms and modernizations since the

1680s, and after its decent performance in the last two Venetian wars, did the Turkish navy slip back to the position of the underdog? For the earlier period – essentially that of the Cyprus and Cretan wars – I suggested the Ottoman government's lack of a genuine economic involvement in maritime trade and overseas engagement as the underlying cause. This, I would propose, still was one reason behind the outcome of the 1768-1774 war, and was to remain operative, *mutatis mutandis*, until the end of the Ottoman Empire. However, it may not have been the only reason any longer. The military revolution that began in 17th-century Europe was a component of the greater scientific, technological, intellectual, educational and commercial revolutions. It affected naval warfare as well, and while Russia from the time of Peter the Great resolutely participated, Turkey stayed out of the larger framework and concentrated only on its military aspect. Like the tsars, the sultans imported experts from the West and founded military schools to train officers. They failed to obtain similar results, however. Perhaps the religious barrier, though by then seemingly less relevant, was still at work here, creating a cultural resistance to internalizing the new types of modernity.¹ And while more secular instincts – power politics over Poland – may have guided Mustafa III in his decision to declare war on Russia in 1768, the next war was launched in 1787 by Abdulhamid I chiefly in order to correct a situation repugnant to an Islamic sovereign – seeing a part of his Muslim territory pass under Infidel rule.

The most grievous provision of the Peace Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca was the “independence” of the Khanate of Crimea. The Ottoman sultan had to renounce all authority over his vassal state except on the religious level as caliph. Meanwhile Russia acquired virtual suzerainty over the khanate, until nine years later she occupied it militarily and, in 1784, ended the khans' rule by proclaiming their territory's incorporation into the Russian Empire as the Tavricheskaya Guberniya.

This was a terrible blow to the Ottoman sultan and society, because for the first time their empire had unequivocally lost Muslim territory to the Infidel. A century earlier the defeat before Vienna had led to a retreat from much of Hungary, but that was Christian land. Catherine the Great's annexation of the khanate was felt unacceptable on religious grounds, and to recover it, on 14 August 1787 the Porte addressed an ultimatum to St. Petersburg demanding its evacuation. The answer was a declaration of war by Russia on 15 September. Practically all the major battles on land were won

¹ One of the manifestations of this barrier was linguistic. The literate elite, well versed in the other great languages of Islam, Arabic and Persian, long remained reluctant to make an effort to master those of Europe, and preferred to rely on the services of renegade converts or of the Ottoman Empire's Greek subjects.