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# Venetian-Ottoman Wars

EDITED BY STATHIS BIRTACHAS

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On the cover: lantern of an Ottoman galley captured at Lepanto.
Venice, Armory rooms of the Council of Ten at the Doge's Palace.
Topwar.ru website of Vjačeslav Špakovsky.


Venice and the Ottoman Empire as warriors. Source: [Roger PALMER, *Earl of Castlemaine], Das von den Türcken auffs äusserst bedrangte, aber: Durch die christliche Waffen der heroischen Republic Venedig auffs tapfferst beschützte Candia* […], Frankfurt, Wilhelm Serlin, 1669.

"Oltremarini" (Overseas) Regiments in Venetian service, nicknamed 'Schiavoni'
(Vinkhujzen Collection, NYPL)

# An Overview of Naval Strategy during the 1714–1718 War
## between the Ottoman Empire and the Venetian Republic

by Dionysios Hatzopoulos*

Abstract: This article aims to bring forward a number of elements related to Ottoman and Venetian naval strategies during the War of 1714–1718. Commanding sturdy ships, and competent men, the Sultan's admirals set in motion a plan to expel Venice from its last possessions in the Greek world. Initially successful, their strategy failed at Corfu in 1716. It was tried anew, but inconclusively, in 1717, and in 1718. On the Venetian side, after a disastrous early stage, a new fighting spirit emerged among naval crews. Fighting throughout the Aegean, the Venetian navy strongly opposed the enemy naval strategy, thus preventing its implementation and preserving for Venice the Ionian Islands. However, the war was decided in the north by the Habsburg Imperial troops, under the command of Eugene of Savoy. In the new treaty, the one signed at Passarowitz on July 21, 1718, Venice, though sitting with the victors, was a defeated party.

Keywords: 1714–1718 Venetian–Ottoman War, Ottoman Empire, Republic of Venice, *stato da mar*, Naval Strategy.

### *A Synopsis of mostly Naval Matters*

In the years of discontent and chaos produced by the long European War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), and with Venice desperately trying to stay neutral and unsuccessfully protect its territories on the *terraferma* from the incursions of the warring parties, one event sparked euphoria and a sense of political and strategic security. That was the visit to the city, in the Summer

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of 1704, of the new Sultan's, Ahmed III (1703–1730), envoy Mustafa Aga. The Ottoman official, and a similar one sent to Vienna, carried the new Sultan's promise to respect and abide by the terms of the war of 1683–1699 ending treaty, signed on January 26, 1699, at Carlowitz, by the representatives of the Ottoman Empire and of the member states of the Holy League, Austria, Poland, Russia, and Venice.[1] While Austria, through its territorial gains, acquiring most of Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, and Slovenia, became the dominant power in the region, Venice also fared equally well. Indeed, while during the war the Republic had failed, in July 1692, in an attempt to recapture Crete, lost to the Ottomans in 1669, by the Treaty of Carlowitz it was recognized as the master of the Peloponnese (the Morea), of the islands of Leucas (Santa Maura), in the Ionian Sea, and of Aegina, in the Saronic Gulf, and also of wide areas of Dalmatia, including Cattaro and its fjord-like bay. Thus, the territorial gains were essentially to be reconfirmed by the new Sultan's envoy. Accordingly, the distinguished visitor was greeted with all honors. He gave all required assurances and then departed.

The European war, which Venice tried to avoid, and indeed succeeded in avoiding, but at the cost of becoming diplomatically snubbed and left without allies in the moment of crisis, came to an end with the Treaty of Utrecht in April 1713. However, by then, things had changed in eastern and southern Europe. The ruler of Russia Peter the Great (1682–1696 with his half brother, Ivan V, and 1696–1725 as sole ruler), who had captured Azov, near the Don river, in 1696, acquiring next a number of sea ports on the northern shores of the Black Sea, his new possessions recognized as such by the Ottoman–Russian Treaty of Constantinople (Konstantiniyye, in its Ottoman name) in 1700, suffered a crushing defeat by the Ottoman Army, near the river Prut, on July 21, 1711. By the Treaty of Adrianople (Edirne) (June 27, 1713), which followed his defeat and the resumption of war, Peter relinquished the Black Sea Russian possessions, including Azov.

While avoiding a crisis with the Austrians, the victory over the Russians gave the Ottoman rulers the desire to recapture the lost territories on the Greek peninsula, namely the Peloponnese, and ideally the Venetian held Ionian Islands, especially Corfu, the gate to the Adriatic Sea. The party, which espoused the re-

1 Pietro Garzoni, *Istoria della Repubblica di Venezia. Ove insieme narrasi la Guerra per la Successione delle Spagne al Re Carlo II*, vol. II, Venice, 1716, pp. 394-395.

sumption of the war against Venice, centered around the Sultan's son-in-law, the Grand Vizier Silahdar Damad Ali Pasha (27 August 1713 – killed during the battle of Peterwardein on August 6, 1716). During a palace meeting of the imperial council (Divan-i-Humayun), in which, according to tradition and in the Sultan's presence, took part representatives of the two branches of Ottoman authorities (the political-military and the religious), the Grand Vizier argued convincingly, rejecting the objections of the supreme religious leader of the Ottomans, the Sheikh ul-Islam, Mirza Mehmed, in favor of an assault on the Venetian positions in the south of the Greek peninsula. His main arguments were based on the convincing Ottoman victory over Peter's army, in July 1711, the high moral of the troops, and, also, the desire of Vienna to stay out of another war, following the end of the exhaustive, for all parties involved, war of the Spanish succession. He carried the debate and the decision to go to war was taken. The necessary fatwa was issued by the Sheikh ul-Islam, and the Sultan's declaration of war acquired legal authority.[2] The new war, known as the Second Morean War (*la guerra di Morea* and sometimes *la guerra di Corfù*), was to be a brief land and sea violent encounter. Its conducting was dictated by the vicinity of the Peloponnese to mainland Greece, to which it was attached by the isthmus of Corinth, also bound by the Saronic in the east, and the gulf of Corinth in the west. Both land and sea operations were to be combined and coordinated, in a military textbook style assault on the enemy. Under the Supreme Command of the Grand Vizier, the huge land forces, about 100,000 men strong, were to feel the benefits of the Ottoman fleet's presence. They were to be reinforced by it, protected from the enemy's naval activity and supplied with ammunition, and all necessary equipment, if and when needed. The Army's big siege guns and mortars were to be transported by the Navy, while the Army's High Command was to be provided with information on the enemy's movements and on the strength of the defenses of the powerful coastal fortresses, soon to be besieged by the advancing troops. Also, the Navy

2 On the functions of the Divan-i-Humayun, and its version of ayak divani, see *Ottoman Statecraft. The Book of Councel for Vezirs and Governors of Sari Mehmed Pasha, the Defterdar*, Turkish Text with Introduction, Translation, and Notes, by Walter Livingston Wright, Jr, Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1971, pp. 25-27; Dionysios Hatzopoulos, *La dernière guerre entre la république de Venise et l'empire ottomane (1714–1718)*, Montreal, Centre d'études helléniques, Collège Dawson, 1999, pp. 27-28, also published in Greek, *Ο τελευταίος βενετο-οθωμανικός πόλεμος, 1714–1718* [The last Venetian-Ottoman War, 1714–1718], Athens, 2002.

was expected to capture the last Venetian outposts in the Aegean archipelago, including those left in Crete, and, eventually in the Ionian Sea itself.

The Ottoman Navy of the end of the 17th century and of the beginning of the 18th was heavily influenced by the *kanuname* (directives) of 1701 of Hajji Husain, also known as Mezzomorto, formerly a privateer and then, starting in May 1695, Kapudan Pasha (Fig. 1). Having diagnosed the shortcomings of the naval branch of the Ottoman might and supported by the Divan and Sultan Mustafa II (1695–1703), himself a strong Navy supporter, he proceeded unhindered. Important issues in his *kanuname*, published shortly after his death, were the definition of the Navy as a fundamental instrument for the defense of the realm, and for this to be accomplished, as it should be, a task force of forty sailing ships would be required. Also, reorganizing hierarchy, besides the essentially political office of the Kapudan Pasha, who dealt with the administration and military issues of the Navy, who was responsible to the Grand Vizier and to the Sultan,[3] and who was rarely a seaman, three new Admirals were to be appointed. They, eventually and, one might say, inevitably, became the true Commanders of the fleet. First would come the Kapudane-i-humayun, a real Grand Admiral of the fleet. Then, under the Kapudan Pasha's orders were to serve as Admirals the Kapudane-i-patrona and the Kapudane-i-riyale, formerly Commanders of the two wings of the galleys's Navy, who now took over High Command of the sailing ships. Competence and top skills were to be essential for all grades, while strict hierarchically ratified advancement in the ranks was clearly defined. The high positions, Admirals and ships's Commanders, needed the Grand Vizier's approval. Strict discipline was also to be imposed on the crews, and they were to be severely punished if they assaulted coastal villages, committed thievery, and other crimes.[4] There is no doubt that the Sultan's Navy rested for long periods on strong human foundations, pro-

3 Idris Bostan, «Ottoman Maritime Arsenals and Shipbuilding Technologies in the 16th and 17th Centuries», *Moslem Heritage. Foundation for Science, Technology, and Civilisation*, January 28, 2007, p. 15. Mezzomorto's passing did not put an end to, nor delayed the development of the Ottoman navy. Also, the late Kapudan Pasha, a sailor's sailor, was allowed to wear a simple sailor's outfit, provoking ironic comments from those higher up in the Ottoman establishment. Cf. Guido Candiani, *I vascelli della Serenissima. Guerra, politica e costruzioni navali a Venezia in età moderna, 1650–1720*, Venice, Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2009, p. 478 and note 6.

4 Daniel Panzac, *La marine ottomane. De l'apogée à la chute de l'empire (1572-1923)*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2009, pp. 179-180.


**1** Hajji Husain, also known as Mezzomorto, as Kapudan Pasha;
by Andreas Matthäus Wolffgang, late 17th century. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

vided by the skilled seafarers of the Mediterranean. They were either subjects of the Sultans, the absolute masters of a multinational Empire, or they came from other European countries and were attracted by high stakes, socioeconomic, religious or personal. They were employed in positions related to their skills, as numerous examples show. Those who served in the Navy, following conversion to Islam, if competent, could reach high positions.[5] Naval excellence corresponded to what had happened on land, when the Ottoman lords wrested control of Anatolia and of its valuable human resources from the Eastern Roman Emperors. The adherence and inclusion of skilled local seamen to the new state entity contributed to the new rulers's sea mastership. The Ottoman Navy remained strong and master of the eastern Mediterranean for centuries. It introduced new technologies, adopted from its European competitors, including the Venetians, and adapted them to its specific needs and conditions. Indeed, as an example, to counter the Venetians, between 1650 and 1718 a Navy of sailing ships was built, with 15 sultanas (government warships) constructed in 1650–1651.[6]

To the Ottoman rulers the presence of Venice in the Aegean world was tantamount to an intrusion, an old notion espoused by the Eastern Roman Emperors. In the Ottoman times, Selim I (1512–1520) had expressed it forcefully, making clear that the whole Mediterranean, ought to belong to a single «sublime state».[7] Despite sometimes protracted periods of peace and trade relations, the Ottoman Sultans, in epic struggles, fought the intruders for centuries, before finally confining them to the Ionian Islands.

As Daniel Panzac writes, on specific topics, concerning the human pool available to the sultans, the seafaring Christian populations of Rumelia and Anatolia were recruited to serve in the Navy.[8] Also, able seamen came from the

5 Girolamo Ferrari, *Delle notizie storiche della Lega tra l'Imperatore Carlo VI e la Republica di Venezia contra il Gran Sultano Acmet III e de' loro Fatti d'armi. Dall'anno 1714 sino alla pace di Passarowitz*, Venice, 1723, p. 191, mentions an «Almirante de' Turchi Fiamengo [Flemish] rinegato chiamato Tre Mustacchi», distinguished in the naval clashes of the war of 1714–1718.

6 Guido Candiani, «A New Battle Fleet: the Evolution of the Ottoman Sailing Navy, 1650–1718, revealed through Venetian Sources», *The Mariner's Mirror*, 104, 1 (2018), pp. 18-26 – Published online: 29 January 2018; Bostan, «Ottoman Maritime Arsenals», cit., p. 16.

7 Maria Pia Pedani, *The Ottoman-Venetian Border (15th–18th centuries)*, translated by Mariateresa Sala, Venice, Ca' Foscari, 2017, p. 91.

8 Panzac, *La marine ottomane*, cit., pp. 34-35.

coastal areas around the Sea of Marmara and from the shores of the Aegean and its islands, with the local governors and the provincial kadis looking after the recruitment requirements of the naval authorities. On the opposing side, Venetian crews, strongly resembling the composition of those in the Ottoman Navy, were principally composed of Albanian and Greek seamen.[9]

Some time before the war of 1714–1718, prompted by the Grand Vizier's active involvement, work in the imperial arsenal accelerated. Intensive labor activity probably covered needed repairs, improvements, reactivation of existing naval units, and construction of new ships. New workshops were established. Already, in 1708, anchors started being manufactured there, while in 1709 followed the manufacture of sails.[10] Furthermore, before the war many Greeks, skilled in ships's construction and repairs, worked feverishly in the capital's arsenal, and there is no doubt that, when the war started, the Ottoman State, contrary to Venice, had a Navy ready for action. It is suggested that between 22 and 27 ships had been built from 1700 to 1714. Among those, there was a three-decker with 110–120 guns, also two or three two-deckers with 70–80 guns, and a number of two-deckers with 50–70 guns. Early in the war the Navy had about 40 sailing ships (sultanas). It is evident that ships of intermediate size were preferred. They were better adapted to the geography and weather conditions of the Aegean. Furthermore, to deal with shipbuilding lumber supply problems the navy acquired about 20 fully armed merchant vessels.[11] Also, before the start of the war, huge quantities of biscuit for the crews were prepared in Thessalonica, Negropont (Chalkis), Volos, and Larissa, while about 15,000 Levents, ready to serve on the ships, were mobilized.[12]

The Ottoman Navy was an impressive weapon, and the competence and efficiency of its crews transformed it into a powerful instrument in the able hands of

9 Panzac, *La marine ottomane*, cit., pp. 34-35, 197, and note 23; Ekkehard Eickhoff, *Venezia, Vienna e i Turchi. 1645-1700: Bufera nel Sud-Est Europeo*, Milan, Rusconi, 1991, p. 467.

10 Akin Sefer, *The Arsenal of Ottoman Modernity: Workers, Industry, and the State in Late Ottoman Istanbul*, A dissertation presented to the Department of History, Northwestern University, May 2018, pp. 46, 47; Ferrari, *Delle notizie storiche*, cit., p. 27.

11 Candiani, «A New Battle Fleet», cit.; Candiani, *I vascelli della Serenissima*, cit., pp. 482, 484.

12 Hatzopoulos, *La dernière guerre*, cit., p.23; Giacomo Diedo, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia, dalla sua fondazione sino l'anno MDCCXLVII*, vol. IV, Venice, 1751, p. 74.

its Commanders, beginning with the Kapudan Pasha Djanum Khodja Mehmed,[13] the three admirals, and the individual captains of the sailing ships. Mezzomorto's reforms, pursued after his death in 1701, combined with financial contributions in the form of taxes, and the continuous improvement of shipbuilding techniques in the arsenals of the Empire, built a strong naval arm. To the above positive factors should be added the dissolution of the Russian Navy and the acquisition of an unknown number of its ships in the Black Sea, in 1713, following the Treaty of Adrianople (Edirne) in the same year, thus eliminating worries about enemy naval presence in that area.

On March 10, 1715, the mighty fleet was inspected by the Sultan in the waters of the Sea of Marmara. Well supplied, manned by competent crewmen and Commanders, its destination, after sailing through the Aegean, was Negropont. There, it would wait for the approaching Grand Vizier's Army. In the Dardanelles it was joined by the North African and Egyptian units. Figures vary. According to Anderson, the fleet included 58 big sailing ships, 30 galleys, 70 galliots, 5 fireships and a large number of transport vessels. Nani Mocenigo gives about the same numbers: 58 sailing ships, including the North African and the Egyptian ones, 30 galleys, 60 galliots, 5 fireships, and many auxiliary vessels transporting equipment and even troops. The Venetian bailo at Constantinople, Andrea Memmo, held prisoner in Abydos, counted 36 big sailing ships, probably before joining their North-African and Egyptian allies. Candiani mentions about 40 sultanas, to which were added about 12 armed merchant vessels (40–60 guns each), a similar number of private ships from Barbary and 5 fireships. The sailing ships

13 The Kapudan Pasha, a competent and humane sailor, came from the fortress city of Coron in the Messenia district of the Peloponnese. According to Ferrari, *Delle notizie storiche*, cit., p. 27, Djanum Khodja was «nato Turco di Coron». Captured at Imbros as a young man, in the first Morean War (1684–1699), he served in the Venetian galleys for seven years until his ransom, thus becoming familiar with his future adversaries. In an Italian portrait engraving he is named as «Meemet Cicala General di Mare, del Gran Turco» (see Mario Nani Mocenigo, *Storia della Marina Veneziana da Lepanto alla caduta della Repubblica*, Rome, Ministero della Marina, 1935, p. 321). Also, during the operation for the capture of Nafplion (Napoli di Romania) in the Argolid, with the fleet's assistance, captain of a ship of the line (from the sailing formation in navies of the time), a sultana named Canal Bianco, was a brother of the Kapudan Pasha, whose name is given as Zecelis (see Manuscript Code «Guerre tra i Veneziani ed i Turchi» in Montreal Presbyterian College – Ms. MPC, ff.157r-159v, section referring to the captives taken by the Ottoman Army when Nafplion fell). Cf. Hatzopoulos, *La dernière guerre*, cit., pp. 53 n. 83, 75 n. 144.

were escorted by about 20 galleys, 31 galiots and 60 smaller ships. According to him, «this was the most powerful Turkish fleet in over a century». The same author mentions an anonymous Dutch source, according to which the Kapudan Pasha's fleet was composed of 36 sultanas, 10 armed merchant vessels, 12 sailing ships from North Africa, 5 fireships, 4 galliots, and 36 galleys. Panzac writes that at the beginning of the war the Ottoman fleet had 18 sailing ships. Among them three had between 60 and 70 guns, six 50 to 58 guns, seven 40 to 44, and two 34 to 38. During the first two years of the war the Ottoman Government undertook with ardor the construction of additional sailing vessels. During that period were built about ten big ships, among which were included a huge three-decks, armed with 112 cannons, and two with 88, the rest being of intermediate size.[14]

From the beginning the Ottoman Armada sailed through the Archipelago unobstructed and achieved full control of it. Strategically and traditionally, the Ottoman Navy operated as an independent unit, it did collaborate but did not subordinate itself to the Army, even when the latter was under the Command of the authoritarian Grand Vizier. To a degree this was due to its martial achievements in the Mediterranean and renown, acquired through its history. Its autonomy was also helped by the vicinity of its bases (at the capital, Gallipoli, and when necessary Negropont), where repairs and maintenance could be carried out, and the ships could be refurbished and resupplied, as opposed to its opponent's having to sail, for serious repairs, to its distant base (Venice). Inevitably, bases near the zones of operations were essential to the conduct of naval war. In 1715 the Navy

14 Roger Charles Anderson, *Naval Wars in the Levant. From the Battle of Lepanto to the Introduction of Steam (1559–1853)*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1952, p. 244; Nani Mocenigo, *Storia della Marina Veneziana*, cit., p. 318. According to Ferrari, *Delle notizie storiche*, cit., pp. 40-41, the Navy, including sixty big sailing ships («sessanta grosse navi»), called on the island of Chios, where it was joined by the North African units («barbareschi»), with no Egyptian vessels mentioned. From there, it would sail to Negropont. On his part, abbé Laugier, *Histoire de la République de Venise, depuis sa fondation jusqu'à présent*, vol. IV, Paris, 1768, p. 290, gives 35 sultanas, 15 big North African sailing ships, and «une cinquantaine de petits bâtiments». Vincent Mignot, *Histoire de l'empire ottoman depuis son origine jusqu'à la paix de Belgrade en 1740*, vol. IV, Paris, 1771, p. 208, mentions 90 sultanas and 70 galleys, while he says (p. 209) that the Kapudan Pasha, Djanum Khodja Mehmed, was «un des meilleurs hommes de mer». Furthermore, of the above mentioned sultanas, six, whose names are known, were still in use twenty years later. Candiani, *I vascelli della Serenissima* cit., pp. 498, 499 note 107. Also, see Panzac, *La marine ottomane*, cit., pp. 186, 193-194, who says that the Kapudan Pasha left the capital with 32 sailing ships (p. 185).

carried out its mission transporting and delivering, where they were needed, military supplies and heavy equipment, such as big guns and mortars, but also troops. It also captured the last outposts of Venetian presence in the Aegean and stood by and supported the huge land army, led by the Grand Vizier, while preparing for its assault against the Ionian Sea possessions of the enemy, and after this, maybe the east coast of the Adriatic Sea, sailing further north.

There is no doubt that the disasters which befell Venice in the first year of the war, in 1715, were due to a series of negative factors. First and foremost the diplomatic isolation of the Republic, due to its desperate, and finally successful, efforts to stay out of the European carnage, during the years of the war of the Spanish succession, and inevitably the political realities in Europe after the Treaty of Utrecht. Thus, with the exception of the Pope, Venice was left without allies to turn to, when it was needed, and the Republic was essentially begging for help, in order to preserve whatever could be saved among its possessions in the Levant.

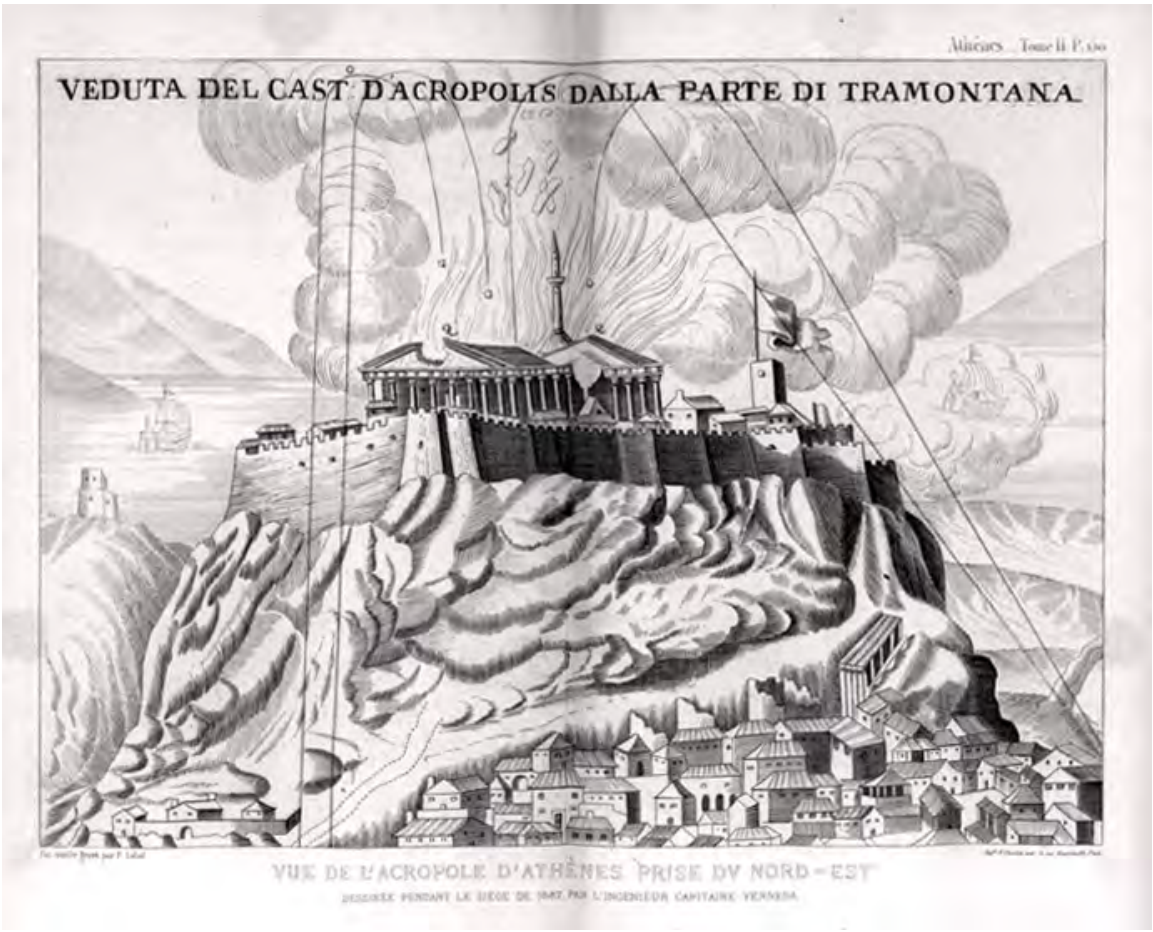
Financially, the long years of the war for the conquest of the Peloponnese (the Morea) constituted for the Republic a heavy burden. Essentially, in its return to the East, Venice had ended up with a largely undeveloped large piece of real estate in the western periphery of the Ottoman Empire, which, as events were to prove soon, the previous owners did not intend to relinquish. As a matter of fact, the Peloponnese might have been peripheral or far from the center of the Empire, but it was also a strategically indispensable piece of land, a wedge between the heart of the Empire and its North African dependencies, the big island of Crete, and even the sea lanes to Alexandria, in Egypt. Indeed, as with Venetian Crete, situated between Ottoman Europe and Ottoman North Africa, which had for a long time been a Venetian irritant between the Ottoman Aegean Sea, Libya, and Alexandria, the Peloponnese was, by its geography, a western bastion of the Ottoman world, ready to shut access to the eastern Mediterranean, if and when needed. Its occupation by a Western power would be challenging for the Ottoman Empire, and would pose a serious threat. Indeed, two great naval engagements had been fought along this western imperial border: Preveza (1538) and Lepanto (1571). Furthermore, the violent events in the Aegean, during the Cretan war, when the naval reaction of Venice and the epic clashes in the Dardanelles, in the 1650's, pointed to clear threats to imperial maritime communications, especially at times of war, posed by land held by the enemy, dictated the strategic elimina-

tion of all remaining Venetian holdings in the region.

To hold the territorial gains, and defend them from the sooner or later to be launched onslaught, the Republic needed money, men, and ships, of which it had very little and very few. This was the reason Mustafa Aga, the Sultan's envoy to Venice in 1703, was greeted with relief and even enthusiasm when he reiterated his master's desire to abide by the terms of the Treaty of Carlowitz. Four centuries of Venetian presence in Crete, with deep roots planted in the island, important commercial interests, a strong military presence, powerful fortresses, and an active naval presence, and powerful reaction to the Ottoman threat, did not prevent the capture of the island by the Sultan's Army, even after a long war and mighty military encounters. One can debate whether any one in authority in Venice had any illusions on the possibility of preserving the Peloponnese. Unless indirect help was provided, as had been the case in the previous war, when the great battles were fought in the Danube front, and Venice stood alongside the victors, something which, as everyone knew, and was afraid to admit, was not forthcoming this time.

The new acquisition, the Peloponnese, was poor in natural resources, without significant urban centers, with the possible exception of Nafplion. It possessed a poor network of roads, and was demographically weak, with less than 100,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, its coastal areas were exposed to the raids of pirates, while robbery was not absent in the mountainous interior. Under the reality of its strained finances, Venice did all that could have been done. In order to deal with the local conditions and problems and try to improve the situation, more or less, decent men were appointed in positions of authority. Money was spent but, first of all, priorities had to be set, and this meant the improvement, the repair, and the construction of defensive works, embodying the best precepts of the art of fortifications, in an age marked by Vauban's genius. Certainly, under the new reality which was dictated by the finances of the Republic and by the geography of the region, plans for the defense of Venetian Peloponnese were drawn and proposed. One of them was Domenico Mocenigo's report, of November 12, 1691, while the war was still going on. Mocenigo, whose Naval Command went back to the Cretan war, was Captain General between the late Spring of 1690 and September 1692. Through practical experience, field inspections, contacts with interested officers and anyone who was familiar with the issues of defense of the new possession, he formulated, even before the end of the war, a plan for its

protection. Due to its proximity to the Greek mainland, the Peloponnese was fully exposed to an Ottoman attack from the north. The plan to expand the Venetian holdings, in order to protect the new acquisition, included Athens and Attica, then Euboea, while envisaging to connect those areas with the coastal zone from the isthmus of Corinth, along the north coast of the similarly named gulf, with linchpins at Nafpaktos (Lepanto), Messolonghi, Xiromero, Vonitza, Preveza, then Corfu and all the way north, along the coastal Dalmatian possessions of the Republic. The failure of the Euboea and Athens operations, during which disaster hit the Acropolis of Athens and the temple of Parthenon, on September 26, 1687 (Fig. 2), put an end to the plan. Realistically, Mocenigo lowered expectations and, in order to deal with the eventual return of the Ottoman Army, urged resistance behind the walls of a number of selected local fortresses. These would be Patras, Old and New Navarino, Modon, Coron, Zarnata, Kelepha (Chielefa), Monemvasia (Malvasia), Nafplion, and the Acrocorinth. As long as the Republic had a strong presence at sea, Monemvasia and Nafplion's three fortresses could be held («Malvasia e i tre castelli di Napoli, si conserveranno tanto tempo, quanto la Repubblica sarà superior in mare»). Acrocorinth's problem, probably due to its relative distance from the sea and from incoming supplies, would be famine. The remaining fortresses were doomed. Otherwise, if defended, their anticipated capture by the enemy would mean a total loss of their guns, their ammunition, and their garrisons. Furthermore, as he wrote, a force of 20,000 infantrymen and 4,000 horsemen would be needed, and could even challenge the enemy under the Command of an experienced, valorous, and prudent General, essentially a Morosini-like leader. As he made it clear, an army and fortresses can protect a country, however with this difference, that a strong army, even without the support of fortresses, can still defend a country, but fortresses without an army are useless, especially when facing a strong and obstinate enemy («Esserciti e fortezze assicurano gli stati con questa differenza, che gl'esserciti anche senza fortezze bastano à difenderli, ma le fortezze senza gl'esserciti non sono sufficienti, massime quando s'ha da fare con un nemico ostinato e prepotente»). The Republic did not entirely reject Mocenigo's report. It adopted and adapted parts of it. Thus, all fortresses were to be held. Furthermore, Nafplion, the capital of the Regno, despite Venice's financial strains, would acquire powerful fortifications, with, inevitably, huge amounts of money being thrown in (Fig. 3). As for the strong army, when the crunch came, in the Summer of 1715, there were in the fortress-




**2** View of the Acropolis of Athens at the moment of the 1687 bombardment. Drawing by the engineer captain Filippo Besseti di Verneda. Source: Léon Emmanuel S.J. de Laborde, Marquis, *Athènes aux XVe, XVIe et XVIIe siècles,* Paris, Jules Renouard, 1854.

es of the territory about 4,500 demoralized mercenaries to defend them, led, in most cases, by equally demoralized Commanders, and no Venetian Navy in sight. Mocenigo's report was reproduced a few years later, when Daniel Dolfin proposed in March 1711, following his in situ inspection, the abandonment of all fortresses, except Acrocorinth, Rio (Dardanello di Patrasso), Modon, Monemvasia, and naturally the capital, Nafplion, which was now transformed into one of the strongest fortresses in Europe, in the early 18th century. Fundamentally, fortress defense was a standard strategy in Venice's wars against its mighty adversary.

However, the navy's participation varied. When and where it was involved, the Republic's fighting capacities increased and the war could last a long time. Such was the case of the Cretan war, when in the 1650's the lines of communications of the Ottoman troops fighting in Crete, and their provisioning of supplies were seriously threatened by the Venetian Navy's blockade of the Dardanelles and Lazzaro Mocenigo's bold, but failed, attempt to break through and sail to Constantinople.[15] When and where the Navy stayed out, for various reasons, fighting came to an end early, and disastrously for Venice, as was the case with Cyprus, soon to be repeated (in 1715) in the Peloponnese. Finally, Venetian victories, leading to the signing of peace treaties, were achieved in collaboration with strong allies.[16]

Indicative of the Venetian authorities' financial problems was the fact that construction of new shipping was lagging. Indeed, between the signing of the Treaty of Carlowitz and the year 1714 only five sailing ships of the first rate were launched: the Colomba d' Oro, on April 23, 1699, the Grande Alessandro, on August 18, 1709, the Corona, on November 25, 1711, the Costanza, on November 19, 1714, and the Madonna della Salute, on January 23, 1714. The five first rate ships were followed on February 27, 1714, by the second rate San Francesco and by the first rate Terror, launched on March 1, 1715 with an additional small number of vessels using oars. However, when the war started the Venetian arsenal was activated and a steady number of sailing ships started coming out. Thus, as an example, Madonna dell'Arsenale was launched in late January–early February 1716, while Leon Trionfante, which became a model for first rate ships, followed on March 7, of the same year.[17] Even so, Lodovico Flangini, the new Capitano Ordinario delle Navi, presented a picture in which the Venetian Navy was still in a problematic position.

Indeed, following the «fattali disgratie della Morea», as Flangini wrote in his

15 Alberto Tenenti, *Venezia e il senso del mare. Storia di un prisma culturale dal XIII al XVIII secolo*, Milan, Guerini e associati, 1999, p. 595.

16 On Mocenigo's report see Dionysios Hatzopoulos, «Capturing and Defending the Peloponnese. Domenico Mocenigo's Report of November 12, 1691», *Thesaurismata*, 37 (2007), pp. 327-342. On Dolfin's report see Hatzopoulos, *La dernière guerre*, cit., p. 17.

17 Cesare Augusto Levi, *Navi da guerra costruite nell'arsenale di Venezia dal 1664 al 1896*, Venice, 1896, p. 28; Mario Nani Mocenigo, *L'arsenale di Venezia*, Venice, Filippi, 1995, p. 102. According to Mocenigo, between 1715 and 1718, the arsenal of Venice built 12 sailing ships of first rate, 10 of second, and 2 frigates. Candiani, *I vascelli della Serenissima*, cit., p. 509.


**3** «Napoli di Romania e Monte-Palamida, Colle Proposte del Giancix». Source: Vincenzo Coronelli, *Morea, Negroponte & adiacenze*, [Venice, ca. 1708]. Antonio Giancix's – a military engineer in the service of Venice – ambitious project for the fortification of Palamidi was applied by the French military engineer Pierre de la Salle (1711–1714). In 1715 the fortress was captured by the Ottomans.

detailed Senate report of February 5, 1716, a few months before the siege of Corfu, the situation in the Navy was still problematic. According to him – for he was in a position to know – the navy disposed of twenty-four sailing ships («navi»), eleven of the first rate, seven of the second, and six of the third. He went on examining the ships, one after the other, pointing to their decay and what had to be done with them. Accordingly, it was necessary to speed up and increase the strength of the Navy, by accelerating the construction, in the arsenal of Venice, of new, more powerful and robust ships, and thus rebuilding «the front wall of the fatherland» («l'antemurale della patria»). Also, a problem that had to be dealt with, as soon as possible, was the dearth of crews, whose absence hindered the movement of the ships. Even superior officers were missing from the big sailing vessels. In the first rates served only four, while in the second served only three. These were scarce and insufficient numbers, given that if one of those officers was hit in battle there wouldn't be anyone to replace him. Under the circumstances, it was not that easy to find crews and, also, the Navy had to deal with the problem of desertions and infirmities. One way to attract people would be to raise wages and

offer benefits, such as being taken good medical care, when wounded, and also receive compensation, when needed, similar to the one received by soldiers.[18]

The war was declared on December 9, 1714, and the Senate named to the post of Capitano Generale da Mar Daniel Dolfin, a nephew of the author of the report of March 1711. At the same time great diplomatic efforts were undertaken in order to acquire the assistance of the Pope, of Tuscany, of Portugal, and of the Order of the Knights of Malta.

The naval squadron which sailed toward the battle areas was composed of eight sailing ships and of eleven galleys. The Ionian Islands provided some reinforcements, such as Zakynthos (Zante), which armed two galleys and two galliots. The allied units at this stage included four pontifical galleys, five galleys armed by the knights of Malta, and later, on July 23rd, two Tuscan galleys, with rather incompetent crews, as it was said at the time. In early July 1715, near Cephalonia, under the Command of Daniel Dolfin, the Venetian fleet, with the allied units added, had increased in numbers. Now, it was composed of 22 sailing

18 Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter: ASV), Provveditori da Terra e da mar e altre cariche (hereafter: PTM), filza 1339, February 5, 1716: «Compresa dall'alto dicernimento del Eccelentissimo Senato la decadenza di tanti navi e la necessità di premere e sollecitare le nuove fabriche nel Arsenale per rimettere e rinvigorire l'Armata con legni più poderosi, robusti, e render con ciò più forte l'antemurale della patria. [...] Ciò che dilania il mio cuore si è il vedere le navi di Vostra Serenità cosi destitute di marineri, che sono nella maggior parte incapaci di mettersi alla vella. [...] Alle navi del primo rango non sono destinati da Vostre Eccelenze che quatro ufficiali superiori [...] et alle navi del secondo rango tre soli. [...] Le fughe e l'infirmità hano ridotto in stato si miserabile le navi di Vostra Serenità e come si quelle, che queste hano le loro caggioni, così io mi conosco in debito di rapresentarle con il dovuto candore à Vostre Eccelenze, come degne del loro sapientissimo esame, onde si doni qualche rimedio al disordine troppo perniciosamente avanzato». On the same issue see individual cases cited by Nani Mocenigo, *Storia della Marina Veneziana*, cit., p. 317, n. 1: according to a report, written by the Capitano Straordinario delle Navi and dated December 18, 1714, the ships Aquila Valiera, Ercole, and Valore Incoronato are in bad condition and should stay in Venice to be used «alla difesa del Golfo»; p. 323, on Daniel Dolfin's inaction, largely due to lack of preparation of the navy and deficiencies of crews and materiel; p. 324, destruction of a ship due to careless handling of explosives: «[...] il 12 gennaio 1716 si incediò il vascello Regina del Mare per incuria nella conservazione delle polveri»; p. 327, according to Andrea Corner's Summer 1716 report from Corfu: «27 navi in gran parte deboli». As mentioned by Candiani, *I vascelli della Serenissima*, cit., pp. 514, 516, the scarcity of naval crews forced the new fleet commander Andrea Pisani to initially equip only 19 ships, but thanks to increased enrolment of men from the Ionian Islands and new arrivals of crewmen from Venice, he was able, in early June 1716, to have ready for action 25 ships, in acceptable condition («in condizioni accetabili»).

ships, 33 galleys, 2 galliasses, and 10 galliots.[19] During the Summer of 1715 the allied naval crews and their Commanders remained inactive, witnessing the depressive reality of the rapid total collapse of Venetian presence east of the Ionian Sea.

The Ottoman Navy, under efficient command, imposed its presence in the Aegean, while assisting the land troops, under the Grand Vizier, in the reconquest of the Peloponnese. On land, the fortress of Acrocorinth was taken by the Ottoman Army on the 2nd of July. The siege of Nafplion began on the 12th of July, and the Grand Vizier's soldiers broke the city's defenses on the 20th. The huge and expensive fortifications did not help much. The siege of Modon began on the 12th of August and ended on the 17th, with its surrender. Coron, Navarino, Kelepha, Zarnata, were abandoned. Rion, on the western end of the gulf of Corinth, surrendered on the 14th of August. On September 7th the Venetian rectors of powerful Monemvasia accepted the terms of surrender. In the previous war, Monemvasia, defended by the Ottoman Army, had sustained a long blockade and siege, from September 1687 to August 1690. In the Ionian Sea, the island of Leucas (Santa Maura) was abandoned, before any serious fight. In about three months Venice was thrown out of the Aegean and of the Peloponnese. It still possessed the Ionian Islands, but Leucas was gone.

At sea, on June 5, 1715, the Ottoman fleet reached the island of Tinos. 27 hours later, after the Kapudan Pasha's promised immunity, the island surrendered without a fight. Aegina and Cythera followed soon. The fortress of Suda, near Chanea, surrendered on the 23rd of September, on the 7th of October came the turn of Spinalonga. Thus ended the long Venetian presence on the island of Crete, a presence going back to the early years of the 13th century and the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade.

With the Venetian Navy out of sight the Kapudan Pasha and his competent captains had executed a masterful naval campaign. The fleet had accomplished its tasks, had transported heavy military equipment, ammunition, troops to combat areas, important prisoners, garrisons of surrendered places to still Venetian held fortresses, according to terms, and, most importantly, by its simple presence it had chased the Venetian fleet and its incompetent Commander out of the Archipelago. Accordingly, the Ottoman Navy made the Grand Vizier's Army its

19 Nani Mocenigo, *Storia della Marina Veneziana*, cit., p. 318.


**4** During the last Venetian–Ottoman War (1714–1718), the Venetian fleet and army, under the command of the *Capitano Generale da Mar* Andrea Pisani (left) and the Field Marshall Johann Mathias von der Schulenburg (right) respectively, captured the castle and town of Preveza on October 22, 1717. They were also the senior Venetian commanders during the Ottoman Siege of Corfu (1716). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

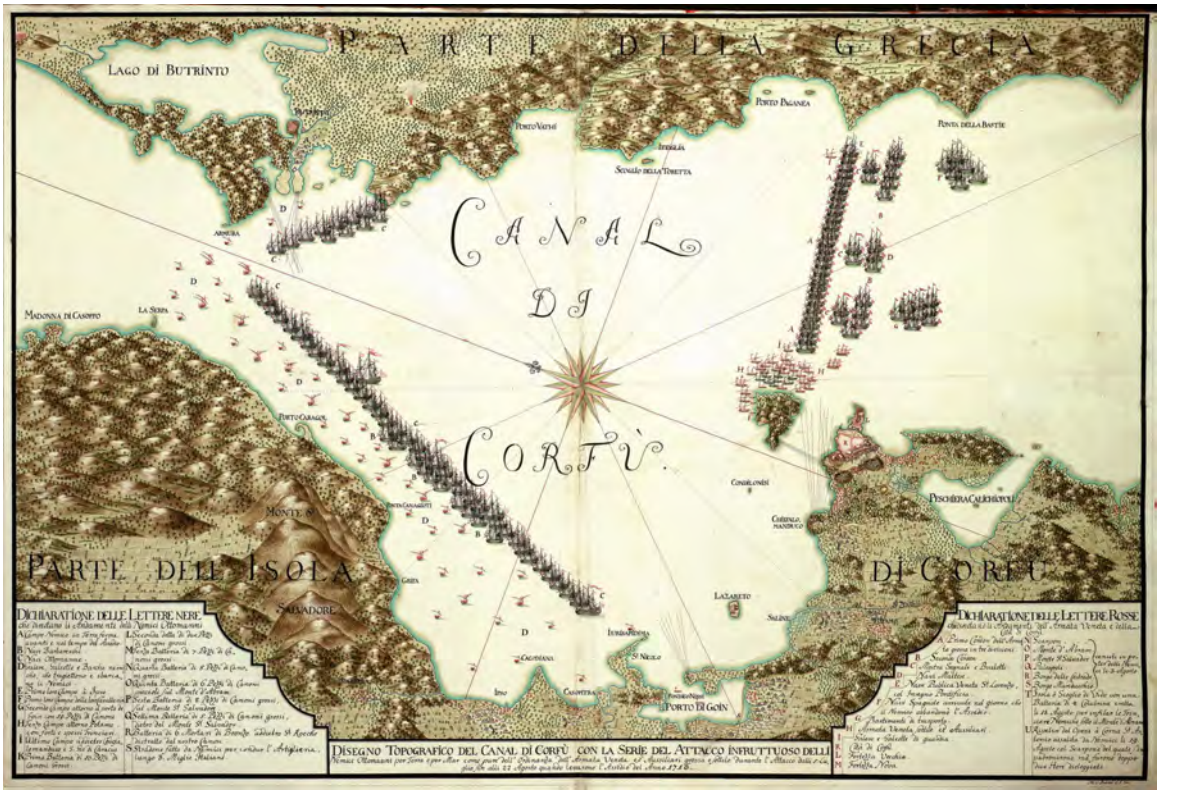
objective, seeing it as a second line and supporting it, while, simultaneously, acquiring control of maritime communications.[20] By all accounts the handling of the operations of 1715 by the Ottoman naval leadership was a textbook perfect exercise, where sailors, in positions of Command and otherwise, using efficiently the ships at their disposal, had prevailed over a demoralized and invisible enemy. On the Venetian side it was a real disaster. Daniel Dolfin represented the spirit of defeatism, which prevailed in Venice before the war. Most definitely, he had nothing of Lazzaro Mocenigo's spirit. With his incompetent handling, blaming every-

20 Thus, it abided by Julian Stafford Corbett's, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1911, pp. 94, 280, 282, theories on naval strategy, enunciated almost two centuries later.

**5** View of the city of Corfu and its fortifications on the arrival of Andrea Pisani, *Capitano Generale da Mar*, in 1715, by an unknown painter. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

one for his failure, he, inevitably, left everyone stupefied, including his supporters in the Senate, who simply contended that his behavior reflected the prevailing spirit in Venice, of denying the eventuality of a new war with the Sultan. Instead of daring, Dolfin spent most of his time sailing around the Ionian Islands, and one wonders what would he have done had the enemy reached him there. He finally entered the Aegean safely, past the season, in 1715, when the enemy had sailed away and the Ottoman fleet was approaching Constantinople in triumph. Dolfin could not stay in his position. Upon his return to Corfu, he was dismissed by the Senate, and replaced by the Provveditore Generale delle Isole Ionie, Andrea Pisani (Figs. 4 and 5).

The events of 1716 were the logical and expected consequence of those of 1715. What was now left was expulsing Venice from all Greek lands, and even from its positions in Dalmatia. The turn of the Ionian Islands had come. The expected fall of the stronghold of Corfu, the front door of the Republic in the




**6** Sketch of the confrontation of the Ottoman (left) and Venetian (right) fleets in the Corfu Channel during the Ottoman Siege (1716). H.C. Bröckell, Marburg Archives. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Adriatic, would be followed by the occupation of the remaining Ionian Islands, and, according to the worst scenario, the road to Venice would be open, with Italy's coast on the Adriatic also exposed.[21] However, in 1716 things changed. The sudden military collapse of Venice and the disappearance of all Venetian possessions in the Peloponnese and in the Aegean provoked a shock in Vienna, which led to the resumption of the war between the two Empires: the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs. The new war, a serendipitous event, saved Venice, and in particular besieged Corfu, from additional disasters, which were also staved off by a new fighting spirit inspired by new, competent, and brave Commanders, worthy opponents of the Kapudan Pasha and of his Captains. However, unfortunately for

21 On the 1716 siege of Corfu see: Hatzopoulos, *La dernière guerre*, cit., pp. 119-146.

Djanum Khodja, he was accused that he didn't do what was expected of him during the siege of Corfu, and also during the encounters with the Venetian fleet near the island. As a result of the accusations, he was removed from his Command and even imprisoned briefly. He was succeeded by Ibrahim Pasha of Aleppo, who held the position during the clashes with the Venetian fleet in 1717 and 1718. Djanum Khodja recovered his position briefly in 1730 and then again from 1732 to 1736.

The year 1717, followed in part by 1718, were the years of Venice's naval counter-attack, or rather attempt at counter-attack, and epic clashes in the Aegean, and, finally, the implementation of a naval strategy, in a sense meaning the pursuit of a goal. The whole exercise was based on past experience. Following the victories of Eugene of Savoy at Peterwardein (August 5, 1716), and, one year later, at Belgrade (the city surrendered on August 22, 1717), the effort could be interpreted as an attempt by the Republic to recapture lost territories. However, the Republic's means were limited and essentially it did not possess an armed force large enough to embark on large scale operations. Even so, enterprises of the kind, based on available land forces and means, of which efficient use could be made by skilled Commanders (Johann Mathias von der Schulenburg [Figs. 4 and 7], Commander of the Corfu garrison during the siege of 1716, being one), were


**7** Commemorative medal for the last Venetian–Ottoman War (1714–1718) and the Siege of Corfu (1716), with reference to Count Schulenburg; by A. R. Werner, 1716. Copper alloy. Courtesy of the National Historical Museum, Athens (cat. n. 4751).


successfully launched along the coastal areas of western Greece and of Albania, capturing a small number of places, including the island of Leucas, and even making an attempt on Modon. However, everything depended on the Imperials who, as was soon demonstrated, with their northern Italian possessions exposed to French mischief, they had no intention of prolonging the war in the Danube. Furthermore, in Venice the enormous cost of supporting and equipping the Navy and the Army, even a small one, had reached, near the end of the war, the sum of 2,700.000 ducats, putting in a serious risk the financial stability of the Republic.[22]

The naval operations of 1717 and 1718 were marked by extreme violence and persistence to achieve the strategic goals set by each rival. While the Ottoman Navy preserved, with the exception of the Kapudan Pasha, its battle tested leadership, the Venetians put forward some of the most daring naval Commanders of the time. The Ottoman Navy aimed at the preservation of the territorial gains obtained in the first year of the war and, depending on developments in the Danube front, at a replay of the Corfu episode of 1716, including an attempt on the other Ionian Islands. On the other hand, if the Republic's Navy could return and operate in the Archipelago, all Ottoman possessions could be exposed to raids and instability. Also, by being challenged in the Aegean, the Ottomans would be kept far from the Ionian Islands, their sea lanes could be endangered, maybe even the ones to Alexandria, local maritime trade and commerce could collapse, insecurity could prevail, and, under a daring naval leadership Venice could even threaten the Dardanelles and sever communications with the island world of the Aegean, first and foremost Crete, which still attracted the revanchist minds among Venice's

22 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

leaders. On the Republic's side, what was clearly brought forward was the intention of shutting the Ottomans in the Dardanelles. If this were achieved, then the Archipelago would be open to intervention and perhaps conquest here and there, while the Ionian Islands would remain safe and distant. Beyond this, landings could be planned, also attacks against coastal fortresses in the Peloponnese, and ideally the capture of at least one of them, perhaps Modon, which would become a convenient anchorage. Of course, what was imperatively needed for success was the continuation of the war in the Danube, more defeats of the enemy, more of its troops withdrawn from the south, in order to reinforce the under heavy pressure units fighting in the north, essentially a replay of the events, which led to victory and the occupation of the Peloponnese in the previous war. The victories of 1716 and 1717, and the annihilation of huge numbers of Ottoman soldiers, including many of their Commanders, imposed the continuation of the war.

Another issue taken under consideration was the Ottoman Government's efforts to deal with the heavy fiscal burden upon the imperial treasury, after years of keeping a huge Army and a powerful Navy mobilized and supplied with new recruits and vessels to fill the gaps, and materiel to replace what had been spent. Also, the Sultan's prestige suffered, and in the European provinces, where most of the population was Christian, this may have had a negative impact and perhaps lead to revolts. The Republic did not want the war to end before it had achieved its aims and that was demonstrated when, in Passarowitz, its representative Carlo Ruzzini asked for the return of the Peloponnese and all the other places lost during the war, that is Tinos, Cythera, Suda, and Spinalonga, and this despite the acceptance of the principle of *uti possedetis* by the belligerents, including the reluctant Venetians, who based on this also asked, besides the above, for Butrinto, Leucas, Preveza, Vonitza, and the region of Xiromero, on the Ionian coast of mainland Greece. If the Ottoman Government refused to return the Peloponnese, then in exchange («contraccambio») it should cede Albanian territory in the region of lake Scutari, and north of that the places of Antivari and Dulcigno.[23] Under Andrea Pisani's orders, in 1717 Lodovico Flangini was named Capitano Straordinario delle Navi (Extraordinary Commander-in-Chief), with Marcantonio Diedo in the post of Capitano Ordinario, and Francesco Correr as Almirante. All four were appointed by the Senate. Unfortunately, the recently appointed new

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 211, 217.

fleet commanders were soon faced with the navy's perennial problem: scarcity of human resources. It seems that only half of the men needed were available. Thus, until new recruitments filled the gaps, the navy had to delay the 1717 offensive in the Aegean and, there again, the Ionian islanders, recruited by the hundreds, alleviated the crisis.[24]

Flangini was in Command of 29 sailing ships, including an auxiliary one, all spread in three divisions: red, blue, and yellow. To them were attached two corvettes, two smaller vessels («pincos»), and four fireships. Having left Corfu on the 10th of May, the fleet reached the island of Imbros, in the northern Aegean, on June 5th, it sailed near the island and anchored there on the 8th. On the 10th of June the Ottoman fleet sailed out of the Dardanelles. Under Ibrahim Pasha's Command it had 38 sailing ships and 6 galliots. From that moment on entered the scene one of the protagonists of the dramatic events in the northern Aegean: the wind and its capricious behavior. Initially, it favored the Ottoman ships, then the Venetian ones, then back to the Ottoman and back again to the Venetian, and so on and so forth.[25] As a result, the two navies, steered haphazardly by the winds, operated in a large area covering the space between the island of Imbros and Mount Athos, and then south towards Skyros and Aghios Stratis. In the interval, when they approached each other, they clashed viciously, usually sailing in parallel lines, causing on each other heavy material damage and death (Fig. 8). Still worse for the Venetian Command, Flangini was hit by a stray bullet on the left side of his neck. Unconscious, he had to be brought on land in bad shape, giving the impression to those around him that he was already dead.[26] Although he was in bad shape and deteriorating, he was carried to the patrona Madonna dell'Arsenale, where he lived, through sheer willpower, until the 23rd of June when,

24 Nani Mocenigo, *Storia della Marina Veneziana*, cit., p. 331; Mario Nani Mocenigo, «Lodovico Flangini», *Rivista di Venezia. A cura del Comune*, XI, 5 (May 1932), p. 213; Candiani, *I vascelli della Serenissima* cit., pp. 527, 537.

25 As Ferrari, *Delle notizie storiche*, cit., writes (p. 192), the ships were pushed by the various changing winds («spinte le armate per que' mari ora da un vento, ora dall'altro»), while pointing that he who enjoys favorable wind is half victorious («è cosa di fatto, che chi ha il sopravvento, ha conseguito mezza vittoria»).

26 From Lodovico Flangini's final report: «[...] circa le hore 18 gravissima offesa da schioperata nemica nel collo al lato sinistro, da cui obligato à cadere in terra, mancatomi nello stesso tempo ogni senso, non mi distinguevo trà vivi, anzi non vi fù alcuno degl'astanti, che non mi giudicasse morto [...]», ASV, PTM, filza 1339, June 21, 1717.

**8** The Battle of Imbros (1717); by Giovanni Raggio, between 1733 and 1741.
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

**9** The last moments of Lodovico Flangini (June 23, 1717), *Capitano Straordinario delle Navi* of the Venetian fleet, mortally wounded during the Battle of Imbros. Drawing by Giuseppe Gatteri, 1850. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

carried on deck to survey the action, he expired, lamented by all who were under his command (Fig. 9). He was succeeded by Marcantonio Diedo.

The second big naval engagement was fought in the gulf of Laconia. It was a violent affair in which participated, with equal violence, nature's elements. The brief clash was interrupted by a storm which dispersed the ships, at least of Venice and of its allies, between Cythera and the east coast of Sicily. On the 2nd of July, 1717, seven Portuguese sailing ships, with two fireships, two sailing ships from Malta, along with a Venetian ship, and a number of auxiliaries joined Diedo's ships at Cape Tainaron (Matapan), in the south of the Peloponnese (Fig. 10). In the afternoon of the same day Pisani joined the fleet with his galleys. There were now 34 Venetian and allied sailing ships. The fleet sailed into the gulf of Laconia and anchored about thirty miles north of the cape. Not far were anchored Pisani's

**10** Portrait of King John V of Portugal alluding to the Battle of Cape Tainaron (Matapan) [1717]; by Giorgio Domenico Duprà, 1719. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

galleys, whose task, for now, was to secure the water supply of the crews of the fleet. This covered the days of 15th, 16th, 17th, and early 18th of July. Then, early in the morning of the 19th the crews saw the enemy approaching: 52 sailing vessels and 4 galleys. The fight started on the same day and was carried in the gulf of Laconia, between the two arms of mountainous land, mount Taygetos in

the southeast, with the peninsula of Mani, and mount Parnon in the northeast. The bloody action went on for a whole day, with the ships carried around by the wind, which kept on changing direction and favoring one or the other of the two opponents. The ferocious naval engagement probably provided a splendid show to the mountain village's population, watching from a natural amphitheater the drama unfolding in front of them, with the elements becoming stronger and more vicious to the point of turning into a storm. Heavy damage was inflicted on the big ships of both enemies, with the allies losing a transport ship and a fireship. On the 20th the Ottoman ships were sailing in the vicinity of Cythera, while the allies were still in the gulf. On the 21st, with both fleets in the gulf, preparing for new action, but far from each other, and the weather deteriorating rapidly and turning into a vicious storm, the council of the captains (*consulta*) voted for the Navy to get out of the gulf and sail towards its Ionian Islands anchorages. In stormy seas, violent winds continuously changing direction, and the ships being battered by high waves, on the 3rd of August the fleet, in disarray, ended up in the east coast of Sicily. One by one, or in squadrons, the vessels reached Corfu, the galleys arrived in the island on the 16th of August. On August 27th, the fleet, with 27 sailing ships, including the two from Malta, the Portuguese having left for home, sailed in a southern direction. At Zakynthos information was received that the enemy was in the waters of Modon, preparing to attack the Ionian Islands of Zakynthos and Cephalonia. The news pointed to a solid strategic plan on the Ottoman fleet's side. Also, in the Ottoman camp circulated the rumor that following its defeat the Venetian fleet had been destroyed by the storm, and the islands were now undefended. However, Venetian anxieties ended there, because soon arrived the latest news from the Danube, about the great victory of Eugene of Savoy at Belgrade, and the capture of that city by his army. Thus, once more, events in the north contributed to the protection of what was left of Venetian possessions.

There wouldn't be another naval engagement in 1717. Fall was approaching and the Ottoman Navy returned to Constantinople, where the Kapudan Pasha was dismissed for failing to destroy the enemy's naval arm.

In the Fall of 1717, following the victories in the Danube and profiting from the demoralization of the Ottoman troops an operation was launched against the fortresses of Preveza and Vonitza, not far from the first, on the Ionian seaboard of Greece. The operation, well prepared, was successful and the two places surrendered on October 23rd and November 2nd, respectively.

The final encounter of the two navies, in 1718, was the most violent. News reached the Venetian fleet's High Command that the enemy's ships were sailing in the southern Aegean. The Ottoman warships had to be kept out of the Ionian Sea by all available means. Thus, on June 10th Diedo issued his order of battle and soon after, the council of the ships's captains decided, without further delay, to sail towards Andros. The fleet left Zakynthos in the morning of June 29th and began sailing along the west coast of the Peloponnese. Again, according to the latest information, the Ottoman fleet, under its new Kapudan Pasha, Suleyman Khodja, had reached the waters around Cythera. The Venetian ships bypassed Modon and entered the gulf of Messenia, where not far from Coron, on July 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, squads of crewmen, under armed protection, carried water supplies to the ships. On the 7th, the fleet abandoned Coron and sailed, in a northeastern direction, in search of the Ottoman ships. On July 20th, the two fleets were separated by a distance of only two miles. They were again in the gulf of Laconia, the Ottomans close to the small island of Elaphonissos, just north of Cythera, with Diedo's units closing slowly. There were 36 Ottoman sailing vessels to Venice's 26. The battle began in the afternoon of the same day, July 20th, west of Elaphonissos, while in the Venetian battle line ships were still sailing into battle position. From the beginning the clash was extremely violent, destructive to the ships and highly murderous to humans. When night came a number of Venetian units had suffered serious damage and had lost many men. The Kapudan Pasha and his captains could boast of an early victory. On the morrow, July the 21st, the date of the signature of the Treaty of Passarowitz, the two navies, in full view of each other, were slowly pushed by the sea current towards Cythera. Tense gunfight on both sides marked the day. More material damage and human losses, but not as serious as the first day, were added to those having already been inflicted, and when night came both fleets began distancing themselves slowly from the mortal entanglement.

During the night, pushed by the wind distance between the two fleets increased slowly, but steadily. Both groups moved towards Cape Tainaron. Every now and then, the wind changed direction and favored either of the opponents. In the morning of the 22nd, the Ottoman ships, pushed by the wind, were able to come close to the Venetian and violent action began. Now, the ships were fighting in an utterly haphazard way. The planned and expected battle lines had collapsed, and the vessels exchanged fire moving in dense smoke, in a confused mass, try-

ing, at the same time, to avoid the threatening enemy fireships. Again, the wind pushed them slowly back, towards Elaphonissos and Cythera. Both opponents suffered heavy material damage, while heavily damaged ships, covered by other vessels, were pulled out of action.

Before nightfall, the Kapudan Pasha signaled the disentanglement of his ships. The Ottoman Armada started sailing away from the battle area, and during the night it was able to distance itself from the enemy. Next morning the distance between the two fleets increased and kept increasing. The Venetians didn't go after the enemy; they had also suffered heavy material damage and high human losses. On the 24th and 25th the Ottoman ships continued their northeastern course. More and more distance was added between the two fleets. The Venetian vessels, still battered by strong winds, arrived at Zakynthos on the 13th of August. The next day, their Commanders received news of the signature of the Treaty of Passarowitz. That was the end of hostilities, the war was finally over.[27]

## *In Search of Naval Strategy*

Strategy, political or military, the latter in its naval expression, incorporates the principles of a state's doctrine. A doctrine, in both its military and political expressions, covers the whole specter of a state's being and contains the elements which promote and protect its existence. Strategy, as a subordinate element, may also be political or military and aims at the achievement of goals set by doctrine. To achieve these goals, strategy invents and applies well rehearsed and effective methods. If all proceeds well, then doctrine, through sound strategy, has achieved its goals, and the state profits. Briefly, a state sets a doctrine, invents a strategy, to satisfy the requirements of doctrine, and sets in motion the necessary methods. All three elements have to be flexible, and respond to changing circumstances. Flexibility protects from failure and promotes chances of success. On the issue of naval strategy, the student of this particular subject first needs to define the constituent element of it, that is its goal. Undoubtedly, the fundamental goal of naval strategy is the acquisition and preservation of command of the sea in a particular geographic area, combined with the elimination of enemy reaction. This

27 On the 1717 and 1718 naval clashes in the gulf of Laconia and near Cythera, see Hatzopoulos, *La dernière guerre*, cit., pp. 171-178, 199-204.

goal may be reached through ways adapted to geography and climate, including weather conditions and, especially, – for warships of the times when sails were used – the bearing of winds blowing in the area of operations. Then, the student has to examine the means for the achievement of the above, including quality, number and type of ships involved, closeness of repair and maintenance naval stations, availability of necessary war materiel, such as number and type of naval guns, including sufficient quantities and types of ammunition. Also needed are equipment and instruments for on board repairs, and, of course, successful recruitment and training of naval crews possessing various skills, as well as of competent Commanders, including High Command, composed of men who, besides being ready for vigorous action, would also be able to draw effective naval operations scenaria and, if possible, guess correctly the enemy's destination, strength, and disposition of ships. Naturally, this process is closely related to conditions and circumstances influencing the actions and reactions of the opposing parties. On naval strategy, the Navy acts as an instrument contributing to the implementation of methods which lead to sought after goals, thus, abiding by and satisfying defined and agreed upon naval strategy, and finally state doctrine. Of course, all three elements have to be combined. As indeed has been proposed, «if there is no doctrine, strategy cannot be translated into tactical actions».[28]

On Venice's side its authorities had to deal with the traumatic loss of Crete in 1669, following four centuries of occupation and absorption of the big island, and also the economic loss inflicted on the Republic's finances, first by the protracted military operations and then by the damage inflicted upon its economy and geostrategic interests. The loss of the big island also meant the loss of repair and maintenance naval stations right in the Aegean Sea, and, inevitably, the disappearance of a pool of human resources. Indeed, long years of fight, huge losses, both material and human, caused irreparable damage. However, as a member of a mighty alliance, the Republic counter-attacked and at the end of the 17th century, in 1699, found itself in possession of a huge piece of land, the Peloponnese, just northwest of Crete. Its efforts to improve economic conditions and plant strong roots in the new territory would inevitably take years and the Republic did not have time. Strategically, in case of a new war, the new territory, adjacent to main-

28 Vice Admiral Luigi Donolo, Italian Navy – James J. Tritten, *The History of Italian Naval Doctrine*, Naval Doctrine Command, Norfolk, Virginia, 1 June, 1995, p. 3.

land Greece, was fully exposed to the enemy. Thus, during the few years of its stay Venice channeled its energies to the task of building and repairing powerful fortifications, a previously tried defensive tactic, with various rates of success. Indeed, the Republic's wars with its great adversary had, for most of the time, been fought around fortresses. Cyprus, with Nicosia and Famagusta, is an example and, of course Crete and the epic siege of the great fortress of Candia (today's Heraklion) is the most notorious. The wars ended only when those fortresses were captured and a peace treaty was signed, until, of course, the next war and the next sieges. However, there was another important element, defining the outcome of those struggles: naval action. Unavoidably, this was imposed by the region's geography which defined, to a large extent, the history of the relations, violent or not, of the two Mediterranean actors, and, inevitably, from very early on their antagonism became marked by a strong naval element. In the war of 1714–1718 Venice had to protect the repaired and newly constructed, with huge expense, Peloponnesian strongholds. Being, however, unable to prevent the land approach of the huge army led by the Grand Vizier, it might be said that the Republic's naval force should at least have tried to impede, or seriously obstruct, all naval assistance, allowing only one arm of the enemy's might to function. The method had been tried at Candia for many years. At least, in the Peloponnese, in the case of strongly fortified Nafplion, it could have been attempted. How successful might the effort have been it is not known. Of course, the issue rests upon the question of whether a Venetian naval strategy, corresponding to a doctrine, existed or not at that time. In the case of the Republic's eastern possessions, before and during the first year of the war, both doctrine and subsequent strategy are lost in fog. Huge investments in fortifications, but no sufficient and competent human investment for their protection, is the rule. Inevitably, the answer to the existence of naval strategy ought to be negative, at least for the first year of the war. Indeed, for that time, it can be said that there was no Venetian Navy. The years 1717 and 1718 were a different story. Those were the years of Venetian naval reaction, but it was too late, and the war ended before any results were produced. Indeed, in 1715 and 1716, the Ottoman fleet, clearly following well defined doctrine and strategy, was moving at will and later, having pushed the Venetian fleet out of the Northern Aegean, was even preparing a new attempt, for 1717 and 1718, to capture the southern Ionian Islands, but in 1718 strong Venetian reaction and then Passarowitz put an end to all naval action.

Corbett put an emphasis on the issue of command of the sea, meaning control of maritime communications and not, necessarily, conquering of the sea, something physically impossible. He advanced the notion that naval warfare had as a main object the acquisition of command of the sea, while at the same time preventing the enemy from acquiring it. Acquiring and securing command of it depends on the outcome of a naval battle or the success of naval blockade. To obtain the best result and secure the desired goal the method needed consisted of the tactic of concentration or grouping of forces. Thus, a powerful strike could be launched upon the enemy.[29] These arguments were successfully set in motion by the Ottoman Navy, which also succeeded in obtaining control of the sea simultaneously with the Ottoman Army obtaining control of the land. It is evident that two negative elements undermined Venetian resolution and caused the loss of command at sea, in the sense of total collapse of communications with its remaining Aegean possessions. Those were the poor condition of the Navy, reflecting the prevailing mood among a number of influential members of the Venetian body politic, and its timorous command, reaching the level of cowardice, in the person of Daniel Dolfin. Thus, to paraphrase Corbett and put Venice instead of England: «if Venice were to lose command of the sea, it would be all over with her»[30] was not far from the truth. On land, things were not much different and thus the Ottoman Army, in full coordination with the Navy, prevailed easily. In the past Venetian Naval Strategy was aimed at keeping the enemy's Navy locked in the Dardanelles and thus protect the Aegean possessions of the Republic, simultaneously preventing the naval arm of the enemy from reinforcing troops operating on land. This time the old tactic was forgotten. Besides, there was nothing left to protect in the Aegean.

As with past wars between the two, the Ottoman Navy was ready to fight in order to avoid being blockaded in the straits. In the first and most critical year of the war the two eternal adversaries found themselves in different situations. It was indeed a one sided war, with Venice bound to disappear from the regional scene almost within three months. Indeed, the Ottoman Army and Navy carried a two prong attack first on land, all the way down to the Peloponnese, and then through the Aegean Sea capturing the last Venetian possessions. In the following

29 Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, cit., pp. 91, 94, 128, 163.

30 England, in *Ibid.*, text, p. 92.

year (1716), again in a combined Army and Navy operation, Corfu was besieged (Fig. 6). However, the expansion of the war in the Danube front in the same year, and Prince Eugene's victories, saved the strategic island for Venice and a new siege was not repeated for the remainder of the war. The years 1717 and 1718 were more traditional in sea activity, but were characterized by dearth of land operations in the region. As in the past, again the Venetian Navy, now stronger – soon to be reinforced by allied units –, attempted to bottle up the Ottomans in the Dardanelles. By successfully shutting up or forcing battle, which would have to be won, with a Navy now about equal in size to the enemy's, at least in firepower, a reversal of the strategic situation in the Aegean could be expected. The question was why now? Wasn't it too late? In the past, in order to preserve possessions in the Archipelago or protect sea lanes leading to the Aegean possessions, that was the way to act. Now, conditions had changed and all Venetian Archipelago holdings had been lost. The idea of preparing the ground for landings here and there, maybe on the Peloponnese or, again, on Crete, and starting all over again the 1680's and the 1690's had to be dropped for lack of means and especially of a land army. However, Venice still held valuable land assets in the Ionian Sea, which had to be defended. Their defense began in the Dardanelles. With the winds imposing, to a large extent, the movements of the opposing fleets, dissolving the concentration of units and upsetting their plans, the Ottoman fleet came out successfully, clashed valiantly with the Venetian ships, and during the fight among the many dead on both sides was counted Lodovico Flangini. Slowly, but steadily, the Ottoman ships made headway and in that same Summer of 1717 they were fighting the Venetians further south, in the gulf of Laconia. By now, it had become clear that the Kapudan Pasha intended to sail westward and assault the islands of Zakynthos and Cephalonia, while transporting from the Peloponnese a landing force. The enemy had to be stopped at all costs, which indeed happened.[31] The next Summer, 1718, violent and particularly murderous fighting occurred again in the area of the gulf of Laconia. With the Venetian sailors being able to repel the assault on the Ionian Islands, and ready to continue fighting, news of the Treaty of Passarowitz reached the parties and the war ended.

Due to the initiative being held by the Ottoman fleet, and the lack of Venetian reaction in the early stages of the war, instructions could be issued and commu-

31 Ferrari, *Delle notizie storiche*, cit., p. 204.

nicated by the Ottoman Supreme Command, aiming at simultaneous operations, without adapting them to the enemy's inexistent reaction. In pursuing its objectives the fleet had freedom of action, and could adapt to necessities and changing conditions. With the Navy transporting heavy equipment and troops to the Army operating in the Peloponnese, other naval units could operate elsewhere. Inevitably, the early successes caused hardship to the Venetian crews, prone to discouragement and desertions. For the Ottoman Naval Command it was a question of trying to hurt the enemy's will to resist. This explains the enthusiasm shown by the Venetians, beyond the usual official ceremonies, for the arrival of the big Portuguese ships and those of the other allies. In the second stage of the war the two opponents were almost equal in war materiel and human resources.

From the beginning, the war was fought on the Ottoman side based on coordination of land and sea forces, with the latter also controlling and protecting sea communications and emerging as a very important element for the realization of the goals set by the Ottoman Supreme Military Command. The Navy acted in close coordination with the Army, seeing it exactly as a second line. The strategy followed by the Ottomans, in 1715 was based on weak enemy reaction and heavy strikes upon him. Following that year and the withdrawal of the Grand Vizier's troops from the Peloponnese, the two adversaries found themselves almost equal at sea. What mattered now were their plans and the methods for their achievement, which influenced the general conduct of the war at sea and the continuity of their actions. The attempt to keep the Ottoman Navy locked in the straits, in order to protect the Ionian Islands, failed. Indeed, in 1717 the Kapudan Pasha's ships sortied but, one year later the two fleets were still fighting in the Aegean, now along the coast of southeastern Peloponnese. The Ottoman Naval Command still intended to assault the Ionian Islands and also transport troops to them from the Peloponnese. It was however, late in the Summer, and in the final action of the war, in August 1718, that the Ottoman fleet was repulsed by the Venetian Navy. Thus, the new aggressive Venetian Naval Strategy produced results. Its main characteristic was, first and foremost, an offensive orientation, set in motion by a combat minded leadership, which also inspired the fleet's crews and raised the spirits of the men. What followed was the reinforcement of the fleet with allied units, especially the Portuguese big warships, in order to upset the Ottoman advantage in the number of units. Also important was the addition of fireships, which, if not materially effective, at least they caused anxiety among the enemy

Captains, who had an additional element to worry about. Meanwhile, in Venice the arsenal's shipyards were actively pursuing construction of new ships.

More than one hundred and fifty years later, the great priest of naval strategy Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) examined in his opus the encounters in the Atlantic and Indian oceans of Europe's sea protagonists, England, France, Holland, and to a lesser extent Spain. He might as well have examined the two Aegean adversaries, who had been at odds for a much longer time than Mahan's actors. However, in the late 19th century Venice did not exist as an independent state, but instead was seen as a cultural icon, thanks in part to John Raskin's three volumes on *The Stones of Venice (1851–1853)*, and becoming a prized tourist destination, while the decaying Ottoman Empire was known as the sick man of Europe. But even so, the two old enemies fall largely within Mahan's prerequisites, something which essentially points to the universality of the precepts diagnosed by the keen American naval academic. Indeed, geographically, a concentration of forces was dictated upon both adversaries. The war had to be fought in the Aegean, a restrained sea space, dotted with islands. Certainly, it was not the wide Atlantic. This, inevitably favored a concentration of forces on both sides in a small area, a more or less limited dispersal of units and better communications under normal sailing, and also better coordinated handling of the movements of individual units by the High Command, when and if needed. However, on the negative side, when, during battle season, the vicious summer winds of the Aegean blew, all plans and calculations simply went amiss. With a strength of 7 or 8 on the Beaufort scale, the Etesians (*meltemia*) imposed nature's will on man's actions and behavior.

Mahan recognized that «circumstances have caused the Mediterranean to play a greater part in the history of the world, both in a commercial and a military point of view, than any other sheet of water of the same size. Nation after nation has striven to control it, and the strife still goes on». Almost all elements, cited by the American author were encountered there, and the Aegean seaboard of the Ottoman Empire may be seen as a frontier opening to the outside world, while Venice was unable to maintain its positions, although it had come to the Aegean long before its antagonist. Of course, on a more practical and positive scale, in the case of both powers the existence of great shipping meant extended employment, crews were recruited from all around the Mediterranean, and great numbers


**11** Corfu, view of the port of Gouvia and the Venetian shipyards. Source: André Grasset de Saint-Sauveur, *Voyage historique, littéraire et pittoresque dans les isles et possessions ci-devant vénitiennes du Levant* [...], Paris, chez Tavernier, [1800].

of people were involved in the construction, repair, and maintenance of ships.[32] Finally, what emerged from the violence at sea, during the 1714–1718 war, was the fact that the Navy was the most important element, far more important than fortresses, for the defense and survival of Venice, something also demonstrated in previous conflicts. When it was neglected and kept aside, the first year of the war ended in disaster, and one can only imagine what might have happened had the Republic not mobilized its one and only available weapon of defense and

32 Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, 12th edition, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1890, pp. 29-31, 33, 35, 46. For example, during the siege of Corfu by the Ottomans in 1716, the Venetians built a shipyard at Gouvia to service their ships (Figs. 11 and 12); it was part of a network of Venetian arsenals and naval stations in the Hellenic territories.

counter-attack. After all, from time immemorial the sea has imposed upon those who sail on it its own terms and rules. Human strategy is adapted to the capricious watery element. One has to abide by it, learn from it, adapt to it, respect it, and know how to handle its component winds, storms, currents, and distances. This experience has to be combined with familiarity, demonstrated by ships's crews, with human inventions, from the lone sail of times past to the complexity of the ships of our times.

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**12** Corfu, today's view of the Venetian shipyards at Gouvia. Photo by the editor.

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Icon of the naval Battle of Curzolari (Echinades in Greek) islands, by the Cretan painter Georgios Klontzas, last decades of the 16th century; one of the most famous depictions of the naval Battle of Lepanto in post-Byzantine art. Courtesy of the National Historical Museum, Athens (cat. n. 3578).

# *Venetian-Ottoman Wars*

## *Articles*



## *Documents*



## *Reviews*