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## AGAINST ALL ODDS: A NAVAL CLASH IN THE EARLY MODERN MEDITERRANEAN BETWEEN THE OTTOMANS AND THE ENGLISH (1633)\*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Large scale institutional structures or major naval clashes have so far been the focus of Ottoman historiography regarding the Mediterranean. This study, in contrast, aims at addressing relatively minor issues in the early modern period. By relying on archival material and narrative sources of both European and Ottoman origin, it firstly scrutinises the preparation of the Ottoman navy for the yearly patrol. The process of preparation showcases the transfer of maritime knowledge from the West to the Ottomans through Moriscos. Then, it evaluates a military clash between two English merchant ships and the Ottoman fleet at the command of Grand Admiral Cafer Pasha (in office 1632-1634) in June 1633. Because defeating the English merchants came at a great cost, the fiasco of the Ottoman navy became instructive. It shows the lack of naval experience many Ottoman grand admirals of the early modern period suffered from, due mostly to their appointment by the Ottoman palace.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Ottoman navy; maritime technology; galley; galleon; Mediterranean; Istanbul; 17th century; Moriscos.*

**SFIDANDO OGNI PROBABILITÀ: UNO SCONTRO NAVALE NEL MEDITERRANEO IN ETÀ MODERNA TRA GLI OTTOMANI E GLI INGLESI (1633)**

**SOMMARIO:** *Strutture istituzionali su larga scala o grandi scontri navali sono stati sempre il fulcro della storiografia ottomana riguardo al Mediterraneo. Questo studio, al contrario, mira ad affrontare questioni relativamente minori nella prima età moderna. Basandosi su materiale d'archivio e fonti narrative di origine sia europea che ottomana, questo studio esamina in primo luogo la preparazione della marina ottomana per il pattugliamento annuale. Il processo di preparazione mette in mostra il trasferimento della conoscenza marittima dall'Occidente agli Ottomani attraverso i morisco. Poi, si valuta uno scontro militare tra due navi mercantili inglesi e la flotta ottomana al comando del grande ammiraglio Cafer Pascià (che fu ammiraglio tra il 1632 e il 1634) nel giugno 1633. Poiché la sconfitta dei mercanti costò cara agli ottomani, il fiasco della marina ottomana è diventato istruttivo. Ciò dimostra la mancanza di esperienza navale di cui soffrirono molti grandi ammiragli ottomani della prima età moderna, dovuta principalmente alla loro nomina da parte del palazzo ottomano.*

**PAROLE CHIAVE:** *marina ottomana; tecnologia marittima; galea; galeone; Mediterraneo; Istanbul; Seicento; morisco.*

\* Abbreviations: Ags (Archivo General de Simancas); Boa (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi), Mad.d (Maliyeden Müdevver Defterler), Kk.d (Kamil Kepeci Defterleri); OeStA (Oesterreichisches Staatsarchiv), HHStA (Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv); Tna (The National Archives), Sp (State Papers). The author would like to thank the reviewers for their invaluable recommendations and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ömer Gezer (Hacettepe University, Türkiye) for his generosity in supplying the images of the documents from Tna.

## 1. Introduction

On a calm summer day around the western shores of the Aegean Sea in 1633, two English merchant ships faced a very unpleasant surprise that any European trader was afraid to experience. The Ottoman armada at the command of the grand admiral (*kaptan-ı derya*) showed up in the horizon while they were trying to load grain on board. Even though there was no enmity between the Ottomans and the English, it soon became clear that the Ottoman navy was approaching with hostile intentions. The English sailors were left with no choice but to defend themselves despite their undeniable numerical disadvantage.

Traditionally, Ottoman maritime historiography has neglected dealing with such seemingly insignificant happenings. Rather, it focused either on macro-perspective evaluations of the empire's naval organisation (like the shipyard) or on the full-scale military clashes in the Mediterranean, such as the Battle of Lepanto (in 1571)<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, the study of minor events or of developments regarded as less worthy of attention by the historiography also has as much to offer us regarding the institutional mechanism of the empire's maritime organisation<sup>2</sup>. Defeats and setbacks might be more telling regarding the commanding staff or technological development of any military establishment<sup>3</sup>.

And studying Ottoman maritime developments is all the more urgent, considering that even the Ottoman military history of the era of Suleyman the Magnificent (the rather popular period of the early modern Ottoman Empire) mostly focused «on the sultan's endeavours in central Europe: Ottoman infantry, cavalry, and artillery»<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For the Ottoman navy in general, see C. Imber, *The Navy of Suleyman the Magnificent*, in C. Imber (ed.), *Studies in Ottoman History and Law*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1996, pp. 1-70; C. Isom-Verhaaren. *The Sultan's Fleet: Seafarers of the Ottoman Empire*. I.B. Tauris, London, 2022; İ. Bostan, *Osmanlı Bahriye Teşkilatı: XVII. Yüzyılda Tersane-i Amire*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1992; H.S. Tabakoğlu, *Akdeniz'de Savaş: Osmanlı-İspanya Mücadelesi (1560-1574)*, Kronik Kitap, Istanbul, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> A similar call has already been made by Jan Glete in his introductory chapter: J. Glete (ed.), *Naval History 1500-1680*, Routledge, London & New York, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Imber's detailed study on the Ottoman navy's recuperation after the Battle of Lepanto is a very good exposition of the dynamics of the naval organisation, C. Imber, *The Reconstruction of the Ottoman Fleet after the Battle of Lepanto, 1571-1572*, in C. Imber (ed.), *Studies in Ottoman History and Law*, The Isis Press, Istanbul, 1996, pp. 85-102.

<sup>4</sup> A. Tzavaras, *Two Perceptions of Süleyman's 'Magnificent' Navy during the Later Italian Wars*, «War & Society», XLII, 2 (2023), pp. 123-139, in particular 127-128.

In short, the Ottoman navy requires further inquiries, including the minuscule events.

Countless small-scale skirmishes must have taken place during the early modern period of the Mediterranean, most of them waiting for scholarly attention. The present study, hence, chooses one of them, a case from the seventeenth century Eastern Mediterranean: Katip Çelebi (1609-1657), the notable Ottoman scientist of the seventeenth century, pointed to a singular maritime incident three times in his famous work *Tuhfetu'l-Kibar fi Esfari'il-Bihar* (Gift for the Grandees regarding Naval Campaigns), probably the most important treatise regarding the early modern Ottoman naval establishment. In the lunar year 1043 (which corresponded to some time between 1633 and 1634), pointed Katip Çelebi, a naval encounter near Kassandra almost claimed Ottoman Grand Admiral Cafer Pasha's life (in office between 1632 and 1634)<sup>5</sup>. Admittedly, the temporal ambiguity of the event and the lacking identification of the actors concerned in Katip Çelebi's account require clarification, which is the intention of the present study.

This study will first briefly evaluate the Ottoman navy within the seventeenth century Mediterranean context at the time of the grand admiralty of Cafer Pasha. Then, a quick overlook at the admiral and a brief chronology of the navy's preparation for the summer campaign will be provided, while the role played in the process by a Morisco (Antonio de Ávalos) in the Ottoman imperial service will also be discussed. Lastly, the pasha's military skill as a navy commander will be questioned with reference to the maritime engagement that Katip Çelebi deemed so important as to emphatically remind his readers. One general and perhaps implicit contribution of this study is to the 'decline' debate in Ottoman military historiography<sup>6</sup>. While Ottoman receptiveness to maritime technology transfer is reconfirmed and further evidenced within the ambit of the present article's arguments, the handicaps of political appointments to an immanently technical job such as the grand admiralty are hereby exemplified, too. Thus, the aim is to contribute to European and Ottoman military historiography via the study of a micro-scale naval battle in the seventeenth century.

<sup>5</sup> Kâtip Çelebi, *Tuhfetu'l-Kibar fi Esfari'il-Bihar*, edited by İdris Bostan, Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi, Ankara, 2018, pp. 192, 223, 230.

<sup>6</sup> J. Grant, *Rethinking the Ottoman "Decline": Military Technology Diffusion in the Ottoman Empire, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, «Journal of World History», 10, 1 (1999), pp. 179-201.

## 2. The Mediterranean Context in the Seventeenth Century

Historiographic tradition places ample emphasis on the fact that there were no major clashes between the Christian polities and Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean in the period after the Battle of Lepanto in 1571<sup>7</sup>. Hence, until the outbreak of the Cretan War (1645-1669), the primary task of the Ottoman fleet was to patrol the Mediterranean in order to protect Ottoman coastal settlements and maritime transportation against Christian corsairs. Ottoman efforts to fend off the raids operated by the Tuscan and Maltese military orders (St. Stephen and St. John of Jerusalem respectively) stated a reason for the Ottoman navy to navigate the Levant each year during the spring and summer<sup>8</sup>. Hence, it was not any great Christian armada at all out sea battles, but rather raids that the Ottoman fleet was operating against in this period. It would be fair to observe that Ottoman navy fought during this era against forces who employed “hit-and-run” tactics and aimed at capturing as many Muslim slaves as possible to fill the ranks of their rowers<sup>9</sup>.

Another novelty of the period was the increasing interest of Western and Northern European sailors in the Mediterranean ports. This so-called “northern invasion” suggested that French, English and Dutch shipping started to take control of the Mediterranean maritime trade around the turn of the seventeenth century<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> A. Tenenti, *Piracy and the Decline of Venice 1580-1615*, tr. by Brian Pullan, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> I. Bostan, *Akdeniz’de Korsanlık: Osmanlı Deniz Gücü*, in İdris Bostan and Salih Özbaran (edited by) *Baslangıçtan XVII. Yüzyılın Sonuna Kadar Türk Denizcilik Tarihi, Cilt 1*, Deniz Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı, 2009, pp. 227-240; D. Panzac, *Osmanlı Donanması (1572-1923)*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul, 2020, pp. 94; P. Fodor, *Maltese pirates, Ottoman captives and French traders in the early seventeenth-century Mediterranean*, in Geza David and Pal Fodor (eds.), *Ransom Slavery along the Ottoman Borders (Early Fifteenth-Early Eighteenth Centuries)*, Brill, Leiden, 2007, pp. 221-238, particularly p. 222.

<sup>9</sup> M. Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010, p. 4; M. Gemignani, *The Navies of the Medici: The Florentine Navy and Navy of the Sacred Military Order of St. Stephen, 1547-1648* in John B. Hattendorf and Richard W. Unger (eds.), *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Boydell: Woodbridge, England, 2002, pp. 169-185, esp. on pp. 181-182; and M. Acıpinar, *Anti-ottoman activities of the Order of the Knights of St. Stephen during the second half of the 16th century*, in Dejanirah Couto, Feza Gunergun, and Maria Pia Pedani Fabris (eds.), *Seapower, Technology, and Trade: Studies in Turkish Maritime History*, Piri Reis University Publications, İstanbul, 2014, pp. 165-172.

<sup>10</sup> M. Greene, *Beyond the Northern Invasion: The Mediterranean in the Seventeenth Century*, «The Past and Present», 174, (2002), pp. 42-71, p. 43.

The Eastern Mediterranean ports under Ottoman rule were likewise exposed to this rising interest and the northern invasion of the Levantine cities took start with the Ottoman granting of capitulations to the English (in 1580) and Dutch (in 1612). Accordingly, Dutch and English trade vessels boosted their commercial traffic with the Ottoman ports in a more organised and intensive fashion beginning in the early years of the seventeenth century.

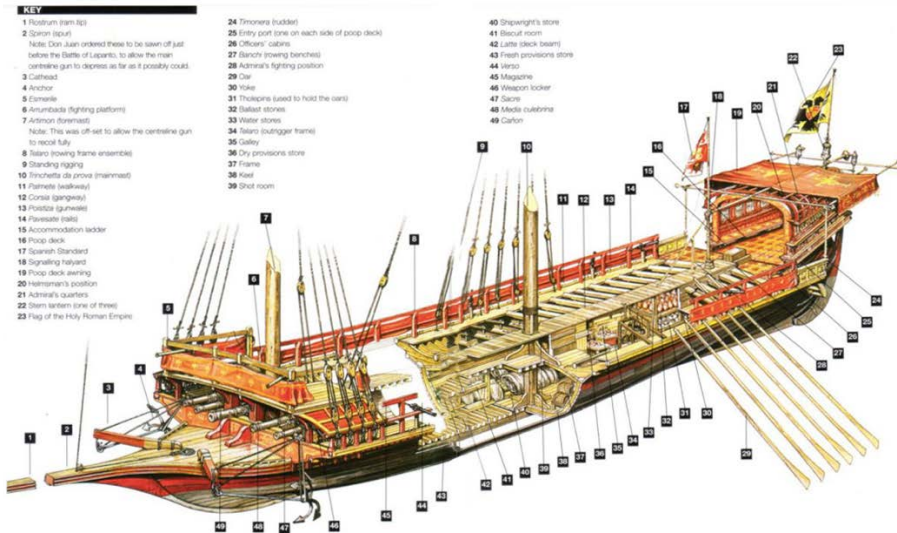
For the Ottoman navy, then, coming across English and Dutch ships during its yearly patrols was only normal. These patrolling navies were made up of two separate parts: first was the set of central pieces that were constantly prepared or repaired in the imperial shipyard (*tersane-i amire*) in Istanbul. They would be the ones to start the campaigns at the command of the grand admiral each year. The second group was that of the provincial contribution: county governors (*sancak beyis*) from a large area covering all the way from the Sea of Marmara to the Peloponnesus (such as Negroponte, Lepanto, Kocaeli, Lesbos and Rhodes among others) contributed to the imperial navy with at least one vessel each, making up a flotilla of fifteen to twenty ships<sup>11</sup>.

These county governors, as a quick overview of their geographical locations on a map would reveal, had an understandable facility with seaborne affairs and, hence, were also named as the *derya beyis* (literally, lords of the sea), the governor of Rhodes being the most prestigious among them<sup>12</sup>. Including them, the Ottoman patrol fleet in the Mediterranean reached up to a total of seventy to eighty pieces each year. Even though its size was far below the sixteenth century levels (when hundreds of galleys used to face each other), the situation was not considerably different from the Western Mediterranean. The so-called «Atlantic orientation» of Spain corresponded to a decrease in the size of the Spanish navy in the Mediterranean: Philip III's squadron of Spanish galleys, for instance, was reduced to 12 in the early seventeenth century, too<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> O. Özkan, *Erken Modern Dönem Akdeniz Hâkimiyeti ve Osmanlı Deniz Gücü (1578-1645)*, İstanbul 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi, Unpublished MA Thesis, 2016, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> C. Isom-Verhaaren, *The Sultan's Fleet*, p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> I.A.A. Thompson, *Las galeras en la política militar española en el Mediterráneo durante el siglo XVI*, «Manuscripts», 24, (2006), pp. 95-124, especially pp. 114-115; D. Goodman, *Armadas in an Age of Scarce Resources: Struggling to Maintain the Fleet in Seventeenth-century Spain*, «Journal of European Economic History» (1999-1), pp. 49-76; M.A. Bunes Ibarra, *La defensa de la cristiandad; las armadas en el mediterráneo en la edad moderna*, «Cuadernos de Historia Moderna», Anejo V, (2006), pp. 77-99, p. 96.



A. Konstam, *Renaissance War Galley, 1470-1590*, Osprey, Oxford, 2002, pp. 28-29.

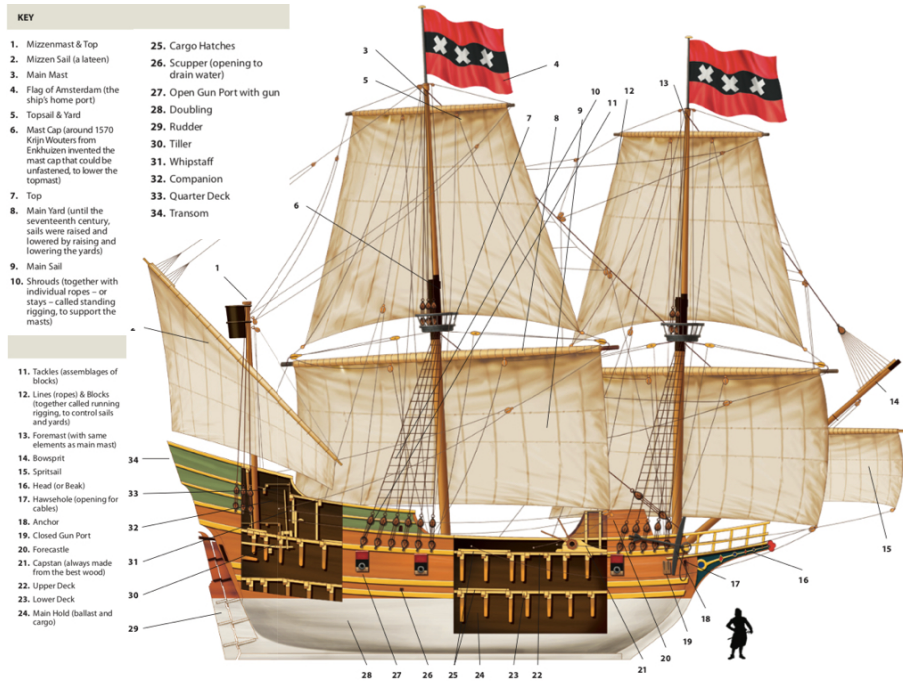
Fig. 1 – A Spanish Galley (ca. 1571)

In terms of technology, there were concrete differences between the preferred model of Ottoman vessels and the ships of the northern traders: the Ottoman navy relied heavily on the two-millennia-old primary medium of transportation of the Mediterranean, the galley (*kadirga*). With a hull size of up to thirty meters in length and five meters in width, flat and low-lying galleys could only be moved with hundreds of rowers, the limited number of sails on board serving only as complementary. Due to the constant need for supplies and clean water required by such crowded crews, galleys could not navigate far from the shore; and if they did, it was not for long. The handful of canons at the prows (three to five) suggested that the striking force of the vessel was not firepower, but rather the melee skills and prowess of the crew after boarding. The spur placed about the prows since antiquity manifested that galleys adopted “boarding” as the primary method of assault during military encounters: a galley would first fire a single round from its canons (the strongest being the centre gun, the so-called *corsiero*, whereas the flanking pieces were of lower calibre) and then try boarding the enemy vessel<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> J.F. Guilmartin, *Galleons and Galleys*, Cassel&Co, London, 2002, pp. 158-163; J.H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology, and War: Studies in the maritime history of the Mediterranean, 649-1571*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1988; M. Morin, *Artiglierie navali in ambito veneziano: tipologia e tecniche di realizzazione*,



In principle, the Ottoman galleys were similar to those of the other Mediterranean powers, following closely the development of galley technology<sup>15</sup>.



B. De Groot, *Dutch Navies of the 80 Years' War, 1568-1648*, Osprey, Oxford, 2018, pp. 14-15.

Fig. 2 – A Dutch Sailing Ship (Late Sixteenth Century)

The northern merchant vessels, on the other hand, were galleons. As opposed to galleys, galleons had higher decks and were operated by sails. Accordingly, they could cover longer distances with smaller crews and, hence, were better suited to navigation in the open seas. Furthermore, the numerous superimposed decks on galleons allowed these vessels to carry more cannons on board and employ higher

«Quaderni di Oplologia », (2006b), pp. 3-28, on pp. 22-23; C. Jörgensen et alii, *Dünya Savaş Tarihi: Erken Modern Çağ. Teçhizat, Savaş Yöntemleri, Taktikler 1500-1763* (translated by Özgür Kolçak), Timaş, İstanbul, 2011, p. 215; E.S. Gürkan, *Sultannın Korsanları: Osmanlı Akdeniz'inde Gazâ, Yağma ve Esaret, 1500-1700*, Kronik, İstanbul, 2020, pp. 113-115.

<sup>15</sup> C. Imber, *The Navy of Süleyman*, pp. 6-7.

firepower thanks to the broadside cannons, though it was still the bow guns that proved to be the main striking force<sup>16</sup>. In particular, the ships developed and utilised by the English and Dutch merchants dominated the Levant and were known as *bertones*, which were broad and vigorous ships with three masts, armed with twenty to thirty cannons<sup>17</sup>. In his case study of such an English galleon's maritime fight in 1617, Tinniswood expressed that the English vessel was protected by nineteen large canons, nine smaller anti-personnel guns and a total of thirty eight sailors<sup>18</sup>. The Ottoman navy, on the other hand, eschewed the widespread use of galleons until the last quarter of the seventeenth century despite having gained familiarity with them as early as the fifteenth century<sup>19</sup>.

The Ottoman reluctance to make use of galleons for a long while and the disaster at Lepanto in 1571 have long been regarded as signs of the Ottoman decline vis-a-vis the rest of Europe<sup>20</sup>. Nonetheless, this study will further the argument that neither in terms of technology nor within the larger picture of Mediterranean maritime warfare were they falling short of their immediate rivals. As will be shown below, if there was anything missing in the Ottoman naval establishment, it was not in material or technical capacities, but rather due to political decisions in the administrative cadres.

### 3. Preparing the Navy: Grand Admiral Cafer Pasha

Ottoman grand admiralty was among the top-ranking offices of the empire for most of the early modern period. Even though the admiralty was supposed to be a majorly technical job given its maritime character, the question of who would fill the office became a matter of debate, particularly after the death of Hayreddin Barbarossa in 1546: would it be a seafarer by profession or a bureaucrat with strong connections to the palace? When the latter choice was opted for, the grand admiral was strongly admonished to listen to the seafarers surrounding him,

<sup>16</sup> J.F. Guilmartin, *Galleons and Galleys*, pp. 158-163; E.S. Tenace, *Review: Naval History, 1500-1680 by Jan Glete*, «The Sixteenth Century Journal», 39, no. 2 (2008), 485-487, on page 486.

<sup>17</sup> D. Goffman, Daniel, *İzmir ve Levanten Dünya (1550-1650)*, (translated by Ayşen Anadol and Neyir Kalaycıoğlu), Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> A. Tinniswood, *17. Yüzyılda Akdeniz'de Korsanlık: Denizler, Fetihler, Korsanlar, Esaret, Politika, Yayılmacılık ve Bölünme*, İnkılap Yayınları, İstanbul, 2011, p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> İ. Bostan, *Osmanlılar Niçin Kalyon İnşasından Bir Süre İçin Vazgeçtiler? (1656-1682)*, «Tarih Dergisi - Turkish Journal of History», 71, n. 1, (2020), pp. 223-238, on p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> J. Grant, *Rethinking the Ottoman "Decline"*, pp. 179, 186.



although the last word duly always belonged to the admiral while making decisions. Palace-trained Piyale Pasha (d. 1578), for example, made his successful place in the annals of history thanks to his naval mentor of corsair origin, Turgud Reis.<sup>21</sup>

Decades later, the situation was still more or less the same, and political appointees kept holding the office. Cafer Pasha was an Ottoman palace official from Ohrid (Macedonia) and took office as the admiral-in-chief of the Ottoman navy during the summer of 1632. Thanks probably to his proximity to the ruling sultan at the time (Murad IV, r. 1623-1640), he was promoted from the palace service as the chief gardener (*bostancıbaşı*) to the admiralty of the imperial navy in 1632, suggesting that his naval experience was at best very limited<sup>22</sup>. And the Venetian resident representative in Istanbul (*bailo*) at the time, Giovanni Cappello, frowned on the phenomenon that a chief gardener, whose mere former connection to navigation was rowing the small imperial excursion boats now and then in the Bosphorus, become appointed to the command of the seas «without any imaginable preceding experience»<sup>23</sup>. To be sure, Cafer Pasha's deficiency in maritime knowledge did not stand out as a problem, as it was already the case with many other grand admirals preceding him, such as Damad Halil Pasha (1595-1598), Topal Recep Pasha (1623-1626) and Hasan Pasha (1626-1630)<sup>24</sup>. One particular comment regarding Cafer Pasha was, however, that he disliked naval campaigns<sup>25</sup>.

Cafer Pasha was invested with this office amidst the upheavals of Sultan Murad IV's entrenchment of personal power in 1632.<sup>26</sup> When

<sup>21</sup> C. Isom-Verhaaren. *The Sultan's Fleet*, pp. 116-119.

<sup>22</sup> M. Yıldız. *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilâtında Bostancı Ocağı*, PhD Dissertation, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2008, p. 341; Mehmed İzzet Bey, *Harita-i Kapudânân-ı Deryâ: Osmanlı Kaptanideryaları (1352-1853)*, edited by Cemil Sağlam and Göker İnan, Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, İstanbul, 2021, p. 110.

<sup>23</sup> G. Cappello, *Relazione di Costantinopoli del Bailo Giovanni Cappello, 1634*, in N. Barozzi and G. Berchet (edited by), *Relazioni degli Ambasciatori e Baili Veneti a Costantinopoli, vol. I, parte II*, Naratovich, Venezia, 1873, pp. 5-68, on page 21: «e dopo questo servizio [Bostangi Bassi] sovente viene eletto Capitan Bassâ; così senza precedente immaginabile esperienza della navigazione passa dall'uso del remo al comando del mar».

<sup>24</sup> E. Türkçelik, *Meritocracy, Factionalism and Ottoman Grand Admirals in the Context of Mediterranean Politics*. in Rubén González Cuerva and Alexander Koller (eds.) *A Europe of Courts, a Europe of Factions: Political Groups at Early Modern Centres of Power (1550-1700)*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2017, pp. 88-108, especially p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> G. Cappello, *Relazione*, p. 43. As a matter of fact, Cafer Pasha shared numerous similarities with Damad Halil Pasha, see E. Türkçelik, *The "Reluctant" Admiral: Damad Halil Pasha and the Ottoman Navy (1595-1598)*, «Mediterranea – ricerche storiche», 20, n. 57, (2023), pp. 9-34.

<sup>26</sup> B. Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire. Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010, p. 213.

Cafer Pasha was declared the new grand admiral, the year's naval campaign had already started: the dismissed Grand Admiral Canpoladzade Mustafa Pasha had to come back all the way from Rhodes. It is hard to know what sort of a Mediterranean policy Cafer Pasha intended to follow; but as a palace graduate admiral who had neither naval nor governing expertise in between, he would certainly do the best by listening to corsairs in his decisions<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4. Preparing the Navy: The Fleet

At the time of Cafer Pasha's first campaign at sea during the summer of 1632, there seems to have occurred no major incidents. Having gathered intelligence regarding the Ottoman navy's progress toward the west with considerable strength, Maltese, Tuscan and Papal ships united their forces around Messina. Nonetheless, allied Christian forces were later dispersed before any encounter with the Ottomans took place<sup>28</sup>.

After returning to Istanbul during the autumn, the Ottoman navy underwent a process of vigorous preparation for the next spring's campaign: as usual, the winter months were spent on building new ships and repairing the old ones. Since the galley had a traditional style, it was easy to build them in short notice in the numerous shipyards of the Ottoman Empire, the most considerable one being *tersane-i amire* (the imperial shipyard) in the capital, or the 'arsenal' as the Europeans referred to it. Regardless of their construction site, all the vessels were fitted out (with artillery and equipment) in Istanbul<sup>29</sup>. Regarding the preparations in 1633, the Austrian resident at the Sublime Porte (i.e., the Ottoman imperial administration), Rudolf Schmid, informed his government in February that the Ottomans were building new vessels both at the central shipyard in Istanbul and at a smaller one in Misivri (modern Nesebur in Bulgaria), among others<sup>30</sup>. Another piece of news dated 12 March from Istanbul (which found its way into a report from

<sup>27</sup> E. Türkçelik, *Meritocracy, Factionalism and Ottoman Grand Admirals*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>28</sup> R.C. Anderson, *Naval Wars in the Levant, 1559-1853*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952, pp. 115-116. Anderson, unfortunately, does not specify any reference for this information.

<sup>29</sup> The following works can be consulted to understand how the Ottoman navy was annually prepared for campaign, C. Imber, *The Navy of Süleyman the Magnificent*, especially pp. 87, 96; and C. Imber, *The Reconstruction of the Ottoman Fleet after the Battle of Lepanto, 1571-1572*.

<sup>30</sup> OeStA, HHStA, Türkei I, Turcica 112-6. Constantinople, 18 February 1633, f. 19v: «Jeziger Capitan Bassa General del mare leste in hieigen arsional auch zu Missevria und ander orths viel neuen Galleen zurichten, glaub wohl auf dem Sommer sie wirdt fertig haben».

Venice and is now preserved in the Spanish archives) pointed to a similar issue in more detail: new galleys were getting built for the campaign; and, during the process, Admiral Cafer Pasha was enlisting the support of a Morisco from Sevilla, named Antonio de Ávalos (de Abalos). Antonio's specific task at the shipyard was equipping the Ottoman galleys with petards, ladders and fireworks (*petardos, y escalas, y fuegos artificiales*), an issue that will be addressed later on in more detail.<sup>31</sup>

The subsequent lines of the same news (dated 12 March 1633) convey the information that the Ottomans also asked for the help of the Barbary States for the approaching campaign. Galliot (small galleys) from Biserta in Tunisia and galleys from Algiers were commanded to gather at Navarino<sup>32</sup>. Ottoman documentation similarly reveals that Cafer Pasha sent Ibrahim, the superintendent of the shipyard (*tersane emini*), with twenty seven robes of honour in January 1633 to Tripoli, Algiers and Tunisia<sup>33</sup>. The leaders of the Barbary States were thus called on to contribute to the Ottoman naval campaign during the summer.

Ottoman fiscal evidence regarding the imperial shipyard for 1633 further highlights the state of affairs in the Ottoman navy. Drawing on a certain shipyard register (Boa, Mad.d 981), Idris Bostan has called attention to the construction and repair of forty one vessels for that specific year<sup>34</sup>. The *baştarda* (It. *bastarda*, a very large galley) built for Cafer Pasha was a gigantic structure for which more than three hundred and sixty workers exerted effort. Approximately five hundred and forty personnel serving as the crew of this vessel outnumbered the personnel of the remaining *bastarda* class ships by almost two hundred and fifty people<sup>35</sup>. Including the crews of a variety of smaller vessels along with the soldiers fighting on board, almost ten thousand people must have been serving in the Ottoman navy in 1633.

Admiral Cafer's *bastarda* was launched, as an Ottoman protocol register attests, on 3 June 1633<sup>36</sup>. The total of 37 robes of honour distributed to Admiral Cafer Pasha and the high-ranking officers of the navy during the hand-kissing ceremony with Sultan Murad IV on 8 June signified that the fleet could now depart from the imperial capital<sup>37</sup>.

Two days later, the imperial fleet officially left Istanbul, while 36 people including the grand admiral, the superintendent of the imperial

<sup>31</sup> Ags, Estado, Leg. 3591-136. Venice, 23 April 1633, f. 417r (accessed on 07.10.2023: <http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/3680815?nm>).

<sup>32</sup> Ags, Estado, Leg. 3591-136. Venice, 23 April 1633, f. 417r.

<sup>33</sup> Boa, Mad.d, 3987, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> I. Bostan, *Osmanlı Bahriye Teşkilatı: XVII. Yüzyılda Tersane-i Amire*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1992, p. 196.

<sup>35</sup> Boa, Mad.d, 981, pp. 23, 27.

<sup>36</sup> Boa, KK.d 667M, p. 82.

<sup>37</sup> Boa, KK.d 667M, p. 85.

shipyard (*tersane emini*), the arsenal chamberlain (*tersane kethüdası*) and certain captains kissed the sultan's hand for the final time at the Yalı Köşkü (on the shore of the Golden Horn) on 12 June<sup>38</sup>.

## 5. Preparing the Navy: Antonio de Ávalos

At this point, it will be useful to pay attention to Morisco de Ávalos, one of the chief men in charge of preparing the armaments for the Ottoman fleet in the imperial shipyard. The abovementioned news from Istanbul (12 March) specified that Antonio de Ávalos had been introduced to the Ottoman grand admiral by the diplomatic representative of Spain's archenemy in Istanbul: Cornelius Haga, the long-time ambassador of the Dutch Republic at the Porte.<sup>39</sup> It was thanks to Haga that de Ávalos had become the *petardier* and cannoneer of the Ottoman navy<sup>40</sup>. Both as a Morisco living in Istanbul and as a weaponry specialist in service of the Ottomans, de Ávalos requires further analysis.

Regarding the utilisation of explosives aboard, it must be pointed out that petards and fireworks were indeed in use by the seventeenth century maritime warfare. Petards, normally, made part of siege weaponry, employed to blast fortification walls or gates. But, in a similar vein, the petards were also applied on the stern of enemy ships to breach holes. And as fireworks, one must understand the "stink pots", incendiaries cast on enemy vessels. An example from the contemporary Dutch navy calls attention to specialists preparing such explosives, like the petardier in 1623, wielding the petard to «blow the transom clean off a ship»<sup>41</sup>. It can be assumed, therefore, that Antonio de Ávalos was one such specialist working for the Ottoman navy.

In this respect, de Ávalos is a worthy example to underline the trans-imperial character of the early modern Mediterranean: challenging as it might be to track down the identity of Antonio de Ávalos in Ottoman archival documents, it is, nonetheless, possible to come across his family name in the related literature. Krstić, for instance, has shown that Dutch ambassador Cornelius Haga's liaison with the

<sup>38</sup> Boa, KK.d 667M, p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> The reference work for Cornelius Haga and his activities is A.H. De Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic. A History of the Earliest Diplomatic Relations, 1610-1630*, Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, Leiden, 1978, pp. 166-167, and particularly on p. 315.

<sup>40</sup> Ags, Estado, Leg. 3591-136. Venice, 23 April 1633, f. 417r: «... un Morisco de Sevilla que se llamava Antonio de Abalos, aqui en el Ministro de Olanda que alli asiste, ha yntroducido con el Baxa del Mar...»

<sup>41</sup> B. De Groot, *Dutch Navies of the 80 Years' War, 1568-1648*, Osprey, Oxford, 2018, p. 34. I must express my gratitude to Fatih Torun (Indiana University) for prompting me to be more attentive towards the use of petards at sea.

Moriscos (Muslim converts to Christianity from the Iberian Peninsula)<sup>42</sup> living in Istanbul could be documented in the 1620s. In 1621, as an annex to a report Haga sent to his government, a letter written in Spanish and signed by Moriscos living in Istanbul was included. Among the signatories, a certain «Mehmed de Abalos» was also present, and Krstić has manifested that Mehmed de Ávalos presented himself as «a captain of the Ottoman fleet»<sup>43</sup>. It has been argued that this Mehmed de Ávalos was very much likely to be a certain Antonio de Ávalos, a Morisco elite who emigrated from Spain in 1610 and settled in Istanbul, becoming a captain in the Ottoman naval establishment<sup>44</sup>. Given the two-decade-gap between this Antontio (Mehmed de Ávalos) who started his new career in the Ottoman navy in 1610's and the petardier Antonio one comes across in Cafer Pasha's preparations in 1633, however, it is a meagre possibility that these two Antonios could be the same person. In any case, it is safer to assume that they were at least related by blood and contributed to the Ottoman maritime activities. Hence, it can be deduced that the Moriscos indeed played a part in the Ottoman naval organisation and facilitated the transfer of nautical knowledge from Western Europe to the Ottoman navy with regard both to navigation and weaponry.

Given the vicissitudinous nature of early modern politics, loyalties, or faith, a figure like Antonio de Ávalos was not exceptional. A better-known example, for instance, would be Captain İbrahim b. Ahmad, or al-Ribash as he was known in Spanish. Al-Ribash had also spent some of his life in Sevilla where he became acquainted with maritime affairs, becoming a master gunner before the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain and before, thus, moving to Tunis in 1609. While serving the Tunisian corsairs, al-Ribash decided to pen down a treatise on firearms, or «a manual of gunnery similar to contemporary Spanish ones». As his command of written Arabic was not strong, he produced his *Manual* in Spanish between 1630 and 1632. And when he found a fellow Morisco trustworthy enough in Arabic to confide his work for translation in 1638, the resulting translation included information and illustration

<sup>42</sup> Wiesner-Hanks suggested that some three hundred thousand Moriscos were ordered to depart from Spain between 1609 and 1614, M. Wiesner-Hanks, *Early modern Europe, 1450-1789*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 111.

<sup>43</sup> T. Krstic, *The Elusive Intermediaries: Moriscos in Ottoman and Western European Diplomatic Sources from Constantinople, 1560s-1630s*, «Journal of Early Modern History», 19, (2015), pp. 129-151, on pages 132, 142-143.

<sup>44</sup> M.M.F. Chaves and R.P. García, *The Perpetuation of the Morisco Community of Granada*, in J.A.R.S. Tavim, M.F.L. de Barros and L.L. Mucznik (edited by), *In the Iberian Peninsula and Beyond: A History of Jews and Muslims (15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, vol. 1, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2015, p. 86-116, on pages 101-102. I must thank the reviewers for this specific reference.

related to the petards (Ar. *batrad* and Sp. *petardo*), too<sup>45</sup>. To wrap up, one Morisco was knowledgeable enough to produce a whole manual on firearms, while the other could become a petardier and gunner in the Ottoman naval establishment. And in the end, the Arabic translation of the manual found its way to the Ottoman Porte when the translator's son presented it to Sultan Murad IV<sup>46</sup>. Accordingly, both al-Ribash and Antonio de Ávalos had accumulated a certain knowledge of fire weaponry in Spain, and helped transfer it to the Ottomans after 1609.

De Ávalos can be regarded as a member of the larger early modern European community of foreign military labour, a phenomenon that played a pivotal part in the making of the sovereign state order. Just like numerous other early modern groups that were exiled and forced to work for new rulers due to confessionalisation, de Ávalos had been banned from his homeland because of religious politics and started to work for the Ottomans<sup>47</sup>. So far as the Ottomans were concerned, he became one of the many «French, English and Dutch gun-founders and engineers; as well as [...] Venetian, Dalmatian and Greek shipwrights and sailors» who created the «technological dialogue» in the Ottoman end of the larger Mediterranean basin<sup>48</sup>.

## 6. An Engagement Against All Odds

Austrian resident Schmid noted that the Ottoman navy departed from Istanbul on 9 June<sup>49</sup>, after having completed its preparations. The resident was surprised, however, that the fleet was not as strong as he had predicted: he could lay his eyes on only twenty vessels. In any case, further reinforcements in the form of Barbary galleys were

<sup>45</sup> D. James, *The Manual de Artilleria of Al-Ra'is Ibrahim b. Ahmad al-Andalusi with particular reference to its illustrations and their sources*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London», 42, n. 2 (1978), pp. 237-257, on pages 237 and 243. Illustration number 25 covered the petard.

<sup>46</sup> G. Ágoston, *The Ottoman Empire and the Technological Dialogue Between Europe and Asia: The Case of Military Technology and Know-How in the Gunpowder Age*, in F. Günergun and D. Raina (edited by), *Science between Europe and Asia. Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol 275. Springer, Dordrecht, 2011, p. 27-39, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> P.H. Wilson, *Foreign military labour in Europe's transition to modernity*, «European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire» Volume 27, n. 1-2 (2020), pp. 12-32, on pages 19 and 25.

<sup>48</sup> G. Ágoston, *Disjointed Historiography and Islamic Military Technology: the European Military Revolution Debate and the Ottomans*, in Mustafa Kaçar and Zeynep Durukal (edited by), *Essays in Honour of Ekmeleddin İhsanoglu*, Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, Istanbul, 2006, pp. 567-582, on p. 579.

<sup>49</sup> It must be remembered that the Ottoman documentation registered the official departure of the navy on 10 June 1633.



reported to eventually meet with the main force of the imperial navy moving out of the capital<sup>50</sup>. A newspaper of the period corroborated that report: the Ottoman navy in the Mediterranean that summer was made up of forty five galleys and six galleons.<sup>51</sup> Since the North African corsairs were familiar with, and integrated into their navies, 'broadside sailing ships' since the early seventeenth century<sup>52</sup>, the newspaper confirms that the Barbary forces did unite with the grand admiral at a certain point, indeed.

It is difficult to ascertain when exactly the imperial forces were joined by the Barbary fleets. In any case, the imperial fleet found its first target before even moving out of the Sea of Marmara: an embassy report from Istanbul suggested that upon arrival at the Dardanelles, Cafer Pasha received intelligence relating to two English vessels. They were spotted in the Aegean Sea, loading grain around the Greek coasts<sup>53</sup>.

In Ottoman waters, loading grain onboard was a problematic issue for any European merchant. Being a primary staple for the provisioning of cities, grain was under the strict supervision of Ottoman authorities. The limitation on grain export was so serious that it was at times altogether forbidden<sup>54</sup>. For instance, when European merchants tried to meet the Venetian need for grain via purchase from the Levant, the Ottoman administration entirely prohibited grain export in 1594. While such a prohibition prompted the emergence of the Baltic grain as a viable alternative, its real effect on the Mediterranean was the flourishing of contraband grain trafficking in the subsequent years. Ottoman authorities had to focus ever more attention on controlling grain smuggling starting with the end of the sixteenth century<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> OeStA, HHStA, Türkei I, Turcica, 112-6. Constantinople, 12 June 1633, f. 82r. In general, there was a tendency to overestimate the Turkish navy during the early modern era even when its size was typical of the time, see Tzavaras, *Two Perceptions of Süleyman's 'Magnificent' Navy*, p. 138.

<sup>51</sup> *Recueil de Gazettes, Nouvelles et Relations de toute l'Année 1633*, Renaudot, Paris, 1634, p. 345. This source will be referred to as *Gazette*.

<sup>52</sup> J.M. White, *Shifting Winds: Piracy, Diplomacy, and Trade in the Ottoman Mediterranean, 1624-1626*, in P.W. Firges, T.P. Graf, C. Roth and G. Tulasoglu (edited by), *Well-Connected Domains, Towards an Entangled Ottoman History*. Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2014, pp. 37-53, on p. 42.

<sup>53</sup> C. Haga, *Brieven van Cornelis Haga aan de Staten-Generaal, 1631-1633*, in *Kronijk van het Historisch Genootschap, gevestigd te Utrecht*, XXI, 5, no. 2 (1867), pp. 370-455, on page 436.

<sup>54</sup> The first documented prohibition on grain export seems to have been put into effect in 1555, see Z. Arıkan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İhracı Yasak Mallar (Memnu Meta)*, in *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan*. İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Araştırma Merkezi, İstanbul, 1991, pp. 279-306, on pp. 284-289.

<sup>55</sup> M.Z. Köse, *1600-1630 Osmanlı Devleti ve Venedik: Akdeniz'de Rekabet ve Ticaret*, Giza, İstanbul, 2010, pp. 128-129; D. Goffman, Daniel, *İzmir ve Levanten Dünya (1550-1650)*, (Ayşen Anadol and Neyir Kalaycıoğlu trans.), Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000, pp. 31-35.

Having received intelligence about the English ships loading grain, Grand Admiral Cafer Pasha led the Ottoman navy to the proximity of Kassandra (Tr. Kesendire) at Chalkidiki where the smugglers were reportedly operating. The admiral was advancing westwards with at least twenty pieces of galleys at that time. And even though it is impossible to deliberate the total size of troops accompanying him, Ottoman fiscal evidence points to 1090 janissaries serving in the Mediterranean fleet in 1633<sup>56</sup>. And these troops were alongside thousands of rowers and Ottoman provincial soldiers who served in the navy, whose numbers are unfortunately impossible to determine. At Kassandra, this tremendous force approached two English trade ships from London, one of which was named the *Hector*, and the other *William and Ralph*, both 400 tons<sup>57</sup>. A crew member aboard one of the ships later on expressed the total number of sailors on the two vessels to be about ninety<sup>58</sup>.



H.H.A. Hötte, *Atlas of Southeast Europe. Geopolitics and History, vol. 1: 1521-1699*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2015, p. 27.

Fig. 3 – Partial Map of the Aegean Sea

<sup>56</sup> Boa, KK.d, 1826, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> H. Robinson, *Libertas; or Reliefe to the English captives in Algier*, John Sweeting, London, 1642, p. 7. The ships received their letters of marque in 1627 and 1628, see *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I, 1628-1629*, John Bruce (edited by), Longman-Brown-Green-Longmans-Roberts, London, 1859, pp. 302, 306.

<sup>58</sup> Tna, Sp, 97/15. Negroponte, 1 July (English Style) 1633, f. 204r.

The ensuing encounter between the Ottomans and the English has been the subject of both European and Ottoman accounts with variations both in length and in facts. Contemporary Ottoman authors (chronicles by Topçular Katibi, Katip Çelebi, Karaçelebizade Abdülaziz Efendi and the travelogue of Evliya Çelebi) chose to keep their narratives of the battle rather concise. European accounts offer a definitely more expressive depiction, the foremost being Paul Rycaut's *Turkish History*. The French newspaper of the time (*Gazette*) and the reports of the Venetian, Dutch and Austrian embassies in Istanbul also provide us with some information that can be best described as divergent. In modern literature, Guillaume Calafat paid particular attention to this naval engagement by relying on Venetian and British documentation<sup>59</sup>. The most comprehensive and yet-to-exhaust narration is provided by The National Archives in London: the copy of a letter penned by Thomas Spaight, the English sailor who survived the fight and fell prisoner to the Ottoman grand admiral; and a note of explanation regarding the event by the grand vizier to Sir Peter Wyche, the English ambassador at the Porte<sup>60</sup>.

The first task at hand is to deliberate the date of the engagement. With reference to Evliya Çelebi (the eccentric Ottoman traveller of the seventeenth century), Calafat suggested that the event took place on the first day of the feast of sacrifice (*kurban bayramı*) in the lunar year 1042, corresponding to 18 June 1633<sup>61</sup>. The eyewitness of the event, Thomas Spaight corroborates the date to a great extent, saying that it was the White Sunday, i.e., 19 June 1633<sup>62</sup>. So, it must have taken roughly ten days for the Ottoman fleet to cover the distance between Istanbul and Kassandra. The activities of the English merchants in the meantime are best described by Thomas Spaight himself.

When the English vessels had arrived in the Aegean Sea several weeks before, as Spaight suggested, they had been informed that the Gulf of Volos (Volo) offered fine opportunities in terms of grain<sup>63</sup>. After waiting for five days around Volos, which served both as an outlet for the grain coming from central Greece and as a biscuit production centre for the Ottoman fleet<sup>64</sup>, they were eventually betrayed by an Ottoman subject (*Turke*) who had promised to provide them with grain. In the ensuing ambush, they suffered five casualties (two of them fell dead and

<sup>59</sup> G. Calafat, *Une mer jalousee. Contribution a l'histoire de la souverainete (Mediterranee, XVIIe siecle)*, Le Seuil, Paris, 2019, pp. 252-265.

<sup>60</sup> Letters are available under Tna, Sp, 97/15, f. 204r. and 206r.

<sup>61</sup> Calafat, *Une mer jalousee*, p. 256.

<sup>62</sup> Tna, Sp, 97/15. Negroponte, 1 July (English Style) 1633, f. 204r.

<sup>63</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>64</sup> C. Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650. The Structure of Power*, Palgrave-Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2002, p. 313.

three became prisoners), and tried thereafter to save their imprisoned friends for a few days, although, in vain. Then, the English merchants continued to Zitouni (*İzdirin*) only to realise that no one was willing to sell them grain. They managed to load only seven hundred kilograms of provisions over a period of ten days. Deeming their cargo insufficient, they moved to the Thermaic Gulf (Gulf of Saloniki) to try their chances, where they succeeded in arranging a deal with local people for six tons of load. Lastly, Cassandra offered them six tons more per ship before they got word of the approaching Ottoman galleys. Fearing retribution from the imperial fleet, they chose to keep anchored and hide for a while. On 19 June, however, the Ottoman vessels appeared from afar<sup>65</sup>.

Depictions of the actual moment of the first contact do not overlap. For the eighteenth-century Ottoman historian Naima, English merchants immediately cut off their anchors to flee<sup>66</sup>. This is confirmed by Cafer Pasha's explanatory note to the grand vizier, which pointed to the brisk anchor-weighing of the English ships in an attempt to flee<sup>67</sup>. According to Calafat, given that the English merchants did not salute the grand admiral and abstained from sending him the accustomed presents, their attitude was interpreted as one of animosity by the Ottomans<sup>68</sup>. Nevertheless, as the only eye-witness from the English party, Thomas Spaight argued to the contrary and claimed that the English had actually prepared a present for the grand admiral and did salute him. Grand Admiral Cafer Pasha, Spaight continued, completely disregarded these tokens of friendship and launched his attack on the English vessels without any warning<sup>69</sup>.

Hard as it may be to decide who was telling the better part of the truth, neither the Ottomans nor the English were in doubt about the illegality of smuggling. In that case, it is more convincing that the English merchants felt red-handed when the Ottoman fleet approached, and they duly tried to escape. But since *Hector* and *William and Ralph* were sailing ships requiring favourable winds to navigate as opposed to the Ottoman galleys that were propelled by oars, the English merchants saw their fates sealed from the start: as Cafer Pasha explained, no wind blew to fill the English sails at the time<sup>70</sup>. And as far as the technicality of these different types is concerned, the crowded rowing crew of a galley

<sup>65</sup> Tna, Sp, 97/15. Negroponte, 1 July (English Style) 1633, f. 204r.

<sup>66</sup> Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, c. 3, edited by Mehmet Ipsirli, TTK, Ankara, 2007, pp. 782-783.

<sup>67</sup> The summary of the note found its way into the ambassador's report: Tna, Sp, 97/15. Therapia (Constantinople), 10 August (English Style) 1633, f. 206r-v.

<sup>68</sup> Calafat, *Une mer jalousee*, p. 263.

<sup>69</sup> Tna, Sp, 97/15. Negroponte, 1 July (English Style) 1633, f. 204r.

<sup>70</sup> Tna, Sp, 97/15. Therapia (Constantinople), 10 August (English Style) 1633, f. 206r-v.

enabled it to gain considerably more acceleration than a galleon in any case<sup>71</sup>. The English sailors, hence, must have known quite well that there was no chance to escape the inevitable. And accordingly, they were equally aware that they would be fighting against all odds.

Once the Ottoman offensive started, galleys took turns in launching their attacks. As Paul Rycaut related, English vessels were assailed by either one or two Ottoman galleys at a time. The *Hector* and *William and Ralph* were trying to fend for themselves by turning their weapons into anti-personnel missiles: they loaded their (quarter deck) guns not with cannonballs, but with shots, wreaking heavy casualties on the Ottoman assailants. Apart from these shots, the remaining crew was using spears in the melee fight against the Ottomans boarding their vessels<sup>72</sup>. It must be kept in mind that higher boards of the English ships and the canon shots they fired at point-blank range must have played an important role in forestalling the Ottoman boarders on the low-lying platforms of the galleys.<sup>73</sup>

Comparing the narrative with a contemporary naval clash, the first impression one gets is the haste with which the Ottomans engaged the English ships: in 1628, when a four-galley-squadron of the Order of the Knights of St. John targeted the English galleon *Sampson*, considerable time was spent before the two sides closed the distance physically. Because the galleys were diligent enough to approach the English vessel, discharge their cannons (placed at the prows) and then turn around. Their aim was to debilitate the English galleon by bringing down the mast and yards, rendering the sails useless<sup>74</sup>. Attempts at boarding could start only after the galleys could feel assured that sufficient damage was incurred at the enemy galleon.

In all their apparent impatience, therefore, Cafer Pasha's fleet was bound to suffer heavy casualties in 1633. During this ferocious engagement, a notable of the Ottoman navy from Rhodes, Memi Beg, took a cannon shot in the head and fell dead<sup>75</sup>: an English traveller visiting Rhodes the next year would realise that a remarkable monumental tomb for Memi Beg was built on the island, suggesting the significance of the Ottoman sailor<sup>76</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> J.F. Guilmartin, *Galleons and Galleys*, p. 106; J.H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology, and War*, p. 71.

<sup>72</sup> P. Rycaut, *The Turkish History, Comprehending the Origin of that Nation, and the Growth of the Othoman Empire, with the Lives and Conquests of Their Several Kings and Emperors. Vol. II*. Isaac Cleave, London, 1701, p. 77.

<sup>73</sup> B. De Groot, *Dutch Navies*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>74</sup> M. Strachan, *Sampson's Fight with Maltese Galleys, 1628*, «The Mariner's Mirror», 55, n. 3 (1969), pp. 281-289, on page 286.

<sup>75</sup> Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, p. 783.

<sup>76</sup> H. Blunt, *A Voyage into the Levant: A brief Relation of a Journey lately performed by Mr. Henry Blunt*, Andrew Croke, London, 1650, pp. 59-60.





British Library - Sloane 3584, f.78v. M.H. Cevrioğlu, *Tulû'î'nin Paşaname'si ya da Karadeniz'de Bir Deniz Cenginin Anlatımı* (1629), «Türk Savaş Çalışmaları Dergisi», 3, no. 1, (2022), 86-102, on p. 97.

Fig. 4 – Detail from a Miniature Showing an Ottoman Galley (ca. 1630)

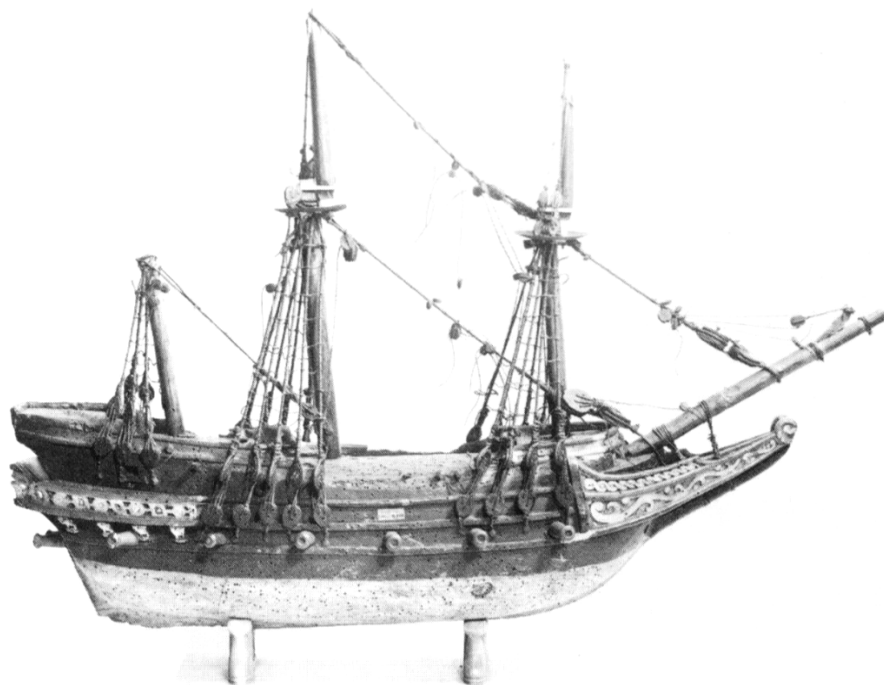
Furthermore, the *bastarda* of Uzun Piyale, the chamberlain of the arsenal (*tersane kethüdası*), had to withdraw from the battle in the face of the damages it suffered from the *Hector* and *William and Ralph*. Uzun Piyale's *bastarda* was, one must keep in mind, run by a crew of 287 excluding the soldiers on board, suggesting that this galley alone was three times as crowded as the two English ships combined<sup>77</sup>.

The alternation of boarding attempts on the part of the assailants and repelling on that of the defendants was the accustomed manner of naval combat in the early modern era<sup>78</sup>. Nonetheless, Memi Beg's death and Uzun Piyale's withdrawal from the fray drove Grand Admiral Cafer Pasha to such an extreme rage as to take a technically rather wrong step.

<sup>77</sup> Boa, *Mad.d.*, 981, p. 27; Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, p. 783.

<sup>78</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Development of Broadside Gunnery, 1450–1650*, «The Mariner's Mirror», 82, no. 3 (1996), pp. 301-324, on p. 316.





B. Lavery, *The Colonial Merchantman Susan Constant 1605*,  
Conway Maritime Press, London, 1989, p. 43.

Fig. 5 – An English Ship Model (ca. 1630)

In opposition to Katip Celebi's advice for sailors to the effect that «the admiral must hold back from the fight and not galvanise into action against the enemy», Cafer Pasha engaged the English vessels with his own ship<sup>79</sup>. In more detail, the admiral's *bastarda* boarded the *Hector*, but not laterally; rather, the admiral approached the English *bertone* from the stern. One of the possible reasons could have been employing the petard on the *Hector's* stern in order to explode the transom, as mentioned above<sup>80</sup>. Nonetheless, no account refers to any explosion, at all; and it is a fact that Cafer Pasha directly employed the spur, the striking force of the galley, against the enemy stern<sup>81</sup>. However, instead of piercing through any random spot there, the

<sup>79</sup> Kâtip Çelebi, *Tuhfetu'l-Kibar*, p. 240.

<sup>80</sup> B. De Groot, *Dutch Navies of the 80 Years' War*, p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> De Groot suggests that attacking at the stern to damage the rudder was a tactic used by galleys against sailing ships, B. De Groot, *Dutch Navies*, p. 26.

*bastarda*'s spur found its way through one of the portholes. Once the Ottoman galley's spur was inside their porthole, the English personnel quickly nailed the protruding parts of the *bastarda* to the wooden furnishing of their ship. In short, Admiral Cafer Pasha's galley was now stuck with the English vessel<sup>82</sup>.

From then on, Cafer Pasha and the English merchants were on the point of no return: since the two vessels were pinned together, there was no possibility to repel the Ottoman galley now and the fight had to continue until one of the parties emerged victorious. The English resumed loading their guns with shots and continued firing upon the assailants. When they ran out of shots and iron pellets, narrated Rycaut, they charged their stern chase guns with Spanish silver coins (*pieces of eight*)<sup>83</sup>: the stern chasers, it must be emphasised, were the strongest armament of the English merchant ships<sup>84</sup> and therefore incurred great casualties on the Ottomans. However, outnumbered by their opponents, the English were soon once more reminded that they were waging a battle impossible to win. Accordingly, they felt compelled to resort to the last measure: in Naima's words, they chose to «burn rather than know shame» (*en-nâr velâ el-âr*) and set their own vessels on fire<sup>85</sup>.

So, while the Ottoman and English sailors were still fighting on board, the *Hector* was getting quickly consumed by fire. Being stuck with it, the Ottoman admiral's *bastarda* did also start to catch fire from the prow backward. Katip Çelebi noted that the admiral saved himself in a lifeboat and got on a nearby Ottoman galley<sup>86</sup>. Only with the great effort of the Ottoman sailors that the admiral's burning *bastarda* was detached from the *Hector* and towed away by other Ottoman galleys<sup>87</sup>.

Simultaneous with Cafer Pasha's attack on the *Hector*, the remaining Ottoman galleys were still fighting the *William and Ralph*. And half an hour after the *Hector*, the crew of the *William and Ralph* set their ship on fire, too. The total duration of the combat was around two-and-a-half hours, at the end of which both English vessels fell prey to self-inflicted blazes and sank. The English sailors who saved their lives by jumping into the sea were fished out by the Ottoman lifeboats and

<sup>82</sup> P. Rycaut, *The Turkish History*, p. 77; Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, p. 783; Tna, Sp, 97/15. Negroponte, 1 July (English Style) 1633, f. 204r.

<sup>83</sup> P. Rycaut, *The Turkish History*, p. 77; Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, p. 783.

<sup>84</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Development of Broadside Gunnery*, p. 314-315.

<sup>85</sup> P. Rycaut, *The Turkish History*, p. 77; Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, p. 783.

<sup>86</sup> Kâtip Çelebi, *Tuhfetu'l-Kibar*, p. 192.

<sup>87</sup> Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, p. 783.

imprisoned on Ottoman galleys. Thomas Spaight estimated the total loss of life for the English around twenty, while about seventy sailors were captured alive, including both captains of the English vessels. Spaight related these events and his conditions as a captive in a letter to the English ambassador at the Porte some days after the combat while he was still detained «aboard galley called Patron Reall», that is, on Admiral Cafer Pasha's command ship<sup>88</sup>.

## 7. The Aftermath of the Fight

The shock of the setback Cafer Pasha felt notwithstanding, the extent of the Ottoman casualties is ambiguous. Rycout claimed that two or three Ottoman galleys were burnt down along with the English ships, with thousands of Ottoman rowers and soldiers aboard<sup>89</sup>. Naima, on the other hand, calculated the Ottoman death toll at six hundred and the wounded at two hundred<sup>90</sup>. Ottoman sources did not allude to any loss of galleys on the Ottoman side. Nonetheless, the failure to seize the English vessels (as there is no evidence to the contrary) must have been as much of a loss as the actual Ottoman casualties.

Following such an eventful assault on the English merchants, the grand admiral was unable to continue his operation. He was obliged to release anchor around Thessaloniki for the navy to recuperate throughout the following month. The fact that he did not directly continue the campaign reveals that the Ottoman casualties must indeed be high enough (may be as high as Naima suggested) for him to take a break. Furthermore, the pasha ordered the execution of the local Ottoman subjects who were involved in the contraband trade<sup>91</sup>. After the admiral regathered his forces later in the summer, he continued eastwards toward Syria in order to assist the Ottoman land forces campaigning in the Eastern Mediterranean, taking the English captives along. It was only at the end of the year that the admiral would return to Istanbul<sup>92</sup>.

<sup>88</sup> Tna, Sp, 97/15. Negroponte, 1 July (English Style) 1633, f. 204r-v.

<sup>89</sup> P. Rycout, *The Turkish History*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>90</sup> Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, p. 783.

<sup>91</sup> Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tarih-i Naima*, p. 783; *Gazette*, 1634, p. 345.

<sup>92</sup> Tna, Sp, 97/15. Constantinople, 28 December (English Style) 1633, f. 228v-229r. That year, the Ottoman navy reinforced the land forces besieging Emir Fakhr al-Din ibn Maan (of Sidon), who was eventually captured by the government forces, P.N. Miller, *Peiresc's Mediterranean World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London, 2015, p. 282.

In terms of Ottoman seafaring, Cafer Pasha's military engagement in Cassandra epitomized two mistakes at the same time. The first was, as cited from Katip Celebi above, that the admiral was not supposed to enter the combat in person. The second, and more technical, issue was that the galleys were strongly advised not to ram the galleons directly. Because, as Katip Celebi admonished again, the galleys were to keep galleons under cannon fire from afar until their «helms and masts were broken»<sup>93</sup>. That is to say, it was only after the galleons would be immobilised by missile shots that the galleys had to attack and board them. Apart from rendering the enemy vessels motionless, the constant canon fire could have also incurred casualties among the enemy crew and damage in the enemy vessels' weaponry. It can hence be argued that the leading attacks by Memi Beg of Rhodes and Uzun Piyale were doomed to fail for not taking heed of this principle. And the subsequent initiative of the grand admiral to ram the *Hector* with his *bastarda* simply invited a further disaster.

By all means, Cafer Pasha must have been aware of the faulty nature of his move. Because years ago, when Grand Admiral Halil Pasha (of Kayseri) engaged a gargantuan Christian galleon named *Karacehennem* (or the so-called Red Galleon) in 1609,<sup>94</sup> his first reaction, too, was to launch an outright assault as Katip Çelebi called attention. Nonetheless, he was immediately warned by the county governor of the Peloponnesus, Murad Reis, who had earned his reputation as a corsair of Algiers before his service in the imperial navy: «[the galleon] ha[d] to be battered from afar». It was only after *Karacehennem* was paralysed by artillery fire that the Ottomans boarded and captured it<sup>95</sup>. In short, Grand Admiral Halil Pasha had thus avoided a grave mistake by listening to the admonitions of a seafarer by trade. Years later, however, Cafer Pasha became so infuriated as to ignore the lessons of such vital a precedent and jeopardised himself (and the fate of the whole Ottoman navy) after seeing his subordinate officials withdraw one after the other from the combat. It needs to be emphasised, hence, once more that Cafer Pasha's quick rise to the admiralty due to favouritism and, accordingly, his acute lack of naval expertise seem to have caused the debacle.

<sup>93</sup> Kâtip Çelebi, *Tuhfetu'l-Kibar*, p. 240.

<sup>94</sup> Williams relates that the Ottomans captured, among others, two large galleons «fitted-out in Malta and Leghorn» in 1609, one of which was probably this *Karacehennem*, see P. Williams, *The Sound and the Fury: Christian Perspectives on Ottoman Naval Organization, 1590-1620*, in R. Cancila (edited by), *Mediterraneo in Armi (secc. XV-XVIII)*, Palermo, 2007, pp. 557-592, on p. 585.

<sup>95</sup> Kâtip Çelebi, *Tuhfetu'l-Kibar*, p. 183.

## 8. Conclusion

The naval engagement off the coast of Kassandra later came to be regarded as a heroic epic by the English<sup>96</sup>. Ottoman perception, on the other hand, treated it as an unfortunate accident. The fact that the Ottoman administration kept Cafer Pasha in office as the grand admiral is enough to extrapolate that the Ottomans did not perceive any failure in that respect. Or at least, it was regarded as one of many venial failures that were eclipsed by palace favouritism.

The partial burning of the grand admiral's *bastarda* during the fight was the result of a tactical mistake he almost consciously walked into. And this was one of the errors that drew the line of maritime technical distinction between the Ottoman naval officers who were seafarers by trade and those who were political appointees of the Ottoman palace.<sup>97</sup> Filling the post of the grand admiral through palace favouritism was, at times, bound to invite such hazards. And it was probably therefore that the closing section of Katip Celebi's work (the forty admonitions) exhorts the grand admirals to «consult with the corsairs (i.e., seafarers by trade) about issues relating to the sea and naval combat if they [were] not corsairs themselves»<sup>98</sup>.

Apart from the actual moment of engagement, the preparation for the 1633 campaign is also important concerning the Morisco connection it offered. Antonio de Ávalos' involvement in the imperial shipyard as a gunner and petardier confirms the conviction that the early modern Ottomans were quick to «adopt the common military technology of the Mediterranean»<sup>99</sup>, turning the great sea into a pool for technical diffusion for both the western and eastern shores. And in the seventeenth century, when the Ottoman rapid overland expansion into Europe was considerably halted in comparison to the previous centuries, figures like de Ávalos became important in continuing the acquisition

<sup>96</sup> G. Calafat, *For a "Livorno-on-Thames": the Tuscan model in the writings of Henry Robinson (1604-1673?)*, «The Seventeenth Century», 37, no. 4 (2022), pp. 535-564.

<sup>97</sup> E. Türkçelik, *Meritocracy, Factionalism and Ottoman Grand Admirals in the Context of Mediterranean Politics*, in Ruben Gonzalez Cuerva and Alexander Koller eds, *A Europe of Courts, a Europe of Factions, Political Groups at Early Modern Centres of Power (1550-1700)*, Brill, 2017.

<sup>98</sup> I.C. Hergül, *Development of the Ottoman Maritime Technology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Middle East Technical University, Unpublished MA Thesis, 2019, p. 43. Hergül's quotation corresponds to Kâtip Çelebi, *Tuhfetü'l-Kibâr*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>99</sup> E. Gugliuzzo, *Sea Power and the Ottomans in the Early Modern Mediterranean World*, in G. Theotokis and A. Yıldız (edited by), *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea. Aspects of War, Diplomacy, and Military Elites*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2018, pp. 79-91, on p. 83; Hergül, *Development*, p. 64.

of the latest military technology that had formerly been established through direct appropriations from lands incorporated into the Ottoman Empire<sup>100</sup>.

Speaking of technology, the notoriety of the Cassandra incident must have set an example for the upcoming generations of Ottoman mariners since the imperial navy adhered to galleys at least until the end of the seventeenth century. After all, as confirmed by Parker, the summer calm of the Mediterranean did indeed render the galley a better option for naval combats, at least, before the eighteenth century<sup>101</sup>. And related to the decline debate, this study largely confirms Jonathan Grant's conviction regarding the absence of an Ottoman naval decline after 1571<sup>102</sup>. The Ottoman navy's preparation for the 1633 campaign and even the Cassandra debacle underline the efficacy of the Ottoman maritime establishments after 1571 in two respects. Firstly, in terms of technology transfer, the Ottomans were keeping themselves on par with Western European weaponry on their fighting vessels, a point highlighted by the employment of de Ábalos in the imperial shipyard. And as for the second, that is, for their adherence to galleys instead of sailing ships, the failure of the two English merchantman ships to escape the approaching Ottoman galleys mostly because of the weather justifies the Ottoman tardiness to adopt galleon.

One thing that goes unanswered within the framework of this study, nonetheless, is why the Ottomans allowed favouritism to become a determinant factor in filling such important a post as the grand admiralty. But it is the question of a different and much more exacting endeavour. This one, to say the least, has tried to set itself apart as one other case study that pronounces the contrasts between the galley and galleon on the one hand, and those between the actual sailors and palace appointees on the other.

<sup>100</sup> G. Ágoston, *Merces Prohibitae: The Anglo-Ottoman Trade in War Materials and the Dependence Theory*, «Oriente Moderno, Nuova serie», Anno 20, 81 (1), (2001 - *The Ottomans and the Sea*), pp. 177-192, on pages 187-188.

<sup>101</sup> G. Parker, *The Military Revolution. Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 87.

<sup>102</sup> J. Grant, *Rethinking the Ottoman "Decline"*.