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MARITIME EDUCATION AND TRAINING: THE TURKS IN THE LATE-OTTOMAN AND EARLY-REPUBLICAN ERA

ABSTRACT: History tells us that the success of maritime powers is a direct manifestation of various factors such as geographical location, seamanship, ship technology, and commerce. A vital condition required for these factors to be utilized, however, is the necessity of educated and trained manpower. A closer look at Turkish maritime history reveals the relativity of these factors. This article will elaborate on the role of education and training in the late-Ottoman and early-Republican era of Turkish maritime history. A particular emphasis will be placed upon the vitality of education and training regarding the ability or inability of the Turks in preserving their sea power position by giving examples from specific historical incidents.

KEYWORDS: Turkish maritime history, maritime manpower, maritime education, maritime training.

ISTRUZIONE E FORMAZIONE MARITTIMA: I TURCHI ALLA FINE DELL'ERA OTTOMANA E ALL'INIZIO DI QUELLA REPUBBLICANA

SOMMARIO: La storia dimostra che il successo delle potenze marittime è una diretta manifestazione di vari fattori come la collocazione geografica, la tecnologia navale e il commercio. Una condizione vitale richiesta per il loro utilizzo, comunque, è la presenza di manodopera ben formata. Uno sguardo attento alla storia marittima turca rivela la relatività di questi fattori. Questo saggio tratta del ruolo dell'istruzione e della formazione nella storia marittima del tardo impero ottomano e dell'inizio della repubblica di Turchia. Particolare attenzione è posta sulla vitalità di questi due aspetti rispetto all'abilità o inabilità dei turchi nel preservare la loro posizione come potenza marittima con l'aiuto di esempi tratti da specifici avvenimenti storici.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Storia marittima turca, manodopera marittima, istruzione marittima, formazione marittima.

1. Introduction

Seamanship has been an important aspect of human civilisation since its inception, relative, of course, to geographical position. Throughout history, countries that made use of the seas have always had a source of wealth and prosperity. When we look at history, we can see that countries that have attained stature among other nations have done so because they realized the importance of both military and commercial sea power. History has also shown us that countries that were incapable of understanding the importance of the seas were doomed to decline. The Ottoman Empire is a clear example of this. This article seeks to understand the causes and the consequences of the failure of the Ottoman Empire to realize the importance of sea power. The principle assumption of this article is that the Ottoman Empire did not allocate the necessary interest in maritime education and training of the maritime personnel, especially during the period of the decline of the Empire. This had been an important obstacle for the Sublime Porte to preserve its power position as well as superiority at

sea. The remainder of the article seeks to elaborate on this argument with examples covering the late Ottoman era. Furthermore, it will try to demonstrate how the new Republic that has emerged from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire overcame these problems.

2. Maritime History and the Turks

The sea has played major role for countries throughout history. Starting right from the time of the Seljuk empire (founded c. 1038), even if the Turks emerged as a land power when they met the sea, they took over stewardship from the previous sea powers. Ottomans renamed the Black Sea and the Mediterranean adding the sultan's name and calling them *hakan'ul-bahreyn*, that is to say "the seas of the sultans"¹. As it is clearly written in the book *Alexiad*, by Anna Komnenos, the daughter of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) that is the major source for the years 1088-1090, Emir Çaka Bey (d. 1093?), (she calls him *Tzakhas*), had a fleet of forty war ships and won his first victory against the Byzantine near the Oinousses islands (Koyun Adaları)². Around two hundreds years later, we see again the rise of a Turkish sea power during the time of Gazi Umur Pasha (c. 1309-1348), the second Emir of Aydın, on the Aegean coast of Anatolia³.

The 16th century was a period of rising sea power for Ottoman Turks but, we believe, the turning point of the Ottoman historical fate was the Malta siege in 1565. The sultan decided to invade that island when the Order of St. John started to harm Ottoman *hadjis* (pilgrims) and merchants as they travelled in the Mediterranean⁴ (According to some sources, the real reason of this attempt had been claimed as to enlarge sea superiority to western Mediterranean). For the first time the Ottomans tried to project their power on an island that requires a long sea passage that requires a definite sea control. Even if they were not involved in a major confrontation at sea around the island, sea control, prevention and possible or necessary reinforcements were key elements for the success. In addition to this, the high level relations between the army and the navy commanders of the siege played a very important role on the results of the operation. During the siege, the command relations were not smooth but the defeat was caused above

¹ İ. Bostan, *Beylikten İmparatorluğa Osmanlı Denizciliği*, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2006, p. 5.

² A.R. İşıpek, Ali Rıza, *The First Turkish Admiral Chaka Bey and the Naval Battles in his Era*, Denizler Kitabevi, İstanbul, 2013, pp. 131-177.

³ See M.H. Yinanç, *Düsturname-i Enverî*, Türk Tarihi Ercümeni Külliyyatı, İstanbul, 1928.

⁴ İ. Bostan, *Malta Kuşatmasından Tunus'un Fethine* in İ. Bostan and S. Özbaran, (eds.), *Türk Denizcilik Tarihi*, vol. I, Deniz Basımevi Müdürlüğü, İstanbul, 2009, pp. 185-197, in particular p. 186.

all by the strong defense of the Knights of St. Johns and the distance from the Ottoman mainland. There is no sign of a lack of education and training among naval personnel in this operation. Turks successfully moved 140 galleys, horse ships and other vessels – altogether 200 ships – to Malta⁵. After being unsuccessful in Malta, in 1570, the conquest of Cyprus was a big step, but, immediately after, the defeat of Lepanto, that caused an enormous loss of manpower – especially experienced personnel – was not easy to compensate. Though the missing ships were replaced with new ones in a very short period, it was impossible to train quickly talented personnel. To maintain a powerful navy, ships, manpower and chain of naval bases were required and this statement is valid even to day.

If we look at the 17th century, the Ottoman Navy was less successful than in the 16th century. Even if, at the beginning, there were some important activities in the Black Sea basin, in this century the main campaign was carried out toward Crete. It took twenty-four years to conquer completely the island: its greater part was taken in 1645-1646, but the siege of the fortress of Candia itself continued until 1669; moreover, the black plague occurred among the sailors and the war turned into a trial between the two navies⁶. At first Ottomans insisted on galleys (*çekdirî*) rather than galleons (*kalyon*). In this period they attempted to build galleons but definite transition was completed only after the war, in 1682⁷, and it required, of course, more talented and experienced manpower. Manpower always played a very important role for the success of a navy and again this fact is valid even today. A very important modernization happened almost at the end of the century, when the *kapudan-ı derya* (chief of the Navy) Mezzamorta Hüseyin Pasha (d. 1701), who got several victories at sea, prepared a series of codes for the navy⁸. This was really a big starting point to get over the

⁵ For the year 2015, the 450th anniversary of Malta siege, Heritage Malta is organizing a very important symposium on this subject and involved also the International Association of Maritime Studies (IAMS), asking it to present the outline of the siege according to the discussions held in the *divan-ı hümayun* (Ottoman imperial council) and the Turkish point of view about the sea passage and the siege itself. We hope we will discuss the operation in detail, not only operationally but also logistically as well. We are sure this symposium will be a very good opportunity for researchers to deal with the siege and to answer to many questions that are still open and unsolved.

⁶ F. Eşli, *The Cretan War and Köprülü Mehmet Pasha's Rise to Power*, in D. Couto, F. Günergün and M.P. Pedani (eds.), *Seapower Technology and Trade. Studies in Turkish Maritime History*, Denizler Kitabevi, İstanbul, 2014, pp. 58-65, in particular p. 65; S. Faroqhi, *Crisis and Change, 1590-1699*, in H. Inalcik, D. Quataert (eds.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, Cambridge, CUP, 1994, pp. 411-636, in particular pp. 423-424; Murphey Rhoads, *Ottoman Warfare. 1500-1700*, UCL Press, London, 1999, p. 186.

⁷ Y.A. Aydın, *Sultanın Kalyonları*, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul, 2011, p. 26.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

problems – due to both technical and personnel reasons – derived from the use of galleons.

In the 18th century, this acceleration went on as an amelioration of the navy and shipyards. Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) was the pioneer of this program and he led his successor Mahmud II (1808-1839) to a modernization of the fleet. Sultan Mahmud followed his uncle's lead and in 1823 he declared codes for the merchant marine. As we noticed, the need for educated and talented personnel could not be met during this period. At that time craftsmanship and the system were in force in the navy. In 1770 the Battle of Chesma, against the Russians, led to the loss of ships and personnel but, at the same time, Ottomans realized that educated personnel was necessary for their maritime warfare. A naval school system was established thanks to the *kapudan-ı derya* Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Pasha (d. 1790). In 1770 there was no school on the Ottoman side, while the Russian Navy had been founded in 1696, and their first maritime school had been created in Moscow in 1698. The first school for the Ottoman navy was founded only seventy-five years later, in 1773⁹ but the lack of educated personnel was not immediately solved and, at this point, one should mention the words of the *kapudan-ı derya* Mandalzade Hüsametdin Pasha, who was in command during the Chesma battle. When he became *kapudanpaşa*¹⁰ he described the situation of the Ottoman fleet to Fındıklılı Süleyman efendi who quoted his words in the book *Mer'ıyyuttevarih*: «sailors were drafted from farms and not eligible for sea duties»¹¹. At sea there is no excuse for defeat!

In the 19th century, the two major negative impacts on the Ottoman Navy were an unexpected battle in Navarin on 27th October 1827 and another one in Sinop on 30th November 1853¹². In the former fifty-seven Ottoman-Egyptian ships and 8,000 personnel members were lost, in the latter eleven ships and 2,000 men suffered the same fate¹³. In 1827 the fleet, built by Selim III (1789-1807), was completely destroyed and Ottoman seamanship culture was totally swept away. In this age, the transition to steam powered ships required different technology and experienced personnel, and, as a consequence, Ottomans started to employ foreign technical personnel in the Navy, even if this situation created other problems during the periods of crisis and wartime. In the

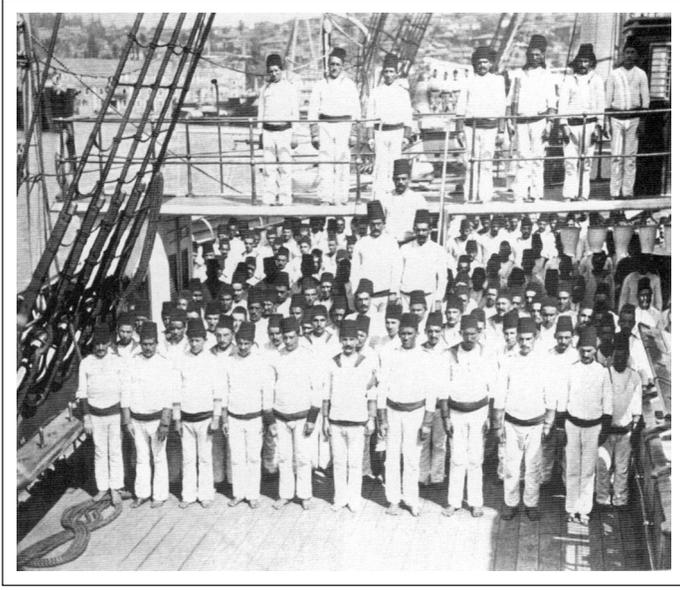
⁹ O. Aydemir, A.R. İşıpek, *1770 Çeşme Deniz Savaşı*, Denizler Kitabevi, İstanbul, 2006, p. 294.

¹⁰ Other name of the chief of Ottoman Navy, see. B.S. Baykal, *Tarih Terimleri Sözlüğü*, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 1981, p. 55.

¹¹ F. Kurtoglu, *1768-1774 Türk-Rus Harbinde Akdeniz Harekatı ve Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Paşa*, Deniz Matbaası, İstanbul, 1942, p. 29.

¹² See B. Özcan, *Sinop Deniz Felaketi*, Deniz Basımevi Müdürlüğü, İstanbul, 2008.

¹³ B. Özcan, *Sinop Deniz Felaketi*, Deniz Basımevi Müdürlüğü, İstanbul, 2008, p. 83.



The crew of the Imperial Ironclad Frigate Hamidiye
(Abdullah Frères photographer, *Imperial frigates and naval personnel*, Istanbul, 1880-1993)

second half of the century, sultan Abdülaziz (1861-1876) invested a lot in the navy that became more and more important. A great number of ships arrived from foreign countries and the Ottoman Navy became officially the third in the world, after those of Great Britain and France, even if there was only the appearance of power: in essence, problems of technology and personnel were still prevailing. In spite of the sultan's efforts, operational readiness and training level could not reach the level it should be¹⁴. During Abdülhamid II's (1876-1909) reign a declining period started for the fleet. Ottoman Navy could not play an important role during the 1876-1877 Ottoman-Russian war and also during the crisis of Crete. During these years, the major naval activities were acquiring two submarines, the first torpedo fired from a submarine in history and the cruise of the Ottoman Navy ship *Ertuğrul* to Japan.

The 20th century saw the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In this age, several amelioration efforts took place such as, for instance, the foundation of the Ottoman Naval Society, which logistically supported the Navy until 1919. During the Balkan war, between 1912-1913, the independent raid operation of the Ottoman Navy ship *Hamidiye* in the

¹⁴ D. Hacıoğlu, *Tanzimattan I. Dünya Harbine: Osmanlı Bahriyesi*, Deniz Basımevi Müdürlüğü, İstanbul, 2013, p. 62.

Mediterranean represented a new tactic that became an example to be carried out by German Navy during the Second World War. The *Hamidiye*, commanded by Rauf Orbay, operated in the Aegean, the Adriatic and the Mediterranean and aimed to lure some part of Greek Navy. On 1914 the German ships *Goben* and *Brestlaw* (aftewards named *Yavuz* and *Midilli*) set fire on Sevastapol and pushed the Ottomans to enter the war. After four years of war, the Mondros Agreement was signed by the Ottomans in Lemnos island on 30th October 1918. It marked the final collapse of the empire and its sea power: all shipyards were closed and its Navy was totally dismissed in a way¹⁵.

The Ottoman Empire lasted for 623 years between 1299 and 1922. During this period 204 *kapudan-ı deryas* (chief of Navy) were appointed and, in the last period of the empire, they were replaced by ministers who took over the command of the Navy. Some of these *kapudanpaşa* were very skillful and clever, above all in the glorious days of Ottoman maritime expansion, even if others were incapable and illiterate. When, in May 1919, Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic, went to Samsun, a coastal city on the Black Sea, to start the independence war (1919-1922), the Ottoman fleet reached 62,000 tons, the total tonnage of the invaders was 250,000 tons, while his navy had only 7,000 tons of various ships. This small fleet, however, that formed the essence of the Turkish Republic naval forces got unexpected results. Atatürk was able to galvanize his men and push them to success. Technology, equipment, educated and well-trained personnel are not enough if maritime spirit lacks: this was the force multiplier that allowed to this small fleet to prevail, and, all in all, to the independence war to be won and the new Turkish Republic to be created.

3. Emergence of the New Turkish Republic and the Navy

During the 1919-1922 war, 7,000 tons of various ships carried 300,000 tons of supply across the Black Sea to meet the requirement of the troops¹⁶. If you compare this total 7,000 tons fleet to the invaders' navy, it results a ratio of one to thirty-six; if you compare solely to the Greek one, it is one to seven. That means every ship carried forty-three times more than its own tonnage. It was really a formidable effort, supported by Atatürk's definite order to keep the Black Sea lines of communication open to supply the independence forces in Asia Minor.

¹⁵ S. Polat, (ed.), *İstiklal Harbi'nde Bahriyemiz*, Deniz Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı Merkez Daire Başkanlığı Basımevi, Ankara, 2003, p. 13.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

During the war all kinds of goods were carried from Tuapse, Novrosisk and Batumi to Anatolia and the rather small Anatolian fleet gave a great help to the national independence troops. On 23rd April 1920 Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) was created and, on 29th October 1923, the Turkish Republic was founded. In this year the total Turkish merchant fleet was 34,000 tons but, within the following three years, it increased to 76,507 tons. It was a very good starting point. On 1st July 1926 TGNA passed a law (*Cabotage*) concerning the nationalization of ports: by now sea waves were considered important also from an economic point of view. The Ministry of Navy was founded on 24th December 1924¹⁷, almost one year after the declaration of Republic, even if it lasted only for four years and, after its dissolution, it was replaced by the Undersecretary of Navy, established on 16th January 1928. During this period, a ten-year-long development program was made and one of its aims was to have twenty destroyers and nine submarines. Within the context of this program, four destroyers, two submarines and three fast patrol boats were offered to Italy and four submarines to Germany. Atatürk wanted Turkey became a great maritime power and, under his leadership, a great effort was made to modernize the navy. He always used to say: «I cannot imagine Anatolia without a naval power».

Montreux Convention, signed in 1936, was very important for the Republic. Now Turkey gained sovereignty over the Straits, while up to that time, according to the Lausanne Treaty, they enjoyed a demilitarized status. On 20th November 1936, Turkish fleet visited Malta: this was the first important long term visit after the Turkish Republic was founded and showed to the world that Turks were a Mediterranean power again. The Turkish Naval Forces Command was established on 15th August 1949, while until that moment, the Turkish Fleet Commander operated under the Ministry of Defense. Turkish Navy has kept its impetus of development until our time and it is one of the prominent navies in the Mediterranean. It can build its own submarines, frigates and command and control systems. We can say that, together with its technological power, Turkish Navy's main strength is its educated manpower. Today 86 per cent of Turkish total export and import are carried out from the sea, and this means Turkey is more reliant upon the seas than ever in past history. Nowadays, because of their possibility of keeping the sea lines of communication open and their ability to project power in case of necessity, countries that control seas can be regarded as maritime powers and candidates to become more prosperous in their respective part of the world.

¹⁷ R. Ünlü, *Atatürk Döneminde Denizcilik*, in Z. Arıkan, L. Sancar, (eds.), *Türk Denizcilik Tarihi*, vol. II, Deniz Basımevi Müdürlüğü, İstanbul, 2009, pp. 195-213, in particular p. 201.



Turkish Naval Petty Officer Vocational School, tour in Venice of training ships A-577 TCG Sokullu Mehmet Paşa and A-579 TCG Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Paşa, 24 May 2014.

4. Conclusion

One of the principle reasons for the decline the Ottoman Empire was its failure to keep its position as a sea power. As this article has shown, events such as Chesma and Sinop battles and Navarin incident, that occurred in the later period of the Ottoman Empire, resulted in the loss of qualified naval personnel. This process was also combined with several drawbacks in the field of maritime education and training, making the collapse inevitable. These deficiencies, however, have been overcome during the Republican Era and the Turkish Navy started to restore its former position as one of the major maritime powers in the Mediterranean. We can say that educated and trained manpower, among other strengths, is the essence of the navy.