
The Battle of Lepanto and the Mediterranean

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Scientifically speaking, the Conference promoted and organized by the Giorgio Cini Foundation and held in Venice on October 8, 9 and 10, 1971, was one of the most fruitful commemorations of the fourth centenary of the famous battle of Lepanto. The same subject was examined from different but interdependent points of view by the score of specialists assembled there, both in their personal contributions and in the discussion of communications received from other historians. The members of the Giorgio Cini Foundation deserve praise for the way in which they planned the Conference, with a wealth of themes and a geographical horizon of exceptional breadth. This encouraged the participation of experts who described the unrest and reactions in the Balkan countries and the situations actually responsible for them during the long conflict that culminated in the naval battle of 1571. The Turkish historians best known in the West today for their publications on the subject were officially invited. In occasion of this four hundredth anniversary, what happened was explained and justified for the first time not only by the descendants of the victors, but also by those who succeeded the vanquished. And in addition to them there were students of various disciplines who, like their ancestors, followed the conflict attentively from outside.

The Conference opened brilliantly with a splendid inaugural lecture by Fernand Braudel in which he summed up his well-known work and, once again applying his by now classical methodology, drew attention to a series of problems, interwoven and connected with one another, which reveal the existence of deep and clearly recognizable links among elements which in appearance are isolated and independent. The work of the Conference could not have been approached more efficiently and intelligently, since it became clear from the beginning what was to be the focus of all the discussions, the essential point to be approached through different channels. It is thanks to

the perspective suggested by the French historian that the various contributions, instead of appearing as single detached elements, were converted into convergent contributions forming a single whole.

Athanassiadis Novas, uniting a wealth of information with a talent for poetical exposition, closed the first session, which might be termed the prologue of the symposium.

Anyone wishing — at the cost of sacrificing even the most interesting details — to sum up the general sense of what he had listened to during the tightly packed meetings in Venice, could group the notes he had taken during the various dissertations under the following five headings: 1) political and diplomatic; 2) military strategy; 3) cultural; 4) economic in a general sense and under particular aspects; 5) national and social repercussions. Let it be clear that this is not intended to be a classification of the various addresses but merely, I repeat, a system for setting in order the schematic notes, or rather the bunch of loose papers, the historian is inevitably apt to collect as a matter of professional habit: following this order the same speaker may appear under more than one of the above headings or even under all of them. An organic history is always likely to consist of a number of pieces which, though independent, fit together. The question is to discover the keystone, if there is one.

The material exigencies of life are of such importance that only transcendent spiritual impulses can compete with them. This is true in the dominions of Islam as it is in Christian countries and in the territories that separate and unite them both.

The chronological coincidences to be found in this respect in these different worlds or, rather, the existence of a single predominant tendency, is probably the factor that would most strike an economic and therefore also a social historian listening to what was said at the Venice Conference.

Between 1550 and 1570 there was a phase of expansion and development everywhere, even if it did not lack the contradictions typical of the economies and societies of that century. For Turkey this situation is described by BARKAN and INALCIK, who stress, for example, how population and incomes, in those last moments of prosperity, were concentrated in the towns, something which should hardly surprise the Italians and the Spaniards. For Greece and the Balkan and Danubian countries MANOUSSACAS, PIPPIDI and WANDRUSCA confirm a favourable valuation which, I feel it is necessary to insist, leaves no room for doubts as far as south-eastern Europe is concerned, since the series of quantitative data at our disposal provides clear and detailed evidence. Between 1570 and 1590, however, this movement of expansion and development slowed down, probably because the population increased more rapidly than production, giving rise to a state of tension such as ALBERTO TENENTI stresses for France and UGO TUCCI for Venice, starting from an analysis of Ugo Zane's process. These tensions, as was to be ex-

pected, caused the unrest that found expression in the defence measures resorted to by Venice when it found itself in difficulty as is clearly documented by JOHN R. HALE.

The powers united in the Holy Alliance were therefore stronger than ever, but they were afraid of not being able to make further progress and felt within them the ominous symptoms of decay. In examining, with regard to the conditions of the navy at the time, the composition of the crew and the technique adopted by the oarsmen, MAURICE AYMARD draws with clear strokes a picture full of assessments which point clearly to deterioration or impotence. Monsignor JEDIN draws attention to the prudence and expedience of the action taken by the Vatican, investigating what mainsprings could have moved the wills of the powerful under similar circumstances. It was not possible to save Cyprus, but the new crusaders — who had formally received the Pope's consent and blessing — were soon imbued with renewed energy by the victory of Lepanto. And the sigh of relief which, as can easily be imagined, the Venetians drew after such trouble times burst out exultantly in the paintings, the iconography and the dialectical works with which they represented and which sang their triumph, as A. PALLOCCINI, G. GORINI and M. CORTELLAZZO tell us. The myth of the thalassocracy of the Sultan of Constantinople is discussed and the conclusions reached are negative, as A. TAMBORRA shows. After the Battle of Lepanto, in fact, the mainland was to be the scene of the subsequent stages of the war. Under the circumstances, could Lepanto possibly have had the consequences contemplated by the victors in their exultance, the echo of which spread to the Protestant countries which received the news that arrived and was diffused with contradictory feelings which made them waver, uncertain how to behave, as ACHILLE OLIVIERI points out.

OMER LUFTI BARKAN and HAILI INAL INALCIK analyze the reserves still possessed by the Ottoman Empire which enabled it, in the winter of 1571-1572, speedily to repair the losses in men and ships suffered the previous autumn, although a state of uneasiness, of recession, of crisis was beginning to take shape also in this area and was soon to become recognizable. ROBERT MONTRAN finds confirmation of these determinant fluctuations in some medieval manuscripts and other sources which are of inestimable value for the information they provide.

The path followed by Spain, which is roughly the same, is viewed by FELIPE RUIZ MARTIN from the important angle of finance which was the trump card in the hands of the *old nobles* of Genoa who, with their speculations, aroused the ire of the *new nobles* driving them to revolt. For the financial operations they effected in the service of Philip II of Spain in respect of this king's expenses in the harbours of the Iberian peninsula, Sicily, Naples and Milan for the hiring of galleys, the recruiting of mercenary troops and their pay and supplies of weapons and victuals, the *old nobles*

abusively used the commercial credits of the *new nobles* who, willingly or unwillingly, had to yield to the demands of men who, in their opinion, were depriving them of their lawful gains by taking advantage of the superiority conferred on them by the constitution of the Republic of Genoa in 1574. This was the reason for the uprising of 1573 and the intervention of Madrid which, if it seemed wavering in 1575, later succeeded in defending the predominance of the *old nobles* over the *new nobles*.

The non-belligerents both near and far, whether they were whole national communities or single individuals — Ragusa and Ancona, Hungary, Eastern Europe, Bernardo Sagredo, according to the plentiful information provided by Sergio Anselmi, Jozsef Perenyi, Zigmunt Abrahamowicz and Gaetano Cozzi — realized or at least guessed the mechanism of causes and effects connected with the episode that took place on October 7, 1571, which were certain to affect its consequences.

The Conference in Venice, which closed with a magnificent lecture by Carlo Dionisotti, followed by an intelligent summing up by Agostino Pertusi and the warm words spoken by Vittorio Branca, succeeded in clearing up some of the points which, viewed by themselves, still seem obscure in the traditional monographic reports. The combination of contributions prepared by a number of researchers who, moving from different fields, centered their attention on a specific target, was fruitful and illuminating. The branches sprouting on the trunk of Clio, provided they are carefully tended, are beneficial to the tree itself. The validity of the whole does not depend on the size of one part or another but on the way in which the various details are connected with one another. And the approach made by the Conference to its subject « The Mediterranean in the second half of the sixteenth century in the light of Lepanto » was distinguished by this fundamental quality. For this reason the results of the Conference, without lacking brilliance, were most constructive.