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Stathis Birtachas, ed., Venetian-Ottoman Wars, Nuova Antologia Militare: Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare 3

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Stathis Birtachas, ed.,
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Military history is, first and foremost, concerned with the examination and analysis of military confrontations (battles, campaigns, sieges, etc.). The conduct and outcome of a battle, the most impressive and most tragic culmination of human conflict, are the result of a multiplicity of factors. For this reason, the study of military history has evolved into an interdisciplinary field, moving beyond the study of military operations into the realm of wider political, social, economic and cultural matters, benefitting from advancements in the fields of sociology and political science, economics, the history of technology, international relations and foreign policy, strategic studies, geography, etc.

This special issue of the open access journal *Nuova Antologia Militare: Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare*, edited by Stathis Birtachas, associate professor in the Department of Italian Language and Literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, is dedicated to the Venetian-Ottoman Wars. It represents a prime example of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of an important protracted period of competition and military conflict between Venice and the Ottoman Empire (second half of the fifteenth century–early eighteenth century).[1] The continental and maritime geographical areas where the military operations in question unfolded (Cyprus, Crete, the Peloponnese, the Aegean and Ionian Seas and the Adriatic) are all particularly interesting.

The opening essay of this volume, "Destined to lead nowhere? Venice, the Ottoman Empire and the Geography and Technology of War in the Early Modern Mediterranean, c. 1530–1715" (9–41), introduces the reader to some of military history's "bones of contention", such as the "revolution in military affairs" proposition. Phillip Williams, senior lecturer at the Sino-British College of the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, challenges the view that the historical period in question constituted a "revolution" in warfare due to the dominance of new types of large warships and defences. The author argues that this assessment overlooks what is sometimes called the "strategic geography" of warfare. The capacity of harbours to accommodate large vessels, the scarcity of truly fortified positions, the hefty logistical demands concerning the transportation of troops and horses, as well as their upkeep upon landing, set limits on how far we can consider

[1] The journal is available online at https://www.nam-sism.org/3.2%20%20fascicoli.html

warfare and military developments in the eastern Mediterranean as "revolutionary". Nevertheless, based on the size of the fleets and military units deployed by the two adversaries, Williams proves that warfare in the Mediterranean cannot be viewed as a secondary front vis-à-vis other military operations in Europe. As revealed by the adopted strategies, these operations by land and sea acted as "diversions" to what was happening in central Europe.

In the same spirit, Gerassimos D. Pagratis, a professor in the Department of Italian Language and Literature at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, in his study "Typology of the War at Sea in the Ionian Sea (Late Fifteenth–Early Nineteenth Century)" (43–72), situates the period in question within the wider developments that influenced the art of war from the end of the Middle Ages to the Napoleonic Wars. Taking a step back from the "traditional" analysis of military conflicts, the author highlights the relatively recent trend in the study of warfare, which incorporates the standpoint of those who suffered its consequences, using the Ionian Islands as a case study. Pagratis distinguishes between conventional and unconventional military conflicts, which are further divided into international (usually involving a coalition of Christian states clashing with the Ottoman Empire) or bipartisan (normally Venice set against the Ottomans). At the same time, the author examines the effects of warfare on the population as well as on the urban and physical environments. In the case of the Ionian Islands, warfare prompted a reorganisation of the urban environment in order to improve its defensive capacity. As far as the populace is concerned, it suffered the economic consequences of war, as well as being forced to offer personal labour in all manner of military and alertness preparations. Finally, it was subjected to frequent incursions as part of a war of attrition, as well as pirate raids.

Pagratis' observation that the topics of intelligence and espionage have received limited scholarly attention in the context of the Venetian-Ottoman Wars brings us to the next study by Kostas G. Tsiknakis, a researcher at the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation. Entitled "The Greeks and the Secret War among Venice, Spain and the Ottoman Empire: the Plans for the Occupation of Nafplio on the Eve of the Fourth Venetian–Ottoman War (1570–1573)" (73–102), Tsiknakis' article examines the activities of secret agents in the Peloponnese in the service of the Spanish and the Venetians on the eve of the fourth Venetian-Ottoman War. Agents of Greek descent proposed plans to liberate the Peloponnese, made records of the state of the fortresses and attempted to build alliances. Their proposals are, indeed, impressive and reveal a broad spectrum of strategic thinking. Among the ideas on the table were: the occupation of the Isthmus of Corinth, thus cutting off the Peloponnese; controlling its centre, namely Tripoli; and the capture of Nafplion. In all scenarios, the participation of local communities was considered vital. The detailed description of the fortifications of Nafplion by the Venetian agent Andreas Londanos is very interesting and can be understood in depth if read in consultation with contemporary maps of Nafplion circulating at the time (1574).

In his paper, "The Multifaceted Role of the Cypriot Élite in the Defense of Cyprus before and during the Venetian-Ottoman War of 1570–1571" (103–39), Chrysovalantis Papadamou, a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Italian Language and Literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, recounts the Venetian preparations for the redesign and improvement of the fortifications and overall defence organisation of Cyprus in order to withstand the Ottoman invasion of 1570–1571. The author explores issues which touch on the cooperation of the Cypriot aristocracy with the Venetian overlords. Some of the tasks undertaken by the Cypriot élite covered the expenses for the construction of new fortifications in Nicosia, supplying the island's administration with grains and foodstuffs, recruiting and supporting military units as well as assuming active military command during the operations. Nevertheless, the lack of a unified command during the Ottoman landing and siege of Nicosia disrupted the smooth cooperation between the Venetians and the Cypriot aristocracy, adversely affecting the course of operations.

A less "warlike" contribution to the special issue is Vassiliki Koutsobina's "Musical Responses to the Lepanto Victory (1571): Sources and Interpretations" (141–68). The author, assistant professor in the Department of Italian Language and Literature of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, examines the composition of musical works honouring the victory at the naval battle of Nafpaktos. The discussion reveals a facet of the link between warfare and art, ideology and the propaganda crafted for the promotion of this specific victory of Christian states, that went as far as using the medium of the theatrical or operatic *mascherata*.

The next contribution, "Memorie della guerra di Candia (1645–1657): La cronaca di un testimone oculare" [Memoirs of the Cretan War (1645–1657): The chronicle of an eyewitness] (169–92), by Irene Papadaki, associate professor in the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at the University of Cyprus, introduces the analysis of a primary source on the Venetian-Ottoman Wars, namely an unpublished chronicle of the first 12 years of the Cretan War, written by an eyewitness, Martio Stefanoni. The details preserved by the document are very important for the study of a variety of aspects of military operations: planning, espionage activities, the battles themselves, problems with the supply line and the lack of appropriate medical care. Stefanoni also describes the deprivation and hardships faced by the besieged in the city of Chandax and criticises the uneven distribution of goods. I contend that the publication of this chronicle by the author will be of invaluable importance to researchers of this war.

In his work, "Assalto dal mare in Arcipelago: Alessandro del Borro nella guerra di Candia, 1654–1656" [Assault from the sea in the Archipelago: Alessandro del Borro in the Cretan War, 1654–1656] (193–224), Guido Candiani, associate professor in the Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World of the University of Padua, examines the nature and characteristics of the amphibian operations waged by the Tuscan marquis Alessandro del Borro against the Aegean islands at the same time as the Cretan War. The

Venetians chose to raid the Archipelago, instead of Crete itself, due to a shortage of troops. In his military operations, del Borro commanded a lightly armed cavalry, infantry equipped with firearms and spears, as well as heavy artillery, including mortars. His operations in Aegina and Volos are thoroughly described in the sources, as is the collection of taxes (the caratch) from various Aegean islands (1655). The raids yielded both prisoners and booty. These were followed by the unsuccessful attempt to capture Monemvasia, which only confirmed the differences of opinion between Francesco Morosini and del Borro. In 1656, raiding activity in the Dardanelles Strait resumed and troops landed on both Tenedos and Imbros. In the case of Tenedos, an excellent description of the Venetian battle formations survives, as well as an account of the siege of the fortress as experienced by the Venetian side. Once the artillery managed to breach its walls, the Ottomans were forced to capitulate. Similar Venetian tactics were met with success in Lemnos. The author concludes that the military achievements of the Venetians were the result of del Borro's labours regarding the organisation and training of his men. Unfortunately, however, our knowledge of technical details, for instance, the landing methods for troops and, more interestingly, the cavalry during these amphibian operations is severely limited.

Moving away from the battlefield, Erica Mezzoli, a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at the University of Ljubljana, argues in her study, "The *Scala* di Narenta: A Rural Inland Port between the War of Candia (1645–1669) and the Morean War (1684–1699)" (225–48), that in the midst of the Venetian-Ottoman military conflicts, Bosnian and Venetian merchants found ways to foster avenues of cooperation. Such was the case of the port of Narenta, which ultimately led to changes in land tenure. The paper is based on sources from the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), thus reflecting the Ragusan perspective.

Warfare cannot be waged with soldiers on an empty stomach and no money. In his essay, "Aspects de l'intendance des Vénitiens dans l'Archipel au cours de la guerre de Morée (1684–1699)" (249–273), Georges Koutzakiotis, senior researcher at the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation, examines the ever-critical matter of army logistics. In order to fund their operations during the First Morean War (1684–1699), the Venetians imposed taxes on the Aegean islands, sometimes solely as, or in conjunction with, payments in foodstuffs. Between 1684 and 1690, powerful and heavily manned squadrons of the Venetian navy were responsible for the collection of those duties. Nonpayment was met with threats of plunder and the torching of properties. After 1690, the author notes a significant departure from this method of tax collection: in lieu of the navy, a single French subject, Jean Dieudé, was charged with the task. A shrewd merchant, Dieudé took advantage of the network of French shipowners and captains for the collection and safe transfer of the funds while profiting by supplying the Venetians with a variety of commodities. Another source of profit for Dieudé was the commission he charged the islanders on top of the Venetian tax rate. France protested this arrangement involving

vessels under the French flag, fearing diplomatic repercussions. Dieudé, however, succeeded in finding alternate ways to sustain his profitable business venture. The Venetians bestowed him with various offices, so that the island of Milos, where he resided, was now "the seat of a Venetian dignitary responsible for administration and logistics". Dieudé provided the same services to the Venetians during the Second Morean War (1714–1718). By outsourcing the collection of taxes to the French fortune hunter, the Venetians appear to have secured an effective system of financing their military operations.

The paper "Personal and Fiscal *angarie* in Peloponnesian Fortification Works during the Second Venetian Rule (1685–1715)" (275–99) by Eirini Vrettou, who holds a PhD in modern history from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, provides an introduction to the issue of the upkeep and improvement of fortifications and, more specifically, of the system of forced labour imposed by the Venetians on the inhabitants of the Peloponnese during the second Venetian period. The aim of these *angarie* was the reconstruction of fortresses and fortification walls in this territory. The author examines the size and demographic characteristics of the population that was forced to participate in the *angarie*. She also furnishes financial information relevant to the corvée, given that manual labour could be commuted by a fiscal levy due to the Venetian state treasury. Working conditions in these fortification projects were dismal and, as a result, the peasants who contributed to the system were exposed to disease and even death. Conversely, those who chose to trade forced labour with the fiscal levy would, more often than not, find themselves in financial distress. The implementation of this measure accented economic and social inequality among the population of the Peloponnese, which led even to mass migrations of inhabitants to territories controlled by the Ottomans. In this way, the popularity of the Venetians among the locals waned and, by consequence, their desire to participate in the defence of the dominion.

The final study in this volume is entitled "An Overview of Naval Strategy during the 1714–1718 War between the Ottoman Empire and the Venetian Republic" (301–40), by Dionysios Hatzopoulos, former professor at the Department of History and Classics at Dawson College in Montreal. As the title suggests, Hatzopoulos concentrates on the naval strategy of the adversaries during the final Venetian-Ottoman War (1714–1718). Sensing that the international climate was conducive to an attack that would extricate the last remaining Venetian territories in the Greek mainland, and the Peloponnese in particular, from the republic, the Ottomans reorganised and strengthened their fleet. Conversely, the Venetians were diplomatically isolated and financially weak. Defending the Peloponnese required that the most important fortresses held, that there was a sufficient number of military units led by competent generals, and that the navy was in a position to provide aid to both. The supremacy of the Ottoman fleet led to the rapid collapse of Venetian defences in the Archipelago, the Peloponnese, the island of Lefkada and in the final remaining strongholds in Crete (1715). The inertia of the Venetian fleet can be largely

attributed, among other things, to the inferior leadership of Daniel Dolfin. The subversion of Venetian supremacy was a cause for concern in Vienna and resulted in a new war between the Habsburgs and the Ottoman Empire in 1716, which worked to the advantage of the Venetians. In August 1716, the occupation of Corfu by the Ottomans was averted, while in 1717–1718 the Venetian navy mounted a counteroffensive with the aim to contain the Ottoman fleet to the Straits. The violent naval battles that ensued did not yield the advantage to either of the combatants. Venice was catastrophically defeated because in the first year of the war, the republic did not follow a clear, cohesive strategy either on land or, most importantly, at sea. To the contrary, the Ottoman navy implemented masterfully a clear-cut strategy aimed at controlling the sea routes. When Venice attempted to use the old, tried and tested method of blockading the Ottoman navy at the Straits, it failed. At the same time, however, the Ottomans were equally unsuccessful in prevailing over the Venetian fleet south of the Peloponnese, which was essential if they were to open up the route towards the Ionian Islands and their conquest. Naval warfare proved to be more vital for the survival of Venice than perhaps the preservation of its strongholds.

This special issue treats evidence and topics of major interest to every military historian: military preparations, the description of military operations, including amphibian ones, naval battles, fortifications, logistics and the economics of warfare, the strategy of land and sea operations, espionage, the effect of warfare on local populations and the environment, and propaganda. All of the contributions are fully documented by bibliographical references, while in most cases the authors support their arguments with the extensive use of unpublished archival and manuscript sources. The issue is completed by: a) the republication of a primary source by the editor, Stathis Birtachas, on the preparations of the Venetians in Cyprus in the face of the Ottoman invasion, entitled "A Primary Source on the Status and Preparations for Defense in Cyprus before the Outbreak of the Venetian-Ottoman War (1570–1571): The Final Report of Lorenzo Bembo, Venetian *Capitano* of Famagusta (November 21, 1567)" (342–71); and b) a fascinating series of book reviews, which touch on the subject of the Venetian-Ottoman Wars (375–448). In addition, the issue is enriched by a plethora of visual sources throughout, and per study in particular, which include images, lithographs, etchings, charts and maps of the period that pertain to the military operations in question. As such, military history is complemented by a visual dimension contemporary to the events.

The complex geopolitical milieu in which the two adversaries operated, the strategies they chose to follow both on land and at sea, the pivotal role of navies in the operations, as well as the breaking point to which land fortifications were stretched, especially when undermanned and undersupported by external forces, present a fascinating case study. Conversely, the evolution of the art of fortification in order for walls to withstand the pressure of confrontations using firearms is emblematic. I argue that the amphibian operations of the Venetians in the

distinct geopolitical space of the Aegean archipelago and the strategy followed by their adversaries merit further attention and analysis. It suffices to note that during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), the failure of the Ottoman fleet to break through the Greek navy's blockade of the straits granted the latter supremacy over the Archipelago, contributed to the liberation of the Aegean islands and, as in the case of the Venetian-Ottoman conflicts, favoured land operations in the Balkan peninsula.

It can be argued that the rich archival material preserved by the republic, primarily in the form of meticulous accounts kept by Venetian officials, which concern either matters of defence planning or the outcome of military confrontations, reveals an early system of "military reporting", which foreshadows the subsequent military organisation of the great European armies. The early use of maps, however incomplete, is also attested, mainly to depict the position of fortresses and fortifications.

As in every war, during the Venetian-Ottoman conflicts, economic and logistical considerations proved to be the main power determinants for the combatants. The Venetians were systematic in their attempts to secure the funds they needed to support their operations, either by taxing the islands or by enforcing a system of corvée, whereby the population were forced to labour for free on improving the Venetian defences. The ability to support the army determined its size, as well as how deep into the hinterland it could operate.

In conclusion, from the point of view of military history, this special issue aligns with the latest scientific trends and interdisciplinary approaches, and it is certain that it will become a reference work for the study of the Venetian-Ottoman Wars. At the same time, this collection of essays reveals hitherto understudied facets of a vastly interesting period rife with military operations unfolding in the eastern Mediterranean from the end of the Middle Ages to the beginning of the eighteenth century.

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