

The Ottoman-Venetian Border (15th-18th Centuries)

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5 Sea Borders

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5.1 The Gulf: an Inland Sea

In 1727 upon his return from Istanbul, the *bailo* Francesco Gritti delivered a speech to the Senate about the Ottoman Empire and its relations with the Republic.¹ His speech began with the following words:

The unbroken and long land and sea border with its states, the trade with its harbours that was necessary there more than elsewhere, the frequent debates and the several atrocious wars are circumstances that lead the Most Serene Republic to have with it the closer relation for which it deserved merit and glory. (885)²

And he ended reminding:

On humbly presenting Your Excellencies' sovereign and wise minds with these very honoured remarks whose aim is to prevent more frequent and more easily apt to arise disorders, I believe I did not avoid the necessary task to examine what is important for the Most Serene Republic when it deals with such a great imperium, for which the Divine Providence had it neighbouring for a long tract of land and sea. (947)³

1 *Relazioni inedite*, 885, 947.

2 The translation is made by the translator of this book. The original quotation reads: «Il continuo e lungo confine di terra e di mare con li suoi stati, il commercio con le di lei scale, più che altrove necessario, le dispute frequenti, le molte et atrocissime guerre, sono circostanze che portano la Serenissima Repubblica ad avere ad essa quella più vicina relazione per cui si è acquistata il merito e la gloria» (885).

3 The translation is made by the translator of this book. The original quotation reads: «Nell'umiliare alle sovrane sapientissime considerazioni dell'eccellenze vostre questi riveritissimi riflessi diretti a prevenire disordini più frequenti, e più facili a insorgere, credo non essermi distolto dall'assunto necessario di esaminare l'interesse della Serenissima Patria

The Republic of Venice, whose territory extended from north Italy to the Aegean, bordered the Ottoman Empire for a long tract of both land and sea in Eastern Mediterranean. Braudel argued that the Mediterranean is not a single expanse of water but the union of separate seas connected by more or less wide straits. This statement inevitably brings to mind a concept conveyed by a much earlier historian, Ibn Ḥaldūn, who in his *Muqaddima* states that the Mediterranean, which originates from the 'surrounding Sea' through the strait between Tangier and Taifa, splits northwards into two other entities: the Black Sea and the Gulf of Venice.⁴

Ibn Ḥaldūn, therefore, represents the thought of fourteenth-century Muslim scholars, for whom the 'Gulf of Venice' was a special entity, different from the 'liquid plain' from which it sprang, i.e. an inland sea that emerged from the north part of the Byzantine territory and extended from the Venetian land to Aquileia's territory. From the point of view of the geo-politics, this description already seemed old at his times, inherited by previous scholars - when Byzantines still ruled over Adriatic shores -, not supervised and adapted to a situation that had already considerably changed. Also for al-Idrīsī, who wrote in the twelfth century, a *ǧūn al-banādiqa* already existed. It should be observed that the first mention of 'Gulf of Venice' is neither Latin nor Italian, but Arabic: before 1000 AD, when a Venetian document still mentioned a *Mare Adriaces* (the Roman name that derives from the town of Adria), the traveller and geographer Ibn Ḥawqal already talked of a *ǧūn al-Banādiqīn* in his *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*.⁵

In the fourteenth century, when Ottomans established contact with Venice, this city asserted his supremacy over the 'Gulf', an entity that, initially confined within the area between the Po and Aquileia, had expanded as far as the axis Zadar-Ancona and then up to an imaginary line that linked Otranto to Vlorë and, finally to its maximum expanse, the landspit of Santa Maria di Leuca on the Italian coast to Corfu. It is important to observe that, however, in the very first years of the fifteenth century, the *capitano generale da Mar* Carlo Zeno defined also the waters of south Peloponnese as «chaxa nostra». The Porte did not question the Venetian right upon the Gulf except when the Most Serene Republic proved to be unfit to defend the Ottoman subjects who ventured there between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. On the contrary, a study carried out on the Ottoman-Venetian capitulations shows that already in 1419 the sultan wanted to

con sì grande Imperio, cui la divina Provvidenza l'ha voluta confinante per lungo tratto di terra e di mare» (947).

4 Braudel, *Civiltà e imperi*, vol. 1, 102; Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, vol. 1, 98-99.

5 Edrisi, *Libro di Re Ruggero*, 78-79 (Arabic text); *Documenti relativi alla storia di Venezia*, 58-60, no. 37 (944); Nallino, *Venezia in antichi scrittori arabi*, 111-120. Other ancient authors mentioned a *baḥr*, *ǧūn* or *ḥalīǧ-Banādiqa*.

establish over the Sea of Marmara the same kind of supremacy Venice imposed over the Adriatic. The control exerted by Ottomans over the Black Sea was even more effective after all its coasts had fallen under the power of the Porte.⁶

During the Middle Ages, other Italian states behaved like Venice: Genoa wanted to have a claim to the Ligurian Gulf; some Tuscan towns to the Tyrrhenian Sea and the papacy to Latium's coast waters. The towns and the states that opposed the supremacy exerted by Venice over the waters were European and not Muslim, on the basis of the Roman law and Justinian's *Corpus Juris Civilis* for which the sea is shared by everybody and it is equally usable. In ancient times, Rome had extended its dominion upon all its shores and had got to the point of forgetting the most remote agreements concluded with Carthage that provided for a division of the sea waters among different states.⁷ From the thirteenth century onwards, welcoming the ancient Roman legislation in the *ius commune*, most European states welcomed the idea that the sea was a common good. Venice, however, on its part, always asserted its own laws, established in its *consilia* and written in its statutes, refusing to conform to the Roman law and what was taught in the universities, and safeguarding its supremacy over the Gulf.

Only little by little, new situations pushed a Europe fed on the Roman law to find new solutions. For example, in 1479 when Europeans were discovering and exploring the ocean, the Treaty of Alcáçovas between Castile and Portugal mentioned some «terminos» in it, whereas the following agreement, signed in Tordesillas in 1494, is called the treaty dealing with the «partición del Mar Oceano». Probably, as Ádám Szászdi Nagy writes, at the beginning it was just the creation of zones of influence that could be placed within the framework of the Roman law; but little by little they were converted into a territorial hemispheric empire, to the extent that the sovereigns Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile stated: «Mar Océano, que es Nuestro, que comienza por una raya o línea que Nos habemos fechos marcar [...] por manera que todo lo que es allende de la dicha línea al Occidente es Nuestro e Nos pertenece».⁸ These statements of principle, however, did not prevent the sovereigns of Spain from opposing, still in the seventeenth century, the Venetian supremacy over the Adriatic in the name of the Roman law and the freedom of the seas, but it was right in this century that some jurists postulated, also from a theoretic-

6 Tenenti, *Il senso del mare*, 48-50; Pedani, *Gulf of Venice*.

7 Vismara, *Il diritto del mare*, 439-474; Cessi, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 45-70, 115-168, 208-217, 233-242; Camera, *La polemica*, 251-282; Sassi, *La politica navale*, 99-200; Stefani, *Carlo VI*, 148-224.

8 Szászdi Nagy, *La partición del Mar Océano*, 62.

cal point of view, a maritime jurisdiction over the waters a state managed to control, both preventing others from sailing there and collecting taxes.

5.2 A Barrier in the Sea

A recent book by Khalilieh shows – on the basis of trade documents, international agreements and legal disputes – how Muslims have distinguished among high sea, stretches of coast and inland waters since ancient times. If high sea was necessarily out of the caliph’s sovereignty, a local authority could assert certain rights along the coast, whereas sea and lake waters fell straight within the state control. David Santillana states that, according to various Muslim scholars, the sea is *fay’*, i.e. a purchase made peacefully by the treasury.⁹ The same customs concerning the funerals at sea, with the body made heavier by stones so that it was dragged down to the bottom (if they took place near an infidel country) or put into a coffin and left to the currents (when sailing was towards a Muslim territory), lead to think that the concepts of *dār al-ḥarb* and *dār al-Islām* applied to waters as well, or at least to a part of them.

The existence of waters belonging to a state does not appear to be foreign to the Islamic thought, just like the idea of a limit placed in the water, however difficult to conceptualise. As a matter of fact, three out of four verses of the Koran concerning the sea talk about a barrier placed by God between the fresh and brackish waters:¹⁰

9 Khalilieh, *Islamic Maritime Law*, 133-148; Santillana, *Istituzioni*, vol. 1, 318-319 («They are not for sale, because they cannot be appropriated by individuals and, therefore, they are bestowed to everyone... Water, a gratuitous gift from God, namely the free sea and the waters of big rivers... The running waters of rivers and coasts» [this quotation and the following ones were translated from Italian into English by the translator of this text]); 373-374 («But the judiciary has found a way of... Restricting such rule. Water is indeed common and cannot be saleable. But if someone collects some water in a jar or in an enclosure, the water thus collected becomes his or her property for the right of occupancy and, since it is in his or her care... It stops being common... By extension, the same reasoning applies to the waters that are within the limits of a bottom, even if it is running water»); 382-383 («Easements... With regard to the waters...»); 406 («Muslims have three things in common: water, fire and fodder»); 409-410 («What is cast ashore by the sea... If it does not bear any trace of human work, it is *res nullius*... When... It bears a trace of human work: if it belongs to an idolater or there is any doubt about it, it shall be considered to be a treasure...; if it belongs to a Muslim or a protégé... The rules of the lost properties shall be applied»); 413 («Lost properties...»); 421 («Shores abandoned by the sea... al-Qarāfi tells the doctrine of Saḥnūn, Aşbağ and Muḥarrif, who believe that, when the sea moves and leaves a tract of land uncovered, this becomes a common property – ‘fay’, namely a purchase made peacefully by the treasury – such as the sea already is...»).

10 *The Koran* [online], 117, 188-189, 215, 273. URL <http://www.streathammosque.org/uploads/quran/english-quran-yusuf-ali.pdf> (2017-01-23).

It is He Who has left free the two bodies of flowing waters: One palatable and sweet, and the other salt and bitter; yet has He made a barrier between them, a partition that is forbidden to be passed. [25.53]

Or, Who had made the earth firm to live in; made rivers in its midst; set thereon mountains immovable; and made a separating bar between the two bodies of flowing water? [Can there be another] god besides Allah? Nay, most of them know not. [27.61]

Nor are the two bodies of flowing water alike, – the one palatable, sweet, and pleasant to drink, and the other, salt and bitter. Yet from each [kind of water] do ye eat flesh fresh and tender, and ye extract ornaments to wear; and thou seest the ships therein that plough the waves, that ye may seek [thus] of the Bounty of Allah that ye may be grateful. [35.12]

[He is] Lord of the two Easts and Lord of the two Wests: - Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? - He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together: - Between them is a Barrier which they do not transgress: - Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? - And His are the Ships sailing smoothly through the seas, lofty as mountains. [55.17-24]

From what has been expounded it seems that in the Muslim thought, and thus in the Ottoman one too, there was nothing to exclude the principle of considering the waters of inland seas that communicate with wider basins only through narrow mouths as state properties, such as the Black Sea, the Sea of Marmara or the Adriatic. Thus, Mehmed II wanted the following words inscribed on the main gate of his new palace built in Istanbul:¹¹

By the grace of God and by His approval, the foundations of this auspicious castle were laid, and its parts were solidly joined together to strengthen peace and tranquility, by command of the Sultan of the two Continents and the Emperor of the two Seas, the shadow of God in this world and the next, the Favorite of God on the Two Horizons [i.e. East and West], the Monarch of the Terraqueous Orb, the Conquerer of the Castle of Constantinople, the Father of Conquest Sultan Mehmed Khan, son of Sultan Murad Khan, son of Sultan Mehmed Khan, may God make eternal his empire, and exalt his residence above the most lucid stars of the firmament, in the blessed month of Ramadan of the year 883 [November and December 1478]. (34-36)

¹¹ Necipoğlu, *Architecture*, 34-36.

As a matter of fact, the two continents and the two seas could be seen from the acropolis of the Byzantine city, the new Istanbul: the plaque refers to the achievement of a universal dominion, the same one that Osman dreamt in the legend that was codified right in the Conqueror's time. In the *intitulatio (unvan)* of Kanûnî Süleyman's imperial documents we read: «sultan and *padîşah* of the White Sea and the Black Sea, of Rumelia, Anatolia, Karaman...», to which his successors added the Red Sea; therefore, the seas were an essential element of the Ottoman sovereignty, at least since the conquest of the city that had been founded where the two seas meet.¹²

Neither was there a problem with having a limit in the Mediterranean waters. In 1403 and in 1411 princes Süleyman and Musa accepted some limits not to be passed by their warships, but by then Ottoman nautical inferiority was manifest, to the extent that still in 1466 Venetians thought that forty light galleys would be enough to contain the sultan's ships. After a few years, however, given the number of masts, the appearance of the new Ottoman fleet seemed to have transformed the sea into a wood: a close past when the Ottoman could only run away in front of the Venetian galleys was missed.¹³ In 1480 the waters around Lefkada belonged half to Venice and half to the sultan. Another ancient example concerns the waters nearby the island of Rhodes that were overrun with pirates at the end of the fifteenth century. The truce agreed in 1481 between the Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson and the *subaşı* Peçin – and confirmed the following year – provided for sailing freedom for both military fleets in the area between Sette Capi¹⁴ and Balat (Miletus), but still respecting coasts and waters. The letters of marque issued in those years by the knights often referred to customary limits (*limites et confinia*), within which Ottoman ships had to be respected. According to Nicolas Vatin, the two words are not redundant at all, since they indicate two distinct sea areas: the first was between Sette Capi and Balat, as in the 1481 agreement, or between Kastellorizo and Patmos, as it is seemingly recorded in subsequent papers, whereas the second was probably the channel of the Genoese island of Chios.¹⁵ It should be observed that these limits were mostly respected by the Christian ships, which were much more numerous and well-equipped than the Ottoman ones, even after 1495 when the letters of marque were more and more frequent. That year, as a matter of fact, prince Cem (Bayezid II's

12 Tursun Bey, *Târîh-i Ebû'l-feth*, 66-67; Gokbilgin, *Osmanlı Paleografya*, 57-59; Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı belgelerinin dili*, 148-149; Kolodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 285 (ve *Ak Deniz ve Kara Deniz ve Derya-i Kulzumun*, 1591, Murad III).

13 Turan, *Türkiye-İtalya ilişkileri*, 356-370; Tenenti, *Il senso del mare*, 59.

14 It is the area between Ölüdeniz and Patara in the old Lydia; it was called 'Mount Crago' by Strabo and then 'Capo Serdene' or 'Sette Capi'.

15 Bombaci, *Il "Liber Graecus"*, 301, no. 10; Vatin, *L'ordre de Saint-Jean*, 115-129.

brother) died in Italy and the West lost a precious shield that for a decade had sheltered it from the advance of the troops of the sultan who was too interested in keeping on good terms with those who had his rival imprisoned. We have less information and documents about the Ottoman attacks, even though we can imagine that, thanks to the patrol done by the ships of the Order, the limits were mostly respected, even in the periods of greatest activity, for example in 1493-1495 when important commanders such as Kemal *reis*, uncle of the more famous geographer Piri *reis*, made a name for themselves, and then during the Venetian-Ottoman war of 1499-1502.

5.3 The Sea as a Territory

When we study the maritime law, we should take into consideration another important issue in addition to inland basins, namely the existence or the width of territorial waters, i.e. the area that trespasses on the high sea and within which the sovereignty of a state that rules the coast extends. In general, except for special cases, in a Europe fed on Roman law it took centuries to regard the sea adjoining the coast as a state territory and, thus, to supersede the previous idea that the sea is of everybody, object only of *imperium* and not of *dominium* on the part of coast political powers. It was not until Grozio that such a concept was theorised and it was not until the year 1621 that for the first time in peacetime the measure of a cannon shot was accepted and used to define the width of state waters.¹⁶

According to Muslim customs, instead, we may affirm that waters belonging to a state could exist at least near coast areas. The local authorities were in control of that area. It is not clear which was their width, even though around 1154 al-Idrīsī explicitly mentioned six miles as the distance within which an enemy advance was considered as such, because it was within the look of the sentry who guarded the Andalusian coast.¹⁷ The starting point of view, however, always was that of the fighters living in border *ribāṭs* (castles), which could be attacked by enemies from whom they had to be ready to defend themselves, and not the point of view of a peaceful state that expanded with its offshoots on the sea as well.

Some clauses of privileges granted by Muslim states to Christian ones during the Middle Ages hint at the existence of waters considered to be a Muslim state's appurtenance. Around 1200, for example, the Almohad commander of the army in Tunis gave an *amān* to the inhabitants of Pisa, specifying that the safe-conduct was valid wherever they were, in castles or on the shores, on land or on the sea of Africa. Similar expressions may

16 Benvenuti, *La frontiera marittima*, 16-24.

17 Khalilieh, *Islamic Maritime Law*, 138.

be found in another *amān* issued by the Hafsid caliph of Tunis for the prince of Pisa and Lucca in 1366; on the contrary, in 1397 his successor promised in the peace agreement that the Tunisian ships would not attack the Pisan ones if they met them, both on the open sea and in a harbour, as was reasserted in 1414 and 1421.¹⁸

5.4 Mediterranean Geo-Politics

After its early conquests, the Ottoman advance in the Mediterranean was not chaotic but followed its own logic, which was not always similar to the logic of land conquests. During the Empire's formative period, it was mainly the control of the straits that appeared to be vital.¹⁹ In the meantime, Venetians ruled a wide sea area placed among Crete, Karpathos, Rhodes, Tenedos and Euboea, while a myriad of local seigniories (*beylik*) formed a protective barrier for the Christian states in the Aegean. In 1479, at the end of a long war, the Venetian ships were pushed away from the Aegean almost definitely, whereas the town of Vlorë, conquered by Ottomans, became like a sultan's watchful sentry placed outside the entrance of the Gulf.²⁰ Shortly after, with the Venetian defeat of 1503, the waterways towards the Western Mediterranean opened up for Ottomans.²¹

The siege of Rhodes in 1522 represents a further step in the Ottoman geo-political vision of the Mediterranean. In 1481 there were already settled limits for the sultan's and the Knights' privateers. After 1495 Christian attacks became more and more numerous. That year prince Cem died and, as was previously said, European states lost, together with their hostage, also a valid defence against Ottoman fancies of conquest. The letters of marque issued by the Order became more and more numerous and turned, for the most part in respect of the previously established limits, towards the ships that sailed the route between Alexandria and Istanbul. As long as Egypt was a Mamluk land, this could bother the sultan's interests but it was not as vital as it was after 1517: after having conquered that reign, Selim I could not allow repeated attacks on the route between his capital and the richest province of his Empire. Not only wheat, but also money and expensive gifts came from Egypt, and much more when the Empire extended to North Africa. Selim I himself, whose interests for the navy

18 Amari, *I diplomati arabi*, 30, no. VII, 117, no. XXXII, 131, no. XXXIV, 146, no. XXXV, 160, no. XXXVI. Some diplomas stress the existence of maritime countries placed along the coasts, cf. 88, no. XXIX (year 1313), 101, no. XXX (year 1353).

19 Fleet, *Early Turkish Naval Archives*, 138.

20 Gullino, *Le frontiere navali*, 51, 105.

21 Hess, *Ibero-African Frontier*, 58; İnalçık, *Essays in Ottoman History*, 415-445.

made the following conquests possible, stated that the Mediterranean was a sole gulf and that it would be worthy and right if it had not belonged to so many different kings and realms but to a single 'sublime state'. Therefore, it is not by chance that the siege of Rhodes was in 1522. Thus, at the beginning of his reign, Süleyman the Magnificent got rid of a 'den of pirates' and the route between Alexandria and Istanbul, which was more and more important for the capital's splendour, was made safer.²²

If we look at a map of the Mediterranean where the Ottoman conquests are marked, we realise that in the first place the advance happened on the basis of the importance of the objectives, not of their distance from Istanbul; on the contrary, the latter principle was valid for the campaigns on land, as Rhoads Murphey showed. As a matter of fact, when we talk about sea spaces, we must renounce the categories that support terrestrial strategy and consider the kind of ships that is used, the time they resist at sea without landing and the distance between the places where it is possible to disembark and take in fresh water and food.²³

After the conquests of the islands placed further north, the sixteenth-century advance seems to be more linked to the necessities of one own's and other's sailing than to an attempt to systematically conquer the entire East. On the other hand, this is the logic that underlay Venice's conquests throughout the centuries, as a state known mainly for its sea and mercantile vocation. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Hayreddin Barbarossa's lucky deeds suddenly brought wide North-African territories under the protection of the sultan who found himself acting on a Mediterranean scale in the struggles among empires and was no longer limited to the eastern territories. The advance came both from East and South. Some islands, however, were not immediately conquered. Cyprus, Crete, Tenedos, Kythira and Antikythera were not reached, whereas the sultan's ships went further West until the failed siege of Malta (1565). It was as if Ottomans had tried to take over the entire Mediterranean beginning with the lesser defended wide areas and encircling the larger islands; not by chance Imber forcefully asserted the predominance of the Ottoman thalassocracy in that sea from the Battle of Preveza (1538) to the Battle of Lepanto (1571):²⁴ once they seized those areas, Ottomans could proceed to the conquest of the key spots, first of all Malta, which ruled the strait between Sicily and the Maghrebi coast; then, they could turn back and more calmly conquer what had been left behind, according to a tactics that remembers the one employed in the terrestrial campaigns by the

22 Bostan, *Osmanlı bahriye teşkilâtı*, 4; Bellingeri, *Il Golfo*, 14 (*bir halic devlet-i âliyye hükminde*); Vatin, *L'ordre de Saint-Jean*, 117-129.

23 Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare*, xiv; Tucci, *L'alimentazione*, 601, 604, 614.

24 Imber, *The Navy*, 221-282.

early Ottomans and by more ancient peoples labelled 'the barbarians' by our history books: the less protected areas were attacked and the towns protected by high walls were ignored and destined to capitulate after the conquest of the whole surrounding territory. Another comparison may connect these two worlds, even though they are very different: the early Ottomans were few if compared to the wide territory they faced, just as the fleets that sail a sea are small in front of the immensity of a sea expanse.

It was perhaps the failed siege of Malta that pushed Ottomans to change their Mediterranean strategy rather than the death of the great Süleyman I (1566) and the accession to the throne of weak successors. Even though Tunis was definitely torn from the Spaniards, the new geo-strategy was not aimed at the clash of great empires in the Mediterranean waters any longer, but at the marginal war that was fought for many years and was made of privateering and quick retaliations, sudden clashes of ships or small convoys beyond the logic of the great naval forces. The Ottoman fleet relied more and more on North-African *reises'* ships, whereas the galley, however partially modified on the basis of the new Atlantic techniques, remained the most popular ship in the Mediterranean.²⁵

Right the uninterrupted use of this ship, which was very suited to sailing along the coast and across the Mediterranean, together with repeated piratical attacks in the important routes of the Empire, forced Ottomans to move in a different direction. The most important route was naturally that between Alexandria and Istanbul.²⁶ It was intended for domestic trade and, thus, it was little considered by the historians interested only in international politics. Until late mid-sixteenth century, the Ottoman fleet used to offer protection mainly to ships and convoys; then, it took a step forward and tried to protect the route in itself in a wider and more general view on the problem, as the conquest of Cyprus shows.

The ships that carried wheat and pilgrims between Egypt and Istanbul were continuously attacked; therefore, it was necessary to deprive the pirates of any possible anchorage and prevent them from getting their supplies of food and water in safe places. At the same time, the soldiers of the harbours along the coast were ordered to ensure that the goods reached their destination and were not landed elsewhere.²⁷ A galley - which was a world populated by hundreds of men shut up in a narrow space and which, according to a maritime saying, firstly was smelled and then spotted on the horizon - had to stop if possible every day, or every two days, for the supplies. The rowers, even though they changed off, had to rest and could

25 Bondioli, Burlet, Zysberg, *Oar Mechanics*, 172-205; Mangio, *Alcune considerazioni*, 117-118.

26 Panzac, *Commerce et navigation*, 195-216.

27 BOA, MD, reg. 72, c. 202.

not keep the same rhythm for long; only favourable winds allowed quicker courses and only in exceptional circumstances could they run the risk of staying at sea for some days because the supplies of food and water could run out while the wind died down.

The small islands scattered in the Mediterranean were strategic points for the galleys' supply; bringing the few landings of the east part of the basin that were still Christian under the sultan's rule meant depriving Christian pirates and privateers of anchorages and, therefore, definitely pushing them and their raids away from those waters. This explains the necessity of conquering Cyprus and, in the following century, also Crete, which was the last important strip of the *Dominio da Mar*.

5.5 The Sea after Karlowitz and Passarowitz

Encouraged by these premises, Ottomans had no difficulty in conceptualising the existence of territorial waters and limits established in the sea. As a matter of fact, according to recent studies, it does not seem that they approached the problem of their theoretical legality, but it appears that they relied only on concrete cases. Already in 1416, respecting specific areas subject to Venetians was considered to be an established tradition, as the sultan reasserted in an order addressed to the *kapudanpaşa* and issued in the second decade of *rebiyülahır* of 1023/21-30 May. At the same time, some limits started to be recognised in the Mediterranean. In 1697, for example, the European states, after several reprisals against the Christians in the Holy Land, agreed on the fact that their privateers would keep away from the area near the eastern coast for fifty miles; for the privateers of Malta the forbidden area was extended to the Adriatic and the portion of Mediterranean placed north of a line that linked the Strait of Gibraltar and Sicily. As to the Porte, instead, another great admiral, in the first decade of *rebiyülevvel* of 1121 (11-20 May 1709), ordered the *reises* of his fleet and the *reises* of Algiers to escort two travelling Venetian ships once they reached the limits (*hududs*) of the Ottoman waters, even though it is not clear where these limits were.²⁸

It was mainly after the Treaty of Karlowitz that there were discussions and agreements between Ottomans and Venetians with regard to sea waters. After fifteen years of conflict, the representatives of the doge and the sultan were talking about borders. It was not a question of bounding only tracts of territory (as it was at the end of the fifteenth century), however long, but they both desired to establish an uninterrupted border that

28 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 253, reg. 346, unnumbered cc. (year 1121/1709); b. 332, reg. 250, c. 91 (second decade of *rebiyülahır* 1203); Hess, *Ottoman North African Provinces*, 79.

clearly distinguished their belongings. During the long discussions that Osman *ağa* had with the representatives of the Republic between 1699 and 1701, also the subject of the waters was tackled. In the second decade of *rebiyülevvel* 1113/16-25 August 1701, for example, an *hüccet* drawn up by the qadi Ahmed and a *temessük* issued by Osman himself granted that the two diplomats had agreed so that – it being understood that there was a prohibition for frigates, caiques and feluccas of privateers and outlaws – the tract of sea between the mainland and Lefkada had to be considered as freely sailable; neither state could create impediments to the ships that crossed it. After a few days, the first *rebiyühahir* 1113/5 September 1701 Ahmed himself drew up a long document, undersigned by the Ottoman diplomat and the *beylerbeyi* of Euboea İsmail, in which it was certified that, by mutual consent, the gulf near Lepanto had to be used in common by Venetians and Ottomans.²⁹

Even after the Treaty of Passarowitz, the limits of waters were still dealt with as a continuation of terrestrial borders and not as a problem in itself. This time, however, the two diplomats (Osman *efendi* and Antonio Loredan), arrived in the small gulf between Vonitsa and Preveza, and wondered if they could carry on delimiting the sea waters and how to consider the range of a cannon shot, that is to say the distance generally established as the limit for territorial waters, in such a narrow space. By then, however, they preferred to refer the question to their superiors, even though they had the qadi of Arta Mehmed draw up a report of their discussions.³⁰ This matter was certainly delicate: for example, from Preveza, which was in Venetian hands, towards the sea an Ottoman promontory was within the reach of a cannon shot; moreover, there were some fishponds that belonged to the Ottoman Empire during the war but were near the coast belonging to the Republic; finally, ships used to sail when the water was deep trying to avoid the shallows of the opposite coast. Therefore, it was not a simple question of territorial expansion but also of the fishing revenues, taxes and duties that could be levied.

This stalemate could not go on because the episodes of piracy by those who tried to profit from that uncertain situation were more and more frequent. Mainly the Tunisian ships benefited from this to the detriment of the Venetian ones; in the absence of a definite law to apply, the Porte had difficulty in repressing such behaviours. The only feasible solution, pending an agreement, was giving back to the Venetian subjects what they had lost allowing Tunisians to go back to their coasts. Finally, in the third decade of *rebiyühahir* 1132/1-10 March 1720, the sultan issued an order for the notables of Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers telling them of the existence

29 *Documenti turchi*, nos. 1615-1617.

30 *Documenti turchi*, nos. 1643, 1645.

of a border within which the Venetian ships could not be attacked since the agreements reached by the Porte and the Republic were in force. Taking for granted that the entire Adriatic was Venetian, that border ran at a distance of thirty miles from the coast from the latitude of Santa Maria di Leuca (the extreme Apulia), carrying on along the Greek coast, beyond Crete, Karpathos, Rhodes and Cyprus, and finally along the shores of Tripoli in Syria, Beirut and Saïda and up to Alexandria. Therefore, for trade reasons, the sea was bounded to ensure the right of way along that domestic route for which the Ottoman armies had fought to conquer Rhodes, Cyprus and Crete.³¹

The protest of the Maghrebi provinces was quick in coming. Imposing such limits meant depriving them of an important income, on which the welfare of their cities was based. At that time, piracy and privateering, as a matter of fact, fed the riches and the trades; it was not just a question of the booty that was gained or the slaves that were sold in the Maghrebi markets, but also of possible ransoms paid by the relatives that were in the motherland or of loads and ships that were bought and resold feeding both an inland and a foreign trade with Christianity. A border like the one established by the Porte would have not only allowed Venetian ships to reach undisturbed the big emporium of Alexandria, but would have also weakened the close ties that had been created in the name of shared sea raids between Maghrebis and the Ottoman subjects of Ulcinj. Mehmed bey of Algiers and the dey of Tripoli wrote by mutual consent to the *kapudan paşa* reporting the terrible situation in which such a limit would plunge the subjects faithful to the sultan and Islam, who fought the *ğihād* by sea and protected the imperial border, which was the bank of the winners and the shelter of Islam. Deprived of adequate resources, they would have certainly run away and become pirates; then, they would not have protected the Empire against the bellicose tribes of the country and the infidels anymore.³²

5.6 The Importance of Fishing

In the eighteenth century, among the maritime activities, fishing was more and more important and was done both on the open sea and growing the

31 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 254, reg. 348, cc. 110-111, 183-186, 206-207 (letter of the *kapudan paşa* Süleyman); cf. also reg. 349, cc. 80-82 (s.d., passport issued by the *kapudan paşa* to Rocco Bon, with the instruction that he is not pestered within or outside the borders (*hududs*) of the sea established by the Porte); c. 87 (s.d., translation in Ottoman of the *bailo's* memorial for a Tunisian ship that had violated the sea borders); BOA, MD, reg. 129, cc. 207-208.

32 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 254, reg. 349, cc. 89-91 (Algiers), 100-102 (Tripoli), first decade of *rebiyülevvel* 1133 (30 January-8 February 1721); Pedani, *Spunti*, 221-239.

fishes in enclosed spaces. Sometimes the existence itself of fishponds along some coasts in the border areas posed problems to a peaceful coexistence between Venetians and Ottomans. For example, right after Passarowitz, there were repeated fights for the waters between Preveza and Vonitsa³³ for some years; in this case it was not only a question of stretches of water where they could fish, but also of duties paid by the ships that crossed them. At one point, shortly before the mid-century, the Porte granted some waters of this area as *malikâne* to a local *ağa*, Aziz, who, relying on that accordance, levied a tax on every *okka* (1280 grams) of catch of fish and demanded by brute force the payment of that undue tax also from the Venetian boats that fished with the trawl net. Venetians obviously turned to the Porte to stick up for their rights. There were other problems as to the fishponds of Buthrotum and Risan and then of the area of Corinth. Here in 1744 the Ottoman officers demanded half the catch from those who used these fishponds, without considering if they were Venetian or Ottoman. On the contrary, the agreements with Venice had always set a tax of 3% for the subjects of the Republic.³⁴

The fishers' life was not peaceful there, also because of unforeseen events that were always in ambush for those who plied the sea. Sometimes they could be mistaken for pirates, who, mainly if they acted along the coasts at a short distance from their houses, often used simple barges – perhaps the same barges that were used to work when they did not buccaneer. Ships, galleys or galleons were used by those who had to sail for many miles before gaining their booty, such as the Maghrebis when they ventured as far as the Aegean or the Adriatic. Therefore, fishers could also be attacked by the pirates of the close coasts and be enslaved: in 1732 twenty-eight Venetians who sailed across the gulf of Corfu were made prisoners by a man of the coast who had invited them to eat and whom they had ingenuously trusted. In 1740, instead, another ship that was fishing near Thessaloniki was seized by some Muslims who thought they were dealing with pirates.³⁵

Other disputes regarding fishery saw the Most Serene Republic opposed to the Republic of Ragusa, which was closely bound up with the Ottoman Empire in foreign policy since the fifteenth century. The first accident involved the island of Sušac. In the years 1590-1592, some men from the Ragusean island of Lastovo started to attack the Venetian fishers

33 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 254, reg. 348, cc. 192-196 (third decade of *cemaziyülevvel* 1132, 30 March-9 April 1720); cf. also b. 257, reg. 355, cc. 48-61 (1734-1735, several documents on the issue).

34 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 265, reg. 353, nameless, *şaban* 1140, 13 March-11 April 1728; b. 257, reg. 356, cc. 30-32; b. 258, reg. 359, c. 158 (1153, 1740-1741); reg. 360, cc. 38-38v (*i'lâm* of the qadi of Corinth, first decade of *receb* 1157, 10-19 August 1744).

35 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 256, reg. 354, c. 109; b. 258, reg. 359, cc. 212-213, 331-332.

of Vis and Palagruža, accusing them of fishing outside their state territory. It was a question of both waters and ownership of the island, which belonged to the people of Ragusa since 1324, when their city was still a Venetian possession though. The Republic reacted appealing to its right over the Gulf and reminding that its subjects fished *a fraïma* in those waters, which implied a cultivation of the fish in rigged areas that had to be prepared many months in advance; therefore, it was not a question of a new fishing area found out that year, but of fishponds used according to an ancient custom. Finally, they agreed on the freedom to fish for the subjects of both states but Ragusa, even though its rights over the island of Sušac were recognised, had to accept the Venetian sovereignty over the Gulf, which sovereignty did not allow the existence of coastal waters belonging to other states.³⁶

After more than one hundred and fifty years later, in 1757, the agreement established for Sušac was validated again by Venetians and Raguseans. This happened even though the Republic had recognised the presence of other forces in the Adriatic, pushed by the emperor who had created a free port in Trieste and Rijeka in 1719 and by the pope who had done the same in Ancona in 1732. On 25 *ramazan* 1167/16 July 1757, two *qadis*, Mehmed *efendi* and Ali *efendi*, issued an *hüccet* that certified the new agreement on duties, fishing and coral. Ragusa recognised the Venetian jurisdiction on the Gulf and pledged to pay a silver *tepsi* (tray) that was worth 20 sequins every three years instead of the usual duties. As for Venice, it pledged not to attack Ragusean boats near the coast and to prevent its own subjects from chopping wood in the other state's territory and from disturbing the gathering of fish and coral.³⁷

Ironically, then, if the first evidence that certifies the existence of a Venetian sea is of an Arabian author, the last document that recognises the supremacy of the Republic over its Gulf was issued by an Ottoman authority.

5.7 The Imposition of a Limit

The order issued in 1720 by the sultan Ahmed III was repeatedly mentioned in several following documents that explicitly refer to it as the 'establishment of a sea border' and, at the same time, bear witness to how the *levends* of the Maghreb usually ignored it. It has often been argued that until 1770 and the naval disaster in the waters of Çeşme Ottomans

36 ASVe, *Provveditori alla camera dei confini*, b. 246, fasc. "Dalmazia", 1590-1592.

37 ASVe, *Provveditori da terra e da mar*, b. 595; no. 48 (29 July 1754, Francesco Grimani, *sindico* and *inquisitore* in Dalmatia).

took no interest in the fleet, preferring to reach an agreement with the European states and leaving the North-African provinces rather free, even though they did not encourage their independence. These two tendencies, however, could come into conflict: on the one hand, the sultan was interested in the respect of the capitulations he had granted, which capitulations provided for a trade sailing free from dangers in the eastern Mediterranean; on the other, Maghrebis considered privateering against Christian ships to be an essential source of income.

It was not surprising that there were tensions mainly with Algerians who were the most active in the eighteenth century. In 1716, for example, the dey stated that his men would obey the sultan's orders only if the latter had paid the slaves and ransomed the sailors held prisoners; in turn, the Porte reacted threatening to prevent Algerians from recruiting soldiers and sailors in Anatolia. Later, in 1723-24, the dey refused an agreement of non-aggression of the Dutch ships that were under Istanbul's protection; four years later, another imperial order concerning the Austrian ships was rejected. This time the threats were put into effect; with the support of the *fetva* of the *şeyhülislam*, the financial and military aids to Algerians were interrupted; the Algerian ships were not allowed to enter the Ottoman harbours of the East; the Anatolian recruitment was stopped and even the caravan that took the pilgrims to Mecca was halted. In this way, Algiers was forced to surrender and obey the Porte again.³⁸

In the eighteenth century, therefore, the politics that had allowed Ottomans to keep their supremacy over the most exposed and peripheral areas of the Balkans was still applied to the North-African provinces. If on the one hand the sultan could leave his provinces free with regard to the inland politics, on the other he could not allow any freedom in international politics.

A more complicated European situation pushed Ottomans to take further measures. When in the first half of the eighteenth century England started to see the threat to the European equilibrium, to its own position in the Mediterranean and to the commercial supremacy of the new European set-up, a conflict inevitably broke out, despite the pacifist politics adopted by the minister Robert Walpole until then. The war was declared to Spain in the name of the principle of the freedom of the seas (1739), but a dynastic controversy for the Austrian succession extended the conflict also to Austria and France, which took opposite sides. Only the Treaty of Aachen (1748) brought accord back to Europe, even though it did not solve the commercial problems that had caused the war.

By then, the sultan lived at peace with both the king of France and the king of England and could not displease either of them and much less

38 Hess, *Ottoman North African Provinces*, 76-81.

damage his economic interests. He decided to consider the Mediterranean as a sea halved by an imaginary line that linked the coasts of Africa to the Peloponnese, which choice was communicated by his grand vizier to the European representatives in Istanbul. The merchant ships could have peacefully crossed that limit, but the warships, either English or French, would have been attacked and captured by the Ottoman fleet anyway and the same would have happened to the commercial ships that would start to levy war upon each other.³⁹ In the legislator's mind, the eastern Mediterranean waters were considered to be a new inland sea, totally belonging to the 'guarded Empire' that still undisputedly ruled over its oriental shores.

The powers that had been fighting in the Mediterranean waters for ages did not radically change the stakes and the war rules. Genoese, Venetians, Catalans, then English, French, Dutch, and in the eighteenth century also Swedes and Americans sailed that sea mainly to trade; some of them devoted themselves also to another less conventional but richer kind of trade, i.e. privateering and piracy; the *levends* of Morocco made that activity their main source of income, but also small communities, such as the knights of San Giovanni of Pisa or the knights of Malta, proved to be as much active in this field. For almost two centuries, from the end of the clash between empires that was completed with the Battle of Lepanto, until the second half of the eighteenth century, the Mediterranean was (in Braudel's words) outside the great history. The ships that sailed it looked only for goods or a booty - which are equivalent but with a rather different view - and this was the most ancient vocation of this inland sea that saw more than one state devote itself to piracy in its first period of expansion, then prefer more peaceful and lawful activities and toughly fight against the new arrivals who went in for piracy, just like Venice before and after the year 1000 and, in its own way, the Ottoman Empire. In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, something changed. France introduced a more aggressive economic policy; the states started to visit North Africa more and more frequently, but it was the arrival of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean that led the so-called maritime Ottoman border towards the West to collapse. The Russian-Ottoman war of 1768-1774 changed many things: the codification of the idea of the sultan-caliph as the holder of a religious ascendancy over the entire Muslim world dates back to these years. This was a new way of opposing the West by means of ideas rather than arms. This was the reaction to the contraction of the land frontiers, the reduction of the Ottoman territory north-east and the transition of Muslim peoples under Christian sovereigns. The coming of the Russians, instead, brought about a new technology and a much more aggressive war by sea, which was comparable to the one that had ended in the sixteenth

39 ASVe, *Bailo*, b. 258, reg. 360, cc. 1-2; Pedani, *Spunti*, 221-239.

century; their fleet came from the Baltic after a long circumnavigation of the entire Europe going through the strait of Gibraltar.⁴⁰ Russians, however, the last to come in the Mediterranean, upset the customs that had settled throughout the ages: as a matter of fact, they came neither to trade nor to devote themselves to privateering or piracy, but to subvert its geopolitical set-up and, in short, to change its borders.

40 Gencer, *Bahriye'de Yapılan Islâhât Hareketleri*, 24-26. There is a formal protest, sent to the *bailo* in 1770, with which the Ottoman government complained because Venice had allowed the Russian fleet to go through inland channels as far as the Adriatic and the Levant; it was drawn up by an officer of the Porte who was evidently little conversant with geography. Cf. Lewis, *Europa barbara e infedele*, 150.