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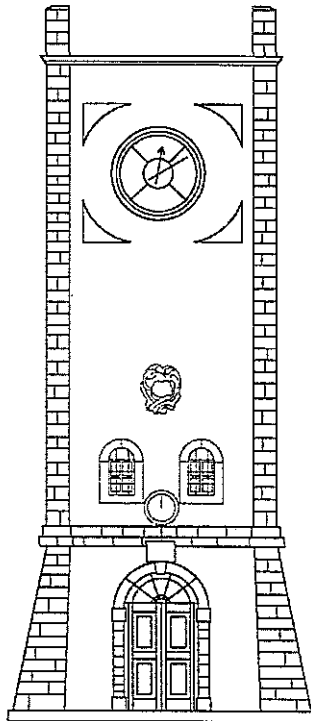
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Simon MERCIECA

*The Battle of Preveza 1538:
the Knights of Malta's Perspective*

GIACOMO BOSIO IS KNOWN PRIMARILY for his three-volume history of the Knights of St John with each volume running into over 700 pages and each page nearly the size of an A3 sheet. What is less known is that this history of the Knights contains a detailed description of a number of historical events whose importance transcends the Order of Malta. The Battle of Preveza of 1538 is a case in point. Bosio discusses this event in Volume 3 of his *Historia* but, for unknown reasons, his description has never been given the attention that it deserves even though he gives a detailed account of what actually had happened in that battle.

What I intend to do in this paper is to study Bosio's account and analyse whether his chronicle can furnish new and unedited information about this battle. It should be pointed out that Bosio began writing this work in the second half of the sixteenth century, some decades after the event even if he was not a contemporary since he was born in 1544 and died in 1627, but his account has the value of a primary source.

Bosio's narrative consists of a detailed chronicle of what happened before and after the two opposing forces met at Preveza. At the same time, he went a step further and tried to give a careful personal interpretation of the different actions taken in the battle. He traced the major manoeuvres that took place at sea and sought to explain them in great detail, including a progressive account of all the military actions. The Order of St John had a direct interest to keep a detailed chronicle of the events since this could serve as a study on naval manoeuvres for the Brethren. Bosio tried to challenge other contemporary writers whose works, in the meantime, appeared in print. As he himself goes on to explain, the merit of his account lies in the fact that it rests on first hand information which he obtained from people who had themselves participated in that war and whom he met and interviewed on the subject. He did not neglect the written accounts by members of the Order who were themselves in battle but whose writings may now be lost. Among the works he consulted are the writings of Fra Giovan Antonio Foxana, who was physically present at this sea battle.¹

Already, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Order of St John encouraged both knights and novices to undertake a number of sea voyages which began to be termed *caravane*. The incentive behind this structure was that those who went on a caravan stood a better chance of obtaining a promotion within the Order. It became normal practice for Knights engaged on caravans, to jot down notes concerning their experiences at sea which were then used

¹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

as text manuals to learn about or improve their sea operations and this is what have happened at Preveza; Foxana was amongst those Knights who recorded the movements of the fleet and the turnout of the battle.²

The owners of these manuscripts had already passed away when Bosio began writing his history but since the Knights were obliged to leave their books and manuscripts to the Order, this material ended up deposited at the Order's Chancellery.³ This is how these volumes came into Bosio's hands, after he took up the post of Chancellor!

The Knights of St John arrived in Malta in 1530 and immediately began to focus all their energy and activity on building an innovative sea policy that at the time was non-existent on the Island. They settled in Birgu which was the only town in Malta situated on the coast. Their choice was determined by the fact that the Order of St John possessed a small fleet consisting of two big ships and three galleys. Galleys needed an operational base in a coastal inlet protected by some form of fortifications.⁴ It was the presence of these galleys, which by the time of the Battle of Preveza became four, that drew the Knights of St John into these international encounters.

In the 1530s, the international climate in the Mediterranean was inclined to war.⁵ Bosio himself recognizes this fact as he rightly pictures the Battle of Preveza within the euphoria of success which then dominated the Western Christian powers after their successful venture in Tunis. In Bosio's view, the formation of a powerful League came as a natural consequence. The mastermind behind this League or Holy Alliance was Pope Paul III who, no doubt, had as model the victorious expedition against Tunis by Emperor Charles V. Kenneth Setton viewed it as part of a bigger crusade that was organised by the West against the Levant⁶ but reading this war through Bosio's narrative, it appears more an expedition aimed at helping Venice regain part of her territory lost to the Ottoman Empire rather than an expedition directed for the recovery of Jerusalem.

The political strategy adopted was one aimed at pleasing Venice, a powerful Christian state that had not participated in Charles V's formation against Tunisia. The Papacy chose Admiral Marco Grimani, Patriarch of the Venetian city of Aquileia as head of the Papal Fleet and the military strategy adopted was one that featured well in Venice's policy. For Venice, maritime routes were vital for her trade but the same could not be said for Spain and the Ottoman Empire. These last two depended mostly on land routes for their internal communication and trade within their Empire.⁷ But for Venice, Preveza was a well calculated choice: Bosio states that the League members agreed that if there was going to be any land conquered in the East this would pass to Venice.⁸ Spain, Venice and the Papal States all parties to the League, had a direct interest to come together to face a common enemy. In 1537, the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman I, tried to capture the Venetian Island of Corfu. Venice once again felt threatened by the Ottoman power whilst the loss of Corfu was seen by both Spain and the Papacy as the gateway for the invasion of Southern Italy.⁹ The last consideration was the defence of Tunis and its puppet regime of king Muley Assam. Spain and the Knights of Saint John

² See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

³ See MERCIECA 1992.

⁴ See MERCIECA 2007.

⁵ See HEERS 2003.

⁶ See SETTON 1984, IV.

⁷ See GUILMARTIN 1974, 20-21.

⁸ See BOSIO 1634, III, 174.

⁹ See GUILMARTIN 1974, 45.

feared that Muley Assam was at the mercy of Barbarossa's fleet. All efforts were made to keep the fleet of Barbarossa engaged away from Tunis and prevent it from sailing to this country to remove king Muley Assam from power.

In Bosio's terms attacking Preveza meant attacking the heart of the Ottoman's system. Moreover, the Christian world would begin to recover the area of Morea which was lost to the Ottomans in 1499. This was music for Venice's ears as the Morea was part of her former territory. Then, there was the perennial fear on the Western side derived from the continuous speculation that the Ottomans were planning the invasion of Italy or Sicily. By the 1530s, the Ottoman Empire began to be seriously considered to possess sufficient military resources to undertake such a mission since it had a large fleet and the western coast of Greece was considered to be its natural harbour from where to operate.

The League based its success on the number of ships that it could bring together. Bosio differentiates between the ships that the Holy League believed it could raise from those that it really succeeded in bringing together. In theory the League projected an armada of 200 galleys¹⁰ but in reality it had no more than 134 besides the auxiliary support ships.¹¹ Having made these calculations, Bosio noted that the Ottoman navy under Khairuddin Barbarossa was by far superior in number and far better armed than the one under the command of the Genoese Admiral Andrea Doria.¹²

The Papacy promised to bring together an army of 40 galleys, four of which belonged to the Order of Malta. Portugal was expected to contribute to this squadron, the Emperor had to bring 82 galleys and Venice the same number. Incidentally, Venice promised the Papacy wood from her forests to enable the Church to build 32 galleys. In return, Venice was allowed to import grain from Sicily without having to pay any taxes thereon.¹³

In July 1538, the Viceroy of Sicily, Don Ferrando Gonzaga, acting under instructions from the Pope and the Emperor –but not Venice– joined the Christian Armada. He pledged to supply the galleys with all that was needed in terms of victuals and armaments. The reason for Venice's absenteeism can be easily understood. Whilst the Genoese Andrea Doria was given absolute command over the armada, the League discussed whether the coordination of the terrestrial operations should be assigned to the Viceroy of Sicily, Ferrando Gonzaga or to the Duke of Urbino.¹⁴ Eventually, the Viceroy of Sicily, Ferrando Gonzaga had the upper hand, a position that he would always seek to uphold each time that, during the battle, he discussed terrestrial operations. He insisted to have them under his command. This was not music to Venice's ear. It had a direct interest to assume full control of all land operations, in particular as the target was a territory situated at the edge of her Adriatic Empire.

According to Guilmartin, Andrea Doria was brought into this battle thanks to the Spanish crown, which had the habit of hiring galleys from private owners.¹⁵ Was the participation of the Order's squadron in this battle part of this Spanish system? Bosio gives us no information as to any reward, in terms of money, offered to the Order of St John to participate in this naval alliance.

While the Armada's mission was eastward bound, the gathering of all the forces had to be carried out in stages and was determined by the geographical location of the participants.

¹⁰ See BOSIO 1634, III, 173.

¹¹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 178.

¹² See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

¹³ See BOSIO 1634, III, 173.

¹⁴ See BOSIO 1634, III, 173.

¹⁵ See GUILMARTIN 1974, 32-33.

Since the Papal States, Genoa and Spain were on the Tyrranean Sea their meeting point was to be the city of Messina which had the largest harbour in Sicily and faced eastwards.

Also in July, through the Viceroy of Sicily, Gonzaga, Pope Paul III requested the Order to be part of the League. Bosio recounts that they were furnished with all that was necessary.¹⁶ The Knights formed a caravan assigning 45 knights to each galley besides the rest of the crew. In all, a contingent of 180 knights, besides the regular soldiers, joined the League. Their presence was advantageous to the Christian army. They formed a sort of an elite corps. They were professionally trained soldiers, capable of successfully undertaking amphibious attacks. This contingent was put under the command of Captain Fra. Paolo Simeone.¹⁷

The gathering of the fleet took time and this was one of the biggest disadvantages of the whole operation. Geographical distance played to the Knights' advantage as the Maltese vessels were the first to reach the city of Messina followed by the squadron of Andrea Doria. They were joined by the squadron of the Papacy and that of the Viceroy of Sicily: The Viceroy himself decided to participate in person on his flagship, the Capitana of Sicily. It was only by the end of August 1538 that the fleet, consisting of 66 ships, succeeded to come together in formation thus permitting it to move out and sail in full force towards the Venetian enclave of Corfu.¹⁸

Near Corfu, the squadron was joined by two more galleys of the Pope as well as the Venetian contingent. The entire armada proceeded to the harbour of Gominizze where it rested for 22 days awaiting more ships and preparing for battle. All in all, the armada totalled 135 galleys and 62 ships including two galleons, one was Doria's and the other belonged to Venice.

One of the criticisms levelled at Doria was about the length of time he had taken to gather the fleet. He was accused of procrastinating and Stanley Lane-Poole even went as far as to affirm that «Doria was certainly not the man he once was; politics had spoilt him».¹⁹ However, if one reads the maritime history of sixteenth-century Mediterranean Sea battles, one finds that there were serious considerations which contributed to delay the formation of the fleet. Such big fleets consumed an enormous amount of victuals and organizing provisions took time. Bosio recounts that the Hospitaller galleys took as provisions fresh bread, large quantities of vegetables and consumed an ox per day per galley.²⁰ In Doria's case, the fleet had started gathering in April and carried on up to late September. Communications were slow and Doria had to take into consideration the fact that the Turks' sailing season extended to the end of December.²¹ All these factors put together determined that the sea battle had to be waged late in the season.

As was to be expected from such a high profile mission, meritocracy was an important component. The formation of the fleet was not only governed by military exigencies as invisible ranks existed within the Armada which determined the positioning of the galleys. Despite this handicap, Bosio insists that it was the biggest Christian armada to have set sail in this part of the Mediterranean since the time of the fall of the Roman Empire.²² No doubt, Bosio was referring to the Battle of Actium between Marc Antony and Octavian.

Bosio's comparison with the Battle of Actium can provide another possibility for the delay that, until now, seems to have escaped all scholars who have studied the Battle of Preveza. If

¹⁶ See BOSIO 1634, III, 177.

¹⁷ See BOSIO 1634, III, 177.

¹⁸ See BOSIO 1634, III, 177.

¹⁹ See LANE-POOLE 1890, 102.

²⁰ See BOSIO 1634, III, 175.

²¹ See FOURNIER 1667, Paris.

²² See BOSIO 1634, III, 178.

one studies the logistics of the Battle of Actium one will find that the two opponents met towards the end of September. Taking the context of the period Bosio was writing, it follows that the classical period was playing a role. Sixteenth century Italy was still under the spell of the Renaissance and one suspects that Doria had a good knowledge of history and wanted to emulate Octavian's victory. What the participants of this expedition were perhaps less conscious of was the fact that Preveza was to be the first important sea battle of the modern era.

As has already, been argued, the arrival of the armada at Preveza does not seem to have been an accident of History. However, the element of fortune did play its role. Some chroniclers were led to think that it was by mere chance that the whole armada ended up in front of Preveza since before launching the land attack, Doria went out to seek the Turkish Armada and found it at Preveza. On their part, the Turkish army too was following Doria's movements and anticipated his arrival at Preveza with the result that part of Ottoman vessels reached the harbour of Preveza before the arrival of the Christian fleet.²³ The castle at the mouth of the Gulf of Arta also succeeded in receiving support and aid from the Turks at Lepanto.

Once at Preveza, the Christian army decided to attack the castle which being situated at the mouth of the Gulf of Arta prevented the fleet from entering the gulf. The first attack came from the Papal fleet but it was repelled. The second attack was mounted by the Venetians whose Admiral, Vincenzo Cappello, began to disembark his soldiers to besiege the fort.

Simultaneously, Barbarossa applied a decoying tactic and, with the remainder of the fleet, went to Corfu in anticipation of the Christian fleet's reaction. He was not wrong. The Christian fleet's reaction was soon felt as Doria moved part of his flotilla to bring aid to the Venetian Island of Corfu. However, Barbarossa's attack on Corfu cost him the life of 1000 of his men. Faced with such a defeat, while the situation at Preveza continued to become tense, Barbarossa abandoned the siege and moved out to help the besieged castle. Lack of coordination from the Christian side, as well as the fact that part of the army had been dispatched in support of Corfu, Barbarossa's fleet made it once more into the Bay of Preveza without encountering any resistance from the Christian army.²⁴

By the time Barbarossa arrived, the Christian army had already called off the siege against the castle of Arta and all the soldiers returned to their posting on the galleys. Bosio recounts in detail the stalemate that ensued. Barbarossa's fleet was trapped in the Gulf while the Christian navy had weighed anchor outside and therefore Barbarossa could not be attacked. At this point, a discussion arose among the Christian generals who wished to take advantage of the shallow entrance of the gulf and wreck two ships at its entrance, by filling them with stones and debris. The channel was so narrow that this would have blockaded the Ottoman fleet inside but at the same time would have prevented the Christian army from moving in or attempting any amphibious attack on Preveza. Viceroy Gonzaga offered to take the land command and disembark the troop to lay siege to the castle. After weighing the pros and cons of such actions, the commanders of the Christian League decided to abandon this option.²⁵

Meanwhile Doria feared that since it was already the end of September, his army would have been blocked in Preveza something he had no intention or desire to do and thus disagreed with the Viceroy of Sicily, Ferrante Gonzaga, to wage a fully fledged war. Instead, he suggested that the Christian Armada should move out, attack and liberate Lepanto and Patraso.

²³ See BOSIO 1634, III, 181.

²⁴ See BOSIO 1634, III, 178.

²⁵ See BOSIO 1634, III, 178.

This would mean the beginning of the «liberation» of the Morea. Moreover, it was argued that this area offered better harbour facilities for the ships than Preveza. However this strategy had one big drawback; the Christian fleet would have had to sail and pass in front of Barbarossa's fleet and this would certainly provoke a battle giving Barbarossa a valid reason to go to war and help him recover his reputation which he had lost after Tunis.

According to Bosio, in view of an imminent battle, Doria wanted to strengthen the Venetian navy by posting soldiers, who until then had been on the supply vessels, on the Venetian galleys. The reasons for these were two. First, Venice's galleys were not well equipped for war. Secondly, in case of a naval engagement, Doria would ensure that Cappello would remain in battle and not try to escape. But Cappello, strongly objected. He insisted that he had sufficient soldiers and should the need arise, he would recall his soldiers from the Venetian land fortress to reinforce his galleys. Furthermore, Cappello insisted that he could not allow Spanish soldiers on board his ships unless he first got clearance from the Senate.

One can clearly understand Venice's objection but this showed lack of unity among the League members. Bosio believed that this refusal undermined the general command of Andrea Doria.²⁶ No doubt Bosio was correct in his analysis. Such a Venetian stance brought on an overall feeling of dissatisfaction among the soldiers.

The formation of an armada of ships from different nations had another disadvantage. Each nation sought to keep its particular squadron together rather than acting in unison. When Doria came to lead his squadron into battle formation, he had to take into consideration all these factors. Andrea Doria's ship was stationed in the middle of the armada while he entrusted his nephew, Gian Andrea Doria with four fast galleys to serve as a connecting link between the front and rear of the armada. Bosio laments that this enabled Barbarossa to understand Doria's strategy for any ensuing battle.

By nightfall, the Christian army passed by the entrance to the Gulf of Arta. It was in such order, insists Bosio, that Barbarossa could count each and every vessel of the Christian armada. The Christians dropped anchor in front of the Gulf to blockade its entrance. The following morning, six Turkish galleys moved out of the harbour with their main masts dismantled, apparently sailing towards the direction of the island of Santa Maura. Soon six Christian galleys under Gian Andrea Doria's command went out in hot pursuit blocking them and after engaging them in an exchange of cannon fire forced the Turks to retreat to the harbour.²⁷

Immediately Barbarossa ordered another six galleys to move out of the harbour. This time it was the turn of the Knight Hospitaller's galleys, under Paolo Simeone, to give chase. His squadron was made up of four galleys and another two from the Papacy. Again, the Turks repeated the same tactics. This time, Simeone wanted to cut their way so that they could not re-enter the Gulf but seeing the Christian galleys advancing, they retreated quickly back into the harbour but Simeone opened fire, causing great damage to the retreating galleys. Barbarossa ordered another four galleys to go out but this time it was the turn of the Papal squadron under Grimani to give chase and drive them back.

Some thought that Barbarossa was adopting these tactics so as to keep the Christian forces anchored outside this bay exposed to all elements. Others considered this move by Barbarossa a practical teaching lesson for his captains so that they could learn more about the tactics and the power of the guns of the Christian galleys. Following these skirmishes, the Christian

²⁶ See BOSIO 1634, III, 178.

²⁷ See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

commanders concluded that Barbarossa did not want a fight. Hence Doria ordered his men to lift anchor and proceed towards Lepanto at the force of sails. But the wind's direction changed to southeast forcing his ships to rely on oars. Thus the armada moved slowly toward Capo Ducato (known as Porto Suessola) on the Island of Santa Maura arriving the following day, 27 September 1538, the feast of St. Cosmas and St. Damian²⁸. Barbarossa immediately moved his army out of the harbour in pursuit of the Christians. Soon, fast moving frigates entrusted by the Christian army with a reconnaissance mission returned back to inform the fleet about Barbarossa's manoeuvres.²⁹

Barbarossa's move came as a surprise to the Christians who had thought that he had no intention of moving his army out the harbour. According to Bosio, it was Munuc Aga «Councillor» and manservant of the Sultan who convinced Barbarossa to undertake such a risky move. Bosio continues stating that Aga threatened Barbarossa with the wrath of the Sultan unless he did not go out and fight.³⁰

The first to spot the arrival of the Ottoman armada were two of the Venetian galleons which had lagged behind due to the weariness of the crew. A battle was now inevitable. Bosio goes on to discuss the battle formation basing his information on the unedited writings about the battle kept by the Knights. He informs his readers that Barbarossa adopted the form of a spread-eagle formation. At its head Barbarossa put Dragut's twenty galleys and ten galleots with Barbarossa's Capitana in the middle, bedecked with flags including a large red banner. The left flank was under Tabach (sic) Reis and the right under Salec (sic) Rais. The rear was made up of the auxiliary ships consisting of galleots, fuste and brigantines.³¹

But of particular interest was the size of the fleet that according to Bosio was far superior in number to that of Prince Doria's. Barbarossa had many more galleys, amounting to over 160 besides the fuste and the brigantines, while Doria's did not add up to more than 134 galleys. Bosio assures us that the count was made by the Knights themselves present at this battle. They had counted the enemy galleys and more than once to make sure of their number. Furthermore Doria's galleys were not considered to be as well equipped as Barbarossa's.³² Besides Barbarossa had the added advantage that his army had rested the night at a home base, giving his crew the time to recoup while fresh victuals were taken aboard. He also reinforced his crew and had the advantage that his armada was already at its fighting stations whilst Doria's was not.

Doria fired a cannon shot, as a signal to rally all his ships to come closer together to take up battle formation.³³ This formation was a rather defensive one intended to counter attack. Bosio explained that the entire armada was separated into four groups, and each group consisted in a line of galleys. At the head Doria placed six galleys, four belonged to the Order of St John and another two belonged to the Emperor. These were put under the command of Simeone. Next he positioned three squadrons of galleys followed immediately by his own galleys. Next came another 43 galleys placed in line formation after which, at a distance of about a quarter of mile behind them, came the remaining galleys of the Papacy and Venice. At the rear were placed the supply vessels of fuste and brigantines.

²⁸ See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

²⁹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

³⁰ See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

³¹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

³² See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

³³ See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

This rectangular formation allowed the fleet to attack and encircle enemy squadrons on both sides but it had the disadvantage that many of its galleys would have to remain out of the fray as the actual battle would be fought by those in the front line while the middle would be hindered from advancing because of the confusion that normally ensued on the front line of battle.

In retrospect, Doria decided to go on the defensive and counter attack. Taking advantage of Venice's galleon, which was the swiftest, he ordered it to break ranks and move forward followed by the other galleys and attack the flank under Salec's command. By this manoeuvre, Doria hoped to destroy some of Barbarossa's galleys.³⁴ Meanwhile, repeating the same manoeuvre, Doria focused his forces and attacked the other flank under Tabech. At the agreed moment, trumpets were sounded and flags flown and the entire fleet moved forward to attack in this formation. The cannon fire did not impede the Venetian galleon from advancing, forcing some of Salec's galleys into retreat.³⁵

Doria took advantage of the wind that had changed direction allowing his fleet to sail with the wind. However at the precise moment of attacking there was a change in wind again. The winds calmed down and those ships including the galleons that depended entirely on their sails got stuck in the centre for at least half an hour – time enough for the fortunes of battle to change. Bosio goes on to tell us that if there had not been a change of wind, Doria would have rammed and annihilated the enemy.³⁶

With the wind once again against him, Doria could only move his army of galleys into battle without the support of the big ships and he refused to take this risk. If he had continued to move on he would have detached himself from part of his army and by the evening his crew would have been too tired to face battle. Inexperience did the rest. According to Bosio part of Doria's army was inexpert in maritime affairs – though perhaps too enthusiastic about the war – yet still wanting to continue moving forward to face Barbarossa.³⁷

On his part, Barbarossa seems to have been playing a waiting game procrastinating until the afternoon or evening when the right moment cropped up. The change in the wind played to his advantage for he ended up sailing with it in his favour,³⁸ with the knowledge that he would rely on a rested crew.

The delaying tactics psychologically unnerved the Christian army. Doria began to face the pressure from his generals who were requesting and insisting to attack while levelling accusations against him that he was now too old and that was the cause for his lack of the necessary stamina to face the enemy.³⁹

In particular, Bosio accredits the Venetian General Cappello with a Spartan spirit. According to the Knights who had participated in this war, Cappello literally went to see Doria, dressed in full armour, arriving at Doria's flagship in a fully decorated frigate. During the meeting, Cappello blatantly told Doria that if he did not feel up to attacking Barbarossa, he, Cappello, was more than willing to take action and, if need be, even takeover the avant-garde position which was the riskier. Doria politely declined and sent him back to his post.⁴⁰ The Patriarch Grimani, who like Cappello went personally to Doria, expressed the same proposal.

³⁴ See BOSIO 1634, III, 179.

³⁵ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

³⁶ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

³⁷ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

³⁸ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

³⁹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

⁴⁰ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

Meanwhile, the two armies continued to slowly approach each other to the extent that the colours of the Turkish galleys became clearly visible from the Order's position which was at the head of the Christian squadron. They could even discern the colours of the vests worn by the Turkish soldiers in Dragut's squadron.⁴¹

Doria was tying his fortune to the climate and continued to wait for a change of wind. Hopes began to rise when clouds were seen coming from southwest but the desired breeze failed to materialize. Therefore Doria had to change his war strategy. He sent a message to Simeone to pull up oars and wait for the arrival of his squadron without firing a shot so that the whole front squadron would join up with the second line of squadrons.⁴²

Furthermore, he ordered all other galleys to take up their original positions. Written orders, with drawings, indicating their position were immediately sent out to all captains while instructing them to be on the look out for fresh orders that would follow in due course. In this new formation, the Prince's galleon stood in the centre. On his right flank he had the Hospitaller galleys. Doria wanted the rest of the squadron to move ahead to form a line position.⁴³

However, despite the command given, both Cappello and the Patriarch did not realize in time that their galleys were meant to move up to the front line position. Bosio attributes this to the lack of attention of their look-outs in interpreting the flag signals that were being sent from the flagship. Instead of taking a line position, the galleys of Venice and the Papacy moved forward and nearly collided with the avant-garde ships causing great confusion and imperilling the Christian galleys.

According to Bosio, Barbarossa was in doubt as to whether this was a mistake or a new tactical move of Doria's. As the day was now nearly over, Barbarossa chose to maintain his position of observation and moved his fleet closer to the shores of the Island of Santa Maura but without giving time to the Christian galleys to disentangle themselves from the confusion and regain an orderly formation.⁴⁴

Barbarossa positioned his galleys with their stern towards land and their bows facing the Christian Armada while keeping under surveillance the movements of the enemy and his cannons aimed at the Christian army.⁴⁵ Doria, meanwhile, with great difficulty, tried to bring back into line the galleys and reassemble his fleet but his men were dispirited by this debacle and the galleys ended up literally having to be towed into position.

This gave Barbarossa the opportunity to align his ships in a firing position, moving closer to the Christian ships and opening his cannons from the bows onto the side of the galleys. Bosio recounts that a big cloud of smoke and fire followed: it was «hell». The Christian army sustained great damage, in particular, those galleys that did not have the protection of the auxiliary ships to act as buffers. Furthermore the Admiral's flagship failed to give orders to counter attack with the result that the galleys did not enter into action.⁴⁶

At sunset the enemy stopped firing on the Christian vessels but found that some of the Turkish galleys were giving assault to the Venetian Galleon while Salec was overtaking and attacking two Venetian galleys which, according to Bosio, were poorly armed and were slow

⁴¹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

⁴² See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

⁴³ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

⁴⁴ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

⁴⁵ See BOSIO 1634, III, 180.

⁴⁶ See BOSIO 1634, III, 181.

in their manoeuvres. They were overrun after a fierce fight.⁴⁷

Doria, on the other hand, went around his galleys trying to attract the enemy's attention so as to act as a decoy and force Barbarossa to pursue him. At the same time, Doria forbade the Christian galleys from opening fire but wanted them to wait until the enemy entered into battle before counter attacking in unison with all the artillery. In this Doria was right. Cannons at that time were not so accurate and they caused less damage than one might be led to believe today. It was a time when the artillery was not yet precise in hitting its target. In fact it was very often quite approximate. Therefore actually succeeding in hitting a target was cause for cheering amongst the seafarers.⁴⁸ This was countered by seeking to have the best manoeuvrability. Rapidity in movement aided the galley to avoid being hit by enemy missiles⁴⁹ not forgetting that galleys carried their ensign and were easily identified by both friend and foe.

In battle, the galleys of the Order were those immediately identified and attacked because, according to Bosio, they were the most hated.⁵⁰ Preveza was no exception. One of the galleys of the Order of St John under the command of del Gallo was hit by four cannon balls. One hit the prow and killed Fra Alvaro Fernandez d'Almeida and Fra Diego d'Ulloa together with other members of the crew.⁵¹ Another killed Gaspare Sommaripa, the boatswain of the galley *Caterinetta*. Moreover, hit by an underwater shot, Captain Figara's Hospitaller galley began to take in water and the crew had to surrender while others sought refuge on nearby ships.

As night approached it began to rain and this forced the arquebusiers of the Ottoman army to seek cover so that the gunpowder would not get wet. The cannons too went out of action. Doria capitalized on this situation to save the fleet. Moreover, two ships belonging to Captains Boccanegra and Machin respectively, which were so weak that they were deemed lost, fell victim to the corsairs' frontal attack. They served as a distraction and gave Doria the opportunity to keep the enemy engaged thus giving his army a better chance to escape.

Eventually, even Boccanegra's and Machin's ship succeeded in escaping to safety after losing many of his Spanish soldiers. Machin's ship remained under enemy attack for much longer. It lost the main mast whilst part of the sails were burnt. Despite these drawbacks, the crew continued to fight courageously and in the end the Ottomans let her go. These two galleys together with the Venetian galleon, which also was extensively damaged, reached the rest of the Armada.⁵²

Bosio goes into the detail of the manoeuvres adopted by Doria to move out of the battle. He recounted how Doria put up the foresail and slowly set sail for Corfu so as not to abandon the other ships giving them the chance to follow his trail. But then Doria changed tactics and put up his full sails and moved forward as fast as possible while keeping the lights of the three back lanterns off. These three lanterns were synonymous of a flagship in both Christian and Muslim fleets. They were only to be found on the Admiral's ship. Putting the lights out was interpreted as a move to impede the enemy from following Doria's manoeuvres. And according to Bosio this aided the fleet to escape in the darkness of the night and reach the Gulf of Arta.⁵³ Other historians however interpreted this as an act of cowardice.

⁴⁷ See BOSIO 1634, III, 181.

⁴⁸ See BOSIO 1634, III, 148.

⁴⁹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 147.

⁵⁰ See BOSIO 1634, III, 148.

⁵¹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 181.

⁵² See BOSIO 1634, III, 181.

⁵³ See BOSIO 1634, III, 181.

Doria did succeed in saving the fleet but not his reputation. Bosio concurs that at the end of the day, Doria had lost most of his great reputation.⁵⁴ As can be expected from such situations, the morale of the Ottoman navy was at its highest. Barbarossa had regained his lost prestige in the eyes of the West. The same could not be said for the Christian side.

Internal strife followed with each side accusing the other for the defeat. Prince Doria accused Cappello and the Venetian for the defeat because of their refusal to take Spanish soldiers on board their galleys. Doria even accused the Venetians of something else. He accused them of having kept their sails furled and tied solely with reeds and hoisted in such manner that with a simple tug they would be in full sail and could flee, abandoning the Imperial Armada to the enemy and manifestly endangering the Realms of Naples and Sicily.⁵⁵

On their part, the Venetians replied that they had reinforced their galleys with good Venetian soldiers. Furthermore they admitted that they had tied the sails with reeds and this was done with foresight in order to be able to put the enemy to flight had they realized that the Ottoman armada was going to ram them. On his part, Bosio insists that Doria should never have doubted the Venetians but should have conceded them the *avant-garde* position in battle as they had requested.⁵⁶

On the other hand, Barbarossa after having forced the Christian armada to retreat moved to the Gulf of Arta and from there sailed towards the Island of Paxu some 12 miles from the Cape of Corfu. Bosio interpreted this as Barbarossa's move to again challenge the Christian armada to fight. However, Barbarossa must have taken into account the fact that with so many captains it was going to be very difficult to get the Christian army to unite and take up the challenge.⁵⁷ Gonzaga, Viceroy of Sicily, wanted to take up the challenge and said so to the rest of the leaders of the Christian Armada. His suggestion was approved and, as a sign of good will, now Venice accepted to take on 25 Spanish soldiers on each one of her galleys in preparation for battle. On 7 October, the Christian army moved against the island of Paxu but once there found that Barbarossa's army had meanwhile moved back to the Gulf of Arta.

The overall feeling in the army was not to return home without even attempting to raid the Turkish enclaves. At first, it was suggested to attack Durazzo. But the Venetian General objected saying that in the area there was no secure harbour capable of taking all the Christian fleet. Instead it was agreed that the Christian armada should move against Castelnuovo in the Gulf of Cattaro that was in the hands of the Turks. It had two castles, one down by the harbour and another on the highest hill. The Christian army was now proceeding with great advantage. Bad weather prevented Barbarossa from stopping the Christian fleet from landing its troops at Castelnuovo.

The four galleys of the Order remained at sea to watch out for the return of the Turkish armada while the rest of the army attacked Castelnuovo. Two other galleys had been left at Corfu for the same reason. Bosio says that Castelnuovo was an easy prey and was quickly conquered. As for Gonzaga, Bosio writes that he showed his knowledge as supreme commander of territorial operations. More than 2000 inhabitants were made prisoners.

On learning the news of the capture of Castelnuovo, Barbarossa moved his army to go and assist this Turkish possession. However winter was now approaching and navigation in October was not always at its best. Barbarossa fell victim of the weather and in the process of

⁵⁴ See BOSIO 1634, III, 181.

⁵⁵ See BOSIO 1634, III, 181.

⁵⁶ See BOSIO 1634, III, 181-182.

⁵⁷ See BOSIO 1634, III, 182.

reaching Castelnovo lost, according to Bosio, thirty vessels between galleys and galleots, which ran aground on the reefs of Cimera and the island of Suasino.⁵⁸

On seeing Barbarossa's armada approaching, the galleys of the Knights and the two other galleys left behind in Corfu set out to join the rest of the Christian armada. They arrived rather quickly because the wind was in their favour. Since Barbarossa had lost some of his ships, the Christian army wanted to capitalize on the situation by giving chase and forcing him into battle.⁵⁹

At the same time, some of the generals feared the winter that was fast approaching and therefore agreed to retreat but left behind a squadron of soldiers to keep control of Castelnovo. Doria opted to leave an army of 4000 Spanish soldiers under Francesco Sarmiento. The Spanish soldiers objected, maintaining that they were going to be left as prey of the Turkish enemy. Cappello objected too, mentioning the fact that any territory that would have been conquered should have gone to Venice. Therefore he wanted the Venetian soldiers to occupy the fortress. Venice in turn expressed fear that such a large force could easily be diverted by Spain against her. Eventually, Venice resolved the problem by seeking a unilateral truce with the Ottoman Empire. She obtained it through the intervention of Ambassador Lorenzo Gritti.⁶⁰

Doria proceeded with the rest of the Imperial Army towards Brindisi. The Viceroy of Sicily Gonzaga proceeded to Messina where he arrived towards the middle of December only to find that a large number of the Spanish soldiers stationed at Castelnovo had abandoned their position and sailed to Messina without being authorized. The soldiers explained that they had taken the decision because they had not been paid for the past four months and therefore they no longer felt bound to obey his orders to remain at Castelnovo. In all, there were about 6000 soldiers demanding payment. Promising them payment, Doria ordered their galleys to move to the Island of Lipari. However, the soldiers refused to obey orders and stayed on to the point where extreme measures had to be taken and the Royal Gate (*Porta Reale*) of Messina was hastily closed to prevent them entering the city. Gonzaga reacted by ordering his galleys to moor with their bows pointing towards the city and fired his cannons onto the motley gathered there. But this had the negative effect of forcing the soldiers to flee to the nearby hills out of range of the cannons where they began to sack the nearby villages.

The soldiers resorted to banditry,⁶¹ attacking peasants and villages in Sicily; Randazzo, Monforte, S. Lucia, Roccella, Francavilla and Linguagrossa were all targets. Other land on the edge of the Etna fell under the sickle. It was open warfare, Bosio states. The services of the Barons of Sicily were required to calm the situation but even that was not enough. Eventually the soldiers were promised that any excesses committed would be pardoned and at the same time were given four month salary to calm them down. The soldiers fell for it and once they laid down their arms, the authorities did not keep their word. Some of the soldiers were killed on the spot, others, fortunate enough to escape, were hunted down. Escaping from Sicily was not enough to gain immunity for the hunt extended to Saragosa. Bosio carries on saying that one could see the bodies of the dead Spanish soldiers lying everywhere. The Council of Spain made a formal protest however the Emperor eventually pardoned the Viceroy.⁶²

But even Barbarossa did not fare well in this battle. Bosio went a step further and confirms

⁵⁸ See BOSIO 1634, III, 182. Guilmartin gives a higher figure. He states that the Ottoman fleet was subsequently decimated by a sudden storm and suffered a loss of 70 galleys and galiots. See GUILMARTIN 1974, 55.

⁵⁹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 182.

⁶⁰ See BOSIO, 1634, III, 182.

⁶¹ See BOSIO 1634, III, 183.

⁶² See BOSIO 1634, III, 183.

that in reality the Turkish armada lost more vessels than the Christian side. In fact, the Turkish armada lost thirty vessels, between galleys and galleots, against the reefs of Cimera and the Island of Suasino.⁶³

One can only but agree with Guilmartin that Preveza was «probably the greatest Ottoman fleet victory of the sixteenth century».⁶⁴ However, Bosio's views are different and he is right to depict it as a pyrrhic victory. Yet, such a consideration should not obfuscate this Ottoman achievement in the west. What diminished its importance at the time were the numerous apologetic writings, which began to circulate immediately after the defeat that tried to tone down the Turkish victory. To a certain extent, Bosio was one of them. It was of paramount interest to the Christian west that their subjects did not lose heart at a time when the arch-enemy was beginning to appear invincible. However, these writings contained one proviso; they sought a scapegoat to account for the Christian debacle. On the contrary, Bosio sought to give an analytical perspective based on maritime considerations.

What Admiral Doria and the Emperor failed to take into consideration at the time was the power of the press. This new medium would be used to propagate ideas and to criticise or praise the actions of men in power. For Doria and the Emperor, pamphlets were frivolous. What was important was that, at the end of the day, Doria and his allies had succeeded in safeguarding their private galleys, whilst the Emperor continued to have at his disposal a big fleet to defend his southern coastal territory. The mission to Preveza had failed to materialise but had succeeded at Castelnovo thus qualifying the overall mission a success. However for those involved in maritime strategy, including the Knights of St John, this was a lost sea battle but one from which they had learned much. The manner in which Barbarossa laid out his squadrons had taught the Christian side a lesson. As Bosio himself recounts, notes were kept of Barbarossa's manoeuvres and his tactics would be used once again: this time against the Ottoman army at Lepanto. The Christian formation would take the format of an eagle (before charging into battle) as amply manifested in a painting of the period which was commissioned by a member of the Order.⁶⁵

It is not the intention of this paper to argue whether Bosio's narrative is correct or otherwise. I leave that to other historians. What I have tried to do is to present his narrative and the Order of St John's perception of this battle since, on reading Bosio's work, one finds that his version varies in some details from other historical narratives of the same event.⁶⁶ Guilmartin admits that the tale of this battle is surrounded by confusion and its historical narrative poses many questions with the result that its international importance has been underestimated. Even the sequence of events has not been adequately explained.⁶⁷ Such confusion is not only the result of different historical versions of what happened in that distant autumn of 1538 but also that, for the first time, historians were confronted with an event of international magnitude. I hope that Bosio's narrative has helped to give us a better insight as to what happened at Preveza in the autumn of 1538.

⁶³ See BOSIO 1634, III, 182.

⁶⁴ GUILMARTIN 1974, 22.

⁶⁵ See ESPINOSA-RODRIGUEZ 2007, 37.

⁶⁶ Amongst these is Stanley Lane-Poole whose work entitled *The Barbary Corsairs*, (and already quoted in this text) and was published in 1890 the series *The Story of the Nations*. More recently John Francis Guilmartin Jr. published his work entitled *Gunpowder and Galleys* in the series *Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History*. This work was also extensively used in this paper.

⁶⁷ GUILMARTIN 1974, 42.

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