

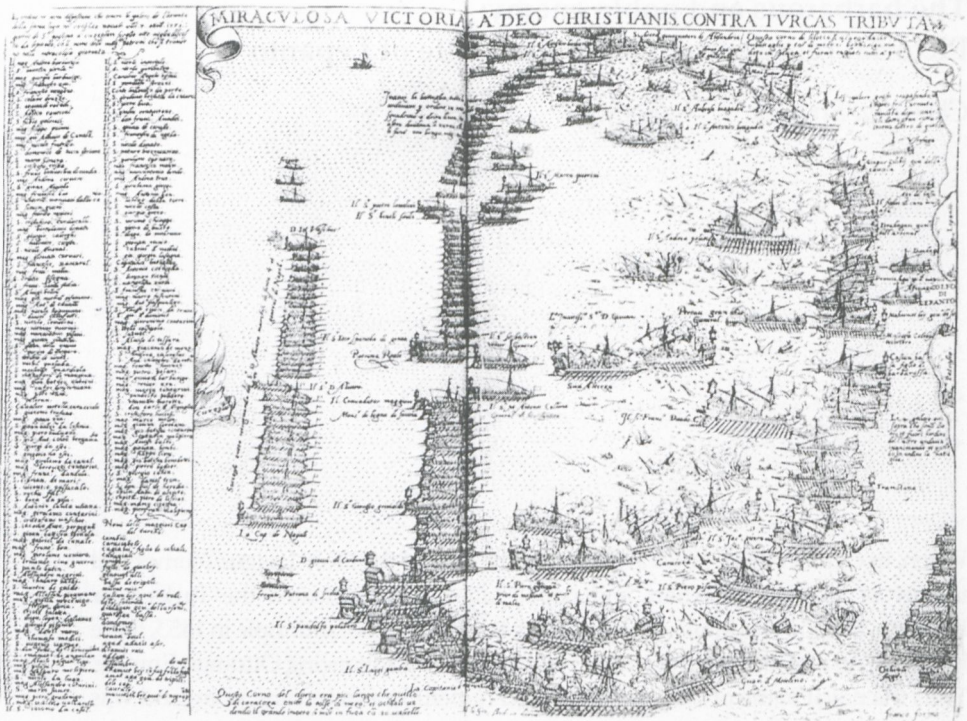
The barbarous and noble enemy: Pictorial representations of the Battle of Lepanto

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When, in October 1571, news arrived that the fleet of the Holy League (composed mainly of Spanish, Venetian, and papal galleys) had defeated the Turks near Lepanto, Europe was jubilant. Since before the fall of Constantinople in 1453, there had been no major Western victory over the steadily advancing Ottoman Empire. Thus the naval battle of 1571 was regarded hopefully as a turning point and was celebrated accordingly in every available medium. Lepanto remained a favorite subject matter for a long time, both because the Turkish threat continued to haunt Europe for most of the seventeenth century and because the “God-given” victory had gained a religious significance of its own through the official and popular attribution of it to the intercession of the Virgin of the Rosary. But while the victory at Lepanto continues to receive much attention from historians,¹ pictorial representations of the battle are seldom studied comprehensively. They are often reproduced without particular comment in historical textbooks and exhibition catalogues, and some of them have become the subject of specialized articles, but only rarely has a comparative analysis of these paintings been attempted.²

The present essay focuses on some particularly significant pictorial representations of the Battle of Lepanto produced in Italy during a time span of just over a century (1571–1685). As it will demonstrate, attitudes towards “the Turk” varied greatly according to the specific agenda of each commission. The purposes of this essay are twofold: (a) to analyze the range of different responses to the battle and (b) to examine the motives which lay behind, respectively, the positive portrayals, “neutral” portrayals, and negative portrayals of the Ottoman enemy.

Before embarking on the interpretation of the case studies, it is necessary to consider briefly the sources available to painters. Soon after the victory, numerous verbal accounts, or *avvisi*, appeared in print, often illustrated by engravings (Fig. 9.1).³ As they were for the most part based on eyewitness accounts,



9.1 Giacomo Franco, *Miraculosa victoria a Deo Christianis contra Turcas tributa*, diagram of the Battle of Lepanto, 1571. Engraving. © Alinari Archives, Florence.

the *avvisi* could claim a high degree of authenticity, if not objectivity. Yet the authors tended to emphasize the merits of their own fellow soldiers and the brilliance of their own co-national commanders: Venetian observers extolled Sebastiano Venier, Romans focused on Marcantonio Colonna, and the Spanish lionized Don Juan of Austria.

Longer and more elaborate accounts of the battle followed, some rather straightforward, others stylized according to the conventions of sixteenth-century history writing. Often it is easy to detect the author's political allegiance.⁴ Some literary forms (popular songs, epic poems, opera libretti) tended to convey a "black and white" image of the battle, insisting on the presence of supernatural powers which helped the Christians, and underscoring the "beastliness" of the Turks.⁵ Some claimed that angels themselves fought the "infidels,"⁶ and that upon death the latter made their way straight to hell.⁷ In history writing, however, more balanced accounts can be found. Authors like Graziano, Paruta, Sagredo, and Leti, who delighted in the rhetorical presentation of history, even composed fictive speeches in which the Turkish commanders explain their own reasoning. Given a voice

in such texts, the Ottoman generals appear as individual persons rather than simply as “the enemy.”⁸

Taking fragments of this heterogeneous material as their point of departure, blending them with ingredients from oral history and/or suggestions from their patrons, painters created their own versions of the battle. Each type of literary representation has its equivalent among the types of pictorial renderings, as the following sections of this essay will demonstrate.

Barbarous enemies: the Vatican Sala Regia and the Church of Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri in Pisa

Just a month after the victory at Lepanto, Pope Pius V summoned Giorgio Vasari to Rome, asking him to produce fresco scenes illustrating the battle on the walls of the Sala Regia, the main audience hall at the Vatican Palace. Vasari’s own very precise explanation of the pictorial program survives in a letter (dated 23 Feb. 1572) that he addressed to Francesco de’ Medici.⁹ Pius’s death in May 1572 caused a change of plan, however: of the three paintings initially projected, his successor Gregory XIII had one (the investiture of Don Juan of Austria) cancelled. Vasari, however, was able to execute the remaining two, departing from the initial program (as set out in the letter) only in minor details.¹⁰ These scenes depict two sequential moments of the battle: the Christian and Turkish fleets approaching each other (Fig. 9.2) and their subsequent encounter (Fig. 9.3).

Vasari took great pains to transmit precise and faithful information about the battle. He consulted an eyewitness (none other than Marcantonio Colonna, admiral of the papal fleet), and asked that drawings of the battleships and topographical materials be sent from Venice.¹¹ In a cartouche at the bottom of the first fresco (Fig. 9.2), he included a map showing the location of the Gulf of Lepanto. The upper part of the painting is similar to the documentary prints that illustrated contemporary *avvisi* (Fig. 9.1): Vasari places the Christian armada to the left, effectively the “Western” half of the image, differentiating meticulously between the galleys (which form the outer battle lines) and the six large galleasses in the center of the fleet.¹² However, Vasari also departs from the documentary mode to add allegorical figures in the foreground, asserting through these the idea that the Turks lost the battle not just because of inferior technology, but also because of inferior character and spirit.

As Vasari himself explains, he intended to complement the battle formation with two groups (of three figures each) symbolizing respectively the Holy League and *La lega de’ Turchi* (Fig. 9.2).¹³ Near the Christian armada, allegorical personifications of Spain, Venice, and Rome embrace, while *spiriti divini* present them with crowns emblematic of the imminent victory of the Holy League.



9.2 Giorgio Vasari, *The Battle of Lepanto (The Fleets Approaching Each Other)*, begun 1572. Fresco. Sala Regia, Vatican Palace, Rome. © Alinari Archives, Florence.

Originally this group was to be balanced on the Turkish side by an embracing trio of Fear, Weakness, and Death.¹⁴ In the end, however, Vasari decided to abandon the symmetry of a second embracing trio and instead visualized the weakness (*debolezza*) of the Turks through the crouching postures of the allegories on the right.

The choice of attributes for the allegories is striking. Rather than choosing a stately personification for the Ottoman Empire (as he had for the three Western



9.3 Giorgio Vasari, *The Battle of Lepanto (The Fleets Engaging Each Other)*, begun 1572. Fresco. Sala Regia, Vatican Palace, Rome. © Alinari Archives, Florence.

powers), Vasari denies the Turks this dignity, associating them instead with vices. Their fear and weakness find expression in three figures: a man who buries his head in his hands and is crowned by rabbit (a proverbially fearful animal), a kneeling woman who raises her folded arms imploringly, and a screaming man who recoils from the evils that swarm from an urn borne by three demonic putti (who Vasari calls *demonij*). While the three Christian powers display firmness and unity, the Turkish side is characterized by confusion and desperation. The obvious message is that the Turks do not possess sufficient valor to prevail.

The Christians delighted in the idea that they had inspired fear in their enemies. A report based on eyewitness accounts and written shortly after the victory claimed that the Turks were overawed when they saw the size of the Christian armada. As one source reports:

Scoprendo i nimici alla fine tutte le nostre galee, stettero sospesi, e veggendo appresso, e considerando che a' lor giorni non avevano mai veduto un'armata de' Christiani, nè si grande, nè che avesse osato di andar loro incontro, si amaravigliarono

grandemente ... e incominciarono ad aver paura d'altra maniera che dello splendor dell'arme che abbagliava lor gli occhi ... Venendo ad incontrarsi amendue l'armate si spaventevoli, gli elmi lucidi, e i corsaletti dei nostri, gli scudi d'acciaio come specchi, e l'altre arme lucenti, percosse da'raggi solari, che insieme con le spade nude forbite, allora tratte ad arte, e a studio vibrare, ripercotevano assai lontano nel viso di questo e quello; non meno minacciavano i nimici, nè arrecavano loro minor paura, che arrecasse a' nostri maraviglio e diletto, l'oro di tanti fanò e bandiere, molto risplendenti e riguardevoli assai per la varietà di mille vaghi e bei colori.¹⁵

The Venetian historian Pietro Giustiniani, too, highlighted the “considerable fear” (“non piccola paura”) that the Turks had allegedly felt when they learned about the Holy League’s declaration of war.¹⁶

Death, the third allegorical figure mentioned by Vasari in his account of the pictorial program, acts as a compositional counterpart to the personification of the Church. Just as the Church (a stately woman crowned with the papal tiara) stands in the center of the left third of the image facing the beholder, so the skeletal figure of Death stands in the corresponding spot in the right third of the picture. This relationship implies that the skeleton does not represent Death in the usual, physical sense, but rather in a spiritual sense as the negation of eternal life. The “infidels” are doomed because they have chosen the fundamentally wrong option—by rejecting the Christian faith they have chosen spiritual death over spiritual life. The outcome of the battle is, therefore, predetermined, as the descent of supernatural creatures from above indicates: the Holy League will receive the rewards of victory, while the Turks have only awful surprises coming.

Vasari’s second fresco in the Sala Regia (Fig. 9.3), in which the combatants are shown fully engaged, reprises the same three aspects of Turkish inferiority: weaknesses of technology, spirituality, and character.¹⁷ The Turkish force, again occupying the right half of the image, is composed of fierce, muscular soldiers. Technologically, however, they are more vulnerable as they do not wear armor and are equipped with just bows and arrows while their Christian opponents shoot at them with firearms. Vasari’s Turks are, moreover, ethically inferior: in the foreground are three instances in which soldiers of the Holy League rescue fallen comrades from the water. The Turks, meanwhile, leave their own compatriots to drown.

Vasari depicts the battle from a bird’s-eye perspective. This removes the spectator from the central sector of the skirmish, where commander-in-chief Don Juan of Austria personally defeats his Turkish counterpart, Muezzinzade Ali. The generals are almost unrecognizable amidst the multiplication of minute detail. To enhance legibility, though, Vasari inserted an angel on a golden cloud directly above Don Juan’s galley. This device simultaneously locates the commander’s flagship and visually expresses the divine sanction of his enterprise.

The supernatural figures at the top and bottom of this image further underscore the spiritual superiority of the Holy League. In the bottom left

corner the personification of Faith (with her standard attributes of the cross, chalice, and consecrated host) sits atop five crouching "Orientals." Powerful, yet bound with chains, these figures are partly characterized as Turks (through their turbans) and partly as "barbarians" of a wild, "uncivilized" aspect (through their shaven heads, long moustaches, and bare chests). As Faith's upward glance indicates, this "Triumph of Faith" was enabled by the intervention of the heavenly powers who appear in the top left corner. There, Peter and Paul, James, and Mark (patron saints of, respectively, Rome, Spain, and Venice) brandish their swords, while Christ and his angels hurl thunderbolts at the "infidels." In the opposite corner of the fresco demons react, fearfully departing in a dark cloud.

The fleeing demons bear a striking resemblance to the damned soul in the *Last Judgment* fresco by Vasari's idol, Michelangelo. The reference would have resonated beyond the circles of art world *cognoscenti*, as the source was visible only one room away, in the Sistine Chapel. The apocalyptic suggestions thus conveyed fit within an established tradition in which the Turks were identified as Satan's recruits. In the book of Revelation, the coming of Satan's warriors precedes the Final Judgment:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.¹⁸

Vasari was hardly the first to emphasize the God-given nature of the Holy League's victory at Lepanto.¹⁹ This interpretation of events, echoed by many contemporary observers, was officially sanctioned by the medal that Pius V issued in commemoration of the battle. The reverse shows the League's fleet surging forward under the protection of an angel.²⁰ The initial *avvisi* repeatedly stated that the favorable shift in the wind on the day of the battle had come about "per miracolo di Dio," a detail that the early historians also recounted.²¹ Some literary accounts of the battle, such as the epic poems by Bolognetti and Costo, claimed the interventive presence of the Archangel Michael himself at the battle.²² According to Costo, spectators from heaven and hell (*beati spiriti* and *spiriti infernali*) observed the fighting, helping the souls of dead Christians ascend to heaven and pulling the souls of the Turks down to hell.²³ The frontispiece to Costo's *Canto quinto* renders this graphically, showing demons leading Turks towards the river of the underworld.

Vasari made use of a parallel vocabulary in order to visualize a hidden dimension of the battle. His fresco joined the documentary mode of the *avvisi* with an allegorical commentary. By inserting Christ, saints, angels, and the personification of Faith, as well as juxtaposing the Turks with hovering demons, Vasari suggests that this is not just a fight between men, but between



9.4 Jacopo Ligozzi, *The Return of the Knights of Santo Stefano from the Battle of Lepanto*, 1604–14. Oil on canvas. Church of Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri, Pisa. © Alinari Archives, Florence.

opposing principles; a battle of Good against Evil. Alluding to the book of Revelation, he presents the battle as a necessary step on the way towards the final triumph of Faith and the establishment of the kingdom of God.

The religiously motivated portrayal of “barbarous” Turks in the Sala Regia forms an interesting contrast with a more secular variant of the theme at the Church of Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri in Pisa. This sanctuary functioned as the spiritual headquarters of the Knights of Santo Stefano, a crusading order founded by Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici in 1561. The pictorial decoration of the church’s new wooden ceiling was carried out under the supervision of Giorgio Vasari the Younger between 1604 and 1614.²⁴ It consists of six panel paintings celebrating the achievements of the order under its supreme leader, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. One of the scenes, executed by Jacopo Ligozzi, refers to the Battle of Lepanto (Fig. 9.4).

It is surprising that, for the section of the ceiling that treats Lepanto, Vasari the Younger did not use Vasari the Elder’s Sala Regia frescoes as a direct or even indirect model, especially since the religious symbolism of those images made them eminently suited for church decoration. Yet neither the battle formation nor the battle itself was selected for representation. Instead, the Santo Stefano cycle depicts the return of the Tuscan ships. While Venice

and the Habsburg Empire had respectively contributed 113 and 74 vessels to the Holy League's fleet, the pope had sent only 12 galleys, all of which he had borrowed from Tuscany.²⁵ These galleys can be seen in the background of Ligozzi's painting, while the foreground is given over to a small boat from which naked Turkish captives prepare to disembark. In doing so, they follow the commands of a knight of Santo Stefano, who gives his orders from horseback.²⁶ The inscription accompanying the image explains that the twelve ships, sent to assist the Holy League, returned victorious.²⁷

While a battle scene would have been more conventional, there were two reasons for the unusual choice of subject matter at Pisa. First, because the Knights of Santo Stefano were required to sail under the papal flag during the Holy League's naval campaign, a representation of the battle itself would not have allowed the display of the knights' own banners and insignia. Secondly, the scene chosen referred to the dual aims of the order, which were not just religious but also economic. Their diverse activities included a form of legalized piracy, from which both the grand duke and individual members of the order profited. Captured treasures from the East, redirected to Tuscan shores, contributed to the economy of the grand duchy. Likewise, prisoners taken at Lepanto (and elsewhere) had material value, as they could be used as slave labor. By foregrounding the captives, Ligozzi combines emphasis on crusade with emphasis on its associated "booty."²⁸

As was the case in the triumph of the faith at the Sala Regia (Fig. 9.3) the shaven heads and bare chests of the Turks make them look "barbarian." The high viewpoint stresses their inferiority as the Turks are presented as being below the ideal viewer's eye. The standing prisoner on the right looks up to the Tuscan commander in fear and awe, unable to master his emotions in a "civilized" way. The confident knight, mounted on horseback, clad in shining armor and giving orders with his *bastone del commando* extended imperiously above the Turk's head, forms a telling contrast to his prisoners. As firmly as he controls his mount, he controls his captives. And indeed, Ligozzi's juxtaposition of the standing captive and the horse may have been intended to suggest a parallel between the "animalistic" captive and the horse. Both move vigorously forward, but are restrained from behind—the horse by the bridle and the Turk by the chains. Connoisseurs of art would have recognized Ligozzi's borrowing and transformation of the celebrated ancient sculptural group of the *Horse Tamers*, from the Quirinal Hill in Rome.²⁹ The combination of a rearing horse and a forward-striding nude makes a strong visual parallel, yet at Pisa the nude is not doing the taming but instead is himself tamed.³⁰ All in all, Ligozzi's painting suggests that the Turks are an inferior race, more closely resembling animals than people. Aside from the more obvious propagandistic functions of this assertion of inferiority, such imagery may also have helped ease the conscience of those Tuscans who benefitted from the exploitation of slave labor.

The Galleria delle Carte Geografiche: an “objective” account of the battle?

In contrast to the negative images of Turks discussed above, another Vatican project, the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche, includes a seemingly objective rendering of the Battle of Lepanto (Fig. 9.5). This battle scene appears as part of an extensive fresco cycle undertaken in the papal palace in 1581, under the auspices of Pope Gregory XIII (Boncompagni).

Overlooking the Cortile del Belvedere, the galleria is a long corridor the walls of which are frescoed with scores of maps. Most simply depict territories, but a few include historical events such as the view of the Gulf of Corinth, which shows the Battle of Lepanto. Based on a 1571 print issued by Antonio Lafréry, the fresco depicts the Holy League’s fleet on the left, attacking the Ottoman vessels, which are aligned on the right.³¹ The bird’s eye perspective gives an overview of the battle formation, permitting the beholder to grasp the tactical aspects of the engagement. Meanwhile the central section of the painting adds drama to the scene, visualizing the skirmish with fire and smoke rising to the skies. At this cartographer’s scale, the Turks are neither represented as individuals nor allegorized as “demons”; instead, the rendering of the battle looks neutral and objective. Like its visual source and other similar prints illustrating contemporary *avvisi* (see Fig. 9.1), it pretends to document the event “just as it was.” The restrained mode of representation, which shuns allegorical embellishments, was certainly related to the matter-of-fact cartographical approach of the decoration of the whole gallery. However, a closer look at the context reveals that this depiction of the battle is part of a visual argument that goes well beyond the simple statement of facts. Indeed, this scene turns out to be a focal point of the entire gallery’s decorative program.

While huge frescoed maps of different parts of Italy cover the gallery walls, the vault is studded with small history paintings of events that took place in the relevant territories.³² The majority of these events are miracles, the depiction of which is intended to demonstrate the spiritual wealth of the peninsula, apostrophized as *REGIO TOTIUS ORBIS NOBILISSIMA* in the inscription over the northern exit.³³ Other history paintings refer to the relationship between ecclesiastical and secular power, reinforcing the pope’s position as temporal ruler.³⁴ Beneath this vault the history paintings are oriented towards the viewer who enters the gallery from the south (the direction of the papal apartment), moving north through the length of the space. The *Battle of Lepanto* is located to the left of the northern exit, paired with a similar representation of the 1565 Ottoman Siege of Malta, to the right of the same doorway. Above the two battle scenes are maps of the islands of Corfu (to the left) and Malta (to the right). The wall paintings are topped by two angels turning towards the center. The one on the left, equipped with a palm branch and a laurel



9.5 Northern Wall of the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche, showing frescoes of the *Battle of Lepanto* (lower left) and the *Siege of Malta* (lower right), 1581. Fresco. Vatican Palace, Rome. © Alinari Archives, Florence.

wreath, holds a scroll with the triumphal inscription *CLASSIS TURCAM AS CROCYLEIUM PROFLIGATA*.³⁵ The angel on the right, clad in the habit of the Knights of Malta, presents a book inscribed with the words *MELITA OBSIDIONE LIBERATUR*.³⁶

Malta and Corfu were two Christian island strongholds in the Mediterranean that were continuously menaced by the expanding Ottoman realm. Appropriately, the maps emphasize the fortresses on each island.³⁷ Malta famously resisted a Turkish siege for almost four months (in 1565) before Christian troops finally relieved it. Corfu served as a military base for the Holy League in 1570 and 1571: though the Turks captured it in 1571, they were soon driven away again by the Venetians.³⁸ By linking Lepanto to representations of Malta and Corfu, the decorations embed it in a larger context celebrating Christian victories over Turks.

The northern wall, towards which the viewer moves in his tour of the cycle, is the natural climax of the gallery. Motifs found separately in other parts of the room are here combined and summarized. Maps of places dominated by Italians (Corfu, Malta) are joined to images of modern history (the victory at Lepanto, the Siege of Malta), and are garnished, moreover, with divine references. The angels, whose presence in the air over both battle scenes identifies the victories there as contemporary miracles, form a visible link between *Ecclesia militans* (the battle scenes on the wall) and *Ecclesia triumphans* (the miracle scenes in the vault).

Aside from forming the climax of the series, the northern wall stands as a natural pendant to the distant south wall, to which it is identical in shape and size. There, the cycle opens with scenes of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and the baptism of Constantine, related narratives that highlight the supremacy of Christianity over paganism and the authority of the pope over temporal rulers. Constantine's god-given victory over his pagan co-emperor Maxentius is implicitly paralleled with the victories over the Ottomans commemorated at the opposite end of the gallery. For Gregory XIII, the patron whose coat of arms surmounts the northern exit, the events at Lepanto and Malta constituted just the most recent proofs of the spiritual and temporal power of the church, a theme that the entire decoration of the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche fervently declaims.

The crucial importance of the gallery's seemingly straightforward, documentary battle paintings is determined by their placement and context. They were meant to demonstrate that the papacy continued to play the same leading role in the propagation of the faith as it always had. From this broader perspective the Turks did not have to appear as a group of individually characterized persons, but could be depicted instead as an anonymous power that threatened Christianity, yet was nevertheless overcome. The Turks were indispensable as a foil which made the glory of the church glow even more brightly.



9.6 Giovanni Coli and Filippo Gherardi, *The Battle of Lepanto*, 1674–78. Fresco. Gallery of Palazzo Colonna, Rome. © Bibliotheca Hertziana, Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Rome.

Noble enemies: the fresco decoration of the Galleria Colonna

The Galleria Colonna in Rome, decorated between 1665 and 1685 by Giovanni Paolo Schor, Giovanni Coli, and Francesco Gherardi, is perhaps the most extensive pictorial decoration dedicated to the victory at Lepanto (Figs 9.6, 9.7).³⁹ Given that the cycle was commissioned by the Colonna family,



9.7 Anonymous artist, *Turkish Captive writing a Letter*, c.1674–86. Fresco. Detail of the ceiling painting in the Gallery of Palazzo Colonna, Rome. © Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome.

it is hardly surprising that the frescoes emphasize the role of Marcantonio Colonna, commander of the papal contingent of the Holy League's forces. However, unlike the images at the Sala Regia, they do not celebrate the victors by belittling or demonizing the Ottoman enemy. On the contrary, these frescoes magnify Marcantonio's triumph by suggesting that the adversaries he vanquished were endowed with a nobility comparable to his own.

The gallery vault features five history paintings that are treated as *quadri riportati*, set into a framework of fictive architecture. The latter represents an elaborate portico decorated with spoils of war, including a number of richly clad Turkish captives. The prisoners are members of the Ottoman elite, as the viewer understands from their elaborate garments, courtly postures and cultivated occupations (Fig. 9.7).⁴⁰

Giovanni Paolo Schor, the designer of the overall decorative scheme, drew inspiration from the Sala Regia at the Palazzo Quirinale (not to be confused with the abovementioned Sala Regia at the Vatican), a room which he knew well having collaborated on the decoration of the Gallery of Alexander VII in the same palace. In the frescoed frieze of the Quirinal Sala Regia, numerous "Orientals" appear, populating a fictive loggia. Some are of noble bearing, while others are slightly caricatured in their "uncivilized" behavior and aspect.⁴¹ They represent foreign ambassadors whose voluntary visits to Rome were both a tribute to the pope and evidence of the missionary success of the Roman church.⁴² In contrast, Schor's Turks are prisoners of war. As such, they recall the noble captives (like the legendary King Jugurtha) who were a chief attraction of ancient Roman triumphal entries.⁴³ By filling the ceiling of the Colonna family palace with prisoners, the frescoes subtly compare Marcantonio Colonna (to whom the city had granted an *all'antica* triumph upon his victorious return in 1571)⁴⁴ to the famous generals of antiquity, some of whom he explicitly claimed as ancestors.⁴⁵ The richness of his "booty" magnifies his exploits, and in this respect the Colonna frescoes parallel the painting that Ligozzi did for the Knights of Santo Stefano (Fig. 9.4). But whereas Ligozzi's treatment of the Turks underlined the prisoners' inferiority, Schor's treatment highlights their nobility, implying that the Holy League had succeeded in paralyzing the enemy by putting the most capable Turkish leaders out of action.

The central painting of the vault, by far the largest scene in the cycle, is a highly unusual representation of the Battle of Lepanto (Fig. 9.6). While naval battles are most often shown from a bird's eye perspective (see for example Fig. 9.3), Coli and Gherardi instead stage a dramatic close-up. The image focuses on Marcantonio Colonna (on the left) and the Turkish commander general Müezzinzâde Ali (on the right), who confront each other just before engaging in their decisive encounter.⁴⁶ According to long-standing naval tradition, the supreme commanders of two opposing forces were expected to locate each other (by firing cannons: *senza palla*), approach each other, and engage in

direct mano-a-mano combat.⁴⁷ On the ceiling their fight has not yet begun, but there are many clues that forecast Colonna's eventual victory. Some of these are more obvious, like the winged figure descending towards Marcantonio extending the palm branch of victory, while others are more subtle. Colonna's head, for instance, appears in front of a yellow flag that assumes aspects of a halo, while a big dark cloud hovers over Müezzinzâde Ali. Likewise, the Ottoman commander is framed by masts which form a downward-pointing triangle, while the masts of Colonna's vessel form a triangle rising to the heavens and topped by the papal flag. The papal galley seems not only higher but also larger than the Turkish ship, and expands dynamically into the right half of the image. The bright color scheme prevalent on the left visually links Colonna's men to the light hues of the sky and its heavenly inhabitants.

As with Vasari's Vatican Sala Regia frescoes (Figs 9.2, 9.3), some supernatural presences at the Palazzo Colonna express the significance of the victory as a triumph of the Christian religion. A radiant cross alludes to the vision of Constantine (*in hoc signo vinces*), identifying Marcantonio as a successor to the first *miles Christianus*,⁴⁸ and the personification of Faith (almost hidden by the clouds) looks down on the scene. But unlike Vasari, for whom allegorical personifications are the main protagonists of his scenes, Coli and Gherardi foreground the actual historic heroes. Colonna, shown as an exemplary knight in shining armor, seems to address Müezzinzâde Ali with a classically inspired gesture of adlocution.⁴⁹ Vigorous, calm and self-assured, he raises his sword and challenges his adversary. The Turkish commander maintains dignified composure, even while his guards appear fearful and disoriented. Nevertheless, Müezzinzâde Ali seems vulnerable, as he carries neither weapons nor armor, and his body language suggests an element of weariness or resignation. Turning his face towards the beholder while pointing at Marcantonio, he seems to say, "behold—this is the man who will win the day." As an experienced leader, Müezzinzâde Ali knows when a battle is lost. The elderly, bearded man that the artist imagines seems more a sage philosopher than a ferocious warrior.

While the majority of authors writing about Lepanto saw the Turks solely as the enemy, there were also some who sought to give an individual profile to the Ottoman leaders. Coli and Gherardi's highly individualized, ennobling portrayal of Müezzinzâde Ali corresponds with this tendency in history writing, a tendency that—significantly—avoids a purely Eurocentric point of view. As a case in point, Giovanni Sagredo's *Memorie istoriche de' monarchi ottomani* had appeared in print just a year before Coli and Gherardi started work on their fresco. Based on similar accounts by Graziano and Paruta,⁵⁰ Sagredo described the discussions that had (allegedly) taken place in the Turkish council of war before the battle. Interestingly, he used the term "infidels" from a Muslim perspective, applying it to the members of the Holy League. He emphasized the reasoning and divergent opinions of the generals,

implying that the Ottomans were driven by tactical considerations and pride, just as much as the Christians were.⁵¹

Despite the noble portrayal of Müezzinzâde Ali by Coli and Gherardi, it would nevertheless be wrong to attempt to interpret the Colonna fresco as an expression of some sort of proto-Enlightenment tolerance, intended to assert the equality of all men. The painting deals with questions of status and hierarchy rather than with equality. In the confrontation scene staged by Coli and Gherardi, the Turk is "ennobled," but not to make a point about the Turks. Instead the point is about Colonna, who gains stature by fighting an enemy of Müezzinzâde Ali's dignity. His direct confrontation with the enemy admiral, an honor that sixteenth-century battle etiquette reserved for commanders, also magnifies his stature. But Colonna was not, in fact, the commander of the Holy League's armada. That honor belonged to Don Juan of Austria, to whom Colonna was a deputy. By making Colonna the protagonist, and by depicting a mano-a-mano confrontation that had never actually taken place, the fresco rewrites history to suggest that Colonna (rather than Don Juan) had acted as supreme commander.⁵²

While the desire to put Colonna on par with the supreme commander of the Ottoman forces explains the general layout of the fresco scene, it does not account for the particularities of design analyzed above, namely the pictorial clues indicating the imminent Christian victory. By these visual hints, Coli and Gherardi strove to identify the selected moment as the *peripeteia* of an epic plot; the decisive moment which changes the hero's destiny for the better.⁵³ The epic potential of Lepanto had long been recognized. Both in Italy and Spain poets felt inspired by the theme.⁵⁴ Indeed, like the first crusade immortalized by Torquato Tasso in his *Gerusalemme liberata*, the exploits of the Holy League formed a perfect epic subject matter, and by Tasso's own definition: a true story of Christian significance, neither too remote in time nor too recent, and preferably drawn from a war of religion.⁵⁵

It seems that Giovanni Coli and Filippo Gherardi sought to rival the literary creations dedicated to the battle. They adapted structural devices of epic poetry to the art of painting, both by stressing the moment of *peripeteia* and by likening the historical event to famous precedents in Homer, Virgil, and Tasso.⁵⁶ And just as Tasso had granted poets the license to depart from historical truth,⁵⁷ Coli and Gherardi produced their own fanciful version of events. By staging a scene that had never actually happened, they let history conform to the model of poetry: the encounter between Marcantonio Colonna and Müezzinzâde Ali reinvents similar crucial confrontation scenes from the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid* and *Gerusalemme liberata*.⁵⁸ The noble image of Müezzinzâde Ali presented at the Palazzo Colonna thus followed the painters' goal to emulate the lofty style of epic poetry. Rather than expressing an anachronistically liberal, Enlightenment, or pro-Ottoman conviction, the positive image of the Turk displayed in the Galleria Colonna was largely a matter of style,

dictated by the rules of the “grand manner” and by the desire to elevate painting to the level of epic poetry.

Conclusion

The examples chosen for this essay are but a fraction of the overall volume of Lepanto-related imagery. However, the range of responses that they represent is telling. The treatment of the Turks depended not only on the temporal distance that the ideators of an image had gained from the 1571 battle, but also depended on the agenda to which they attached the battle imagery.

While in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Rome, few real Turks were to be encountered, “Oriental” captives employed for slave labor were a familiar presence in Tuscany. Accordingly the Turks represented in Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri in Pisa were likened to strong animals, whereas the Roman depictions of Turks tended to be more “abstract,” cast in terms of the religious significance of the victory.⁵⁹ Thus in the Vatican Sala Regia Vasari paralleled the Turks with apocalyptic demons driven away by Christ and his divine helpers. By literally demonizing the Turks, and by inserting allegorical figures in his Sala Regia frescoes, Vasari sought to comment on invisible aspects of the event, notably the Turks’ presumed lack of ethical and religious values.

Although the Lepanto fresco in the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche seems more neutral and “objective” at first glance, it is actually even more ideologically charged than the paintings in the Sala Regia. As Lepanto appears in a cycle of maps depicting the states of Christian rulers, this territory (which had fallen back under Ottoman control shortly after the battle) was durably reclaimed for Christendom. Moreover, by establishing a parallel with Constantine’s victory over Maxentius, the cycle implies that the Battle of Lepanto would result in far-reaching benefits for Christianity—perhaps even suggesting that (like the pagan-turned-Christian Constantine) the sultan too might convert.⁶⁰ As a conclusion to the cycle of miracle scenes in the gallery’s vault, the victory over the Turks is presented as a contemporary miracle—an interpretation of the historical event which would later become officially sanctioned through the canonization of Pius V as an intercessor saint.⁶¹

In the Galleria Colonna, too, the religious significance of the victory was stressed, but whereas the two papal commissions had cast the battle as a conflict of superhuman forces (in which the human participants remained anonymous) the Colonna cycle foregrounded individual agency in order to honor the famous family ancestor. For this reason Coli and Gherardi invented a direct confrontation between Marcantonio Colonna and Müezzinzâde Ali, modeled on similar encounters in epic poetry. The Turkish leader and the captives were ennobled to make them conform to a literary vision. In each case,

the patrons got the Turks they needed, a statement that could be extended to most of the case studies in this volume.

Notes

1. The literature on the Battle of Lepanto is extensive. Recent studies include Bicheno 2003, Cacciavillani 2003; Konstam 2003; Muños Bolaños 2003; Gargiulo 2004; Rodríguez González 2004; Capponi 2006; Hopkins 2006; Ponce del Rio 2006.
2. Döbele 1989 (particularly strong on non-Italian examples). Iris Contant's doctoral thesis on this subject is to my knowledge still unpublished (Contant 2005). The present article is based on research carried out for my Ph. D. thesis (submitted in 2000, published in 2007). When this text was already in press, Le Thiec 2007 touched on some related issues.
3. Bulgarelli 1967; Göllner 1978; for the prints, see Wolters 1983: 219.
4. For pro-Venetian texts, see the 1571 *Descrittione generale ...* in Bulgarelli 1967: 159–64; Diedo 1571/1863; Giustiniani 1576; Guarneri 1597; Paruta 1645; Leti 1679: vol. 2. For accounts written from the Roman point of view, see Gabuzio 1605; Graziani 1624; Bernini 1685; Folieta 1704.
5. An overview of this segment of the literary production is given by Mazzoni 1895; see also Medin 1904: 229–89.
6. Bolognetti 1572: 48; Costo 1582: 40, 44; Fenlon 1991: 395 (quoting an opera of 1571).
7. Costo 1582: 60.
8. Graziano 1624: 205ff.; Paruta 1645: 2:150–52; Sagredo 1673: 578; Leti 1679: 2:37–8, 43–4.
9. Transcriptions of this lengthy letter are in Vasari 1981: 8:466–8; Böck 1997: 130–31 n. 97.
10. Böck 1997: 17, 75–83, 130 n. 96.
11. *Ibid.*, 184 n. 375.
12. *Ibid.*, 77. On the crucial role of the technologically innovative galleasses, see Morin 1985: 210, 213, 219, 223–31; Konstam 2003: 19–20, 23, 28.
13. An excellent color reproduction of this fresco appears in Pietrangeli 1996: 404.
14. “3 altre figure che saranno abbracciate insieme per la lega de' Turchi, che figureranno il Timore, la Debolezza e la Morte” (Böck 1997: 130 n. 97).
15. Diedo 1571/1863: 25–6.
16. Giustiniani 1576: 335.
17. For a color reproduction of this fresco, see Pietrangeli 1996: 402–3.
18. Rev. 20:7–9. On the sixteenth-century identification of the Turks with the warriors of Revelation, see Wang 1975: 110–11; Mertzenich 1990, 128–58; and Benjamin Paul's contribution to the present volume (Chapter 4, above).
19. See for example the inscription of Fig 9.1: *Miraculosa victoria a Deo Christianis contra Turcas tributa*; see also Muret 1571.
20. Pollard 1984–85: 1075ff.
21. *Descrittione generale ...* in Bulgarelli 1967: 160; Diedo 1571/1863: 26; Costo 1582: 50; Catena 1586: 194; Gabuzio 1605: 171.
22. Bolognetti 1572: 48. Costo 1582: 40, 44, 50.
23. Costo 1582: 50, 60, 61.
24. The program of the ceiling paintings is discussed by Matteoli & Paliaga 1980; Capitani 1996; Strunck 2005.
25. Bicheno 2003: 201, 235–6, 306. Cosimo de' Medici's important logistic support of the papal cause must be considered in the context of his elevation to the rank of grand duke of Tuscany by Pope Pius V in 1570.

26. Barca & Ciuti identify this figure as “Gran Contestabile dell’Ordine Pietro Borbone” (Barca & Ciuti 1828: 8).
27. TRIREM ES DUODECEM IN AUXIL. SACRI FOEDERIS MITTIT / UNDE CUM VICTORIA REDIERE ANNO DOMINI MDLXXI. For the cycle, see Matteoli & Paliaga 1980.
28. On the economic aspects of the order’s activities, see Strunck 2005: 167–8, 179, 192 n. 113.
29. Bober & Rubenstein 1986: 159–61; Haskell & Penny 1981: 136–41.
30. Ligozzi’s image may, furthermore, include a kind of learned joke, turning on the contemporary identification of the Quirinal sculptures with Alexander the Great and his horse Bucephalus. Alexander and the Ottoman sultan were sometimes compared (including by Mehmed II himself) as the extent of their realms partially coincided. Holding the reins of a horse traditionally signifies leadership (Erben 1996: 341–5), yet in Ligozzi’s free variation on the Quirinal group, the tied hands of the striding nude (the “Alexander” figure) are themselves restrained, rather than engaged in restraining the horse.
31. Gambi & Pinelli 1994: 1:379.
32. *Ibid.*, 2:428–9.
33. *Ibid.*, 2:385. A translation of the whole inscription is in 1:384.
34. The subjects of the other paintings are the baptism of Constantine, the Countess Matilda of Canossa, the meeting of Pope Leo I and Attila the Hun, and the meeting of Pope Alexander III and Frederick Barbarossa.
35. Gambi & Pinelli 1994: 2:392. “Crocyleia,” a toponym taken from Homer’s *Iliad* (II: 633) might have been chosen because of its resemblance to the Italian word “croce,” or cross (see Gambi & Pinelli 1994: 1:379).
36. *Ibid.*, 2:396.
37. *Ibid.*, 1:377–82.
38. Bicheno 2003: 194, 213, 216, 220–21, 239, 242, 280.
39. The frescoes are traditionally dated 1665–78. The extended range given here (1665–85) is based on research undertaken for my doctoral thesis, which also contains a detailed analysis of the pictorial program (Strunck 2007a: 227–91). For a short English summary of the thesis, see Strunck 2007b.
40. For more illustrations of these prisoners, see Strunck 2007a: 428–36, pl. 28–36.
41. Schor was certainly aware of the frescoes in the Quirinal Sala Regia, but may not have ever received a precise explanation of the scenes. Given that the series had been painted a half century earlier, the Persian ambassadors could very easily have been mistaken for Turks.
42. Laureati & Trezzani 1993: 76–129.
43. Künzl 1988: 141–50.
44. Borino, Galieti & Navone 1938; Strunck 2007a: 252–5.
45. The Colonna claimed descent from Caius Marius who had seven times triumphed on the Capitoline Hill. They also claimed kinship with Caesar, Augustus Trajan, and other ancient luminaries, for which see Mugnos 1658; Strunck 2007a.
46. The identity of the protagonists is made explicit by the flags on their vessels. Behind Marcantonio’s head a yellow flag with the Colonna coat of arms appears, while the scarlet flag on the Turkish vessel corresponds to the one mentioned in Müezzinzâde Ali’s galley (see Pastor 1958: 589; Fenlon 1991: 385).
47. Diedo 1571/1863: 27.
48. Constantine, who had allegedly founded the first order of Christian knights, was an obvious role model for any *miles Christianus* (Böninger 1995: 254–7, 260, 268; see also Wang 1975).
49. Strunck 2007a: 251.
50. Graziano 1624: 205ff.; Paruta 1645: 2:150–52; Leti 1679: 2:37–8.
51. Sagredo 1673: 578: “Anco fra’ Turchi fù divisato, se si dovea scansare, ò incontrare la battaglia. Ali mostrò prontezza; Portaù dubbio. Siloc Sangiaccio d’Alessandria huomo maritime, esperimentato,

apertamente la disuasse, dicendo non convenire giuocarsi in un punto la sorte prospera di tante vittorie riportate in Cipro. Essersi guadagnato un Regno con propitia fortuna, à che tentarla di nuovo, variante per natura, e porre in contingenza il guadagno? Diversamente Ali Capo supremo s'esprime: Disse che gl'Infedeli avviliti da tanto discapiti appena haverebbero tollerata la vista d'Armata prepotente, e trionfante del Gran Sultano. Che sempre vittoriosi gl'Ottomani, e soccombenti i Cristiani, non si dovea con risolutezza codarda rallentare il corso delle vittorie, nè corromper con abietti consigli i favori della fortuna."

52. See Strunck 2007a: 246–50.
53. Aristotle, *Poetics* 5; Tasso 1587/1964: 74–5, 101–2, 141–2.
54. The epic poems by Bolognetti and Costo have been quoted above: an overview of further material is to be found in Mazzoni 1895: 197; Medin 1904: 249–50, 529; Santiago Páez 1993: 167, cat. 147; Bicheno 2003: 255–72.
55. Tasso 1587/1964: 83–4, 93, 98, 100.
56. For a fuller discussion of this aspect, see Strunck 2007a: 261–78.
57. Tasso 1587/1964: 83–4: “dovendo il poeta con la sembianza della verità ingannare il lettore” (The poet must deceive the reader with the appearance of truth).
58. Homer, *Iliad* XXII, 25ff; Virgil, *Aeneid* XII, 451ff; Tasso 1581: bk XX, stanzas 105–7.
59. Further aspects of the Roman and Florentine fascination with Turks are explored in my forthcoming article “Libertins in Verkleidung. Die Pariser Précieuses, Maria Mancini und die römische Orientfaszination des Seicento”, in *Das Bild des Feindes. Die Konstruktion von Antagonismen und der Kulturtransfer zwischen Ost(mittel)europa, Italien und dem osmanischen Reich im Zeitalter der Türkenkriege (16.–18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Eckhard Leuschner and Thomas Wunsch.
60. The idea that the Sultan might convert and join the Christian states under the leadership of Rome actually did have some currency during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (see Tognetti 1985).
61. Silli 1979: 20.

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