

THE AEGEAN EXPEDITIONS OF BAYEZID II  
(H. 903-906/1498-1500)  
(THE CONQUEST OF LEPANTO, MODON,  
KORON, AND NAVARINO)

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The detailed sources, distinct from the Ottoman chronicles and naval histories, to which references will be made, are mainly the following: A biography of Bâyezîd II, *Târîkh-i Sultân Bâyezîd*,<sup>1</sup> to be shortly mentioned as the *Târîkh* is an anonymous manuscript, written in the reign of Selim I (H. 918-26/1512-20). The work is illustrated with paintings, of equally unknown artists, apparently familiar with the related topography. The *Târîkh*,<sup>2</sup> as well as other documents<sup>3</sup> narrate that Bâyezîd II ordered the construction of fortifications, on the sea-shores and the frontier regions, and planned expeditions, along the Black Sea and Aegean sea, then called in Turkish *Ježâ'ir* (the Islands). In the latter area, the Sultan wanted to dismantle the strongholds of Mora (Morea) from where attacks and landings on Ottoman soil were started. However, the Ottoman fleet had to be first strengthened. New ships were built by the renowned sailor *ghâzî* (combatant for the faith) Kemal Re'is.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, in brackets, that the translation of the term *ghâzî*, as pirate, is erroneous. The Ottoman *ghâzîs*, on land and sea, were semi-religious fraternities of warriors, who, in the words of the oath taken at the

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<sup>1</sup> Ms R. 1272 of the Topkapu Palace Museum Library, fol. 63 (the biography was written under Selim I).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 6 verso.

<sup>3</sup> Sa'du'd-Dîn, *Tâju't-tavârikh* (Istanbul, H. 1279), vol. 2, pp., 40-43. R. M. Meriç, "Bâyezîd Câmî'i mimârı ve İkinci Bâyezîd devri mimârları", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyât Fakültesi Yıllık Araştırmalar Dergisi*, vol. 2 (Ankara, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> Sa'du'd-Dîn, vol. 2, pp. 33-34. İ. Parmaksızoğlu, "Kemal Reis", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1955).

sword-girding ceremony, fought for God (*Lillâh, ghazâ niyetine*).<sup>5</sup> The sailor *ghâzîs* were a variety of the *Gâhziyân-i Rûm*, the "Roman (Anatolian) *ghâzîs*,"<sup>6</sup> in continuity of the pre-Islamic Turkish associations of free warriors (*alp*).<sup>7</sup> Piracy, for the sake of gain, was considered a crime, sometimes expiated on the gallows.<sup>8</sup>

Kemal Re'is achieved, in 904/1498, the task of ship-building, reportedly, to the degree of surpassing the Venetian navy, as depicted on a book-painting of Kâtib Çelebi's history of the Ottoman navy, entitled *Tuhfatu'l-kibâr fi asfâr'il-hihâr* (ill. 1).<sup>9</sup> The Jezâ'ir-sea expedition started at once, with Aynabakhtî (Lepanto) as its first goal.<sup>10</sup>

The second consulted source is the account of the expedition, by Safâi of Sinop,<sup>11</sup> a *ghâzî*, who took part in it. This voluminous, almost diarized record, partly versified in epic tradition, was to be recited, in successive chapters, to the Sultan. Safâi described the Sultan's departure, with the land-army and the embarkation of the *azabs* and *ghâzîs*, from Beshiktash, on the Bosphorus. The *azabs*,<sup>12</sup> distinguished by a peculiar red *börk* (hat), were recruited among the Anatolian Turks, from the coastal provinces and remained celibate, during their period of service (hence their name). The two largest ships, of the variety called *küke* in Turkish, were commanded by the two senior *ghâzîs*, Kemâl Re'is and Barak Re'is. The cartographer of the Mediterranean, Muhyî'ud-Dîn, son of Hâjî Mehmed, who

<sup>5</sup> Kâtib Çelebi, *Tuhfatu'l-kibâr fi asfâr'il-bihâr*, ms R. 1192 of the Topkapu Library, fol. 20. Ms *Ghazavât-i Khayru'd-Dîn Paşa*, ms R. 1291 of Topkapu, fols. 23, 94. *Târîkh*, fol. 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ghâziyân-i Rûm*, 'Ashîq Pashazâde, *Târîkh* (Istanbul, H. 1332), p. 205. Sailor *ghâzîs*: see note 5 supra and M. Şukrî, *Asfâr-i Bahriyye-i 'Othmâniyye* (Istanbul, H. 1306), pp. 246-49, 254-57, 304-308, 314-16, 321. I. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Bahriye Teşkilâtı* (Ankara, 1948), pp. 389-93.

<sup>7</sup> The pre-Islamic and early Islamic period: E. Esin, "Türklerin Orta Asya'dan getirdiği universalist devlet mef'hûmu", *Papers of the First International Social and Economic History of Turkey* (Ankara, 1980). The later period: F. Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* (Istanbul, 1918), p. 275 and note 2.

<sup>8</sup> I. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Târîhi*, vol. 2 (Ankara, 1949), 208-11.

<sup>9</sup> Kâtib Çelebi, fol. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Sa'du'd-Dîn, vol. 2, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Safâi, *Târîkh-i Feth-i Aynabakhtî ve Moton*, ms R. 1271 of Topkapu, fols. 14v-, 19v, 27v-34-39, 40-45.

<sup>12</sup> Şukrî, index, 'azab. Uzunçarşılı, *Bahriye*, p. 406.

had assumed the surname Pîrî,<sup>13</sup> in sign of his attachment to his uncle and *pîr* (patron-saint) Kemâl Re'îs, accompanied the latter. Pîrî drew maps and made sketches of the fortifications of Venetian origin and of those built by Ottoman Turks, during and after the expeditions. One may thus identify both varieties of architecture, in the paintings of the *Târîkh*. The Venetian forts are lower and crenelated, while the taller Turkish ones are further distinguished by pinnacles (ills. 2, 3) and sometimes, ornate flourishes (ill. 2, Moton).

The dramatic episodes of Safâî's epic include a battle, of the shores of Avarîna (Navarino), near the island of Partana (Bordano) (ill. 2). The location is shown, on a painting of the *Târîkh* (ill. 8) on which the rocky island is on the foreground. As the belligerent navies drew close to each other, the Turks stood on board, lance in hand and psalmodized "Allah! Allah!", in readiness to meet death, while uttering God's name. They were so near to the Frankish ships that they could see the Franks, clinking cups, with each other. Barak Re'îs moved his ship forward, to encounter the first shock of the adversary's guns. The küke, attacked by two galleys, blazed in flames. While the sailors dived overboard, Barak's calcinated body stood erect, still supported by a mast. A painting of the *Târîkh* seems to depict the scene of the event beside the rocky island, named thereafter, "Barak Re'îs Adası" (ill. 4).<sup>14</sup>

The sea-battle went on throughout the day and night and the Turkish fleet could penetrate into the gulf of Aynabaktı/Inebakhtı, only on the dawn of the next day, the 23rd of Muharrem 905/1499. The city surrendered and a general pardon was proclaimed. A red Ottoman flag was then hoisted. The banner, with solar emblem, seen on a peak, on the painting of Aynabakhtı, indicates the Sultan's camp, (ill. 5).<sup>15</sup> The city and the circumvallation were renovated by the Turks. Through<sup>16</sup> comparisons with their locations and appearance, on Pîrî's map (ill. 3,) the Turkish forts may be identified on both ends of the city-wall, at the paintings background (ill. 5). The Turk-

<sup>13</sup> Ezgü, "Pîrî Re'îs", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1964).

<sup>14</sup> Pîrî Reîs, *Kitâb-ı Bahriyye*, ms R. 1633 of Topkapu, fol. 153 (Partana). Sa'du'd-Dîn, vol. 2, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> See note 14 sup. and Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Târîhi*, vol. 2, p. 212.

<sup>16</sup> Pîrî, fols. 156-157v. *Târîkh*, fol. 22v. Sa'du'd-Dîn, vol. 2, p. 95.

ish forts were on opposite shores at the narrowest part of the gulf (ill. 3). The centrally situated minaret, in the same area, indicates the Turkish quarters, within the town.

On this occasion, Piri could locate, with the help of elderly natives, the island of Keshishlik, occupied over a century ago, by the Turkish prince Aydın-oğlu Bahâ'ud-Dîn Umur Beg (died H. 749/1348). (ill. 3).<sup>17</sup>

When, in the poetical terms of the *Târikkh*, the tulips and anemones announced the spring of H. 906/1499-1500, Bâyezîd II sent the navy to Moton (Modon), Koron and Avarina (Navarino).<sup>18</sup> The staunchly defended Moton was difficult of access, surrounded on three sides by the sea and separated from the coast, with a precipice (ill. 6).<sup>19</sup> After a month's siege and shelling, when the Turks climbed the walls, the Franks set the city on fire. In sequel to the surrender, on Muharram 14th 906/1500, the city had to be entirely renovated.<sup>20</sup> The tower, on which a Janissary had first raised the crescented tail-standard and the banner with solar emblem of the Sultan, is indicated on the margin (not shown on ill. 6) of the painting of Moton (ill. 6).<sup>21</sup> Here again, through the indications on Piri's map (ill. 2), the tall Ottoman forts, extended further than the city-walls, to protect the adjoining coast, may easily be distinguished from the lower Venetian walls (ill. 6). The Latin cathedral of Moton is seen on the foreground.

Koron (ill. 7) and Avarina (ill. 8) showed no resistance and the Frankish warriors, together with their families, could sail back to "Frankistân" (the land of Franks).<sup>22</sup> A surprise attack of a Franco-Venetian fleet, to Midilli (Mytilene) had yet to be repelled.

While Safâi recited to Bâyezîd II the memorable episodes of the expedition, the historians composed a chronogram, giving the date, in Abjad letters: *Feth-i Bilâd-i Frenk* (The Expansion to the Frankish cities).<sup>23</sup> *Târikkh* concludes that after the dismissal of dan-

<sup>17</sup> Piri, fol. 156. *Târikkh*, fol. 23. Sa'du'd-Dîn., vol. 2, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> *Târikkh*, fol. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Piri, fol. 152v.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, fols. 51, 52v. Sa'du'd-Dîn, vol. 2, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Sa'du'd-Dîn, vol. 2, pp. 101-101-104. *Târikkh*, fols. 25-26v. Piri, fols. 151, 153v.

<sup>23</sup> Sa'du'd-Dîn, vol. 2, p. 104.

gers, for the security of the Empire, Bâyezîd II dedicated his life to scholarship and religious devotion, hence his name Bâyezîd Velî, (Bâyezîd the Saintly). He died in H. 918/1512. The Turkish libraries keep many precious manuscripts, dedicated to Bâyezîd II, by the "scholars and sages, whose presence was welcomed at his court" (*Târîkh*, fol. 27v.).

