

MY MONEY OR YOUR LIFE: THE HABSBURG HUNT FOR ULUC ALI

La bolsa o la vida: Los Habsburgo a la caza de Uluc Ali

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RESUMEN: Este artículo trata de los esfuerzos de los Habsburgo para eliminar la amenaza naval otomana a través de medios clandestinos y emprendiendo operaciones secretas. Dándose cuenta del peligro que creaban la flota otomana y los corsarios otomanos en sus defensas, los servicios secretos de los Habsburgo enviaron a unos mediadores para recordar a Uluc Ali su pasado cristiano y sus obligaciones hacia su verdadero monarca y convencerle de que hiciera alianzas. Los Habsburgo también intentaron organizar el magnicidio de este corsario que llegó al cénit de su poder como el Gran Almirante Otomano. Mientras la eficacia de los servicios secretos de los Habsburgo nos demuestra el poder de los mecanismos y las redes epistolares a la hora de recabar información en el circunmediterráneo, los intentos de magnicidio y de desertión nos sirven para analizar un aspecto poco estudiado de las rivalidades inter-imperiales: la diplomacia secreta.

Palabras clave: Magnicidio; desertor; soborno; conspiración; diplomacia secreta; espionaje; diplomacia interconfesional; corsarios otomanos; rivalidad Otomano-habsburgica.

ABSTRACT: This article deals with Habsburg efforts to eliminate the Ottoman naval threat by employing clandestine measures and undertaking covert operations. Realizing the danger that the Ottoman fleet and corsairs created for their defenses, the Habsburg secret service dispatched a number of go-betweens in order to remind Uluc Ali of his Christian

past and obligations to his true monarch and thus convince him to switch allegiances. The Habsburgs also tried to arrange the assassination of this dangerous corsair who reached the zenith of his power as the Ottoman Grand Admiral. While the efficiency of Habsburg secret service demonstrate us the strength of circum-Mediterranean information gathering mechanisms and epistolary networks, the attempts of assassination and defection point to an understudied aspect of inter-imperial rivalries: secret diplomacy.

Key words: Assassination; Defection; Bribery; Conspiracy; Secret Diplomacy; Espionage; Cross-Confessional Diplomacy; Ottoman Corsairs; Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry.

1. INTRODUCTION

The sixteenth century witnessed the concomitant rise of two powers, the Ottomans in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Habsburgs in the West. The rivalry between these two empires became the major driving force in international politics. The result was a «global» conflict where every polity in Europe and the Mediterranean had to take their sides, some as allies, some as vassals¹.

There were two main theatres of competition: the Hungarian plains and the Mediterranean waters. Even though from the Ottoman point of view military expeditions undertaken in Hungary were far more important than naval operations in the Mediterranean², the latter were more threatening to the Habsburgs, especially following the break-up of Charles V's empire in 1556. The conflict in the Mediterranean manifested itself in a number of ways. First of all, there were major naval battles between large imperial fleets in 1538, 1560 and 1571. However, as Francis Guilmartin has aptly noted, such battles could not produce strategic results in the Mediterranean³. The nature of galley warfare rendered it essential to acquire naval bases in order to support the operations of large fleets. Hence, a second type of

1. Those who wanted to remain neutral such as Venice and Ragusa struggled. They managed to stay clear of this rivalry only thanks to their centuries-long commercial and diplomatic networks on both sides of the conflict. In spite of its political relevance, the Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry is an understudied subject. There are a good number of articles written recently in a variety of languages, but a proper and comprehensive monograph is still lacking. Nonetheless, Özlem Kumrular's two books are worthy of mention: KUMRULAR, Ö.: *Las relaciones entre el Imperio Otomano y la Monarquía Católica entre los años 1520-1535 y el papel de los estados satélites*. Estambul, 2003. KUMRULAR, Ö.: *El duelo entre Carlos V y Solimán el Magnífico (1520-1535)*. Estambul, 2005.

2. It is indicative that while they spared tens of pages to the Ottoman-Habsburg conflict in Hungary, contemporary Ottoman histories mostly omitted even the most important wars and political events in the Mediterranean.

3. GUILMARTIN, J. F.: *Gunpowder and Galleys: Changing Technology and Mediterranean Warfare at Sea in the Sixteenth Century*. London, 1974, p. 3.

conflict was besieging naval strongholds such as Malta, la Goletta and Algiers. A third way of settling scores was to resort to the service of corsairs, i.e. privateers funded by central authorities. Here, the Ottomans had the upper hand. When they found themselves engaged in an imperial rivalry with the Habsburgs in the 1520s, already there were established corsair centers in North Africa. These corsairs were attacking Habsburg coasts and challenging lines of communication, trade and supply at the very heart of their empire. They quickly entered into a mutually beneficial alliance with Istanbul against the common enemy, the Habsburgs⁴.

In the Mediterranean, the Habsburgs usually remained on the defensive. While the Ottoman fleet dispatched from Istanbul reached its full potential by roaming the waters of the Tyrrhenian, Ligurian and the Balearic Sea in 1543, 1544, 1550, 1552, 1553, 1555 and 1558, Ottoman corsairs located in North African ports ravaged Habsburg coasts in Sicily, Naples, Sardinia, Aragon, Valencia and Granada. Moreover, the latter challenged the Habsburg power in North Africa as well. They laid siege to Habsburg *presidios* in the region and attacked their allies such as Tlemcen, Morocco and Tunis.

Even though they had extensive dominions in *Mare Nostrum*, the Mediterranean front was not the first priority for Habsburg decision-makers. As their fragmented possessions throughout Europe bestowed upon them several responsibilities, they had more pressing concerns. Until 1559, they were engaged in a perennial war with their nemesis, France and they had to participate in Italian wars. Similarly, the issue of Protestantism evolved in time into an open challenge to the Habsburg authority both in the Holy Roman Empire where the Emperor Charles V had to concede the treaty of Augsburg (1555) and in the Low Countries where a rebellion that would end in independence eight decades later erupted in 1568. Alongside these concerns came the powerful Ottoman challenge in Central Europe and the Balkans which culminated in the siege of Vienna in 1529 and the expedition of 1532.

Moreover, even though the Habsburgs went to great lengths in order to meet the Ottoman challenge in the Mediterranean, most of the costly naval operations they undertook produced little strategic result. The Ottomans could not be stopped in spite of the decisive Christian victory at the Battle of Lepanto (1571). Next year, a quickly rebuilt Ottoman fleet would successfully bar Don Juan's eastward progress «by taking refuge under the cliffs and batteries of Modon»⁵ and ward off the Christian threat in the Eastern Mediterranean. Soon, it would take the offensive and carry

4. For the evolution and dynamics of this alliance, see. GÜRKAN, E. S.: «The Centre and the Frontier: Ottoman Cooperation with the North African Corsairs in the Sixteenth Century», *Turkish Historical Review*, 1/2, 2010, pp. 125-163.

5. GUILMARTIN, J. F.: *Gunpowder and Galleys*, p. 250. For a detailed analysis of Uluc Ali's evasive campaign in 1572, see. BRAUDEL, F.: *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*. Paris, 1966, 2nd ed, vol. II, pp. 409-415.

the war to the western half of the *Mare Nostrum*: it re-conquered Tunis and la Goletta in 1574 and anchored in Algiers for an aborted Moroccan expedition in 1581. Moreover, in spite of repeated naval operations and sieges, it proved impossible to dislodge corsairs from their North African bases. On the contrary, they intensified their depredations in Habsburg waters and consolidated their power in the North African hinterland. The age of the «little wars» in the Mediterranean had just begun.

This thorn in the Habsburg side not only cost huge amounts of money for an empire whose financial difficulties are best epitomized by its frequent bankruptcies in 1557, 1560, 1575, and 1596. It also forced the Habsburgs to reorganize their defenses and always remain alert⁶; thus, it reduced their strategic flexibility and impaired their war efforts elsewhere. For instance, Geoffrey Parker established a correlation between the Ottoman challenge in the Mediterranean and the Habsburg military vigor against Calvinist rebels in the Low Countries⁷. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Habsburgs reached the conclusion that methods other than open military conflict should be employed in order to pacify the Ottoman threat that caused them so much trouble.

This essay will concentrate on one of these methods: the Habsburg secret service's efforts to eliminate the threat imposed by the famous Ottoman corsair Uluc Ali, a key player in Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry in the Mediterranean for more than two decades as the governor-general of Tripolis (o. 1565-1568) and of Algeria (o. 1568-1572) and the Ottoman Grand Admiral (o. 1572-1587). It will delineate how Habsburg agents negotiated Uluc Ali's defection to the Habsburg camp on the one hand and plotted against his life on the other.

2. ULUC ALI AS A HABSBURG TARGET: ASSASSINATION AND DEFECTION IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MEDITERRANEAN

Born in a small village of Calabria and enslaved by Ottoman corsairs when he was a young boy, Uluc Ali's exceptional success on the Mediterranean frontier is a story told too many times⁸ and needs not concern us here. What is interesting

6. For these preparations, see. BONO, S.: *I corsari barbareschi*. Torino, 1964, pp. 193-216.

7. According to him, it was the siege of Malta that prevented Philip II's travel to the Low Countries. Such a visit only a year before the Dutch Revolt commenced could be of key importance in dispelling the anti-Habsburg spirit. Moreover, according to a Frenchman in Brussels in 1574, the loss of la Goletta would push Philip II to come to terms with the rebels. PARKER, G.: *Dutch Revolt*. Ithaca, 1977, p. 166, fn. 49. When on August 31, 1577 Philip II received Sokollu Mehmed Pasha's assurance that the Ottoman fleet would not attack the Habsburg coasts, he immediately dispatched veteran soldiers from Italy to the Low Countries. PARKER, G.: *Dutch Revolt*, p. 188, fn 18.

8. There are a number of works on Uluc Ali's life. Two stand out: VALENTE, G.: *Vita di Occhiali*. Milano, 1960; SOLA, E.: *Uchalí: El Calabrés Tiñoso, o el mito del corsario muladí en la frontera*. Barcelona, 2011.

from our point of view is how his trans-imperial connections on both sides of the conflict brought forth the possibility of cross-confessional diplomacy. The following will not only shed light on the clandestine measures employed (or covert operations undertaken) in the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry. By focusing on the information gathering mechanisms and circum-Mediterranean epistolary networks, it will also illuminate the conduits through which secret diplomacy was conducted across the seemingly impermeable civilizational boundaries between the Christian and the Muslim Mediterranean.

As soon as he started to rise through the ranks of the corsair establishment in North Africa, Uluc Ali entered into the orbit of the Habsburg secret service. The Habsburgs' military power was at best fragile in the Western Mediterranean following the annihilation of their fleet by the Ottomans at Djerba (1560). Luckily for them, the Ottomans chose not to reap the benefits of this exceptional victory and their fleet stayed in the Eastern Mediterranean rather than sailing into the Habsburg waters⁹. When it did return in 1565 in order to besiege Malta –a Christian corsair den as well as a strategic port–, the outnumbered Habsburg fleet nearby could only apply the strategy of wait and see. Only at the right moment when months of heavy fighting wore down the Ottoman fleet and the besieging army, the Habsburg admiral Don García de Toledo acted and forced the Ottomans to break the siege¹⁰. Nor were Habsburg galleys doing any better against Ottoman corsairs who not only continued their attacks on Habsburg coasts but also undertook military expeditions against presidios in North Africa such as Mers el-Kébir.

Where guns failed, diplomacy and espionage could be effective tools. By means of their agents throughout the Mediterranean, the Habsburg authorities sought to eliminate the Ottoman naval threat. First, they tried to bribe prominent Ottoman corsairs such as Uluc Ali and tried to ensure their defection to the Habsburg side. When this failed they tried to assassinate them.

Changing sides was a common feature of sixteenth century politics and there was nothing unrealistic about the defection of an Ottoman corsair. For instance, the famous Genoese admiral/condottiere Andrea Doria switched allegiance from the French to the Habsburg side in 1527 at the most crucial moment of Italian wars¹¹. Similarly, another important Habsburg military figure, Charles de

9. To see how much the Habsburg authorities feared an Ottoman naval offensive following the Battle of Djerba, BRAUDEL, F.: *La Méditerranée*, pp. 297-301.

10. GUILMARTIN, J. F.: *Gunpowder and Galleys*, pp. 191-2.

11. Upset with Francis' plans to develop Genoa's rival Savona as a commercial port, Andrea could not resist the favorable terms proposed by the imperialists. His defection with his fleet at a time when French soldiers were besieging Naples tipped the fragile balance of power in favor of the Habsburgs.

Bourbon was a turncoat; when he quarreled with his suzerain Francis I over an inheritance issue, he sought refuge in Habsburg service¹². Even though religious, cultural and legal differences between Christian Europe and Muslim Ottoman Empire may lead one to assume that cross-cultural defections were unlikely, this was hardly the case, especially when it came to men with military skills. As they were high in demand, they traveled freely and found employment across civilizational boundaries. They were not even required to convert, at least not in the case of the Ottomans. However, the unsuccessful career of Christophe Roggendorf¹³ as well as the disappearance of Christian timar holders in the Balkans testify to the fact that the Ottomans became less inclined to elevate Christians to influential positions in the sixteenth century, which would be the century of confessionalization not only in Europe, but also, as recent studies suggest¹⁴, in the East.

In fact, a number of high-level Ottoman renegades came into the orbit of Habsburg secret service. Corsairs were natural targets. First, their position rendered them important in the Habsburgs' eyes. Second, most of them were of Western Mediterranean origin with cultural and familial ties in Christian Europe. Recent studies demonstrate that changing religion did not mean that the converts severed ties with their past. They kept their memories and familial ties intact¹⁵, without

12. Quite ironically, he was one of the Habsburg generals in the Battle of Pavia where Francis I prisoner to the Habsburgs.

13. Roggendorf was a hereditary grand master of Austria, one of Ferdinand of Austria's chief counselors and his lord high steward. When Charles V ruled against him in a dispute over property with his wife, the wronged Roggendorf left the Habsburg camp and sought employment in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottomans against whom he had previously defended Buda and Vienna in the 1520s. The Ottomans appointed him a *müteferrika* in the palace, a position which had an income, but no authority. Naturally, he was disillusioned with this symbolic appointment, believing he had not received the advancement he deserved. The Ottomans informed him that should he convert, he would be given the governor-generalship of the Baghdad province. According to the French ambassador, they argued that the Sultan was willing to bestow upon him more important offices, but as long as he remained a Christian, he could not fully trust him and appoint him to a prominent position. In the end, the recalcitrant Roggendorf refused to convert and chose to seek his fortunes in France. ISOM-VERHAAREN, C.: «Shifting Identities: Foreign State Servants in France and the Ottoman Empire», *Journal of Early Modern History*, 8/1-2, 2004, pp. 130-1.

14. KRSTIĆ, T.: «Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization», *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51/1, 2009, pp. 35-63. KRSTIĆ, T.: *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*. Stanford, 2011.

15. BROOS, D. A.: «The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction», *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, eds. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier, Lanham, 2003, pp. 1-12. DURSTELER, E.: *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. Baltimore, 2011, passim. SOLA, E.: *Uchali*, passim.

forgetting their language¹⁶, and completely foregoing their faith¹⁷. They also continued communicating with their kins in the Christian world¹⁸. Such cross-confessional connections could easily be exploited by central governments and their negotiators. Moreover, Muslim-born corsairs would not feel an irreconcilable hostility towards the Christian «other», either; after all they were accustomed to living in cosmopolitan North African port cities.

Certain descriptions in Antonio Sosa's *Topography of Algiers* clearly solidify our argument¹⁹. Moreover, the language in Seyyid Murad's *Gazavat-ı Hayreddin Paşa* is a good testament to this cosmopolitanism²⁰. Moreover, in spite of modern historians' propensity (especially in Turkey) to depict these entrepreneurial privateers

16. For instance, Uluc Ali could still speak Italian, albeit imperfectly, decades after his capture in 1583. SOLA, E.: *Uçaltı*, pp. 68, 366.

17. Several renegades contacted Christian sovereigns and indicated their desire to return to Christianity. Archivo General de Simancas (hereafter AGS) is full with documents testifying to their genuine interest.

18. It was a common incident that renegade Ottoman grandees brought their kins to their side. Ottoman Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha had both his parents convert to Islam, arranged the governorship of a sandjak near Parga for his father and ensured the induction of his two brothers to the Palace School (Enderûn). ALBERI, E. (ed.): *Le Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*. Firenze, 1855, Serie III, Vol. III, pp. 97 and 103. In a similar fashion, the Grand Admiral Hasan «Veneziano» was in contact with his family members in Venice. His brother-in-law came to Constantinople to ask for his reference for the Signoria. Moreover, Hasan employed his cousin Livio Celeste as a spy. FABRIS, A.: «Hasan 'il Veneziano' tra Algeria e Costantinopoli», *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 5, 1997, pp. 59-61. The Ottoman Grand Admiral Cigalazade Yusuf Sinan Pasha brought his brother Carlo Cicala and secured for him the governorship of the «Aegean Archipelago» (Naxos), AGS, Papeles de Estado (hereafter Estado) 1344 K 1675, fol. 44 (30 April 1591); Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 460, document dated 25 July 1600. Sometimes, it was the renegade pashas who visited their relatives. Cigalazade Yusuf Sinan Pasha's quite exceptional story is worth noting. After ravaging Sicilian and Neapolitan coasts with a large Ottoman navy, he anchored off Messina and demanded to see his mother and siblings. Quite interestingly, his wish was granted (an Ottoman fleet off the coast could be a quite persuasive argument) and next was the most unusual family reunion aboard Ottoman galleys. AGS, Estado, leg. 1158, fols. 186 (1 October 1598), 187 (fifteen letters between the Grand Admiral, his family and Habsburg authorities dated September 1598).

19. For instance, according to his account, people from fifty-two nations ranging from Muscovites to Danish, from Abyssinians to Indians resided in the city of Algiers. He stated with awe: «there is no Christian nation on earth that has not produced renegades in this city». HAEDO, D.: *Topografía e Historia General de Argel*, Madrid, 1927, vol. I, pp. 52-3. For an English version of the first volume with a bit controversial title, see. GARCÉS, M. A.: *An Early Modern Dialogue with Islam: Antonio de Sosa's Topography of Algiers*, trans. Diana de Armas Wilson. Notre Dame, 2011.

20. Written as a propaganda piece that celebrated the deeds of Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha, this Ottoman text contains too many foreign words that derive from a variety of Mediterranean languages. This is quite a novelty. Ottoman is flooded with non-Turkish words, but these generally come from Arabic and Persian. For the list of these foreign words of western origin, see. GÜRKAN, E. S.: «Batı Akdeniz'de Osmanlı korsanlığı ve gaza meselesi», *Kebikeç: İnsan Bilimleri İçin Kaynak Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 33, 2012, pp. 180-181.

as ghazis²¹, i.e. holy warriors, sixteenth-century corso was an economic enterprise undertaken by a number of investors²². Therefore, in this cosmopolitan world inhabited by self-interested entrepreneurs, secret negotiations between the Habsburg authorities and Ottoman corsairs should be considered natural.

We know that Habsburg spies entered into a series of negotiations with another renowned corsair, Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha (born as a Muslim) in late 1530s and early 1540s²³. Other governor-generals of Algeria such as Hasan Ağa (a Sardinian renegade, o. 1535 - 1544)²⁴, and Mehmed Pasha (o. 1567 - 1568, the son of famous Salih Reis, also governor-general of Algeria between 1552 - 1557)²⁵, as well as grand admirals such as Hasan Veneziano (a Venetian renegade, also governor-general of Algeria and Tunis)²⁶, and Cigalazade Yusuf Sinan Pasha (a Genoese renegade)²⁷ secretly negotiated with Habsburg authorities, too. In spite of the fact that none of these secret negotiations produced concrete results, it is still of cardinal importance that central governments invested time and money in them.

Now let us proceed to the negotiations that took place between Uluc Ali and the Habsburg authorities. Could this shrewd Calabrian, a successful entrepreneur and a self-made frontier creature, be convinced to return to the bosom of the Catholic Church and more importantly to come under the wing of his «natural king» (*Re Naturale*)? Uluc Ali first entered the Habsburg secret service's radar in 1567 when he was only the governor-general of Tripolis, a corsair center of lesser importance than Algiers. Uluc Ali's lieutenant, a renegade from Lucca named Murad Ağa, plotted with Alferéz Francisco de Orejon and Matheo Pozo. Murad offered to kill Uluc Ali and then submit Tripolis to the Habsburgs. Given that the

21. For a critique of this propensity, see GÜRKAN, E. S.: «Bati Akdeniz'de Osmanlı korsanlığı».

22. For the economic aspect of corso, see. BONO, S.: *Corsari nel Mediterraneo: Cristiani e musulmani fra guerra, schiavitù e commercio*. Milano, 1993, pp. 173-211.

23. AGS, Estado 1027, fol. 13; E 1031 fols. 26, 58, 98 and 99; Estado 1033, fol. 160; Estado 1372, fols. 57, 60, 64, 66, 73 and 84, (1539); Estado 1373 fols. 15, 18, 19, 20, 28, 30, 41, 42, 85, 88, 117, 118, 119, 151, 156, 160, 165, 176, 178, 181, 187 and 226 (1540); Estado 1376, fol. 34 (1543-4). See also Estado 1027, E 1031, E 1033, passim. For a good summary of the negotiations between Charles V and Hayreddin, see CAPASSO, C.: «Barbarossa e Carlo V», *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 49, 1932, pp. 169-209.

24. AGS, Estado, leg. 1374, fol. 171, (1541). Also see. BERBRUGGER, A.: «Négociations entre Hassan Agha et le comte d'Alcaudete, gouverneur d'Oran, 1541-1542», *Revue Africaine*, IX, 1865, pp. 379-385.

25. AGS, Estado, leg. 488, document dated 21 June 1576.

26. AGS, Estado 1417, fol. 41, 62 and 109 (1583). ASV, *Senato Dispacci Costantinopoli* (hereafter SDC), fil. 30, no. 38 (20 January 1590) quoted by FABRIS, A.: «Hasan 'il Veneziano'», p. 52, fn.5.

27. AGS, Estado, leg. 1157, fols. 151 (26 February 1593) and 152; Estado 1344 K 1675, fols. 4 (13 September 1590), 8 (8 December 1590), 44 (30 April 1591), 70 (3 July 1591), 125 (16 February 1592) and 150 (12 December 1592); Estado 1885, fol. 6 (June 1592).

Ottomans only recently conquered the city in 1551 from the Maltese knights²⁸, the Ottoman power was not yet consolidated in the region. The Ottomans' failure to capitalize on their victory at Djerba as well as the unsuccessful siege of Malta suggest that such a change of hand would not be so hard to realize. Here are the details of the plan: Orejon and Pozo would come to Tripolis with 20-25 men and Murat would secretly allow them in the citadel. According to the latter, with the help of local Christians so few men would suffice to defend the citadel until the Maltese galleys came to their rescue. Uluc had already left the city with the bulk of his forces to fight the Berber tribes in Fezzan, leaving only 50 old guards behind²⁹. There is no further documentation on the subject, so we do not know whether the plot failed or whether it was not executed at all. We do know, nonetheless, that Tripolis remained in Ottoman hands until the twentieth-century. The fact that Murat Ağa appears in Habsburg documentation eight years later suggests that the latter assumption, that the plot was never executed, is more likely.

As could be seen above, even though this plan targeted Uluc Ali's household and power base, the Calabrian corsair was not a direct party to negotiations; he was in fact their victim. The first contact between Uluc Ali and Madrid occurred in 1569. Encouraged by the news that Uluc was on good terms with Christians, the Habsburgs sought to capitalize on his family background. They believed he could be persuaded to convert to Christianity and submit Algiers, if negotiations were carefully undertaken, or to use a contemporary expression, if he was approached with *buena negociación y industria*. An order was sent to the Viceroy of Naples that he should find one of Uluc Ali's relatives in Calabria (his mother, brothers and some other relatives were still living there) and then send him to negotiate with the corsair³⁰. The Viceroy failed to locate a reliable relative (they were either too young to know the corsair or too old to travel long distances), but instead found Giovanni Battista Ganzuga who was not only from Uluc Ali's village, but also his former slave³¹. According to the plan, Ganzuga was supposed to go to Algiers in disguise of a Mercederian friar³². There he would propose his former master the following terms: should he accept to switch allegiance and submit Algiers to the Habsburgs, he was to be inducted into nobility with the title of marquis or count (whichever he would choose) and a fief worth 12.000

28. Please note that the knights were Habsburg allies and it was Charles V who gave them Tripolis and Malta in 1530 with the obligation that they patrolled the waters of the central Mediterranean and protected Habsburg coasts from Ottoman attacks.

29. AGS, Estado, leg. 1132, fols. 22, 23, 24, 30, 31, 33 and 34.

30. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, document dated 15 December 1568.

31. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, document dated 18 March 1569.

32. Mercederians were a monastic order specialized in slave ransoming in North Africa. The document uses the word *redentores*. The official name of the order was, however, the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, or *Ordo Beatae Mariae de Mercede redemptionis captivorum*.

ducats per annum. In case Uluc agreed to go on with negotiations, Ganzuga was to immediately go to Madrid and discuss the details with Antonio Pérez, Philip II's controversial secretary and the de-facto head of the Habsburg secret service, its «real éminence-grise»³³. An interesting detail is how this miserable peasant would introduce himself to the King's secretary and convince him that he was in fact an Habsburg agent: he would touch the secretary's hand with his right hand in a special manner³⁴.

A second parallel connection was to be established by the Corsican Gasparo Corso family³⁵. This was a trans-imperial family composed of five brothers who established key trade connections and information networks throughout the Western Mediterranean³⁶. One of these, Francisco, a merchant in Valencia, wanted to make use of his brother Andrea's (a merchant and a ransom agent) connections in Algiers which included several important political and military figures. According to the deal that the brothers cut with the Viceroy of Aragon, the Count of Benavente, Andrea would provide the Habsburgs with information about Algiers which he received through his connections. Moreover, Francesco would go to Algiers to join his brother and negotiate with Uluc Ali his defection to the Habsburg side. According to Francesco, the promise of a good income and an inheritable title, *muy buena renta con algun titulo para si y sus descendientes*, would persuade this former Habsburg vassal to change sides³⁷.

I should add here that Habsburg spies reported in 1569 that the janissaries of the city had sent a messenger to Istanbul, asking for the dispatch of former governor-general Hasan Pasha, the son of Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha³⁸. This news made Philip II conclude that Uluc Ali's precarious situation in his post would render him more susceptible to the idea of defection. There were also incentives for the Habsburg side to open negotiations as soon as possible: a deal with a powerful corsair and the governor-general of Algeria would be an invaluable

33. GARNICER, C. and MARCOS, J.: *Espías de Felipe II: Los servicios secretos del Imperio español*. Madrid, 2005, p. 94.

34. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, document entitled «el despacho que estava hecho para que llevase el hombre que avia de yr a Argel».

35. SOLA, E.: *Uchalí*, pp. 147-151, 159-164.

36. They were active in Valencia, Algiers, Barcelona and Marseille. They not only ran a trade agency between these port cities but also coordinated diplomacy and trade between northern Mediterranean and North Africa by engaging in information gathering, the translation of documents, the ransoming of Christian slaves and the negotiation of commercial agreements between Europe and North Africa. GARCÉS, M. A.: *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive's Tale*. Nashville, 2002, pp. 89-90.

37. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, documents dated 22 October 1568, 9 January 1569 and 22 January 1569.

38. AGS, Estado, leg. 487 document dated 30 January 1569.

asset especially at such a critical juncture when the Revolt of Alpujarras erupted in Granada and rumors of a possible Morisco-Ottoman alliance intensified³⁹.

Having agreed with the Viceroy of Naples on basic principles, Francesco went to Madrid to work out the details of the plan. The Gasparo Corso brothers would first contact Uluc Ali's steward (*kahya*) Memi Corso (a relative of the Gasparo Corso brothers), a galley captain named Catania Reis and the Moroccan prince in exile, Abdu'l-Melik (later Abdu'l-Melik I of Morocco, r. 1576-1578). Even though the latter's financial remunerations were left out, details regarding the offers to be made to Uluc Ali, Memi Corso and Catania were recorded in a document dated 2 July 1569: Uluç Ali was offered 10,000 ducats *de renta* in the kingdom of Naples that he could pass to his descendants as well as the title of count, marquis or duke. Catania would receive 4,000 ducats *de renta* in the kingdom of Sicily with the title of baron or count and Memi would get 3,000 ducats *de renta* in either one of the two kingdoms with the title of baron or count. All were allowed to bring their properties and families with them. Andrea and Francesco themselves would get 2,000 ducats. This unusually high amount for go-betweens and spies operating in the Mediterranean borderlands⁴⁰ should be read as a testament to the anxiousness of the Habsburgs to ensure Uluc's defection. Finally, the Gasparo Corso brothers were authorized to make financial offers to other potential defectors (could one of these be Abdu'l-Melik whose financial remuneration was not mentioned in the documentation?) in accordance with their «quality»⁴¹. In case Uluc refused the offer, they were also allowed to raise the value of Memi and Catania's fief to 6,000 ducats with the inheritable title of count or marquis, provided that they could submit Algiers on their own⁴².

The kind of arguments that the authorities believed Andrea should use in order to convince Uluc Ali are clear proof that the Habsburgs wanted to employ psychological as well as material factors and that they believed that Uluc Ali's Christian background was an asset they should make use of⁴³. Andrea would remind the Calabrian corsair of his Christian past and add that he should leave this life he conducted «against reason, natural law and the God's truth» and return

39. HESS, A. H.: «The Moriscos: An Ottoman Fifth Column in the Sixteenth-Century Spain», *American Historical Review*, LXXIV, October 1968, pp. 1-25.

40. Based on the payments that the Habsburgs authorized to spies operating in the Ottoman Empire, my conclusion is that they received amounts changing between 100-400 ducats. GÜRKAN, *Espionage in the 16th century Mediterranean: Secret Diplomacy, Mediterranean go-betweens and the Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry*. Ph.D. Diss., Georgetown University, 2012, p. 156. Numbers mentioned by Garnicer and Marcos (*Espías de Felipe II*, p. 291) are higher: 300-500 ducats.

41. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, documents dated 2 July 1569, 28 July 1569 («Instruction primera a Andrea y Francesco Gasparo sobre el negocio de Argel»).

42. AGS, Estado 487, document dated 17 July 1569.

43. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, document dated 2 July 1569.

to him (*deve tener aborrecido camino tan contra la razon y ley natural y contra la verdad de dios como por el que ha bivido hasta agora y que deve de desear en su animo y coraçon grandemente bolverse a el*). Moreover, Andrea would point out that neither his life nor his property would be safe as long as he stayed in Algiers. If he returned to Catholicism and submitted Algiers, on the other hand, he would be granted aristocratic titles and fiefs. In short, he could be his own master and honor his family name (*sera senor para sy y para su posteridad con tanta honra y gloria como la que le esta agardando desta obra para ilustrar su nombre y casa y el de todos los suyos perpetuamente*). Here Andrea would be referring to the fact that it was common in the Ottoman Empire for high-level officials to be executed and their possessions confiscated⁴⁴. For a parvenu outsider such as Uluc Ali who made his fortune quickly in a frontier region and who lacked necessary connections in the Ottoman capital, losing favor could easily result in losing his life and possessions. At a time when rumors of his dismissal from his post were circulating everywhere, such an argument would have seemed quite compelling. Moreover, arguments that Andrea would make reflect the common stereotype of the time: greedy Turks, the despotic Ottoman Sultan and an empire of slaves where nobody's life and possessions were secure⁴⁵.

Francesco never made the trip to Algiers. In his stead, a third brother, Felipe, arrived in the corsair den. Before there was an agreement, however, Uluc left Algiers in order to take advantage of the Habsburgs' occupation with the Revolt of Alpujarras. With a swift military expedition, he conquered Tunis in 1569. During his absence in Algiers, a new idea came to the fore: Could Memi, Uluc Ali's lieutenant in the city, submit this strategic port to the Habsburgs?⁴⁶ According to Andrea, this was not possible given that Algerian janissaries who were already not very fond of Uluc Ali kept his renegade lieutenant under close surveillance. When Uluc returned from Tunis, he was no more cooperative than before. He

44. On the Ottoman practice of confiscation, müsadere, see. BOSWORTH, C. E.: «Musâdara», *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. VII, p. 652. RÖRNBORN, K.: «Konfiskation und intermediäre Gewalten im Osmanischen Reich», *Der Islam*, 55, 1978, pp. 345-51. FODOR, P.: *Vállalkozásra kényszerítve: az oszmán pénzügyigazgatás és hatalmi elit változásai a 16 - 17. század fordulóján*. Budapest, 2006, pp. 125-144. BARBIR, K. K.: «One Marker of Ottomanism: Confiscation of Ottoman Officials' Estates», *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World*, eds. Baki Tezcan and Karl Barbir, a special issue of *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 13/1-2, 2007: pp. 1-6.

45. For Turkish image in early modern Europe, see. SCHWOEBEL, R.: *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453-1517)*. New York, 1967. VALENSI, L.: *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte*. Ithaca, 1993. SOYKUT, M.: *Image of the «Turk» in Italy: a History of the «Other» in Early Modern Europe, 1453-1683*. Berlin, 2001. RICCI, G.: *Ossessione Turca: in una retrovia Cristiana dell'Europa moderna*. Bologna, 2002. KUMRULAR, Ö. (ed.): *Dünya'da Türk İmgesi*. İstanbul, 2005.

46. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, documents dated 30 November 1569 and 14 December 1569.

refused to negotiate with Andrea, even though Memi Kahya was still willing⁴⁷. A few months later Uluc left North Africa with his corsair fleet to join the Ottoman fleet for the Battle of Lepanto. Memi was once again left behind. When rumors of his negotiations with Andrea started to circulate, however, tensions between him and the Algerian janissaries arose even further. The latter obliged Memi to reside in Uluc's palace under the watchful eyes of forty of their comrades⁴⁸. In the meantime, the Marquis of Pescara, the Viceroy of Sicily, dispatched a certain Jaime Losada, one of Uluc's several former slaves, in order to continue negotiations. He could not produce any results⁴⁹.

Meanwhile, Uluc Ali survived the disaster at Lepanto with the left wing of the Ottoman navy intact and his success in extricating his ships and salvaging a part of the Ottoman fleet brought him the grand-admiralty. This meant that he left the scene of Algerian politics. Still, Habsburg spies continued their activities in North Africa, in the aftermath Lepanto when rumors arose in Algiers that the victorious allied fleet would besiege the city. In 1573, Don Juan sent to Spain an Italian soldier named Renzo who offered to the Habsburg authorities to arrange the submission of Algiers with the help of his brother Kaid Hasan. He was dispatched to Algiers accompanied by Andrés Fernández de Truvia, a Spanish soldier. They were authorized to offer Renzo's brother 12.000 ducats and an aristocratic title. Their mission failed when Don Juan attacked Tunis rather than Algiers. Similarly, there were negotiations with Uluc Ali's successor, Arab Ahmed, from two different channels: one via a merchant named Juan Pexon and a Murcian cleric, Francisco Núñez and the other via the Gasparo Corso brothers⁵⁰.

Leaving these negotiations in Algiers aside, let us follow Uluc Ali to Istanbul. First of all, his promotion to the grand admiralty made him even more important in the eyes of the Habsburgs decision-makers. Financial problems as well as the revolt in the Low Countries made the Habsburgs growingly reluctant to invest in a conflict with the Ottomans in the Mediterranean. Their primary ally, Venice, signed a separate peace agreement behind their back in 1574. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that most of their fleet was annihilated in Lepanto (they lost more than 200 ships), the Ottomans quickly rebuilt their fleet and conquered Tunis and la Goletta in 1574. Finally, while naval costs and defense expenditures continuously increased, Madrid had to declare bankruptcy in 1575. Under these circumstances, something had to be done about the Ottoman navy which was strengthened by the manpower and expertise of Uluc Ali and his corsairs.

47. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, document dated 6 April 1570.

48. AGS, Estado, leg. 487, document dated 14 June 1570, full text in SOLA, E.: *Uchali*, pp. 165-172.

49. AGS, Estado, leg. 1072, fol. 14 (15 December 1575).

50. For details of these negotiations, see. SOLA, E.: *Uchali*, pp. 208-210.

Far-away Istanbul was out of reach for Madrid; it was simply impossible to operate with spies and agents sent from the center. Provincial authorities had to step in. The first to take the initiative was the commander of the allied fleet, Don Juan de Austria, who dispatched from Messina to Istanbul a renegade named Paulo de Arcuri as early as December 1571, only three months after the Battle of Lepanto. Knowing Uluc Ali in person, Paulo would try to ensure the cunning corsair's defection in the aftermath of a disastrous naval defeat. He was ordered to remind Uluc Ali of his Christian past and let him know that Philip II was willing to bestow upon him exceptional honors should he return home. Uluc was expected to submit either Algiers or Tripolis, or revolt with a number of Ottoman ships and switch sides, or surrender a strategic place to Don Juan's navy. One should not forget, however, that Paulo's mission also included information gathering; he was to send regular reports regarding the Ottoman navy. We do not know whether he managed to find Uluc Ali⁵¹. The silence of documentation suggests his mission failed to produce serious results.

Once Uluc Ali returned to the Ottoman capital with his fleet, the Habsburg secret service had to find another medium to negotiate with him. Fortunately, following the defeat of Djerba they had already established an operative intelligence network in Istanbul, composed of merchants, ransom agents, go-betweens as well as renegades in key positions within the Ottoman administrative and military apparatus⁵². These resident agents on payroll sent regular information regarding the naval preparations in the Ottoman Arsenal, the possible destination of the Ottoman navy and the political situation in Istanbul. They also proposed several covert operations of sabotage, assassination and bribery in order to debilitate the Ottoman naval capability⁵³. To achieve their ends, it was only natural that these go-betweens quickly established connections within Uluc Ali's household and faction, mostly composed of renegades. Two of them, for instance, Sinan (Juan de Briones) and Haydar (Robert Drever), agreed to provide information⁵⁴. They

51. AGS, Estado, leg. 1134, fols. 198 and 199 (20 December 1571).

52. For their activities, see. SOLA, E.: *Los que van y vienen: Información y fronteras en el Mediterráneo clásico del siglo XVI*. Alcalá de Henares, 2005, pp. 199-248 and GÜRKAN, E. S.: *Espionage in the 16th century Mediterranean*, Chapter Five.

53. On their sabotage operations in Istanbul, see. GÜRKAN, E. S.: «Fitilin ucunda Tersane-yi Amire», *Osmanlı İstanbulu I: I. Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbulu Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, 29 Mayıs – 1 Haziran 2013, İstanbul 29 Mayıs Üniversitesi, eds. Feridun Emecen and Emrah Safa Gürkan. İstanbul, 2014, pp. 43-70.

54. AGS, Estado, leg. 1080, fol. 33 (3 and 18 June 1579).

wrote several letters⁵⁵, some of which were sent aboard Ottoman galleys⁵⁶ and thus included the most fresh news regarding Ottoman naval plans.

After a series of attempts to entice Uluc into changing sides failed, the Habsburgs started to look for other ways. If he could not be corrupted, he could perhaps be assassinated. Assassination was a frequently employed method in sixteenth-century politics. Monarchs such as Henri III, Henri IV and Jeanne d'Albret, aristocrats such as William of Orange, ministers such as Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and several other important figures, soldiers, diplomats, courtiers, etc. all met their demise at the hand of an assassin. Blade and poison were the most common tools; yet, there were more complicated methods as well. Catherine de' Medici, for instance, killed Jeanne d'Albret with a pair of perfumed gloves. It was reported that Prince Mehmed tried to kill his father by sending him a mechanical box that fired a bullet when opened. Fortunately, the cautious Sultan had one of his mutes open the box⁵⁷. A similar attempt would be proposed by Pietro Lanza, a skilled corsair in Habsburg employ in 1608⁵⁸. The Ottomans seemed aware of the fact that the sultans were natural targets for assassins. Strangers, even ambassadors, were not allowed to approach the Sultan without gatekeepers securing their arms on both sides.

Poison seemed to be the most popular method of assassination in the Ottoman capital. Rumors abound around the death of important political figures. It was suspected, for instance, that Bayezid II was poisoned by his son Selim⁵⁹. Similarly, when Ferhad Pasha passed away, his men claimed that his physician had

55. AGS, Estado, leg. 490, documents dated 17, 18 and 22 October 1579; full text in SOLA, E.: «Un Ferrarés en Estambul, Regef Bei Uglan o Recep Oglan Bei», *Archivo de la Frontera*, <<http://www.archivodelafrontera.com/pdf/A-MED24.pdf>>.

56. AGS, Estado, leg. 1080, fols. 41 (14 May 1579), 51, 58 (3 August 1579) and 93 (7 June 1580).

57. LUBENAU, R.: *Beschreibung der Reisen de Reinhold Lubenau*, ed. W. Sahn. Königsberg, 1930, vol. II, p. 169.

58. According to this plan, the seventy-five year old corsair-cum-spy Lanza would go to Constantinople and give the Sultan a present, a wooden round-shaped box with two compartments. In the one above, he would put something odorant such as musk, amber, zibet or an odorant soap (*cose odorifere cioè muschio o ambre o zibetto overamente sapone odorifero*). In the one below, he would place gunpowder that would explode when the fuse ran out. Needless to say, the odorant material to be placed in the above compartment would make sure no one smell the gunpowder or the fuse. He also offered other covert operations: to torch the Ottoman Arsenal with Greek fire in such a way that the blame would fall on the Venetians (Lanza's nemeses). Moreover, he would enter the two castles on either side of the Bosphorus, *Rumeli and Anadolu Hisarları* and explode their ammunition depots (*intrate in li 2 castelli di Constantinopoli et brusiargli le monicioni de la polvere*). ASV, *Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Ambasciatori*, b. 19, fol. 81 (16 December 1608).

59. For a comprehensive survey of contemporary sources that recorded these widespread rumours, see. EMECEN, F. M.: *Zamanın İskenderi, Şarkın Fatih: Yavuz Sultan Selim*. İstanbul, 2010, pp. 67-70.

killed him by administering a wrong medicine (*mesirditos*)⁶⁰. When Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha died in the Persian front, his corpse was brought to Istanbul and an autopsy was performed in order to decide whether he was poisoned or not⁶¹.

At the top of the Ottoman naval establishment, it was natural that Uluc Ali was a prime target for assassins. The first recorded attempt on his life, however, was made not by assassins employed by another state, but by his own men. According to a letter dated March 1574 and written by Habsburg agents in Istanbul, three of Uluc's renegades conspired with Christian galley slaves against their master. Their plan was to kill the Calabrian at night and then escape with his brigantine to their fatherland. It was common that renegades, longing for their home, repented their conversion and attempted to run away. Even if their motive is understandable, there are certain incongruities in their plot. What they tried to achieve by killing Uluc Ali is not clear. They could run away without killing him; there should have been several other briganlines to steal. Moreover, it would be wiser for these fugitives not to draw the attention of the entire empire by assassinating an Ottoman grandee. In short, killing the Grand Admiral and disappearing with his brigantine was a terrible idea. So why do it? Were they commissioned by an unnamed state to kill the Ottoman Grand Admiral? It is obvious that the Habsburgs were not involved, but this is totally possible; Uluc Ali had no shortage of enemies. Again, another possibility was that there were tensions within the Ottoman establishment or more specifically within Uluc Ali's household that pitted the culprits against the Calabrian corsairs.

It is hard to say which of the above theories is valid, or if any of them is valid at all. What we know for sure, however, is that the conspiracy was discovered and the culprits met a terrible end: their noses were cut and they were killed with all sorts of (*diverse sorti*) tortures⁶². Another witness to this conspiracy was Stephan Gerlach, the chaplain of the Austrian ambassador whose memoirs have survived. He related that some of Uluc Ali's slaves were caught just before they assassinated the corsair; they had dug below his bedroom in order to place explosives. They were only two bricks away when they were apprehended because a Spanish conspirator betrayed them to the authorities. According to the chaplain, some were impaled while others were beaten to death. Ironically, the Spanish was among the executed on account of the fact that he participated in the early stages of the plot⁶³. The fact that Gerlach

60. The physician, Şeyh Şucâ, was tried in the Ottoman imperial council with court physicians and the leading *'ulama* present. He was found guilty and imprisoned even though the author who related the story believed that his treatment of the patient was the right one. SELÂNİKİ: *Tarih-i Selânikî*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli. Ankara, 1999, vol. I, p. 111.

61. ASV, SDC, fil. 22, c. 393r (8 January 1585, more veneto).

62. AGS, Estado, leg. 1064, fol. 136 (17 March 1574).

63. GERLACH, S.: *Tagebuch*. Frankfurt am Main, 1674, p. 46.

said nothing of a desired escape to Christianity strengthens our suspicion that they may have been hired by enemy secret services. A word of caution: the presence of a Spanish renegade in the plot should not mislead us into thinking that the Habsburgs were behind the conspiracy. Uluc Ali had several Spanish renegades and slaves, and in turn, the Habsburg secret service did not exclusively hire the Spanish.

It is not very likely that the Habsburg secret service played an active role in this plot. When a year later another attempt was made on Uluc Ali's life, however, it would be planned and funded directly by the Habsburg authorities. Francisco Peloso was one of several agents that the Viceroy of Sicily sent to Istanbul to gather information. When he returned from the Ottoman capital without bringing substantial information in 1575, he quickly came up with an interesting offer, most probably in order to prove his use to his employer. He offered to poison the Grand Admiral and other important captains in the Ottoman navy, something he claimed he could do easily as he was welcome in their houses. Moreover, he could explode the ammunition depot (*magazen de las municiones*) which, he argued, was an easier target than the Arsenal, the primary target of several Habsburg saboteurs in the past. Even though the Viceroy of Sicily, the Duke of Terranova, did not categorically refuse the offer, he was cautious: «I know very well the difference between the word and the deed», between *palabra* and *exequición*, he stated⁶⁴. The Viceroy quickly provided the Greek fire (*fuegos artificiales*) that was necessary for Peloso's sabotage operation. It proved impossible, nevertheless, to find poison (*veneno artificial*) in Sicily. This means that the prospects of a successful assassination already looked thin from the outset⁶⁵. Leaving his son to the Viceroy's care⁶⁶, an undeterred Peloso returned to the Levant, and there is no further mention in the documents about his mission⁶⁷.

In 1573, Don Juan sent to Istanbul two go-betweens named Antonio Avellán and Virgilio Polidoro. Their mission was to accompany the ransomed Ottoman slaves, among whom the son of the Ottoman Grand Admiral at Lepanto, Müezzinzade Ali Pasha. According to the French ambassador, François Noailles, Bishop of Dax, the duo also tested the waters for a five-year truce⁶⁸. Even though negotiations

64. AGS, Estado, leg. 1144, fol. 96 (9 August 1575).

65. *Idem*, fol. 122 (21 October 1575).

66. He received assurances from the Viceroy that if some disgrace befell him in this dangerous mission, he would treat his son in such a way that it was «just» and worthy of his father's service.

67. For Peloso's letters from Chios: AGS, Estado, leg. 1145, fols. 54 (9 February 1576) and 60. Also see. E 1144, fols. 113-4 (29 September 1575).

68. CHARRIÈRE, E. (ed.): *Négociations de la France dans le Levant, ou, Correspondances, mémoires et actes diplomatiques des ambassadeurs de France à Constantinople et des ambassadeurs, envoyés ou résidents à divers titres à Venise, Raguse, Rome, Malte et Jérusalem, en Turquie, Perse, Géorgie, Crimée, Syrie, Egypte, etc., et dans les états de Tunis, d'Alger et de Maroc*. Paris, 1848-60, vol. III, pp. 416-424.

for a truce did not go through, the duo returned to Istanbul two years later to negotiate the ransom of Christian soldiers that had fallen captive in la Goletta. They received a safe-conduct from Sokollu with the condition that they returned with more Ottoman captives to be exchanged with Christians. During their stay in Istanbul, they got in touch with Aurelio Santa Croce, the Habsburg spymaster in the city, Hürrem Bey, a renegade from Lucca and the imperial dragoman (interpreter of the Imperial Council, *Divan-ı Hümayun tercümanı*) on Habsburg payroll, and two new potential Habsburg informants: Murad Ağa, the Lucan *mayordomo* (*kahya*) of Uluc Ali whom Habsburg agents Alferez Francisco de Orejon and Matheo Pozo had contacted in 1567, and Lorenzo Saminiate, the resident of Lucca in Constantinople and a relative of a Habsburg official.

The duo was also carrying letters of encouragement from Philip II addressed to Aurelio, Hürrem and Murad Ağa. The Prudent King congratulated their decision to «reduce themselves to their holy Catholic faith» and asked Murad Ağa to persuade Uluc Ali to follow the same path as well⁶⁹. The fact that Philip II, who generally shunned addressing his agents and informants directly, wrote a letter to Murad Ağa is a clear proof of the importance attributed to secret operations targeting Uluc Ali, his household and the corsair establishment in the Ottoman capital. Avellán established other contacts among Uluc's men and recruited five other renegades who, he believed, could help him convince Uluc to change his allegiance: Süleyman Ağa from Lombardy, a.k.a. Antonio de Vale, the English Comorat (Murad?) Ağa, a.k.a. Carlo Daniel, two French Maltese knights (*dos franceses del hábito de San Juan*) and a Spaniard, the son of the commander of the la Goletta fortress (*capitán de Goleta*)⁷⁰. An interesting side story is that Virgilio Polidoro made a fatal mistake and lost Philip II's letter which fell into the Ottoman hands. The conspiracy was almost compromised if not for Antonio Avellán's ability to think on his feet. He was shocked when the son of an Ottoman pasha, a prisoner-of-war whom he ransomed and brought to Constantinople (he should be the afore-mentioned son of Müezzinzade Ali Pasha), gave him the letter so that he could cryptanalyze it. Realizing the danger, Avellán quickly lied about its contents and destroyed the letter.

The same year, in March 1575, the Viceroy of Sicily dispatched Jaime Losada to Istanbul. Under the pretext of negotiating the exchange of slaves with the

69. Avellán's first letter, AGS, Estado, leg. 1144, fol. 281 (6 June 1575). For Philip II's letters, fols. 283-5. Full text online in SOLA, E.: «Antón Avellán, un eficaz agente español en estambul al descubierto», *Archivo de la Frontera*, <<http://www.archivodelafrontera.com/pdf/A-MED03-avellan.pdf>>.

70. AGS, Estado, leg. 488, Antón Avellán, Constantinopla, 1576 and the two letters written by two of these renegades. SOLA, E.: «Moriscos, Renegados y Agentes Secretos Españoles en la Época de Cervantes», *Otam*, 4, 1993, pp. 350.

Ottomans, he would conduct a secret mission: to contact his former master Uluc Ali and negotiate his defection. Losada was Uluc's *grande amico*, according to the Venetian bailo, and the Calabrian corsair welcomed him very warmly, arranging a house for him to stay in Galata and gladly accepting his presents (*diversas suertes de confituras y quesos y otras cosas*). Previously, he had taken part in the talks between Uluc Ali and the Gasparo Corso brothers in Tunis in 1569. However, in spite of all the courtesy with which he treated his former slave, Uluc was not responsive to his offers. He stated that «the Grand *Señor* gave him everything he wanted and he [Losada] should give up making such offers». Even though he did not relate the entire conversation in his long report (he promised to do it orally, *a boca*), Losada was disillusioned enough to state that these negotiations were a waste of time⁷¹. Was it a coincidence that Losada started the conversation in which the issue of defection came to the fore by mentioning the negotiations that had taken place in Tunis in 1569? Or was it a calculated attempt that demonstrates that his instructions included not only the Grand Admiral's defection but also the submission of one of the corsair ports in North Africa? If this were the case, this port would most likely be the recently conquered Tunis where the Ottoman power was weak and where Uluc Ali left his loyal lieutenant Ramazan Pasha. Unfortunately, given that the instructions he was supposed to have received from the Viceroy of Sicily have not survived, we can only speculate.

The Ottomans and the Habsburgs finally came to a mutual agreement when they signed a truce in February 1581 after forty months of negotiations. The negotiator of this truce and the unofficial Habsburg ambassador Giovanni Margliani plotted another possible attempt on Uluc's life. Given that Uluc was the most ardent opponent of truce negotiations, Margliani should have thought it wise to eliminate such a threat. He wrote to the Viceroy of Naples *Comendador Mayor* Juan de Zúñiga y Requesens that two of his informants among Uluc Ali's men, the aforementioned Sinan and Haydar, offered to assassinate their master. It is worth

71. Even though he refused the offer, Uluc made use of Losada. He secured him an audience with the Ottoman Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha with the hope of acquiring information from him. The Grand Vizier initially asked Losada to intervene in securing the restitution of a ship whose crew rebelled and took refuge in Malta. The conversation took a different turn, however, when the issue came to the possibility of a truce, an opportunity of which both the Grand Vizier and Jaime were quick to realize the importance. The Grand Vizier told him that if Philip II sent Istanbul a diplomat, he would be welcome and well-treated. Losada showed an impressive acumen and aptness in diplomacy, arguing against a possible tribute and refusing to say something binding. Moreover, he quickly socialized within the diplomatic circles of the Ottoman capital by befriending the Venetian, French and Austrian ambassadors. Even though he soon set sail in order to communicate the message to the Habsburg authorities, he died in Otranto before completing his mission and left behind a detailed report. It was one of his men who went to Naples and informed the Viceroy. AGS, Estado, leg. 1072, fol. 14 (15 December 1575), reprinted in SOLA, E., *Uchali*, pp. 220-231; ASV, SDC, fil. 11, fol. 12 (23 March 1577).

noting that the Viceroy of Naples considered killing Uluc Ali morally unproblematic. He could be assassinated with «good conscience» (*buena conciencia*), because he was Philip II's vassal and a renegade. Nevertheless, the same Viceroy opposed Margliani's offer to have Sinan and Haydar assassinate Bartolomeo Brutti, an Albanese go-between who was tampering with truce negotiations in Istanbul. Brutti could not be assassinated with «good conscience» because he was neither his majesty's vassal nor a renegade. Thus Uluc's betrayal to his monarch as well as his abandonment of the true religion meant that he deserved to be killed. Our aim here is not to enter into a theological or a legal debate, but I believe that this example, one of few instances where Habsburg authorities revealed their perception of renegade turncoats like Uluc Ali, is quite enlightening⁷².

The Ottoman-Habsburg truce was signed between Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and Giovanni Margliani in 1581⁷³. It was renewed in 1584 and there were talks of another renewal in 1587, the year of Uluc Ali's death. The Calabrian corsair appeared in the Western Mediterranean for the last time in 1581 for an expedition that never reached its principal target, Morocco. Although he continued to play an important role in Ottoman politics, he was of no more concern to the Habsburgs and thus not a target for Habsburg spies anymore. Engaged in a lengthy and costly war in the eastern front, the Ottomans could not invest in naval operations in the Western Mediterranean. In spite of his pleas for action and political machinations to make sure that the Ottomans pursued a bellicose Mediterranean policy, Uluc Ali had to be content with sweet words and unprofitable assignments such as carrying provisions and victuals in the Black Sea for the Ottoman army fighting in the East.

3. CONCLUSION

This article is as much about go-betweens who operated in Mediterranean borderlands as Uluc Ali himself. These entrepreneurial agents of espionage capitalized on their trans-imperial life trajectories while brokering between capitals. Mastering the cultural codes of both empires, they weaved dense networks of patronage across civilizations, networks which they relied on when they offered central governments their services as information traders, saboteurs, negotiators, assassins and even unofficial diplomatic intermediaries.

72. AGS, Estado, leg. 1081, fols. 61 (24 March 1580) and 94 (31 March 1580).

73. For details of the truce negotiations, see. BRAUDEL, *La Méditerranée*, vol. II, pp. 439-450. SKILLITER, S. A.: «The Hispano-Ottoman Armistice of 1581», *Iran and Islam: in memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky*, ed. C. E. Bosworth. Edinburgh, 1971, pp. 491-515. RODRÍGUEZ SALGADO, M. J.: *Felipe II, el «Paladín de la Cristiandad y la paz con el Turco»*. Valladolid, 2004, pp. 51-181. SOLA, E.: Los que van y vienen, pp. 224-248. GÜRKAN, E. S.: *Espionage in the 16th century Mediterranean*, pp. 291-302.

I have sought here to shed light on the conduits through which covert operations were undertaken by central governments and their agents dispersed throughout the Mediterranean. The power of information gathering mechanisms and the efficiency of epistolary networks illustrate how easy it was to transcend the seemingly stark boundaries which historians once hastily erected between monolithic civilizational/religious/cultural blocks. Islam and Christianity were simply not self-contained binaries dividing the *Mare Nostrum* into two hostile camps. By concentrating on a comprehensive series of negotiations between Habsburg authorities and the key figure of the Ottoman naval establishment, I have also tried to emphasize the possibility of cross-confessional diplomacy in the early modern Mediterranean.

It is also necessary to illuminate a rather less obvious part of this diplomacy. Imperial rivalries did not necessarily play out in the form of open warfare or by means of guns and cannons. In order to eliminate the Ottoman naval threat, the Habsburgs resorted to a number of methods, ranging from open diplomacy to secret warfare, i.e. clandestine measures such as sabotage, bribery and assassination. Whether these produced results or not is irrelevant; the point is that they were deemed worthy of money, manpower and attention. In either case, the amounts dispersed to these agents in whatever operation that seemed implausible to the modern reader were much more modest compared to those employed in military measures. While our agents received some hundred ducats per annum, Uluc was offered amounts changing between ten and twelve thousand ducats. These were not small amounts; but they surely were no match to millions of ducats invested in large fleets and coastal defenses. Though small their success rate may have been, the continued conduct of clandestine activities was surely an affordable gamble.

This study has also highlighted a security issue that the employment of renegades imposed upon the Ottomans. Incorporating these go-betweens into the empire was a double-edged sword. Their connections on the other side of the frontier brought substantial benefits in terms of diplomacy, warfare, information gathering, technology, and trade. Yet, on the other hand, this practice opened the empire to outside influences and brought the possibility of information leakage (as was the case with Uluc Ali's men Haydar and Sinan, but also several others) as well as defection. This threat should be an obvious one for the Ottomans. Some of the renegades were for a good reason extremely careful not to contact their compatriots publicly or seem supportive of their former monarchs in the Ottoman capital⁷⁴.

74. For instance, Gazanfer Ağa always preferred to keep his distance from his Venetian compatriots. PEDANI, M. P.: «Veneziani a Costantinopoli alla fine del XVI secolo», *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 15, 1997, pp. 70, fn. 8.

An interesting detail is that no matter how firmly Uluc Ali refused Habsburg offers of defection, he never denounced a Habsburg agent or had one arrested. On the contrary, he treated them exceptionally well. It could justly be argued that Uluc was trying to make use of these go-betweens who would have the most updated information regarding the enemy's naval preparations and who had connections with the Habsburg authorities that could have been used for diplomatic purposes (please keep in mind that there was no open diplomatic channels and diplomacy between Istanbul and Madrid was conducted through these trans-imperial intermediaries)⁷⁵. Nonetheless, it is fair to assume that Uluc tried to keep such channels of communication open in case things took a different turn in the Ottoman capital. It should not be for nothing that Habsburg agents tried to capitalize on the Calabrian renegade's fear of losing his life and/or property. Such fears were not irrational; many stronger men than Uluc Ali lost everything along the Ottoman corridors of power.

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75. The case of Jaime Losada is a perfect example of this. The Ottomans tried to extract information from him and convinced him to tell the Habsburg authorities to send an ambassador to start to talk truce negotiations. Losada died on the way, but later his mission was picked up by other go-betweens who filled the gap created by the lack of open diplomatic channels between two imperial capitals and who opened truce negotiations on their own initiative, without authorization from the center.

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