Review: Review Essay: The Ottoman Empire and the Sea
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Review Essay: The Ottoman Empire and the Sea


The author, Daniel Panzac, begins the first book under review with the following statement: “Coming after the *Corsaires barbaresques* and the *Caravane maritime*, this work too covers the same theme: the Ottoman Empire and the sea.” He then adds that “more ambitious than the two former works, it intends to follow over a very long period—three and a half centuries—an important Ottoman institution, namely the navy (*marine militaire*).” There is an implied paradox, almost a contradiction, here: for the book tells the story of an important institution in a chronic state of weakness that followed the gigantic rebuilding of the navy’s strength after the battle of Lepanto, a weakness interlaced by spasmodic and only partly successful efforts at reconstruction and modernization until the demise of the empire itself. This long period presents a contrast to the preceding one, which marks the Ottoman navy’s rise since Mehmet the Conqueror and then its glorious dominance during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent. Panzac defines the principal reason for limiting his book to the later period: “To begin this history from the origins themselves of the navy…would have presented a challenge exceeding the capabilities of a single historian, besides the fact that the rise of the Ottoman Empire, especially the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent, has already been treated by many studies.” The author could have added that he is the best qualified scholar for the period in question.

Two somewhat separate themes emerge as dominant in this book: the navy’s organization and structure, a maze of political, technical, logistical, administrative,

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1 It is with great sadness that this reviewer notes the passing away of Daniel Panzac on 7 December 2012. He was a good friend and colleague, and he will be missed.


financial and social components; and its functioning, dominated by two kinds of activity: war waged by full-fledged fleets, called here “guerre d’escadre,” and forays of corsairs, the “guerre de course.” The detailed table of contents on pp. 529–37 helps the reader acquire an idea of what to expect: a thorough treatment of the navy’s structure, dwarfing the story of its activities. Thus in chapter 1, “Reconstitution of the Fleet after Lepanto,” thirty-one of thirty-nine pages are devoted to the rebuilding in its various aspects (the titles of the subsections are: The role of the grand vizier; The role of the kapudan pasha; The ships: the hulls of the vessels, the equipment: oars, ropes and sails, metallurgical products; The men: the sailors, the rowers, the soldiers on board; Reactions of those affected: those made responsible and state employees, those mobilized), and only eight pages to action at sea (A campaign of adaptation, 1572. The reconquest of Tunis). The rapid reconstruction of the sultan’s fleet after Lepanto occupies an almost legendary place in Ottoman historiography, but Panzac’s account is the most detailed and lucid one. Also significant is his corrective conclusion on p. 53, however. While the reconquest of Tunis is routinely brought up as proof of Lepanto’s insignificance and Ottoman Empire’s unimpaired naval dominance, the French scholar admits that “the failure at Malta in 1565 and the defeat at Lepanto in 1571 mark the end of Ottoman ambitions in the western Mediterranean and withdrawal to the eastern Mediterranean, henceforth the heart of the Empire.”

This withdrawal to the eastern Mediterranean signified more than just scaling down the hydrographic and geographic span of Ottoman thalassocratic ambitions. It was a refusal to join—or rather compete with—those maritime powers (chiefly Holland, England and France) that by the middle of the seventeenth century had seized the mastery of the seas and oceans, a process intimately linked with a constant evolution and improvement in naval architecture as well as navigational and military technology on the one hand, and with these powers’ commercial and colonial aspirations on the other. Especially relevant for the subject under discussion, it also signified the penetration of their seaborne trade into Ottoman home waters of the eastern Mediterranean. From then on, the Ottoman navy ceased to count as a factor on the world scale; its history becomes a narrative of attempts to catch up and modernize along European patterns, of efforts to stand up to the declining power of Venice, and ultimately of trying to cope with the nightmarish rise of the Russian specter, a danger held in check not by the Ottoman navy but by that of other powers, chiefly Britain.

However, if the donanma-yi hümayun withdrew after 1571 to the eastern Mediterranean (with the fleeting exception of its 1574 campaign to reconquer

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Tunis), the Ottomans who pursued the guerre de course did not. As Panzac writes, the volume and success of their activities far exceeded that of Christian pirates.

The Barbary corsairs were, especially from the first half of the 17th century, clearly more numerous than those of European states. [They] practiced their trade in an especially favorable context…. The number of ships of European commerce which crisscrossed the Mediterranean was considerable, beyond any possible comparison with their Ottoman counterparts (pp. 129–30).

We see here confirmed the often mentioned phenomenon: given the right strategic and psychological climate, it is the blossoming of seaborne trade that makes piracy flourish.

From 1574 to 1644, the absence of a real guerre navale had favored the guerre de course, especially that of the Barbaresques which then realized a spectacular development. However, if the course barbaresque perturbed European navigation, it did not seriously compromise it. One could paradoxically propose the idea that it even encouraged it. The ransoms paid enriched the corsairs and the owners of the captives, engendering an increased monetization in the Maghreb and developing a consumption of luxury articles and products of European manufacture (p. 140).

The Ottomans thus gained the upper hand in the course, while eschewing competition in the arena of commercial shipping. The implied paradox goes further: the Ottoman guerre de course was good for Europe’s seaborne trade, whereas the Ottoman withdrawal from the commercial arena impoverished Christian piracy.

By far the greatest part of captures of Ottoman ships took place on the trajectory followed by the Alexandria convoys. Elsewhere, we see just a few captures scattered in the Cyclades, around the Peloponnese, as well as along the long coast of North Africa between Cyrenaica and the regency of Algiers. The reason is simple: Except for the Alexandria convoy, commercial navigation under the Ottoman flag in the Mediterranean was little active and [remained] limited to nearby coastal shipping in the Aegean Sea by small vessels usually manned by Greek crews, and along the African coast by small Arab vessels. The Christian course was thus limited to attacks on the Alexandria convoy and to coastal raids (p. 121).

The guerre d’escadre reappeared with the Cretan campaign in 1645, and the Porte expected a speedy victory. The time was right:

Venice was exhausted by the terrible plague of 1631 as well as by [recent] wars in northern Italy…In contrast, a series of accords and
treaties left the Ottoman State free to use its army and fleet... Peace was reestablished with Persia in 1639 and with the Habsburg Empire in 1641; in 1642 Azov was retaken from the Cossacks and an agreement was concluded with Russia, while George Racoczy, prince of Transylvania, ... recognized the sultan’s suzerainty. Evoking the efficaciousness of Mehmed Sokollu three quarters of a century earlier, the Ottoman state mobilized... an imposing military and naval force that left Istanbul on 30 April 1645 (pp. 144–45).

The Venetians had been aware of great preparations during the winter of 1644–45 in the arsenal of Istanbul and then followed with an almost sympathetic eye the sailing of the fleet, hoping that the target might be Malta, whose corsair knights were a nuisance to them too. As Panzac writes on p. 142, “Since the treaty of 1573, Venice always scrupulously avoided... participating in the warlike expeditions of its former allies of the Holy League against the Ottoman Empire; nevertheless, there was a tacit agreement that she could defend herself against attacks launched against her ships by North African corsairs.” Such an attack occurred in July 1638, when

after having criss-crossed the Adriatic, a squadron of sixteen galleys and galliots from Algiers and Bizerta, led by Ali Bishnin, sought refuge in the roadstead of Vlorë (Valona) in Ottoman Albania. After a four week blockade, the Venetian squadron under Admiral Capello... penetrated into the roadstead, bombarded the Ottoman forts, and seized the corsairs’ ships, of which the admiral’s galley was sent to Venice and the others were sunk at Corfu to serve as breakwaters.

This violation of imperial territory enraged Murat IV, but the ongoing war with Iran made him accept a peaceful settlement against an indemnity payment of 250,000 ducats. With a new sultan on the throne and seven years later, the Signoria expected peace with the Porte to continue. That wishful thinking was shattered when a great fleet reinforced by regional contingents ranging from Alexandria to the Maghreb, a total of over 350 ships, reached Crete on 23 June. The Venetians scrambled to mobilize their fleet, and the contest between the huge empire which by then had approached the maximum extent of its size and the small merchant republic was to last a full generation—from 1645 to 1669.

The Ottomans may have started the war with an immense war fleet, but, as Panzac writes,

The priority of Ottoman leaders was to bring to Crete reinforcements, in men and matériel, necessary for the conquest of the island, while avoiding a decisive naval confrontation. In contrast, the strategy of the Venetians... was to prevent at all costs the Ottoman reinforcements from reaching the island and they thus endeavored to destroy the naval potential of their adversary (p. 145).
Had the Ottoman Empire been a strong naval power, the dice might have fallen the other way: the Ottomans could have endeavored to destroy the naval potential of Venice, or to bottle up their opponent’s fleet in the “Gulf of Venice,” and the island would have fallen into their lap like a ripe fruit. Instead, for over a decade the republic’s navy thwarted that of the empire in its home waters, at times even bottling it up in the Dardanelles.

What had happened since the time, a mere century earlier, when the squadrons of Suleyman the Magnificent defied their only rival worthy of the name, those of Charles V and Philip II, all over the Mediterranean, including Spanish home waters in that sea’s westernmost reaches? Having discussed in great detail various aspects of the campaign on pp. 145–62, Panzac proceeds, somewhat indirectly, to address this question (pp. 162–69). Like many other historians, he emphasizes the sailing warship’s superiority to the galley, an innovation long realized on the oceans but only recently introduced by Atlantic powers into the Mediterranean. Both Venice and the Ottoman Empire were beginning to use sailing warships too, often hired from the English and the Dutch, but the Venetians did so more than the Ottomans—hence, according to Panzac, their margin of superiority at sea (p. 155). This explanation stops short of asking the crucial question: why was it Venice that adjusted faster? The author comes closer to identifying the cause of Ottoman weakness on p. 163, when he writes that

the Ottoman fleet, primarily an auxiliary branch of the army, was incapable of conceiving of a strategy that would be its own, something that would have speeded up the end of the war. While the Venetians were able to impose for a duration of fifteen years an effective blockade of the Dardanelles…the obligation of the kapudan pasha to bring back the fleet to Istanbul each year at the end of the campaign…prevented him from establishing a surveillance and especially the blockade of the Adriatic, although the roadstead of Vlorë (Valona) was situated on the strait of Otranto, only 80 kilometers wide, and it also prevented him from using the ports of Lepanto, Patras, or Navarino to survey and intercept Venetian vessels.

Indeed, the Ottoman strategic position was infinitely better than that of Venice. So why did not an Ottoman fleet establish a blockade of Venice? The marginal superiority of Venice thanks to her sailing warships—if there ever was one—could hardly have caused the monstrous imbalance at sea, where the diminutive power’s navy stymied the fleet of the mighty empire on the threshold of the Gate of Felicity. The root cause was an imbalance in strategy, as Panzac writes, but that in turn calls for an explanation. He hints at in on p. 143: “The conquest of Crete… was more a simple act of revenge against Venice, and even more, one of conquering new territory open to military expansion of an Empire which dictated its terms to central and eastern Europe as well as to the Near East. And it was, in the last analysis, a chance to advance the spread of Islam.”
Whatever the cause, the war of Crete revealed the hitherto unsuspected weakness of the Ottoman navy. The cause of the imbalance of power between the two navies went beyond the question of whether the right kind of ships was used, or even that of the proper strategic planning. The navy of the Serenissima was functional—it had the task of protecting its seaborne trade and shipping lanes, and partly overlapped with its merchant marine; that of the Porte did not—as Panzac writes, the Ottoman navy was above all the auxiliary of an army: its task was not protecting shipping lanes and securing connections with overseas bases but supporting the conquest of territories. And since territorial expansion seldom called for naval support, much of the time the imperial fleet remained idle, with adverse effects on the state of the ships and seamanship of the men.

Such policies might have doomed the naval branch of another state’s military might, but the Ottoman Empire’s resilience and organizational genius (and, once again, its exceptional geo-strategic advantages and geo-economic assets) time and again reemerged also at sea, bearing fruits that confounded contemporary observers and confuse modern historians. The title of the section describing this resilience is suggestive: “The First Morean War: a successful metamorphosis of the navy (1684–1699)” (p. 172). The process had started already in 1682, when the grand vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha ordered the construction of ten sailing warships (p. 171). The measure came none too soon. Two years later Venice, still smarting from the loss of Crete and jumping on the bandwagon of the Holy League after the collapse of the siege of Vienna in 1683, stepped out of her customary neutrality and declared war on the Porte. By then the structure of the Ottoman navy had been modified in a telling manner: Alongside the traditional fleet of galleys commanded by the kapudan pasha, there appeared a fleet of sailing warships (kalyon sınıfı). This process was partly inspired and bolstered by Algerian corsairs, one of whom, Mezemorta Hüseyn Pasha, led in February 1695 the Ottoman warship squadron to two victories over the Venetians and to the recovery of Chios. For the rest of that year and during 1696, the two fleets engaged in a sparring contest over various parts of the Aegean.

In contrast to the Cretan war during which the Ottoman fleet had often been blocked inside the Dardanelles…, the Morean war was a real naval war…. Sea battles, henceforth dominated by sailing warships, saw the Ottoman ships capable of withstanding those of Venice, or even of defeating them. This unexpected reestablishment of the Ottoman navy was to a large extent due to Mezzomorto, appointed kapudan pasha in 1695 until his death in 1701. It behooves us, however, to emphasize the limits of this process, especially in the domain of protection of seaborne traffic (transport maritime) within the confines of the Empire (p. 175).

The last sentence is fraught with meaning. By “limits” Panzac may mean both geographical and international limitations: the contest was for the Aegean Sea, Ottoman home waters; and the adversary was Venice, no longer the mercurial mistress of the sea she used to be in her heyday but a declining power totally
eclipsed, in war and trade, by the maritime merchant empires of the day. As for the “seaborne traffic,” the author explains and develops his argument on pp. 175–76:

We have seen how much interior navigation of the Empire had been perturbed by Venetian ships… The Ottoman State then had recourse to Europe’s neutral shipping in order to maintain, first and foremost, the indispensable relations between the capital and the provinces, but also those of the provinces among themselves. From the beginning of the Morean war, Venetians again attacked Ottoman maritime connections. The government…once more turned to the neutrals, and the text of the Capitulations, renewed in 1675 with England and in 1680 with the Netherlands, for the first time alludes to the hiring, for commercial purposes, of European ships by the Ottomans. Its preferences, however, at least for commercial ships, went for those of the French. Thus in August 1686 the French ambassador…obtained from the sultan a firman which made such practice official…This document thus reveals the original traits of the caravane maritime: European ships from now on freely ensure the relations between Ottoman ports, especially those of North Africa and Egypt as well as those of the latter and Istanbul…Their importance and role in case of war is explicitly emphasized by the firman of 1686: “French ships…carry the possessions and merchandise of Muslim pilgrims and other Ottoman subjects from one port to another or to the Gate of Felicity, in order to ensure their safety from Venetian ships.” This means an official admission of the insufficiency of the Ottoman merchant fleet and the inability of the war fleet to protect it.

The paradox is indeed telling. The Ottoman navy had been modernized enough to successfully confront that of Venice in Ottoman home waters, but not to the extent of becoming functional where it really mattered—ensuring the safety of the Empire’s commercial navigation and links with overseas provinces. Efforts at the navy’s modernization become a recurring theme in this book, but the galley to the man-of-war (kadırgadan kalyona) stage, which we can bracket with the years 1682 and 1701, was the most significant. Panzac discusses it on pp. 179–82, introducing this segment, La nouvelle marine ottomane, with what amounts to a homage to Mezemorta Hüseyn Pasha: “It [the new navy] was largely due to the action of Mezzomorto…He was not only a brilliant admiral. Aware of the deficiencies and of the archaic state of the navy, backed by the Divan, and supported by Sultan Mustafa II, he radically reorganized it. His reforms were assembled in a kanunname published one month and a half after his death.”

The role of Mezemorta Hüseyn Pasha, originally an Algerian corsair, draws our attention to what is at first sight a curious gap in the scope of the time and space covered by the book. We have seen that the Ottoman guerre de course thrived especially in the central and western Mediterranean, and Panzac discusses it in intermittent but considerable detail up to p. 140 or, in chronological terms, up to 1644. The course in fact continued to thrive in those waters until 1815, but
disappears from this book after that page and date except when incidentally mentioned on such few occasions as that of the above-mentioned kapudan pasha. This is regrettable, for it impairs the comprehensiveness of the subject’s treatment. The reason for the omission may be its significant coverage by the author in the form of his two masterly studies mentioned at the beginning of this review, besides many valuable articles. Two other types of the course also existed in this period, that of the Uskoks in the Adriatic and that of the Cossacks in the Black Sea. Panzac deals with the Uskoks on p. 98, a brevity attributable to his implied view that they could hardly compare with the Turkish corsairs or even with the Zaporogian Cossacks:

Fleeing Ottoman rule, Catholic inhabitants of Bosnia sought refuge in the 16th century in a region under Austrian domination destined to become a Military march (Militärgrenze). Some of them settled at and around a town called Senj on the Dalmatian coast to the south of Rijeka…. The Uskoks, “fugitives,” then took up piracy, posing as champions of Christendom. In fact…they shamelessly plundered any cargoes and seized ships for ransom regardless of the flag, including those of Catholic Venice…. Ceding to vehement protests by Venice and the Ottoman state, the Habsburg state at first tried to register them [in government service] under the command of Austrian officers, without much success. The Venetians then mounted a naval blockade of Senj, with indifferent results. Finally, after the Austro-Turkish peace of 1606, the Austrians sent troops which took the town and deported the worst offenders to the interior. Their numbers dwindled to 700, and those among them who obstinately persisted in piracy were deported after the new treaty of 1616.

Panzac then devotes five valuable and informative pages (pp. 104–9) to the Cossacks. Yet another omission, which is not really an omission, is the almost total absence of the Indian Ocean from Panzac’s book. The reason is clear and valid: after 1571, except for a few desultory corsair actions during the 1580s, the Ottoman navy, imperial or corsair, had disappeared from those waters.

The creation of the “new Ottoman navy,” to use Panzac’s words, launched in 1682, tested by the war of 1684–99, and legislated in the kanunname inspired by the great kapudan pasha before he died in 1701, may have been the most radical and successful attempt at reform carried out by the Porte. It bore fruit in this war and the next, also with Venice, in 1715–18. Both times the donanma-yı himayun reasserted its presence in the Aegean and achieved a draw or even an edge over its traditional maritime rival. The war of 1715–18 was the last between the empire and the republic, and also the last war from which the Ottoman navy emerged up to a point victorious. Panzac writes on p. 184: “Victory over Russia of Peter the Great in 1710–11 prompted the Ottoman state to re-conquer the Morea, in order to again ensure its mastery over the entire Aegean Sea and place the Dardanelles beyond the reach of the menacing Venetian fleet.” In my view, this motivation is unlikely, chiefly because such concerns were unnecessary. Venice was in no mood for another naval contest with the Ottomans, to say nothing of trying to threaten the
Dardanelles, and her overarching pursuit was, as it had always been, trade, not war. A more plausible explanation is yet another grand vizier’s ambition bolstered by the Porte’s fundamental abhorrence of losing a territory that, as an Ottoman possession, had been part of the Dar al-Islam, to the infidel. The strategic assets presented by the Peloponnese could indeed have inspired the Porte to undertake a naval and commercial expansion beyond the Aegean into the eastern Mediterranean and the Adriatic, but no such things happened, a fact symbolized by the neglect—or inability—to resume efforts to conquer the strategically invaluable Corfu after the initial failure in 1716 (p. 185). Panzac indirectly says as much. The seaborne struggle was again pushed by the Venetians back to the vicinity of the Dardanelles in 1717, but the Ottomans managed to force them back to the southern rim of the Peloponnese where the two adversaries then fought each other in several sea battles that were as inconclusive as they were exhausting, and the scenario was replayed in 1718. Although victorious in the above-mentioned sense (facilitating territorial conquest), in the sense of naval strategy Ottomans contented themselves with a draw, in their home waters, against an exhausted adversary whose overall strength had entered inexorable decline.

Nevertheless, the reconquest of the Peloponnese could not have been achieved without the support of the navy, and it confirmed the latter’s value in the eyes of the Porte. Panzac writes on p. 189: “In contrast to the republic of Venice which, after 1718, gave up on maintaining a war fleet, the efforts made by the Ottoman State to keep and even expand its fleet after the peace of Passarovitz preserved it from a third Morean war, thereby enabling it to avoid fighting simultaneously on two fronts.” Panzac is referring here to the war with Russia in 1736–39, which in 1737 was joined by Austria; the latter then put pressure on Venice to join the alliance, but the republic refused and signed a pact of neutrality with the Porte.

It was probably on the occasion of this threat of war that the French embassy in Istanbul tried to obtain exact data on the Ottoman navy and sent them to its minister. This État de la Marine du Grand Seigneur, kept in the Archives nationales in Paris, is especially valuable because in the present state of historiography, no equivalent Ottoman documents are available. It offers a detailed portrayal of the Ottoman fleet and of its organization and, taking into account the precision of the data it contains and the number of Turkish names and words found there, it was most probably compiled on the basis of information supplied by Ottoman informants who belonged to the executive branch of the State (pp. 189–90).

We thus find, on pp. 190–202, a description of the imperial fleet (Une flotte imposante) based on this document in its various aspects, including a comparison with those of other major maritime powers. On p. 192 we see a table, “Les flottes de guerre (1736–1739)”, which lists thirty-three warships for the Ottoman Empire.

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thirteen for Venice, forty-nine for France, forty-nine for Spain, and 140 for England. Panzac writes:

This table shows that Ottoman sea power occupied an important place in the Mediterranean during the years 1735–1740. It clearly dwarfed that of Venice…[Moreover,] in contrast to Venice and the Ottoman Empire the totality of whose fleets was concentrated in the Mediterranean, the other European sea powers—[the fleet of] each of which was superior to that of the Ottomans—were forced to divide them between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. The Spanish fleet was almost entirely based in the Atlantic ports. In 1738, France stationed 14 ships [vaisseaux] and 3 frigates at Toulon. As for England, whose superiority was overwhelming, it had in the region 16 ships in 1739. Admittedly, the English, French, and Spanish always could transfer there additional squadrons. That involved, however, long, complicated and costly operations, and on paper, the Ottoman fleet was, at this time, the most powerful in the Mediterranean.

The long description of this “flotte imposante” comes after a brief account of what one might call, with some degree of exaggeration, the second naval war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia (1736–39). Venice was not the only state that had jumped on the bandwagon of the Holy League formed in 1684. Russia did so two years later, a move that signified the inception of her drive to gain access to the Black Sea. Peter the Great’s first attempt to seize Azov in 1695 failed, partly because its garrison benefited from a steady supply of men and matériel provided by an Ottoman naval force, whereas the besieging Russians lacked an adequate counterpart.

The Tsar then ordered the construction…of 22 oar-propelled vessels…The flotilla, completed by two other ships armed with 36 guns…was commanded…by the tsar himself. It came in May 1696 to blockade the port of Azov besieged by a Russian army. An Ottoman squadron consisting of six ships and seventeen galleys arrived on 24 June and tried, several times, to break the blockade but failed, and on 28 July the garrison of Azov surrendered (p. 178).

The next two years, 1697 and 1698, witnessed efforts made by the Ottomans to bolster their naval forces in the area, but could not prevent the adversary’s steady progress that included the founding of a base at Taganrog. The two years’ truce concluded on 3 December 1698 ceded both Azov and Taganrog to the Russians, and was then confirmed in the peace (in fact, again a truce for 30 years) signed in July 1700 (p. 179). This was an ominous breach in the status of the Black Sea—even if so far represented only by its ramification, the Sea of Azov—as an exclusive Ottoman preserve. True, there came a prolonged period of grace which restored that exclusivity through a stroke of luck that happened on land in the next Russo-Turkish
war. In July 1711 an Ottoman fleet of eighteen ships and fourteen galleys entered the Sea of Azov and, avoiding confrontation with a smaller Russian squadron, landed troops which were quickly thrown back. At that very time, however, Peter the Great, having pushed too rashly into Moldavia, was surrounded with his troops on the river Prut by a larger Ottoman force under the grand vizier Baltaci Mehmet Pasha. The tsar regained his liberty at the price of restoring Azov and Taganrog to the Ottomans, and the Black Sea with its Azov extension was again an Ottoman lake.

The war fought with Russia and Austria twenty-five years later was marked by a draw with the former and success against the latter, seemingly consolidating that exclusivity. The Treaty of Belgrade, signed between the Ottoman Empire and Austria on 18 September 1739, restored Serbia’s premier city to the Ottomans, while that of Nissa, signed on 3 October between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, included a clause that once more reasserted the Black Sea as an exclusive Ottoman preserve, for it barred all Russian shipping—military as well as commercial—from it. It lulled the Porte into a self-confidence which Panzac introduces in Chapter 5 with the headline “A reestablished but fragile domination (1701–1774),” and describes in the following manner:

Endowed from now on with a battle-tested naval force, the Ottoman State endeavored to reestablish the integrity of its maritime façade both in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea. This will be achieved in 1740. There follow three decades which probably belong to the most peaceful ones ever known by the Empire on the naval plane, a period during which the Ottoman fleet, maintained at a satisfactory level of power, contents itself with routine cruises in an Aegean Sea that appears pacified. This peaceful situation is brutally interrupted from 1769 onwards (p. 183).

Indeed, behind this façade there were features that portended future trouble. Panzac writes on p. 189:

In 1740, the Ottoman maritime space was reestablished, but this has happened chiefly thanks to victories won by the army on land. True, the navy had played an effective supporting role in the Morea, but if it managed to defy that of Venice, or even to dominate it, the conditions of naval war on the Black Sea, in 1695–1700 as well as in 1736–39, created difficulties for it, allowing it, at best, to confront the Russian fleet in the Sea of Azov.

Indeed, while in the south the donanma-yi hümâyûn fought against the navy of a small republic entering a stage of terminal decline, in the north it was confronted by the fledgling squadrons of a rising giant. At first sight Panzac’s somewhat enigmatic statement acquires meaning if it is designed to show the incongruousness of setting the Porte’s struggle against the two powers on a par. The Ottoman Empire should not have had to worry even if Venice had kept the Peloponnese, because the
republic, fully aware of her weakness, neither could nor wanted to expand further at the expense of the Ottoman Empire; and there was little the latter gained from possessing the Peloponnesse in the naval sense, unless it was bent on launching a maritime and commercial expansion into the wider Mediterranean, which it was not. In contrast, the struggle between Russia and the Ottoman Empire entailed a great promise for the former, and a searing danger for the latter. For Russia, it meant two things: acquiring potentially rich agricultural land of the Pontic steppes, ready to be settled by the tsar’s subjects; and a breakthrough toward the Black Sea, with all the strategic and economic rewards offered by that penetration. For the Ottoman Empire, the struggle meant—or should have meant—keeping the dangerous hulking neighbor out of there, defending this valuable territory inhabited by her Tatar vassals, and conserving naval mastery of the Black and Azov Seas both for economic reasons and as a matter of its own imperial security. Moreover, a third element further enhanced the importance of this contest. On the Russian side, it was curbing and absorbing a bothersome neighbor that was the Tatar Khanate; on the Ottoman side, it was saving this Khanate, a Muslim vassal, from being overwhelmed by the infidel.

The Porte, however, did not see things in this light. Content with the outcome of the last Venetian war and the most recent one with Russia and Austria, it embarked on a three decades long peace that proved its worth by enhancing the Ottoman Empire’s prosperity and incipient acceptance in the European concert of nations. The prosperity was due to internal productivity and commerce, as well as to foreign trade carried by European shipping. Competition was fierce among Europe’s nations, and their navies had become an indispensable tool for promoting their commercial and colonial interests. The latest actor to appear on this scene was Russia, eager to seize a share of both, and she kept strengthening her navy as well as commercial shipping for that purpose. Not so the Ottoman Empire. After the wars with decrepit Venice and a fledgling Russia (fledgling, that is, as a naval power in the Black Sea), it had little use for its navy except annual tax-gathering cruises of a few ships between Istanbul and Alexandria. It was this passivity, rather than the long peace itself, that proved harmful for the empire as a sea power. Panzac indirectly hints at this when on p. 203 he describes the effects of the long peace:

Thus continued the summer cruises of the Ottoman fleet during which the kapudan pasha collected the taxes, as part of his duties, and dispensed justice along the ports of call, ensuring thereby the presence of the sultan’s flag in the maritime provinces of his empire. In contrast, they never involved any military preparation: as a measure of saving money, only a fraction of the ships were armed, and we see a total absence of sailing maneuvers, of gunnery practice or of crew training. The wars of 1684–1718, in which the Ottoman navy had gained great experience, were followed by several decades of peace in the eastern Mediterranean during which the Ottoman sailors somehow lost the purpose of the navy’s existence: making war. In 1770, the awakening will be brutal.
The awakening may have been brutal, but the adversary who roused the Ottomans was Russia, a state whose navy too had passed through four decades of peace at sea. The author’s oversight eerily reminds us of that of Fernand Braudel, who proposed a similar explanation for the failure of the Ottoman navy in the Cretan war: “inaction” caused by seven decades of peace that separated it from the conquest of Cyprus—disregarding the fact that Venice too had passed through those seventy-odd years without war at sea.

The weakness which the awakening revealed was not new, but it became far more critical because for the first time in its long history, the Porte faced an enemy who not only had become stronger but, unlike Venice or any other European adversary, was also determined to project his power into the Ottoman Empire’s terrestrial and maritime core. The nightmare would become a permanent one, passing through a gamut of often contradictory mutations and receding only with the end of the Cold War. Fending off this specter would acquire a crucial naval dimension, and Ottoman history becomes, henceforth, the story of an unending sequence of resumed efforts to rebuild and modernize the sultan’s fleet after repeated slippages back into obsolescence, incompetence, and defeat. This paradoxical and contradictory situation was as painful and hard to deal with for Ottoman statesmen as it is to explain for modern historians. Almost two thirds of Panzac’s book, pp. 204–504, illustrate this problem. The new phase is introduced on p. 204 by the title “The Russo-Turkish War 1768–1774,” and we read on p. 209: “The Russians totally dominated the eastern Mediterranean, and their cruises allowed them to intervene everywhere with success.” On the next page, however, the author qualifies that statement: “In fact, the Russians having failed to benefit from their victory at Çeşme, their naval dominance produced nothing tangible in the Mediterranean, because they had no land troops to extend their dominance on the continent.” This is to disregard the broader context of Russia’s victory. First of all, her squadrons stymied Ottoman shipping of provisions to the capital, which had adverse effects on the Ottoman war effort; the Porte avoided Istanbul’s starvation only by relying on neutral shipping, which continued because Russia could not risk a simultaneous conflict with other powers. The main harm, however, was caused by the fact that the destruction of the Ottoman fleet in the Mediterranean prevented it from moving to the Black Sea basin where more was at stake. Not the Peloponnese but the Crimea was the vital peninsular possession, and its loss, camouflaged in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) but one that the Porte had to fully acknowledge with the Peace of Jassy (1792), was to have fateful consequences for the Ottoman Empire. It would be hard to overstate the magnitude of the Russian victory in these two wars, which were intimately connected by what became their most important outcome: the extinction of the Tatar Khanate as an Ottoman vassal and bulwark against Russia, and transformation of its territory—the Pontic Steppes and the Crimea—into a base for Russian naval mastery of the Black Sea, no longer an Ottoman lake but an avenue for expansion toward the Straits and Constantinople.

Victory in the war of 1768–74 enabled Russia to lay the groundwork for this change; that of 1787–92 grounded the change in official recognition as well as naval realities. These were many, but could be both symbolically and realistically summed
up in two pivotal facts: the new naval base at Sevastopol, founded in 1784, and the battle off Cape Kaliakra, fought on 31 July 1791. The latter was the last engagement between the two fleets in this war, and the consequence of Admiral Ushakov’s victory over the kapudan pasha, Giritli Hüseyn, was the withdrawal of the Ottoman fleet into the safety of the Straits. Henceforth not the Ottoman Empire but Russia was the number one naval power in the Black Sea, marking the beginning of a new era. It is in this light—mastery over a vital sea space—that the second of the two wars should be evaluated, discarding the routine verdict stating that on the whole, the Ottoman Empire came out of this war unscathed, since it incurred no territorial loss. It reinforced the impact of the previous war, which Panzac sums up in the following terms on p. 212:

This war was at the origin of what quickly appeared as a permanent element in international relations in this part of the world, summed up under the lapidary title of the Eastern Question. It was the consequence of the henceforth patent weakness of the Ottoman Empire, which whetted the appetites and stirred the rivalries of the powers over their influence in the territories still under Ottoman rule. What is no less certain is that the Ottoman leaders were aware of this situation and endeavored to remedy these insufficiencies…The coming conflicts threatening the future of the Empire would also be at sea. Once more, reconstruction and modernization of the Ottoman navy were on the official agenda.

One of these Ottoman leaders was Selim III, and the attention he paid to the navy paid off: under the direction of his damat and kapudan pasha, Küçük Hüseyn Pasha, on one hand, and with assistance from French, Swedish, and other experts on the other, a new fleet came into being that met with approval and even admiration from European observers. Yet in the next two battles it failed the test. As Panzac writes on pp. 263–64:

In the years 1806–1812, facing the English and Russians, the Ottoman navy finds itself again in a real naval war…At the battle of Mount Athos which lasted from July 1st to July 4th 1807, the Russians lost no ship and had 79 men killed and 189 wounded. The losses aboard the Ottoman fleet are not known, but eight of its ships were sunk, scuttled or captured, and the ship Seddi’il Bahr, which surrendered on July 3, suffered 230 dead and 160 wounded from among its crew of 850 men…The striking disproportion between the Ottoman…and Russian losses shows that the latter possessed competent crews…This was not the case for the Ottoman navy…Over a period of twelve years, Selim III and his advisors had managed to build and arm a magnificent war fleet, but it displayed…a serious…weakness. Its physical component had attained a level of excellence, but not the formation and level of competence to be expected from the men assigned to use it.
This may also be the right place to single out the battle of Mount Athos as the last of the three historic encounters between the Ottoman and Russian navies. The first, at Çeşme in 1770, crippled the former and facilitated the main thrust of the Russians toward the Crimea and Black Sea littoral; the second, off Cape Kaliakra on 11 August (or, if we go by the Julian calendar then still used in Russia, on 31 July) 1791, sealed the outcome of the two wars, which was the incorporation of the Crimea into the Tsar’s empire and transformation of the Black Sea from an Ottoman lake into an avenue of Russia’s thrust toward the Straits and the Mediterranean; the third, off Mount Athos, delivered the approaches to the Gate of Felicity to the Russians. Only the battle of Çeşme has received adequate attention from historians; the other two are either ignored or inadequately interpreted (with the understandable exception of Russian historiography). Panzac’s book is one of many examples. He glosses over the battle of Kaliakra with the ambiguous sentence “The Turks cruised in the region before clashing, on 11 August, with the Russian fleet as undecided as the previous ones” (p. 253). Stanford Shaw’s frequently cited article about the navy of Selim III is another example. The eminent historian singles out the navy as “the one case of military reforms launched by the enlightened sultan that can be qualified as successful, inasmuch as the Ottoman navy, unlike the army, gave a good account of itself when confronted by the enemy.” We have seen what happened in the battle of Mount Athos. Senyavin’s victory in July 1807 enabled him to place a stranglehold on the Dardanelles, besides consolidating the Russian presence in the Mediterranean with all the consequences that could have followed. What saved the day for the Ottomans—and, in the long run, for the British—was Napoleon’s victory over the Russians at Friedland on 14 June, which led to the peace of Tilsit on 7–10 July and orders from Alexander I that Senyavin return with his fleet to the Baltic.

5 “Selim III and the Ottoman Navy,” *Turcica* 1 (1969): 221–26. This article mirrors the fate of the Ottoman navy. The author successfully portrays the impressive modernization and buildup of the infrastructure—shipyards, teaching establishments, type and number of ships—but fails when he takes up the application of that formidable apparatus: here, his account is riddled with anachronisms and factual errors. He writes on p. 240: “The revitalized and modernized navy fought a number of successful engagements against the European enemies of the Sultan. Already in the war with Russia and Austria (1787–1792), Gazi Hasan Pasha’s fleet held back the Russians to a stalemate on the Danube and on the Black Sea and routed the Mediterranean pirates who had been liberally supplied with money and arms by Russian agents.” The success of the Ottoman navy against the Aegean pirates during the war of 1787–92 was real (although never complete), but it precludes the very reforms Shaw set out to describe, those launched by Selim III with the appointment of Küçük Hüseyin Pasha to the post of kapudan pasha. Gazi Hasan Pasha failed to hold back the Russians, which caused his replacement with Giritli Hüseyin Pasha in November 1788. The new commander in turn not only failed to hold back the Russians but his defeat off Cape Kaliakra meant more than just losing a battle: the Ottomans withdrew to the safety of the Straits, leaving the Black Sea to the Russians. As for Gazi Hasan Pasha’s routing the Mediterranean pirates, Shaw confused him with other commanders, the latest being Küçük Hüseyin Pasha, kapudan pasha from 1792 to 1803, who indeed scored signal success against such Aegean pirates as Lambro and Kara-Kaçan in the early years of his career, thus after the war with Russia. The real test of the new
The Ottoman navy’s reconstruction, modernization, preparation for conflicts at sea would threaten the Empire: an unending challenge for the Porte, and a problem for the book’s author, who implicitly admits the ultimate futility of those efforts and cannot but admit the following reality:

Having sized up the range of Russian ambitions…, Great Britain rose as the protector of the Ottoman Empire which, in her view, had become a barrier to Russian expansion in the East. This opposition to Russia, in what has been called the Great Game, would henceforward be a constant of Britain’s foreign policy all along the 19th century (p. 262).

This reality also makes the task of the scholar writing a book on the history of the Ottoman navy in this final period of its existence difficult and painful, for it is an extraordinary tale of often successful efforts at rebuilding and modernization relapsing into irrelevance and dependence on the will and fleets of the Great Powers. Panzac repeatedly tries to explain this phenomenon, most emphatically on pp. 264–65 where he develops his above-quoted statement about the human dimension of the navy’s problems:

The disasters incurred by the Ottoman navy were not due only to the insufficient number of officers who had benefited from modern training. It derived chiefly from the existence of a patent cultural gap between European instructors and their students. The intellectual approach of the Europeans, primarily the French, was methodical, rational and scientific, hard to follow and assimilate for their interlocutors whose education, formation and reasoning were profoundly different from theirs. This incomprehension was made worse by an ingrained distrust of what was brought by the Westerners coming from the Dar al-Harb, land of war, the centuries-old adversary of the Dar al-Islam.6

navy should have come with Napoleon’s intrusion into the eastern Mediterranean, especially the occupation of the Ionian Islands and of Egypt, but did not really, for the essential fighting and operations were done by the British and Russians. The moment of truth came when the alliance was reversed and Russia once more became the enemy: as we have seen, that chapter was closed with the battle of Mount Athos.


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The rest of the book, a whole 237 pages of text, reflects this contradiction. We read about such disasters as the battle of Navarino and such humiliations as the captivity of the Ottoman fleet in Mehmet Ali’s Alexandria, about renewed efforts at rebuilding and modernization, about the modernized navy’s failure to carry out the task of protecting the empire’s integrity not only from Russia but even from internal dangers such as Egypt, and about the fundamental dependence on the navies of the Western powers, chiefly that of Britain, to ensure the empire’s survival. Even they would not always provide complete protection. To Britain, the overarching goal was to keep Russia out of the Straits, and to see Egypt safely tucked away within the Ottoman Empire and thus sheltered from other powers, a stance then modified with the opening of the Suez Canal and eventual occupation of that region by British troops. In contrast, Britain’s reluctant intervention in the Greek war of independence on behalf of the rebels, an issue less vital to her interests, did indeed impair the empire’s integrity, as did her acceptance of the French occupation of Algeria.

Panzac presents a lucid portrayal and discussion of these events, but again, it is the structural, organizational, and modernizing aspects of the Ottoman navy that receive his main attention. After the revolutionary shift of the types of ships from oar-propelled galleys to sail-driven warships at the turn of the eighteenth century, and the even more radical change from sail to steam that followed the Battle of Navarino, there came a third revolution perhaps even more drastic because the sultan’s capital ships began to be built no longer in Ottoman shipyards but in those of Europe. In the chapter “A Metamorphosis: The Navy in the Period of the Tanzimat (1842–1878),” the author states on p. 318:

> The reign of Abdülaziz comported a spectacular break with the navy of the previous reign. The construction of an imposing and costly fleet of armored ships, no longer built in Ottoman arsenals but in European shipyards was its most salient feature. It was accompanied...by a thorough reorganization of the administration, of the arsenal and of the formation of the personnel.

On the following pages we read about the progression of this trend marked by ever-increasing dependence on Europe’s arsenals, expertise, and ultimately the presence of Europeans in the Ottoman navy itself at first as instructors but eventually also as commanders. Modernization now meant more than just a switch from sail to steam or from wood to metal and armor, but with the dawn of the twentieth century it included an ever more sophisticated array of new weapons from torpedoes to submarines.

Another new element appeared on the scene, however, a different and ominous one. The traditional Great Game between the British and Russian empires became sidelined by the rise of a strong and aggressive Germany, frightening many but not...

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the Ottomans. The persistent francophilia and occasional anglophilia of Ottoman statesmen receded before growing sympathies and admiration, among army officers, for the state that was now on the cutting edge of military progress. At the outbreak of World War I, Enver Pasha and his faction may have felt inclined to join the Central Powers from the start, but might not have dared to take that fateful step without a curious convergence of hurt pride and ensuing developments, all connected with the navy. One was the cancellation by Winston Churchill (at that point First Lord of the Admiralty) in view of the gathering storm of the projected sale to the Ottoman Empire of two battleships built in Britain, an act that humiliated and enraged the Ottomans; the other, a kind of embittered compensation, was the fictitious sale of the German cruisers Goeben and Breslau to the Porte, renamed Yavuz and Midilli and placed, with their commander Souchon and crews, at the disposal of the Ottoman government despite British protests and demands that the ships be interned or expelled from Ottoman territorial waters. The Ottomans refused, but even that might not have sufficed to push the empire into the German camp if Enver Pasha had not used his ultimate trump card by having Admiral Souchon—a German only too eager to oblige—shell Russian ports and thus provoke Russia into a declaration of war, which happened on 2 November 1914 and was then followed by Britain and France on 5 November. This was the ultimate irony of the Ottoman navy: after almost a century and a half of inability to protect the empire’s integrity, which repeatedly and incompletely had to be saved by Western, especially British, navies, two fictitious Ottoman cruisers were used as tools to engineer the Ottoman entry into a war that would bring about the end of the Ottoman Empire.

It is also an irony of Panzac’s book. The French scholar expounds in great detail the saga of the Ottoman government’s efforts to rebuild and modernize its navy, and this is the most original, exhaustive and valuable aspect of his work. He also admits the ultimate futility of these efforts, a painful admission the author is repeatedly forced to make. The admission is at times bluntly spelled out, as we have seen. It may also have caused a desire for compensation or consolation that has led to his somewhat contradictory and questionable conclusion on the last page, p. 504:

The primary function of the fleet after Lepanto was less to undertake uncertain conquests of far-away places, to shield coastal provinces or to protect a tenuous maritime trade, than to serve as an auxiliary of land troops…But the navy was above all expected to participate in the defense of the Empire’s core. Its task was essentially to dissuade an enemy fleet, by stopping it and sufficiently harming it, from penetrating the Straits…Here the navy was able to carry out its thankless task which consisted in securing the advance defense posts of the capital, and it is in this light that we should view the battles of Çeşme, of Navarino, or again that of Sinope. One can thus paradoxically affirm that the Ottoman fleet had, throughout the centuries, accomplished its mission.

The fact is that there was no fleet strong enough to protect the Straits and Istanbul after Çeşme, Navarino, or Sinope. In each case, the adversary chose not to force the
entry for other reasons. When enemy fleets did try to do so on two other occasions, in 1657 and 1915, it was not Ottoman ships but coastal artillery and mines that stopped them, or again when in 1807 Duckworth’s fleet did penetrate the Dardanelles and threatened Istanbul, it had to withdraw because of the rising danger from the shore batteries that were being rapidly improved with French help. It is indeed not an easy task to devote a major effort to telling the story of an institution that stayed, for the greater part of the period covered, on the losing or, worse still, irrelevant side, and Panzac deserves sympathy if he closes his impressive work on this optimistic though not fully justified note. The strength of his book consists in presenting a meticulous account of the efforts the Ottoman Empire made to assert the security of its waterfront by possessing an adequate navy, and the fact that in the end it was other factors—international power play and navies of the great powers—which shaped its destiny does not make the study of these efforts less worthwhile.

Unfortunately the book lacks an index, a grievous failing rare in scholarly literature. Its bibliography and annotation should be improved, although an argument could be made that making them adequate would expand the volume to unwieldy proportions, but at least greater care might have been given the existing apparatus. For example, Danişmend’s valuable *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* (p. 509) is listed as consisting of 4 volumes, leaving out the one that should have been emphasized in the first place, volume 5, which includes an exhaustive biographical list of the kapudan pashas; and the reviewer’s article “Certain Types of Ships in the Ottoman-Turkish Terminology” is attributed to Stanford Shaw (p. 519), which could count as a compliment to the real author but probably is due to a more prosaic error of typesetting.

*La marine ottoman: De l’apogée à la chute de l’Empire* is the best history of the Ottoman navy in this period, and the only one in any language except Turkish. It is to be hoped that an English translation, which could also perform the role of a new edition with an index, improved bibliography and annotation, correction of minor factual errors, and a better set of maps, will appear before long.

Although Idris Bostan could hardly have planned *Adriyatik’te Korsanlık* (The course in the Adriatic) as a companion to Panzac’s *La marine ottomane*, his book might be viewed as a special development of the latter’s Chapter 2, “De la reconquête de Tunis à l’assaut de la Crète (1574–1645),” a period which the French scholar identifies as that of the guerre de course. Professor Bostan has to his credit several outstanding works on Ottoman naval history, and *Adriyatik’te Korsanlık* should further consolidate his stature as the premier Turkish scholar in this field. The book has a perfect and in certain respects original structure. After defining his objective in a preface (p. 7–9), he provides an illuminating introduction to the sources (“Kaynaklar üzerinde,” pp. 11–16). Of the primary ones, most of those used by him were archival documents from the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Topkapı Sarayi Müzesi Arşivi, and Archivio di Stato di Venezia. He then proceeds to the introduction (“Giriş,” pp. 17–27), an excellent survey of the book’s central theme presented in four parts: “Korsan, Levend ve Gönüllü Reisler” (Corsair, Levend and Freelance Mariners); “Korsanlığın Hukuki Statüsü” (The Legal Status of the Course); “Büyük Savaşların Yardımcı Unsuru Korsanlık” (The Corsair Element as
an Auxiliary Element of Great Battles); and “Adriyatik’te Korsanlığın Yükselişi” (The Rise of the Course in the Adriatic). This is followed by the three principal segments: “Adriyatik ve Mora sularında Osmanlı Korsanları” (Ottoman Corsairs in the Waters of the Adriatic and the Peloponnese), pp. 31–74; “Adriyatik’te Venedik Korsanları” (Venetian Corsairs in the Adriatic), pp. 77–93; and “Adriyatik’te Osmanlı ve Uskok Mücadelesi” (Ottoman and Uskok Struggle in the Adriatic), pp. 97–118. A brief but intriguing conclusion on pp. 119–20 is followed by Bibliography (pp. 121–26), Appendices (Ekler, pp. 127–244) and index. The appendices, which occupy almost one half of the volume, include a yeni yazı transcription of forty Turkish documents and facsimiles of six others from the Archivio di Stato di Venezia.

The introduction opens with a linguistic and conceptual discussion of korsanlık, a term whose comprehensiveness and role in Ottoman as well as modern Turkish is virtually untranslatable into English, which would use piracy, course (a not fully naturalized loanword from French), the trade of being a corsair (corsairdom, corsairship? or rather again the course?), or privateering, depending on the circumstances. The word korsan partly overlaps with levend, and the two are reserved, though the former not exclusively, for Muslims. The concept is linked, on the Muslim side, with the theme of gaza, holy war. Bostan writes on p. 32: “Levends who undertook maritime expeditions with the gaza on their minds were also called korsans.” By and large, however, korsan was applied to corsairs from Ottoman North Africa, levend to those from the empire’s home waters of the eastern Mediterranean. When the infidels were meant—and sometimes also Muslims defying the sultans’ authority—the words harami or eşkıya, “outlaws, bandits,” were used.

Complying with the axiom that seaborne trade stimulates piracy, the Adriatic during the decades under discussion presents an example of both the truth and the complexity of this fact. Merchants from the Ottoman domains were many, but Venetians retained the lion’s share of seaborne trade and played a leading role both in the shipping itself and in patrolling this maritime expanse. Conversely, while all nationals were tempted to take up the course, Ottomans retained primacy in it. Bostan’s book is an eloquent illustration of this fact. For one thing, just the number of pages: forty-four for Osmanlı Korsanları, sixteen for Venedik Korsanları. His discussion, as well as the documents in the appendix, bears this out. It also shows, however, that while trade and piracy can perfectly well coexist, on the whole the former ultimately gets the better deal. More numerous than Venetian haramiler, Ottoman levends preferred the course to trade, and sooner or later paid the price. An illustration is the fate of two port cities, Valona and Split. Valona, the Ottoman Avlonya and now Albanian Vlorë, is thus described by Bostan on p. 36:

Valona, one of the first ports of the Ottomans on the Adriatic coast, was also with its arsenal and command an important naval base...At the same time, it acquired the status of an important commercial center...In general, however, it became a base for Muslim corsairs, both local and those who came from the Maghreb. This probably was why, as a result of
their effect, towards the end of the sixteenth century Valona lost its commercial importance and Split, a Venetian possession situated farther north, moved to the forefront.

Corsair attacks, when Venetian ships and coasts were the target, did not happen with approval or encouragement from the Porte, which as a rule responded positively, though not always successfully, to the demands for the rescue of captives and return of goods or compensation lodged by the baylos in Istanbul. Success was chronically compromised by the tendency of local governors to collude with the corsairs, which represented a breach of the ahdnames or treaties between the two states. This does not mean that there never was any Venetian piracy preying on Ottoman ships and raiding the empire’s coasts. Like the Porte and any other government, the Serenissima could not always restrain its citizens from flouting the law and seeking to enrich themselves as pirates.

This universal propensity acquired a special dimension with the appearance of one of the oddest pirate communities in the Mediterranean, the Uskoks (the “Uskok eşkıyası” of Ottoman documents). Mostly Slavic and politically Habsburg semi-outlaws located along the north-eastern fringe of the Adriatic, which also was the Mediterranean fringe of the Habsburg Empire, and operating chiefly from their harbor fortress of Senj, they preyed on Ottoman, Venetian, or any other ships they dared to attack. As Bostan writes on p. 87, Venice, responsible for protecting seaborne trade, was performing this task with respect to both the Uskoks and to the Ottoman corsairs. Again, however, some citizens of the republic, local administrators among them, were not averse to colluding with the Uskoks and taking a share of the spoils. Both the principal partners—the Ottoman Empire and Venice—managed to live with the problem, and such incidents never rose to the level of compromising Ottoman-Venetian relations. Despite their notoriety, the Uskoks remained a local, passing phenomenon that had begun to wane by 1620—a pale shadow of the great Ottoman corsairs of the Mediterranean, those of the three North African regencies. In his conclusion on p. 120, Idris Bostan makes an effort to come to terms with this complex, often blurred and contradictory relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Venice as neighbors and commercial partners. He writes in the final paragraph: “In the last analysis, it does not appear easy to clearly untangle corsair relationships in which the Adriatic often became mutually enmeshed. One should thus question the ‘allied’ Venetian-Uskok relationships as much as the ‘enemy’ Ottoman-Uskok relationships.”

Bostan’s conclusion is thus somewhat inconclusive and contradictory, perhaps reflecting what was a permanent state of tension and contradiction between the two communities, Muslim Ottoman and Christian Venetian. Much of the time they lived in peace and pragmatic cooperation, but never fully escaped an asymmetry of relationship stemming from religious incompatibility, a different concept of political

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7 Aslında Adriyatik’te çoğu defa iç içe girmiş olan korsan ilişkilerini sağlıklı bir şekilde birbirinden ayırmak çok kolay gözükmemektedir. Nitekim “muttefik” Venedik-Uskok ilişkileri kadar “düşman” Osmanlı-Uskok ilişkilerinin de sorgulanması gerektiği anlaşılmaktadır.
purpose and economic enterprise, and a huge disproportion in their resources and military power. On one side there was a forceful pursuit of the *course* as the principal form of maritime enterprise, on the other an equally tenacious pursuit of seaborne trade. While the Porte disavowed the *course* when Venice, with which it had treaties, was the target, it neither quite wished to nor could suppress it, partly for ideological reasons, but also because it lacked the economic incentive that would substitute for it—its own seaborne trade. Bostan has shown that this asymmetry did not prevent successful trading relations during the long peace between the Ottoman Empire and Venice, despite the Ottoman *course* that flourished more than ever. The forty documents included in the appendix, sent by groups of private merchants, grand viziers, or sultans, either to local Ottoman officials or to the Venetian authorities—usually the Doge himself—bear testimony to efforts to maintain peaceful, mutually beneficial relations. The asymmetry kept them fragile, however, for while Venice needed seaborne trade as a linchpin of her prosperity, the Ottoman Empire did not; and while the Serenissima knew she could never win a war with the Ottoman Empire except perhaps as part of a coalition and thus took the utmost care to avoid it, the Porte was assured of victory any time it chose to take on the merchant republic, as it did in 1645 when the *guerre de course* once more turned into a *guerre d’escadre*.

Idris Bostan’s latest book is a first-rate contribution to Ottoman and Mediterranean historiography. Scholars will also appreciate the rich and careful annotation, besides the fascinating sampling of Ottoman documents from Venetian archives. Although the Uskoks occupy a somewhat less prominent place in it than the subtitle might seem to suggest, the book will no doubt be hailed as a welcome addition to Catherine Bracewell’s *The Uskoks of Senj*, a classic study which, however, was written without much use of Ottoman sources. Of the few regrets this reviewer has, one is the lack of good maps and the utter inadequacy of the only one included (p. 113, “Adriyatık’ten Korsanların Üğrak Yerleri ve Limanlar”); besides its technical mediocrity, some places are misplaced or misidentified: Valona is moved further south to the vicinity of Corfú, the Gulf of Taranto is called Gulf of Otranto, and Naples receives the startling name Pulya Anabolusu = Puglia Naples). Another is the irrelevance and repetitiousness of some of the illustrations, both the ordinary ones in the text and the color plates between pages 112 and 113 (why four maps of Venice, all from manuscripts of the Kitab-i Bahriye?). One welcome exception in this respect is the four plates with views of Senj fortifications and their interiors, all from photographs taken by Professor Maria Pia Pedani. It is to be hoped that Adriyatık’ten Korsanlık will be well noticed and used by the academic community.