Abandon Neutrality in 1537, a Turning Point for Venice

Dr Emmanuelle Pujeau[1]

Abstract *How did Venice compromise its independence by renouncing its neutrality in 1537 to join the Christian League and what were the consequences? A first point explores the Venetian neutrality, seen as a traditional attitude. Then, the threatening events of 1537 are detailed. After that, there is a discussion examining the opportunity to abandon neutrality. The next point shortly presents the Christian League. The fifth point discusses the French choice. The point after explains the campaign of Preveza as a consequence of the previous point. And the seventh point exposes the consequences for Venice.*

Keywords

Venice; neutrality; strategy; late crusades; Ottoman empire; diplomacy; Christian Republic; Preveza

I. The Venetian neutrality seen by historiography

The Venetian neutrality is seen as a traditional attitude, especially by the historiography. In his *History of the Government of Venice*, Amelot de la Houssaye even criticizes the neutrality of Venetians toward the Turks:

> "It does not matter to the Venetians to ever be in peace with the Turks, because they do everything to stay in peace. They cultivate or rather they buy their friendship by continual gifts. They ignore their insults to avoid avenging them; they suffer the piracy in the Adriatic Sea, and finally, the more he despises and mistreats them, the more they return to him submissions and duties."[2].

In the *History of his time*, Paolo Giovio[3] repeatedly emphasizes the neutrality of Venice as the principle of Venetian strategy as he sets out in the First Book:

> "Venetians, who have increased their own empire from the ruin and damage of the others, always delayed the war to later times, looking for the success of the others, used to increase their own empire […] they would not help both of them, staying away from any conflict"[4].

This advice arrived at a turning point according to historiography: the disaster of Zonchio (1499) seen as the end of the Venetian naval superiority. This neutrality would be useful after the disaster of Zonchio, seen by historiography as "the end of the Venetian naval superiority"[5].

This failure is seen as weakness sharpening the covetousness. The warrior pope, Julius II sees the opportunity to enlarge the pontifical states[6] too small to his advice. The League of Cambrai (1508) would therefore be a way to attack both the Turks and the Venetians by referring to them as two dragons...

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1 Independent scholar (éditions Bouchon Chérie), France, dr.pujeau@gmail.com

2 Amelot de la Houssaye, *Histoire du gouvernement de Venise* (Paris; Frédéric Léonard, 1676) chap. "Avec la Porte Ottomane", 124.

3 See T.C. Price Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio The Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Princeton; University Press, Princeton, 1995) and Emmanuelle Pujeau, *L'Europe et les Turcs, la croisade de l'humaniste Paolo Giovio* (Toulouse; Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2015).

4 Paolo Giovio, *Historiarum sui temporis* (Paris; Vascosanus, 1553) 1, c.10: "*Veneti, qui ex aliorum ruina atque incommodis tantum imperium magna parte condiderant & ipsas semper maturis temporibus gerendi belli occasiones captando atque alienae fortunae circunspectando eventus ex suas amplificare didicerant […] neutris praebituros auxilia & ab omni prorsus contentione ab futuros.".*

5 I have studied this episode about the Grimani's fortune according to Paolo Giovio in Emmanuelle Pujeau, *L'Europe et les Turcs*, 430-433. There is also the chapter "Double disaster" in John Julius Norwich, *A history of Venice* (London; Penguin Book, 1983), 383-387.

6 David Abulafia represents Italian states in 1494 in *I regni del Mediterraneo occidentale dal 1200 al 1500* (Rome; Laterza, 1999), 310.

Even threatened, Venice renounced joining the Turks and preferred to develop useful diplomatic relationships. In this idea, the Venetian authorities thought of the most powerful man of the XVI[th] century, the emperor Maximilian of Habsburg. Such strategy was taught by their geographical situation, as explained by Paolo Giovio: "Grimani [...] recommended the leaders of the Senate to moderation, proposing them to prefer [to have] as their neighbor a weak kinglet rather than a very powerful king of a foreign nation"[7].

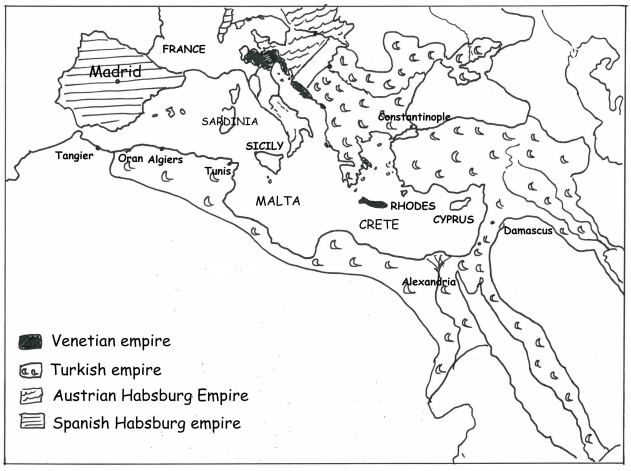

Fig. 1 Map of the empires (XVI[th] Century) by Dr E. Pujeau

As developing international relationships, Venice works also to correct the inadequacies revealed by the failure of Zonchio. It is a general renewal. It is the moment of "*renovatio urbis*", "*renovatio militiae*" and so on. At the Arsenal[8], among other projects[9] we can quote the *quinquerema* proposed by Vettor Fausto. This revolutionary boat would finally would have a certain posterity in the Venetian navy in the *galeasse*[10], so crucial during the Lepanto battle. In the same time, the authorities reflect on the naval propulsion: they hesitate between short and long rows. The Senate subjects the individual rows (short ones) and the collective rows (long ones) to tests in 1534 to be able to choose the best for the Venetian fleet. And it is also the construction of the galleon designed by Matteo Bressan[11], proposed in 1526 and which will remain the masterpiece of the Venetian fleet until 1547! This galleon on a fleet was enough to get a great advantage.

In this idea, innovation[12] and diplomacy[13] make Venice into a determining ally, or at least that getting the Venetian neutrality could be profitable. In the Venetian authorities' eyes, neutrality is a perfect guarantee of independence.

7 The original text in Book V, *elogium*. IX: "*Grimanus […] moderationisque Senatus primores admonebat ut infirmum Regulum potius quam potentitissimum externae gentis Regem accolam ma llent*" in Paolo Giovio, *Elogia Virorum bellica virtute illustrium* (Rome; Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1972), 410-411.

8 Frederic Chapin Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance* (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), Mauro Bondioli, "L'Arsenale di Venezia e l'arte della costruzione navale' *IX International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archeology* (Venice, 2000).

9 To discover different Venetian inventions or findings see Emmanuelle Pujeau, *Inventions de génie à Venise et à Malte* (Maurens; éditions Bouchon Chérie, 2024), 14 sqq.

10 Michel Lesure, *Lépante la crise de l'empire ottoman* (Paris; Julliard, 1972), 115-116.

11 This galleon had Bertucci Contarini and Alessandro Bondulmiero as captains in the Girolamo da Pesaro's war fleet against Suleiman in 1537, Cesare Augusto-Levi, *Le navi della Serenissima* (Vittorio Veneto; Dario De Bastiani, 2011) 8-9.

12 The excellence of the Venetian artillery see Marco Morin, *I cannoni di Venezia* (Florence; All'Insegna del Giglio, 2014) 29-47.

13 Maria Pia Pedani, *Venezia porta d'Oriente* (Bologna; Il Mulino, 2010).

Sultan Suleiman writes to Doge Andrea Gritti[14] in the beginning of 1534[15] to announce to him that Barbarossa, the *beylerbey* of Alger, was named Great Admiral and his mission is to "avoid the pirates under his authority to attack Venetian lands and boats." He also requires in return "that the Republic refers to the Sublime Porte all they know about the enemies as established in treaties".

However, those treaties will be challenged in 1537.

II. How the events of 1537 threatened the Venetian neutrality

Different disorders between the Venetian fleet and the Turks threatened the peace in 1537. Actually, the siege of Corfu will precipitate the situation. On the 8th of July, the Venetian authorities learned the coming of the Turkish forces in the channel of Corfu. Their ambassador[16] detailed the Turkish forces: 170 galleys, 70 *fuste* and other boats for a total of 330 sails.

On July 11th, different dispatches[17] informed that the Turkish fleet burned the village and did a lot of damage. The Venetian authorities affirmed to be decided to deploy all the needed support promising to send reinforcements[18]. The Venetian legate to the Holy See mentions the preparations of the Knights of Rhodes[19]. The Captain General on the Sea is called to sail to Brindisi[20] to join the other Christian fleets. On 12th, the authorities gave secret orders (written in square brackets) about new preparations[21]. There is no longer any question of punishing the Venetian officials for the "disorders" in the fleet[22].

On September 13, Venice finally wrote the Prince Andrea Doria to expound him on the difficult situation of Corfu[23] and the great disadvantage for the whole Christianity[24]. The solution would be to join their forces[25] as they also wrote to the Pope[26].

On September 15, the projects of League are exposed to the imperial orators: "a defensive and offensive league against Infidels between His Holiness, His Imperial Majesty and the Venetian Republic"[27].

However, on September 16, the Turkish army abandons the siege without the Venetian intervention. A dispatch reports this news on 28th: "We received the news that the Turkish fleet that besieged and damaged the city and

14 To discover the tremendous Gritti's life see Alvise Zorzi, *Il Doge Un Romanzo vero* (Milan; Mondadori, 1996) and a study of his storytelling in Robert Finlay "The Self-Fashioning of a Venetian Doge: Andrea Gritti in Istanbul", *Mediterranean Historical Review* forthcoming.

15 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Documenti Turchi*, Busta 3, fol. 315.

16 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Senato Segreti*, Reg 58, fol 55r.

17 *Ibidem*, fol 65 v.

18 *Ibidem.*

19 *Ibidem*, fol 66r-v.

20 *Ibidem.*

21 *Ibidem*, fol 67r-v.

22 *Ibidem*, fol 68r.

23 *Ibidem*, fol 70r.

24 *Ibidem.*

25 *Ibidem.*

26 *Ibidem*, fol 70 v 71r.

27 *Ibidem*, fol 73r.

island of Corfu has left, and it is returning to Constantinople with a troubled mind for the failed success, and it decided to cause all the most damage it could to all of our places"[28].

As the Turks have raised the siege without Christian help, would the diplomatic relations be reopened or would the preparation of the league would be continued?

III. Venetian Senate discusses the opportunity to abandon neutrality

In the same time, Constantinople sent a messenger[29] to Venice to discuss peace. Perhaps to be more convincing, he also explained the Turkish preparations[30]. The Venetian Senate discusses the point: do they choose the war or the peace? The question is to decide between two options: to join the Christian league and choose the war or to restore peace with the Turks? In one hand, the Sage Marcantonio Cornaro defends the league in a vibrant speech, and on the other hand, the Sage Marco Foscari urges his colleagues to peace. The Venetian historian Paolo Paruta has reproduced both their speeches in his *Historia Vinetiana*[31].

A. Choosing the war with Cornaro

For Marcantonio Cornaro, they have to decline the Turkish offer of peace because they have already made a lot of preparations, especially "now that the truce between the Emperor and the French King is already certain"[32]. Cornaro said that the Venetians took up arms "to defend our State, the freedom and our goods"[33] and he observed that it was very ambiguous to discuss peace arrangements at the same time that they were preparing a league[34]. Cornaro warned them not to be lulled by false promises[35] urging them to make all the useful preparations[36], because the Turks could invade a part of the Venetian State[37].

He revealed their real goal: "They have pointed on our State; they would like to oppress this Republic, from whom they think to receive some counterweight in the sea forces & no slight impediment to their plans to become Monarchs of all countries"[38].

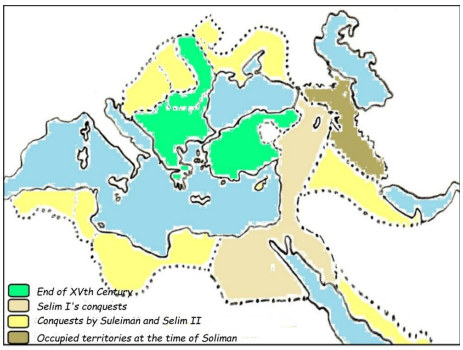

Fig. 2 The expansion of the Ottoman Empire by Dr Emmanuelle Pujeau

28 *Ibidem*, fol 79v.

29 Paolo Paruta, *Historia Vinetiana* (Venise ; Giuseppe Nicolino Angeli, 1703), 393. Part II, book 9.
30 *Ididem.*
31 See Paolo Paruta, *Historia Vinetiana* in *Degl'istorici delle cose veneziane, i quali hanno scritto per pubblico decreto* (Venice; Lovisa, 1718), 394 sqq.
32 *Ibidem*, 394.
33 *Ibidem.*
34 *Ibidem.*
35 *Ibidem.*
36 *Ibidem*, 395.
37 *Ibidem.*
38 *Ibidem*, .395-396.

Cornaro accuses the Turks of trying to isolate Venice: "to separate us from the friendship of the other Christian princes"[39] in order to favour their strategy: "that is to say to assail us, alone and without any defence"[40]. He also mentioned "clear signs of unwillingness and deceit" and he concluded that the Turks look for war and not peace[41].

Cornaro describes the disastrous consequences of neutrality: "What security, what quietness will it bring to our things? However, for fear of the power that the Turks have in the sea & for their doubtful faith, we will agree to continually stay in trouble and expense the war every year: armies, garrisons of soldiers, fortifications, everything full of suspicion[42].

The "doubtful faith of the Turks" recalls the Paolo Giovio's text "their faith could be suspect as Carthaginian"[43] that is a literary reminiscence of the latin *Punica fedes* "Punic faith", a Roman expression to translate the idea of "bad faith" or to express the depths of the perfidy as Sallust when he presented the negotiations[44] between Sylla and Bocchus.

In his speech, Cornaro also explained the Turkish method: "they will observe peace with the Republic to get a better opportunity to wage war against the Emperor, occupied in other wars with the King of France and deprived of our aid to be able to attack Puglia, and as they would not find resistance, seize some strong places and get a sure foothold in Italy"[45]. Cornaro reached the conclusion: "Soon delaying war won't do anything else than increase the Turkish empire"[46].

In his demonstration, he also appealed to the Venetian bravery: "Wouldn't we once prove our bravery and the fortune of this Republic?[47] and criticized their passivity "as we managed for years, inactive witnesses of the others' dangers"[48], because their tranquility stays in the weakening of the Turks that is very close, because they have the advantage of the number and the quality of the combatants. If the success won't be total, at least choosing his proposal would be generous[49].

The Cornaro's speech convinced those who were already convinced, according to Paruta.

B. Continuing in the friendship with the Turks

Not convinced by Cornaro's speech[50], Foscari began: "If we would understand according to the truth and not according to our wishes"[51]. Turning the Cornaro's arguments back, Foscari focused on the Christian princes' sincerity: "This confidence in words and promises of princes, customary declaring what could turn to their

39 *Ibidem*, 396.
40 *Ibidem.*
41 *Ibidem.*
42 *Ibidem.*
43 Paolo Giovio, *Historia sui temporis*, (Paris; Vascosanus,1554), tome II, fol. 160 v.
44 Sallust, *De bello Jugurthino*, CVIII, 3.
45 Paolo Paruta, *Historia Vinetiana* in *Degl'istorici delle cose veneziane, i quali hanno scritto per pubblico decreto* (Venice; Lovisa, 1718), 396.
46 *Ibidem.*
47 *Ibidem*, 397.
48 *Ibidem.*
49 *Ibidem.*
50 *Ibidem.*
51 *Ibidem.*

advantage"[52]. He asked: "What sort of help could we expect from the other princes, who are different about the ideas and the affections and who run with reasons and regards opposed to us?"[53]

Pragmatical, Foscari said: "If we can support war, let's make peace"[54].

Talking about the Pope, he deplored his lack of activity[55] and he warned who would trust too much to the Emperor: "To believe blindly in his words when they are expecting to join a league that could be useful and turning to his advantage and forgetting the other things that could be understood on the contrary"[56]. He even criticized the Emperor: "because with our weakness he can find opportunities to increase his power & to finally become almost only arbiter of the things of Italy"[57]. Foscari emphasized a crucial point: "without peace between the Emperor and the King of France, the league would be very pallid[58]. Foscari said they have to choose between two alternatives: "in the idea to escape from war to desire war, to avoid a doubtful and distant danger to prefer a sure and actual one"[59].

Why in such a situation should Venice sacrifice itself? Foscari observes the consequences of the choice: "Who among us does ignore the advantages that are linked with peace and the many other disadvantages that will arrive from that war?[60]. He supported his speech with the consideration: "Being able to know our advantages and disadvantages and to expect profit from time is the behavior of the wise man"[61]. Foscari recommended also: "Do not let us be deceived by the appearances and to not pay attention to good pieces of advice"[62].

Developing his demonstration, Foscari arrived to the point: "To wage the war against the Turks seems to be a pious act"[63] with the clear idea to let his audience conclude that it would be false in reality. Continuing his argument, he said: "That is foolishness and rashness to expose ourselves to real dangers as much as we can; this is nothing else than tempting Divine Providence"[64] and he gave a Biblical argument: "That can be read in the gospel Whoever has to wage war against a powerful enemy must, beforehand, with a peaceful mind, estimate rightly if he would be able to win with ten thousand men against twenty thousand men who are to assail them" [65] paraphrasing the Gospel of Luke "Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand?"[66]. Cleverly Foscari let his audience complete his demonstration with the next verse that is to be inferred: "If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace."[67], echoing his proposal of peace.

52 *Ibidem*, 398.
53 *Ibidem.*
54 *Ibidem.*
55 *Ibidem.*
56 *Ibidem*, 399.
57 *Ibidem.*
58 *Ibidem.*
59 *Ibidem*, 400.
60 *Ibidem.*
61 *Ibidem*, 401.
62 *Ibidem.*
63 *Ibidem.*
64 *Ibidem.*
65 *Ibidem.*
66 The Original Version of the Foscari's speech "*che si legge nell'Evangelo, che chi hà d'andare contra un nemico potente, deve prima con anima sedato pensar bene s'egli possa con dieci mila huomini farsi incontra à quello, che co, venti mila venga ad assalirlo*" is very close to the Italian version in *Bibbia*, Vangelo secondo Luca, 14, verse 31 : "*Oppure quale re, partendo in guerra contro un altro re, non siede prima a esaminare se può affrontare con diecimila uomini chi gli viene incontro con ventimila?*".
67 Gospel of Luke, Chapter 14, Verse 32 in the Italian Version : *"mentre l'altro è ancora lontano, gli manda un'ambasceria per la pace".*

Despite the Foscari's subtle demonstration, the Venetian Sages chose to join the League as shown by a dispatch to the ambassador to the Holy See on 6th October: "Furthermore, as we have decided to conclude the league, we command you to recall with all due respect to His Holiness that it is necessary not to delay the conclusion of the league, remembering that this campaign would be not only defensive but also offensive in order to attack such a powerful enemy, and it will be necessary to raise the most efficient and powerful troops as possible to get surely the desired success"[68]. Venice actively prepares[69] a new crusade.

IV. The Christian League

All the particulars of the League are described in a text, entitled *Les Chapitres ou articles de la tressainte confederation faicte antre notre sainct pere le Pape, la Maieste Imperiale, et les Venitiens, Contre les Turcqz* and published in Paris by the editor Vorsterman in 1538. This opuscule could refer to two interesting manuscripts. One from the King's library (10061) is entitled *Instrumentum ligae et foederis initi inter summum Carolum imperatorem V et illustrissimum dominium Venetorum* dated from 1538. The other manuscript is from the Vatican Library (Urb. Lat. 870) *Instrumentum ligae et foederis initi inter Paulum III, Carolum V, dominium Venetum necnon regem Romanorum (Ferdinandum) ad defensionem a Turca et ad defensionem illius. Romae 8 febr. (1538).*

Those *Chapters of the League* were made of fourteen items. Naming all the princes taking part in the campaign, the chapters also organize the different sides of this crusade. The economic aspect is precisely established. The nature and number of boats are also fixed through the different parts, describing the respective fleets, e. g. thirty-six galleys for the Papal fleet. The *Chapters* also hold out one's hand to other princes like the King of Portugal. The infantry is also described as the artillery and the ammunition. The Pope would play a part in organizing the role of everyone. The *Chapters* name the Knights of Rhodes, the King of the Romans, and the King of Poland and Russia and all the other Christians who could join the crusade. The ninth chapter is dedicated to the French King offering him a special place in the campaign. The tenth chapter fixes March as the moment of joining the forces or "the earliest time possible" to be able to get under way. The *Chapters* also established the different commanders. The provision with food supplies and ammunition is also established by the chapters. There is also a special role for the Pope to settle any sort of disputes or discords.

The official seal of the League is put on February 8 in the Consistory Room at Rome.

A letter from the Venetian Senate sent to his secretary Fedeli on the 13th of February announces this event: "By letters of our ambassador to the Holy See, we have been informed of the conclusion of the league in the name of God on the 8th of this month"[70]. They also give the names of the different commanders and the order to join as soon as possible, Genoa.

Immediately, the Venetians began their preparations writing instructions[71] to each one.

68 Archivio di Stato of Venice, *Senato Segreti*, Reg 58 fol 85v.

69 To discover how Venice and its allies passed from theory to practice see Emmanuelle Pujeau, *Se préparer à la croisade!* (Maurens; éditions Bouchon Chérie, 2025).

70 Archivio di Stato of Venice, *Senato Segreti*, Reg 58, fol 134v.

V. The French involvement in the campaign

The ninth item of the *Chapters of the League* reserves a special place for the French kingdom: "A place would be reserved for the very honorable King, very Christian as one of the most important kings, who if he joins this league..."[72].

The letters of the papal legates in France are very useful to observe the French policy about this argument. In this idea, the cardinal Pio di Carpi (papal legate in France) wrote a letter to the cardinal Farnese on 24th February 1537[73] about the League: the French king would be afraid that the Pope would be deceived by the Emperor.

On the 22nd May[74], Ferrerio informed the cardinal Farnese that, following the Pope's advice, the French King allows a truce for three months.

On August 28[75], Ferrerio wrote to Ricalcato that Francis the Ist is sure that the Emperor doesn't sincerely want the peace. The French King would secretly[76] offer to the Pope to stay neutral by renouncing to join the League of the Emperor, and in order to encourage him, he also promises him to get the Great Turk to stay away from his territory.

On September 18, Ricalcato explains Ferrerio why the Venetians have *motu proprio* "spontaneously"[77] joined the league, on the 13th! The Pope would also get the French King in his league. This would be a guarantee of general peace.

Nonetheless, Ferrerio wrote to Ricalcato on the 1st October that the King sent his galleys against the Emperor "who is his enemy as much as of the Turks"[78]. However, the French King has delayed crossing the Alps to clearly show that he was not supporting the Turks who were threatening the Christendom.

On October 4[79], Ferrerio refers Ricalcato to having harassed again the French King on the argument of the league, referring to the growing threat and how the Venetians, after hesitating, have chosen to join the league on September 13th, after the siege of Corfu. He said again that there was a place for the French King in the league. Nevertheless, the King answered that the Venetians joined the league because they had no choice and talking about himself, he explained that peace was the only way to get his agreement. At this point, the league hung upon the peace between the Emperor and the French King.

Another piece of archive would be very useful to understand better the French position: the *Relation*[80] of the Venetian Francesco Giustiniano -who has been sent to France to make peace between the French King and the Emperor[81]- gives us new explanations[82].

71 E.g. the instructions to the General Captain of the Sea, Vincenzo Capello, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Archivio Privato Correr*, 255, 14 integrally translated in French in Emmanuelle Pujeau, *Se préparer à la croiade!*, 89-106.
72 *Les Chapitres de la Ligue* (Paris; Vorsterman, 1538), fol.6.
73 Archivio Vaticano, AA. I XVIII 6528 fol.1.
74 Archivio Vaticano, N. F. Ia ; fol.161v.
75 Archivio Vaticano, N. F. Ia fol.113v.
76 As referred to in the postscript of the letter.
77 Archivio Vaticano, *Principi*, 14a, fol.162.
78 Archivio di Stato of Parma, Francia 7/2.
79 *Ibidem* and Archivio Vaticano, N. F. Ia, fol. 116v.
80 *Relazione di Francia del magnifico signore Francesco Giustiniano tornato da quella corte l'anno 1538*, in *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, Série I, vol.I (Florence; Società editrice fiorentina, 1839), 199.
81 *Ibidem*, 200.
82 *Ibidem.*

In this idea, Giustiniano explains: "The war between the Great Turk and the Emperor maintains him busy and protects the French King from any attack by the Emperor"[83]. He also analyzed that joining the Papal League[84] would separate himself from his Lutheran allies. It was a very bad choice[85] for him, because joining the league he would increase the emperor's power, and he would lose the union between German princes and Lutheran captains to hope in the faith of who openly used to say that he had no faith in him.

Giustiniano underlined the disagreement between both princes: "They are opposed by nature"[86] so much that "if this one used to say to desire peace, the Emperor answered that he was not able to make peace, but that he was ready for some composition; and on the other hand, if this one was used to propose some composition, it was answered to him that the truces were better; for that reason it was impossible to accord their wills"[87].

When Giustiniano talks about the "Holy League"[88] detailing the circumstances[89] that the news arrived to the French Court that Venice refused the peace with the Turks and decided to wage war by joining the league.

Giustiano suggests that the French King could take advantage of the situation[90] by waging war against the Emperor, already busy in Italy or somewhere else. However, such behavior[91] would arouse the papal ire and finally of all the Christian princes. For that reason, there would be a blemish on the French King's fame with consequences: "The entire world would think that he is unworthy of his name of '*cristianissimo*', when he helps the Infidels to defeat and ruin the Christians"[92].

This remark recalls a Vatican manuscript[93] entitled *Esortazione a Francesco re di Francia primo di questo nome che si levi dall'amicizia et intelligenza che egli ha con il gran Turco*[94].

The author addresses the French King reproachfully: "It's impossible for me to call you by a name, deserving of a Christian as you"[95] with the explanation: "How can we really call king and free […] the one who begs support from real barbarians, enemies of his blood, rebels to their God or their Sire" with the conclusion "You are like the Ottoman knife sent in the heart of Christendom"[96]. He also recalls his enmity for the Emperor: "Caesar who is your enemy"[97], reproaching him for becoming the companion of the Turks. The author also explains the expectations of the other Christians: "They are waiting for your ruin"[98] warning him to become tyrant at the expense of Europe with the forces of Barbarossa[99].

83 *Ibidem*, 201.
84 *Ibidem*, 202.
85 *Ibidem.*
86 *Ibidem* 203.
87 *Ibidem* 204.
88 *Ibidem* 212.
89 *Ibidem* 213.
90 *Ibidem* 213-214.
91 *Ibidem*, 214.
92 *Ibidem.*
93 This manuscript is explained in Emmanuelle Pujeau, *L'Europe et les Turcs*, 228 sqq.
94 Biblioteca Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 849.
95 *Ibidem* fol. 83 r.
96 *Ibidem.*
97 *Ibidem*, fol. 83v.
98 *Ibidem.*
99 *Ibidem*, fol. 84r.

Despite this vibrant speech, the French King will stay in the friendship with the Turks, to the point that joint troops (joining French and Turkish forces) will lay siege to Nizza[100] in 1546. This episode will offer the "strange sight of a French fleet joined to an Ottoman fleet against a power of the Christendom"[101].

VI. Sabotage of the campaign

So, there is a mutual mistrust climate and an important threat of a rearguard attack as explained by the Venetian ambassador. Would the French King attack on weakened places, taking advantage of the Emperor's difficulties on other theaters of operations?

In such a threatening situation, a new crusade seems to be inopportune in the Emperor's eyes. Venice will strictly observe the *Chapters*, preparing[102] all that was fixed in the different items. However, the other participants won't be so scrupulous...

I have studied at length this complex campaign through many papers[103] and talks[104], observing different aspects: the strategy or the naval point of view, for example.

Avoiding a new exhaustive telling of the events, let's focus on the relevant points that give a new appreciation of the Venetian neutrality.

This is the moment in which the Christians[105] have already lost superiority in the land war at Essek (1537). At Preveza the naval superiority will be a central point, especially between Venice and Genoa, eternal rivals! The Christian fleet reaches a total of two hundred vessels. The *Chapters* have established different points that would be important for the campaign. For example, the papal fleet will be prepared by Venice and the troops and the provisions will be conveyed by the Emperor and the Genoeses. It was also decided to give back the territories taken in Greece, on the islands or in Dalmatia to Venice, because they were in its possessions before the Ottoman conquest…

Very well informed, the Turks learned about the Holy League and a possible campaign by sea as the Christians were still making their preparations… So, they made their arrangements too. In this manner, Khaireddin has to prepare his fleet to swoop down on the enemies. In this way, Crete is the center of the struggle between Khaireddin and the Venetians. At this moment, the situation seems to be quite simple: as the war is to happen, all must be prepared. However, this expedition, very simple in the beginning, will become in little time quite a crisis.

The first problem is certainly the disorderly arrival of the Christian forces at Preveza. The generalissimo of the campaign, Andrea Doria, is delayed: officially because of preparations and unofficially owing to the mutiny of

100 See Paolo Giovio, *Historia sui temporis*, 299 sqq and Nicolas Vatin, "The Ottoman View of France from the late fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century" *French History* 29 (2015): 8-10.

101 Joseph de Hammer, *Histoire de l'empire ottoman* (Paris; Bellizard, 1836) tome V, 364.

102 Emmanuelle Pujeau, *Se préparer à la croisade !*, 115 sqq.

103 See among other papers Emmanuelle Pujeau, "La Préveza (1538) entre idéologie et histoire" *Studi Veneziani* LI (2007): 155-204 or "Préveza, de l'échec (1538) au succès (1605), les leçons de l'Histoire ?" *Thesaurismata*, (Bolletino dell'Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini) 43 (2014): 127-154.

104 See among others Emmanuelle Pujeau, "Preveza in 1538: the Background of a very complex situation" *Proceedings of the Second International Symposium for History and Culture of Preveza*, Actia Nicopolis Founfation, 2010, Preveza, 121-138 or the talk "Innovations et considérations techniques vénitiennes : un nouvel éclairage sur Préveza ?", Poitiers, April 2016 7, on Uptv [http://uptv.univ-poitiers.fr/embed/5153/

105 For an accurate description of the circumstances see Marino Zorzi "La 'guerra turchesca' del 1537-40 nelle memorie di Bernardo Sagredo" *In viaggio. Scritti di amici per Bruno Crevato-Selvaggi* (Rome; Società Dalmata di Storia Patria, 2025).

Spanish soldiers (still waiting for their soldiers' pay from the 1535's campaign). For that reason, the Venetian and the papal fleet arrive first (respecting consciously the suggested date of the *Chapters*).

Thinking to take advantage of the Doria's lateness, on the 10th August, the number two of the campaign, the Venetian Grimani, Patriarch of Aquileia, tries to attack the Preveza fortress by surprise. But his badly prepared attempt miserably fails, and he re-embarks with quite heavy losses. However, the worst consequence is certainly concerning Barbarossa, because, at the moment of the Grimani's attack, Khaireddin Barbarossa was still in Modon. It is only because he learns the attack that he comes as fast as possible to Preveza to stop the Christian fleet, as was required by Suleiman. And for that reason, the most experienced Barbarossa will change the balance of the forces at Preveza! Nevertheless, "more than a month of good weather and various opportunities for a united attack had been lost"[106]. Finally (between the end of August and the 7th September)[107] the last protagonist – the generalissimo Doria – arrives at Corfu. The situation has drastically changed!

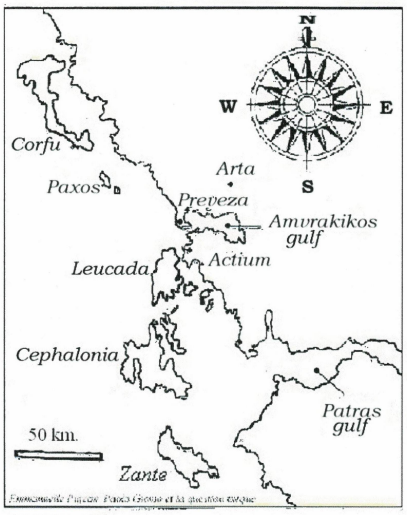

Fig. 3 Map of places around Preveza by Dr Joëlle Dupuy-Pujeau and Dr Emmanuelle Pujeau

The different Christian commanders quarrel on the tactics: Ferrante Gonzaga proposes a land battle blockading the Amvrakikos Gulf to lock the Turks in, by just sinking a boat full of rocks in the mouth. Only three galleons disposing of important artillery would be sufficient for this purpose. But Doria does not agree arguing that the enemies would send reinforcements from Lepanto or that the autumnal weather (e.g. a storm) could deprive the landed troops of any support. After controversies, they finally chose to try an attack by sea. On their side, the Turks seem to hesitate: fighting in the open sea or staying in the protective gulf? After reflection, Barbarossa chooses to leave the safe gulf to risk the fight in the open sea at the moment in which the Christian fleet sails back to Leucada. Nevertheless, the allied forces turn round and attack the Turks. After such a manoeuvre, Capello (firstly as rearguard) is in the vanguard with his heavy artillery and chases the Turks. In the same moment, the Grimani's vessels occupy the shore to take advantage of the place, to avoid that the enemies disembark their troops in case of attack. Grimani has the project to cut off their line of retreat, but curiously Doria vehemently orders him to abandon his position and to join the other Christian forces. Later, as the Turks are nearly at the mercy of the Christians, Doria incomprehensibly orders the general withdrawal under threat of

106 K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant* (Philadelphia; The American Philosophical Society, 1984), tome III, 446.
107 According to Paruta, it was not before the 7th September !

great punishment. So, the Christians leave the place. This retirement is differently explained by the authors[108]. Then new heated debates at Leucada urge Doria to order an attack again. The fleet sails again back to Preveza. Firstly, some frightened Turks surrender, but Barbarossa spurs his troops who come back to fight. The Venetian Captain, Capello wants to begin the fight against Turgut (recognized by Capello in the vanguard of the fast galleys), saying "either I will vanquish with glory, or I will succumb with dignity"[109]. Doria categorically refuses and orders him to wait for his signal before doing anything… because he has decided on another tactic: to let the Turks come nearer to destroy them in one go with the artillery. The Christian captains have another point of view: they urge him to fight again and not delay longer. In the same time, the Turks show great mastery in manoeuvring the fleet: when the center turns the flanks named *cornua* "horns" sail so perfectly that the manoeuvres look like an eagle spreading its wings. But Doria delays again when the captains urge him to launch the attack. This time, it is the Patriarch Grimani to come on Doria's boat to obtain the signal of attack. Doria refuses once again! Such suspicious procrastination lets fall the opportunity to get the good moment and the weather drastically changes. The wind dies down and the great sailing ships need to be towed. This misfortune disadvantage the Christian forces as the superiority of the fleet came from the great vessels and their powerful cannons! Taking advantage of this new lateness, the Turks deploy their rowing galleys, disposing of the fleet in battle, ready to fight. The sea is so calm that it seems to be a plain. Andrea Doria (expert in meteorology) pretends to be surprised by this sudden change of weather. The result of this is that the great vessels arrive in the theater of operations later than the enemies. Then Doria imagines a new tactic: assembling the enemies in the same sector to attack them in one go. So, the allied ships describe large circles around the great vessels. It would be a trick to manoeuvre the enemies without them knowing. According to Doria, the Turks aiming to fight with equal forces would try to protect themselves from great vessels (real floating fortresses). Thus, the enemies come close to the Christians and Doria orders his Captains to await strictly his signal (a great open standard). Mistrustful, the Turks keep their bows pointed at the Christians in order to keep their (unmovable) cannons pointed at the Christians. But as they want to escape from this threatening situation, the Turks try many unfortunate endeavors of outflanking the Christian fleet. Barbarossa tries a new tactic[110]: going straight through the Christian lines. They sink a ship and take heart for that exploit. Despite the harm of the Christian fleet, the Christians show their bravery in the battle. The fight rages until the moment when a terrible storm gets up. Great gusts of sirocco make some Christians propose to sail to Corfu. However, some vessels are still slow in manoeuvring. New destruction happens. It is only at night that the obscurity "hiding the anxious trouble [of the allied troops] muddles the mind and the sight of the barbarians"[111], Doria orders a quite shameful fall back in the darkness extinguishing the great lanterns. Nevertheless, the Turks follow them until about 9 o'clock, when Barbarossa decides to quit because of the total dark: "it was impossible to see each other, there were only the noise of the oars and nothing else but the voice to recognize one another"[112]. The wind becoming stronger the

108 Emmanuelle Pujeau, "La Préveza (1538) entre idéologie et histoire", 173 sqq and for the conclusions 195-199.
109 Paolo Giovio, *Historia sui temporis*, 210.
110 Because of the panic, as a skiful manœuvre or as *ea ratione faciebat* according to Paolo Giovio, *Historia sui temporis*, fol. 210 v.
111 Girolamo Borgia describes this "retirement" in Girolamo Borgia, *Historiae de bellis italicis ab anno 1494 ad 1541*, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Lat.X-98 (3506), fol. 265v.
112 G. Bonaffini, *La vita e storia di Ariadeno Barbarossa* (Palerme; Sellerio editore, 1993), 228.

fleet goes straight to Corfu. The Christians abandon the naval supremacy to the Turks. That is the beginning of the Turkish *thalassocratia*.

The next day, Barbarossa provokes the Christians to fight on Paxos. New debates delay the Christian reaction again so that Barbarossa turns back owing to the threatening weather. However Christian captains are decided to make up this clamorous failure. They think of attacking Durazzo. The Venetian Capello[113] has a different idea: knowing those territories, he suggests Castelnuovo[114] (firstly a Venetian place). Seizing the fortress within a few days, the allied army does not take advantage of the situation in order to continue the enterprise. At this moment, another curious behavior happens. Following the resolutions of the *League*, that old Venetian territory has to be given back to Venice, but Ferrante Gonzaga and the Genoese Andrea Doria decide to install four thousand Spanish veterans[115] to guard the place. The idea was to keep those men far from Italy. But during the winter, a part of them will go to Brindisi and the other part to Sicily.

So, the situation has been entirely reversed: from a great opportunity for the Christians as Barbarossa was not able to escape safely from the Gulf of Ambracia to an enormous failure for the unified forces of the Christendom. The Doria's behavior seems to be a sabotage of the campaign: arriving late in Corfu, incomprehensible hesitations during the fights, ordering illogical retreats in moments of Christian advantage, and probably meeting[116] secretly with Barbarossa. Helping the Turks, Doria was certain to weaken the Venetians, his atavistic enemies, which was a very good thing for Charles V, his master. On the contrary, in case of success of the campaign, the Venetian State could recover, thwarting the emperor's plans. After such a clamorous failure, Venice finds itself back in a very uncomfortable situation with the Turks…

VII. Serious Consequences for Venice

On August 30, 1539, the Venetian Senate wrote to its ambassador at Constantinople: "With the joined letters, we announce the recent seizure of Castelnuovo"[117]. Another dispatch (August 31) to the imperial orator precises that in a first time, they received: "the news of the seizure of Castelnuovo with the hope that it was false. After we were assured with great displeasure that it was true, although the Turks had launched fights, the last attack continued all night; the ones who were inside bravely resisted despite the rain that neutralized the artillery and the arquebuses. The Turks entered Castelnuovo at 7 o'clock"[118].

However taking back Castelnuovo is not enough to calm the Turks!

113 Paolo Paruta, *Historia Vinetiana*, 428.
114 *Ibidem.*
115 Paolo Paruta, *Historia Vinetiana*, 429.
116 Two Venetian advices report such meetings, see Emmanuelle Pujeau, "L'indicible trahison de Doria à Préveza en 1538", *Une mer pour les réunir tous* (Toulouse; Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2023), 127-128.
117 Archivio di Stato de Venise, *Senato Segreti*, Reg 60, fol. 78v.
118 *Ibidem*, fol. 79r.

The *relations*[119] of the ambassadors to the Ottoman Porte illustrate the dissension between Venetians and Turks. After the Lorenzo Gritti's extraordinary embassy to conclude a truce between the Turks and the Venetians following the seizure of Stampalia and the siege of Corfu and Cattaro, in 1539, Venice sends the orator Pietro Zen to negotiate the peace with the Turks, but he died on the road to Constantinople, precisely at Sarajevo.

Nevertheless, the *Documenti Turchi*[120] conserve a Suleiman's letter (between 14th – 23rd September 1539) to the doge Pietro Lando. The sultan talks about the venue in Constantinople of the Venetian ambassador, Tommaso Contarini, in charge of negotiating the peace, under the doge's order.

However, fortified by his military successes, Suleiman replies vehemently that with his huge power he does not need friends nor fears his enemies. Nonetheless, he is disposed to agree to a request of peace if the offered conditions would suit him. But his pretensions were so exorbitant that the ambassador declared cleverly to have no authority to negotiate, and consequently the Turks sent him back to Venice. So, the Venetian State finds itself back in an awkward position with the Turks.

There is a new attempt to renew the relationship in order to resume the neutrality between Venice and the Turks. Paolo Giovio writes to Federico Gonzaga, duke of Mantova, on January 8th 1540 to explain symbolically that the Venetians are forced to make peace[121] with the Turks: "there won't be a surprise if Badoer lets himself be circumcised to avoid that Master Saint Marc would be tortured by impalement, because he is sure to starve to death if he does not become Mahometan"[122]. Giovio shows that Venice (personified by its patron saint) is cornered and has to sign a peace treaty with the Turks. When Giovio talks about the Badoer's circumcision to save Venice, he spins the metaphor to describe how the Senator Luigi Badoer, sent to Constantinople to reopen negotiations of peace, would act. His mission is very delicate: he has "to negotiate stipulating that everything would be replaced as it was before the war. He was allowed to offer three hundred thousand ducats as war indemnity, however under no circumstances was him to give up Malvasia or Naples of Romania."[123] But at the same time, the French ambassador, Cantelmi, manoeuvres to shatter his negotiations. Two Venetian brothers have revealed all the details of the mission to the French ambassador. Those traitors, Nicolò and Costantino Cavezza, were very well informed because one was secretary of the Venetian Senate when the other was secretary of the Council of Ten (the heart of the Venetian State). Their betrayal has been discovered: they have been in the pay of the King of France and they revealed to him the secret orders of Contarini and Badoer – that is to say the authority to renounce all claims on the two ports if it were absolutely necessary to achieve a treaty. And "the Most Christian King had lost no time in passing the information to his new ally the Sultan"[124]. So, informed that in the extreme the Council of Ten allows him to abandon Nauplia and Malvasia, when Badoer tries to negotiate following the first instructions, the viziers refuse and demand greater sacrifices to concede

119 The Girolamo Zane's *Relation* (1542), the Alessandro Contarini's *Relation* (1544), and the Alvise Renier's *Relation* (1546) have been lost. The oldest preserved is Bernardo Navagero's *Relation* (1549).
120 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Documenti Turchi*, Busta 3, fasc. 407.

121 For more explanations, see Emmanuelle Pujeau, *L'Europe et les Turcs la croisade de l'humaniste Paolo Giovio*, 49 sqq.
122 Paolo Giovio, *Historia sui temporis*, 229.
123 Joseph Hammer, *Histoire de l'empire ottoman*, 316.
124 John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice*, 455.

peace. After three months of discussions, Badoer managed to get a treatise[125] whose the National Library of Venice conserves an exemplary[126] with a date: 22nd October 1540.

The treatise details "the promises between us" and imposing to "deposit the castles they have in Morea, Nauplia and Malvasia with their lands […] after removing artillery, […], weapons and the other things" with the precision of the special measures for the "soldiers who are inside" according to whether they would leave or stay there and about the compensations that they would have to deposit a sum of money in his Treasury, in that case. The Sultan adds: "the places taken by the very victorious sword during the war before any pact" and gives the details "Varna, Madin […] with all the people and homes under their command". There is also question of the "islands of the Archipelago" and the treatise enumerates the islands and the castles in there. The list continues: "Over and above the previously quoted places, those under their command or those they possess […] and the other castles and their subjects and all the places as on the sea as in mainland whose raise the standard of Saint Mark with their frontiers".

The treatise also regulates the relations between the subjects and commercial questions and fixes the measures imposed upon the "Venetian merchants and the others" who would come "to my kept country by sea or by land" before their arrival and at their departure "they can't move without a permission". In fact, the question is to regulate all the commercial controversies, or the problems about the navigation or on another argument according to the Ottoman legislation.

After a long list of disadvantageous articles for Venice, the text turns back to the main argument: "Agreeing the peace with the enclosed items, I swear God, creator of Earth and Heaven, ruler of the world, that I will always respect the friendship and previously mentioned pacts and I won't do anything against them and that it won't be done anything against those chapters and peace".

Consequently to this diplomatic negotiation, Venice renews with its legendary neutrality, even if it was at such a price!

Conclusion

So, we have first discussed the legendary Venetian neutrality. After, we have described the context of 1537 deeply threatening the peace. Therefore, Venice had to reflect on the alternative to abandon or not its traditional neutrality. After that, we have presented the Christian League and its *Chapters*. At this point, it was crucial to observe the French position. As consequence of the previous point, the French defection has changed the balance of the events, and we have explored the failure of Preveza on this angle, giving an explanation of this campaign. And finally, we have observed the consequences for Venice and how the diplomats succeeded in restoring the Venetian neutrality.

So, in 1540, at the expense of great sacrifices, Venice took up neutrality again, assuring almost thirty years of peace, in very troubled times all the same, as Paolo Paruta summarizes in the conclusion of his Book X: "The

125 Fortunately, this manuscript has been transcribed by my late mother, Dr Joëlle Pujeau, giving me the opportunity to get an illustration text for this part of my study.

126 National Library of Marciana, It. VII 923, fasc. V, *Trattato fra il sultano e Venezia*, 1540.

year 1540 did not produce other major accidents than the conclusion of peace with the Turks, in which the Republic stayed for thirty years with great prosperity, because at the same time the things of the Mainland were calm and sure by the conserved friendship with the Christian princes"[127] !

If Venice abandoned neutrality in 1537, only three years later, the Venetian State restored it, conceding some huge damages but assuring its independence and even getting some new prosperity, as a reward of a balanced politics.

127 Paolo Paruta, *Historia Vinetiana*, livre X, in *Degl'Istorici delle cose veneziane*, 121