

# Conflict and Culture in the Mediterranean: Catalonia and the Battle of Lepanto (1571)\*

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It is not surprising that a warlike event of the importance and dimension of the Crusades, organized by the Christian Kingdoms of Europe determined to win back the territories known as the Holy Land, should be mirrored in the literature of the period. Indeed, some troubadours composed sirventes which constituted warlike propaganda, to the extent that specialists have come to define a subgenre of sirvente well-known as the crusade song (Bédier-Aubry, Jeanroy, Dronke, Riquer 1975). Obviously, Catalan troubadours were not an exception: Cerverí de Girona, for instance, referred to this topic when writing about the failure of James I's crusade (September 1269) (Riquer 1947). However, the presence of the crusade theme at the birth of Catalan literature is not exclusive to troubadour poetry, and we also find it in Ramon Llull's and Arnau de Vilanova's works (Hillgarth, Batllori). In fact, it is an idea that will continue for centuries in the West, and very especially in Catalonia. A territory with such a long shoreline in front of the African coast was very easily vulnerable and the continual Turkish and Northern-African pirate actions --it is enough to remember the fall of Constantinople (1453) or the taking of Ciutadella in Minorca (1558)— went on contributing to it, in spite of the centuries which had passed since the last great Crusade (1270) (Nicolau d'Olwer, Braudel).

As Francesco Petrarca mentions in his work about the Crusade projects (*Canzoniere*, poems XXVII and XXVIII), Ausiàs March, among other Catalan poets, in some verses of his poem XXX (*Vengut és temps...*) also mentions some of the military projects against the Turks engineered by the king of Aragon Alfons el Magnànim. Not only the organization, obviously, but the warlike actions also find echo in the literature. The siege of Rhodes, for example, maintained by the Egyptians between August 10<sup>th</sup> and September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1444, was narrated by one of those besieged, the writer Francesc Ferrer, author of the *Romanç de l'armada del Soldà contra Rodes...*, who probably met Joanot Martorell, author of the novel *Tirant lo Blanch*. But none of these Christian projects nor the different warlike actions had the impact,

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in the West, produced by the fall of Constantinople by the Turks, a topic which appears in six poems in the Catalan language (Riquer i Permanyer).

Later on, with the Catholic Kings, who considered themselves heirs of the Byzantine Empire (Reglà 1959), the idea of the winning back of the Holy Land stayed alive in both the Crown of Aragon and that of Castile. At the end of Ferdinand's reign, after Isabella's death (1504), the king returned to his own Kingdom --the Crown of Aragon-- and tried to improve his previous poor administration in these territories. He made an effort to reconstruct them politically and along military lines and, among other things, he reorganized the Catalan navy, so he was able to liberate the coasts of his Mediterranean domains from the Barbary raids and our ships recovered their old prestige in this sea. This tendency acquired new strength during Charles V's reign who embodied the hopes of a new world harmony governed by a single man and organized for the common good (Grilli). This point was very explicit in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (octaves 24 and 25, canto XV). Even saint Ignatius Loyola referred to this identification in his *Exercicios espirituales* (Batllori). The city of Barcelona counsellors, in their answer to a letter sent by Charles V informing them about his coronation as emperor in Aachen, dated on November 28<sup>th</sup> 1520, urge him to organize the crusade:

[...] axi V. M., verdadera progenie de aquell [Carlemany], será lo unidor del [Imperi] Occidental ab lo Oriental, debellant y subjugant a la Santa Fe Catholica los turcs y altres inimics de aquella, per hon tornaran los temps que los antichs apellaren *aurea secula* y habitará lo leo ab lo anyell, segons seguí en lo temps del gran emperador Octaviano Augusto, predecessor de V. C. M., quant per la redempció universal plagué al Verb increat humanarse, y que de aquesta ciutat partirá lo gran stol ab les ensenyes de la Santíssima Creu per reparació de la Casa Sancta de Ierusalem y terra de promissió, segons en alguna antiga scriptura es legit (Reglà 1958).

Charles V was able to organize an armada that, in 1535, carried out an expedition to Tunisia with success (Nicolau d'Olwer). Probably, the vision of this armada, anchored in Barcelona harbour, from where it left on May 30<sup>th</sup> of that year, stimulated the manierist painter and poet Pere Serafi to compose a new crusade song in sonnet form: *Sonet exortant a tots los faels christians a recuperar la Terra Sancta* (Bover, Romeu). But the emperor Charles didn't know how to take advantage of the victory of Tunisia: Barbarossa plundered Maó, in the island of Minorca, in September of that same year and defeated Admiral Andrea Doria in the battle of Preveza, in 1538, making clear that one could no longer speak about the Mediterranean as a Christian lake (Nicolau d'Olwer). The situation had changed, and the fall of Rhodes (1522) and the victory of Preveza (1538) marked the beginning of a spectacular series of Ottoman successes. At least until 1545, the Turks and their allies, the Barbary pirates, practically became the owners of the Mediterranean. It is against this double enemy that the Hispanic monarchy would have to fight since, during the XVIth century, this monarchy would become the leader of the Christian world in its struggle against the Ottoman

empire (Braudel, Reglà 1956).

The Hispanic recovery didn't take place until the middle of the century, already in times of Philip II, and thanks to the massive construction of galleys. Without a doubt, Pere Serafi will have been aware of the extraordinary activity developed in the shipyards of Barcelona, and he will have known the impact produced on the people of Barcelona by the new looting expedition of the Turks, instigated by France, that culminated with the "desgràcia de Ciutadella", in Minorca (1558), or the signature of the Hispanic-French peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559) and the victory of Malta (1565), that was the beginning of the end of the hegemony of the Turkish armada in the Mediterranean. However, the Latin colonies of the Mediterranean East and, consequently, the markets where Catalans could trade, a good part of which had belonged previously to the Catalan-Aragonese Crown, fell one after another to the Turks, such as the Genoese island of Quios (1566) or the Venetian island of Cyprus (1570), etc. It is not surprising, therefore, that when the coalition of the Holy League was formed between Venice, the Church and the Hispanic monarchy, which won the battle of Lepanto, the Catalans felt deeply committed to this coalition. As Antoni Comas said, Catalonia "no sólo participó en la batalla, sino que se entregó a ella con entusiasmo". Indeed, the allied armada was under the effective control of Lluís de Requesens, the official lieutenant of Juan de Austria; the flagship had been built in Barcelona, where its replica can be contemplated in the Royal Shipyards Maritime Museum; Joan de Cardona, who had participated already in the siege of Malta, commanded the reconaissance ship and, thanks to a skilled maneuver that was decisive for the victory, he managed to frustrate the attack of sixteen Turkish galleys on the Christian flank; and among the main officials we find Ferran Sanoguera, Montserrat Guardiola, Enric de Cardona, Dimas de Boixadors, Miquel de Montcada –who had in their infantry regiment Miguel de Cervantes--, Alexandre and Joan de Torrelles, Guillem de Sant Climent, Galceran de Cardona, Francesc Cornet, Lluís de Queralt, Jaume Mitjavila, Ramon Calders, Rocafull, Rafael and Bernat de Marimon – the latter died in combat--, Lluís Sacosta, Enric de Centelles, among many others --only from the village of Sant Feliu de Guíxols eighty officials participated. As all the historians point out, Lepanto was the swan song of the Catalan navy.

Obviously, the news of the Christian victory in the battle of Lepanto, which happened on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1571, as is known, didn't take a long time to arrive in Barcelona. In the collection Bonsoms of the Biblioteca de Catalunya, there is a copy of a letter written by the Ambassador in Venice to the Viceroy of Catalonia, dated October 19<sup>th</sup>, where the former explains that an armada galley had just arrived which gave news of the victory. The Diary of the Old Council of Barcelona, on Wednesday October 31st, mentions the news. On the same day, Brother Francesc Ribes, a friar of the order of the Poor Brothers of Saint Francis of Paula, pronounced a thanksgiving sermon in the Generalitat (Government Palace) in Barcelona and, days later, at the funeral for the dead knights and soldiers in the battle, and another in the cathedral. On November 18<sup>th</sup>, also as a thanksgiving act, a procession like the

one on the day of Corpus Christi was organized (Comas). As the survivors were returning, Catalonia was acquiring trophies and souvenirs of the battle: a sailor from Sant Feliu de Guíxols, called Camisó, took the pavilion of the admiral Alí Bajà's ship; the lantern of the Turkish captain galley was taken to the monastery of Montserrat; the Virgin of the Victoria to the monastery of Montsió, in Barcelona; to the cathedral of Barcelona, the celebrated Christ of Lepanto –which seems to have an inclined head in order to avoid to an Ottoman bullet--; besides numerous flags and streamers that were spread throughout the whole country (Nicolau d'Olwer, Comas).

As could not be otherwise, the literature of the period echoes this heroic deed. In the Mediterranean Christian countries many works about the battle appeared in diverse languages. In Catalan, for example, two sheets of paper are kept, which were published in 1571, one of them in Barcelona: *Cobles i relació de tot lo que està dit fins lo dia de vull sobre la victòria que Nostre Senyor Déu ha dada alcançar al senyor Joan d'Àustria contra l'armada del Gran Turc*, and the other one in València: *Crida sobre les gràcies i alegries de la victòria contra l'armada del Turc, la qual se féu ab trompetes, atabals i ministrils*. But also, at least two learned poets composed poems on this topic. The Majorcan Dionís Pont wrote a poem in octaves, of which, at present, only the three first are known, titled *Vertadera relació del combat naval dels cristians tengut en lo golf de Lepanto quantre els infeels*. The other text, on the other hand, was more fortunate. Their author was Joan Pujol, a counter-reformist priest and admirer and imitator of the poet Ausiàs March, and his long poem --1568 verses-- was the first important literary work to appear in the Iberian Peninsula after the battle: *La singular y admirable victòria que per la gràcia de N[ostre] S[enyor] D[éu] obtingué el sereníssim senyor don Joan d'Àustria de la potentíssima armada turquesca* (Barcelona: Pere Malo, [1573]) (Comas, Anton).

For the most part written in hendecasyllabic verses, following the great Valencian poet, the poem is divided in three cantos, preceded by the argument of the story. The first one is about the aid provided by the Christian squad to Famagusta (Cyprus), sieged by the Turks, one year before the battle. The second one narrates the formation of the Holy League and the preparation for the battle. And the third one, the longest, describes the victory on October 7th. Next we find Pujol's introduction, a poem in Latin by his friend Canon Lluís Joan Vileta and the translation into Catalan also by Pujol. In the dedication of his work to Jeroni de Pinós, Pujol who didn't participate in the battle, explains that he has tried to narrate the true history of what happened and that, if the whole truth is not to be found there, it should be attributed to those who have participated in the battle, from which he has taken the information. His poem, which speaks of the Christian victory in Lepanto and highlights the importance of the Catalan contribution, constitutes the only sample of Renaissance epic poetry in Catalan literature.

But the presence of Lepanto in Catalonia is not limited to learned literature, it can also be found in popular literature. The lantern of the Turkish flagship that was deposited in

Montserrat --missing after the fire and destruction of the monastery during the war against France (1811-1812)-- inspired a traditional song, well-known as *La llàntia del rei moro*, also known in the island of Majorca (Massot). Pope Pius V's decision had important consequences for popular religious practice in Catalonia and, in turn, it created a new genre in our song book. The Pope explained that on the eve of the battle, October 6<sup>th</sup>, the Virgin of Roser appeared and announced the victory that the fleet of the Holy League would obtain the next day in the Gulf of Lepanto. As a consequence of this appearance, the Catholic Church decided to transfer the festivity of the Virgin of Roser to October 7<sup>th</sup>. Starting from then, the devotion to the Virgin of Roser extended quickly throughout Catalonia and the construction of altars and chapels dedicated to her spread, such as the Roser Chapel in Valls, with its magnificent panels of glazed tiles representing the battle of Lepanto (1634). Some groups of girls that were known as the "majorales" of the Madonna of Roser took charge of making this cult known. With the purpose of picking up funds for the maintenance of these altars and chapels, these girls used to sing in popular gatherings of a festival kind (baptisms, weddings, patron saint festivities, i. e.), events in which they specialized in interpreting brief and improvised profane songs, accompanied by a tambourine. Then, the tambourine passed around for people to make a contribution. These songs, well-known as "cançons de pandero" (tambourine songs), were characterized by having a verse that was repeated all through the song, a verse that served so that the "majorala" who was the main singer could be improvising the new verses that would continue the piece (Serra, Cogul/Gassol).

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