

THE RE-FORMATION OF ANTICHRIST:



Jacobean adaptations of the Battle of Lepanto

By Bent Holm

The Battle of Lepanto, 1571, between the Holy League and the Ottoman Empire became an iconic point of orientation in the early modern European encounters with the Islamic world. In His Maiesties Lepanto from 1591, James VI of Scotland depicts the Battle as God's victory over Antichrist. It was referred to in James' entry in London in 1604; and it was echoed in Shakespeare's Othello, which was premiered that same year. Lepanto played a role in the Jacobean regime's staging of itself. It was re-enacted various times in performances that were given an official design in panegyric publications.

A two-story historiography

The European victory in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 between the Catholic Holy League under the command of Don Juan of Austria, and the Ottoman Empire became an iconic point of orientation in the early modern European encounters with the Islamic world. The significance ascribed to the event as a proof that the Ottoman Empire was not invincible nor unstoppable, was enormous.

The Battle was not the result of a plan or strategy. An Ottoman army had invaded Cyprus in 1570. When Don Juan's Christian fleet came to the rescue, he realized that the mission was hopeless, and therefore headed for Lepanto where the Ottoman fleet lay at anchor. From the Ottoman point of view, the defeat was a minor episode in a lasting warfare against the Western powers – originally marked by the idea of a re-integration in the Empire, under Ottoman leadership, of the lost western part of the Roman Empire, in a kind of reverse crusade thinking. The Sultan's reaction to the defeat was to rebuild his fleet and double his resolve to control North Africa and the sea routes via Malta and Sicily. In a short time, the Ottoman fleet was reconstructed and the frightening advances were resumed. Six months after the defeat, the Turks had built two hundred new galleys and captured Cyprus – which, by the way, is the scene of Shakespeare's *Othello* that takes place during the Turkish-Venetian wars. Two years after Lepanto, the Venetians signed a peace treaty

acknowledging the Sultan's sovereignty over Cyprus and even paid him a financial tribute. A massive Turkish fleet then seized Tunis.¹ So much for western superiority and triumph.

However, in the western perspective, Lepanto stood as a turning point, God's crucial intervention in the ongoing apocalyptic drama between good and evil. Paolo Veronese's painting from 1572–1573 (see Fig. 1) exposes the two levels. The divine implication in the events, represented by the group of over-size figures in the sky, dominates the upper half of the picture; it shows the presentation of the personification of Venice to the Holy Virgin to the left, surrounded by the patron saints of the participants in the League, Rocco, Peter, Justina, Marcus, accompanied by a chorus of angels. The lower level presents the actual battle. The two halves are divided by a layer of clouds. From the heavenly level rays of light are sent down to the left side, while oblique rays of storm and darkness and arrows of fire, thrown by an angel, hit the right side. The horizontal movement in the painting goes from left to right; on the upper half Madonna is turned to the right, on the lower part the vessels' pennants indicate the wind direction. It is the sun's direction, and even the reading direction. The dynamic is directed against the negative right side. The western part is strong and light and equipped with straight, rank masts, whereas the eastern side is dark and chaotic, marked by more crooked or scattered masts. The overall composition is oriented around a vertical and a horizontal axis, eventually forming a cross. The montage of heavenly and an earthly level implies that the truth about the event is twofold, spiritual and material at the same time. However, the different proportions in the painting demonstrate that the physical aspect is of a minor importance, compared to the heavenly drama, which in all respects takes place above the actual naval battle.

Not only the Catholic side read the Battle as God's intervention in a crucial conflict. It played a significant role even in various Protestant – for instance English and Scottish – contexts, with particular reference to Daniel's prophecies from the Old Testament and the New Testament's Book of Revelation. In such contexts, the adversary would appear to be an incarnation of Antichrist – Christ's diabolical, apocalyptic counterpart. Together with the Spanish Armada, 1588, Lepanto was included in both confessional and national mythologizations of contemporary historiography.

The idea of this article is to focus on the interaction between the actual event on the one hand, and a complex conglomeration of ideological and performative interpretations on the other, with specific regard to King James VI of Scotland – from 1603 James I of England, Scotland and Ireland – and

¹ Cf. Brotton 2017, 64 and 72.

his relation to the Ottoman Empire. The Battle itself was a dynamic event. It was inscribed in an apocalyptic narrative. The encoding was transformed into staged embodiments in ritualized re-enactments. And the performances were published in authoritative versions in official splendour books, based on given formulas. However, there are no absolute distinctions between history, theology and theatre.

Certain wave motions between dynamics and fixations, events and medializations, circumstances and framings, can be observed. But first and foremost, it is about a constant juxtaposition of fact and truth.

Apocalypse soon

Given the geographical conditions it may seem strange that the ‘Turk’ played a role in the Jacobean mind. Nevertheless, he did. Although the British Islands were remote from the Ottoman Empire, the *mental* front was far from remote. Despite the distance to the theatre of war, the fear was massive. In the late sixteenth century prayers were said in the churches during the fights in the Mediterranean Sea about Malta and in central Europe about Hungary. God was invoked for help to avert the assaults on the Christian world. The point is that what was at stake was Christendom as such. When the Turkish campaign in Hungary was reassumed in 1593 – which initiated the Long Turkish War that lasted until 1606 and aimed even at a conquest of Vienna – a *Policy of the Turkish Empire* was published. It claims that “the terrour of their name doth even now make the kings and Princes of the West [...] tremble and quake through the feare of their victorious forces”.² The archbishop of Canterbury referred to “our sworne and most deadly enemyes the Turkes”, when he preached that if “the Infidels” should prevail in those regions and manage to conquer them completely then the rest of Christendom will be exposed “to the incursions and invasions of the said savage and most cruel enemies the Turks, to the most dreadful danger of the whole Christendom”.³

It was thus the religious implication of the military challenge that was at stake. But that should be seen against an eschatological backdrop. This apocalyptic aspect of the Turkish peril was inspired by continental conceptions, primarily developed by Martin Luther.

² Bergeron 2010, 1. See also Vitkus 2003, 82. Vaughan 1994 describes p. 31 the work as anonymously published in “London: Printed for Iohn Windet 1597”. See also Burton 2005, 175 and 204 about the commercial-political relations to the Turkish ‘Antichrist’. See also Kenan 2010, 13–64, concerning socio-cultural interactions between the Ottomans and Europe.

³ In Vitkus 2003, 79–80. See also Dimmock 2005, 76–81.

The continental connection

During Queen Mary's re-catholization of England 1553–1558, almost 300 religious dissenters were burned at the stake, and around 800 persons sought exile in Protestant cities on the continent to avoid the persecutions. Several of them cooperated with the reformers and frequented the Protestant universities; it is the period when a Lutheran historiography was elaborated.⁴

Luther paid great interest in the Apocalypse. Initially, he was not sure of its canonical status, nor of its significance. As for the Turks, in his 95 theses from 1517 that initiated the Protestant Reformation, he implicitly defined them as the scourge of God that could only be averted by refraining from sin. However, Süleyman I's siege of Vienna, 1529, was a real eye-opener to him. Only then did he really understand the message: that the Book of Revelation described the history of the church, and that the papacy and the Ottoman empire filled the role of the arch-enemy, in the shape of the twofold Antichrist. Based on that realization he phrased his comments on the Book and saw to it that it was properly illustrated so the message became clear.

In his dissertations about war against the Turk from 1529, Luther elaborated the apocalyptic motif.⁵ He took his point of departure in Daniel's prophecies from The Old Testament, and he identified the four monsters that Daniel saw in his vision as the Assyrian-Babylonian, the Persian-Median, the Greek and the Roman empires. The argument was applied to actual, contemporary historical events meaning that the eleventh horn that emerges from the 'Roman' monster stands for the aggressive Ottoman Empire. Two particularly negative components play roles on the contemporary stage, following a diabolical and a divine scenario: the Pope and the Turk. First, the Pope has been sent out by the Devil in order to kill us spiritually, and then the Turk to kill us physically. These events herald the end of times, the coming of Doomsday and the return of the Saviour. He, who fights the Turk in war, fights the Devil. And he who falls because of the Turk's bloodthirsty cruelty, he will immediately become a martyr. He goes directly to Paradise. The Devil thus deceives himself. For the sooner Paradise is filled up, the sooner the Saviour will return.

Luther's sermon against the Turk calls the citizens to fight against the Ottomans under Emperor Charles' banner. So, although his German majesty is Catholic and the Pope is Antichrist, whoever fights the Turk defends Christendom as such.

⁴ Firth 1979, 69.

⁵ See Holm 2014, 29–38. Principal sources are Luther's treatises "On war against the Turks" and "Military sermon against the Turk", 1529.

Luther came back to the conspiracy model in various connections throughout his career. In one of his *Table Talks* published in 1566, he claimed that:

Antichrist is at the same time the Pope and the Turk. A living creature consists of body and soul. The spirit of Antichrist is the Pope, his flesh the Turk. One attacks the Church physically, the other spiritually. Both however are of one lord, the devil, since the Pope is a liar and the Turk a murderer. But make a single person of Antichrist and you'll find both a liar and a murderer in the Pope.⁶

The key to the true meaning of actual events thus lay in the continental apocalypticists' statements. Luther's texts had an enormous impact on the conception of the Catholic Church, on the understanding of the Pope as Antichrist, and of the Islamic world, the Ottoman empire, personified in the image of the Turk, as one aspect of Antichrist.

The unholy league

This apocalypsation of history was annexed at an early stage of the reformation process by the English and Scottish reformers. The true identity of Antichrist was introduced by Archbishop Cranmer already in 1536;⁷ obviously, it had to do with the tense relationship with Rome under Henry VIII, resulting in the construction of the Church of England in 1534. Also, the figure's duality was soon exposed. In his *Exposicion of Daniell the Prophete*, 1545, the Bible translator George Joye said about Antichrist, that "the Turk, Mahomet, the Popes of Rome, their cardinals, bishops, monks, priests and friars have played, and yet play this part."⁸ In *The Image of bothe Churches after the moste wonderfull and heavenly Revelacion of Sainct John the Evangelist*, 1548, the influential churchman and playwright John Bale talked about "the universall or whole Antichriste" or the "bestiall body" of Satan, "comprehending in hym so well Mahomete as the Pope, so well the ragyng tyraunt as the still hypocrite, and all that wickedly worketh are of the same body."⁹ In short, the beast from the abyss in the Revelation was:

The cruell, craftye, and cursed generacion of Antichrist, the pope with his bishoppes, prelates, priestes, and religiouse in Europa, Mahomete with his dottinge dousepers in Affrica, and so forth in Asia and India.¹⁰

The reformers' depiction of the fundamental conspiracy is pretty unequivocal.

⁶ In Vitkus 2003, 60.

⁷ Bauckham 1978, 100.

⁸ Bale, *The Image*, sig.b.vii.v., quoted from Bauckham 1978, 95.

⁹ Quoted in Bauckham 1978, 61.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

The most influential book of English Protestantism next to the Bible, and one of the most widely spread and widely read texts in Elizabethan England at all, was the historian John Foxe's imposing *Acts and Monuments*, also known as 'Foxe's Book of Martyrs', first published in 1563. The book, that was made accessible in public halls, cathedrals, churches etc., contains a history of the Church, including the sufferings of Protestants under the Catholic Church, "speciallye in this realm of England and Scotland", and an identification of Antichrist with the papacy. It was edited several times, for instance in 1596, after the renewed Turkish campaign in Hungary. In the second edition from 1570 Foxe inserted a long account of the "history of the Turkes", stating that even though the Turk seems to "to be farre off, yet do we nourish within our breasts at home, that [which] may soon cause us to feele his cruell hand and worse, if worse may be, to overrunne us: to lay our land waste: to scatter us amongst the Infidels" and claiming that "the whole power of sathan the prince of this world, goeth with the Turkes",¹¹ in the well-known internalization manoeuvre – stating that the Turk's power is due to our own sins. Furthermore, he included a section on *Prophecies of the Turke and the Pope, which of them is the greater Antichrist*. He related the Turks' incursions in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean to the usual apocalyptic context, ending up in reflections on the existence of two churches, that of Christ and that of Antichrist. The Church of England is the Church of Christ, whereas the adversary includes both the Pope and the Turk. The demonization of the Turks gave an argument for a powerful reformation of the English church: the Turkish threat was due to the need of a radical showdown with Catholicism.

Foxe also used dramatic forms to convey his message. In his allegorical 'comoedia apocalyptica' *Christus Triumphans* from 1556, he combined history and prophecy, thus anticipating the periodisation he elaborated in *Acts and Monuments*. The satanic characters perform, according to the place where they act, in different disguises. Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, Psycephorus becomes Hypocrisy, dressed as a Franciscan, Adopylus becomes the Catholic King etc. Antichrist is devil and man, like Christ was God and man. It appears even that the Pope is one of his identities. However, his time is limited, his power is restrained. He participates in a divine scenario.

This correlation between prophesy and historiography and the doctrine of the two churches including the papacy as Antichrist was dominant in the late sixteenth century. The effect of the false church's acts was close at hand: the actual persecutions, the martyrs under Queen Mary's reign. The threat of new

¹¹ In Vitkus 2003, 61, cf. Dimmock 2005, 79 and Bauckham 1978, 165.

persecutions, carried out by the false church, was still there, given the nation's alleged disobedience to the Gospel. On the other hand, the Apocalypse assured, as a consolation, that the power of Antichrist was not unlimited. The Reformation was per se part of the final, apocalyptic battle. The expectation of the end of times was real. When Elizabeth took the English throne 1558 she was hailed as "A noble conqueror of antichrist and of his wicked kingdom."¹² A medal from 1587 presents her enthroned in triumph over a seven-headed apocalyptical beast.

In his *Sermons upon the whole booke of Revelation*, 1596, the preacher George Gifford proclaimed that the fire-breathing cavalry of the sixth trumpet represented the Turks, and that:

No man of judgement [...] can doubt, that this revelation revealing and describing all the greatest calamities and plagues that should come upon men in the world, should not set forth the kingdome of the Turkes.¹³

This view was followed up by Arthur Dent in his *The Rvine of Rome* from 1603, when he says that the first four trumpets describes the gradual growth of heresy within the church, making way for the coming of Antichrist, and the fifth and sixth trumpet foretold the parallel rise and growth of papacy and the Turks including a comparison of Muslim and papist doctrines.¹⁴

These ideas were not just reserved to the theological field. In 1570 the poet John Phillips wrote in his *A Friendly Larum or Faythfull Warnynge to the True-harted Subiectes of England. Discoueryng the Actes and Malicious Myndes of those obstinate Papists that hope (as they term it) to haue their Golden Day for instance that:*

If Mahomet, that prophet false,
Eternity do gain,
Then shall the pope, and you his saints,
In heaven sure to reign.¹⁵

The enemy of God showed two primary faces that furthermore tended to merge. Protestant writers called for a battle against the Roman Catholic regime a crusade against "the second Turke", and Roman Catholicism was

¹² Thomas Becon in 1564 quoted by Bauckham 1978, 128.

¹³ George Gifford, *Sermons upon the whole booke of the Revelation*, 1596, 173. Quoted after Bauckham 1978, 98.

¹⁴ With the lengthy subtitle that predicts that *the power and authoritie of Rome, shall ebbe and decay still more and more throughout all the churches of Europe, and come to an vtter overthrow euen in this life before the end of the world*. Cf. Ball 1975, 81–82. The idea lived on during the 17th century, cf. op. cit. p. 87.

¹⁵ After Burton 2005, 129.

equated to Islam in for example *De Turco-Papismo*, published in London in 1599, after catholic accusations of *Calvino-Turcism* in the year 1597.¹⁶

That the Pope is Antichrist became a solid dogma to the Elizabethan Church of England, also shared by James. The Turks rose and fell as an anti-christian threat; the papacy was a more constant adversary.

The apocalyptic Armada

The ascription a higher meaning to actual events was a general feature in the era. Even the Spanish were supposed to conspire with Antichrist. Consequently, an enormous significance was attributed to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 – a year that according to various calculations was assumed to imply the end of the world and the second Coming of Christ. Allegedly, Spain's aggression was due to the Pope's fury because of Elizabeth's restoring the pure faith in her realm; and the victory was due to a divine intervention. Evidently, Protestant England had a special role to play in God's cosmic drama.

The event provoked reflections on the biblical prophecies in both England and Scotland. In his *Ane Frvitfvll Meditatioun contening ane plane and facill expositioun of ye 7.8.9. and 10. versis of the 20. Chap. of the Reuelatioun* from 1588, King James stated that "Of all the Scriptures the buik of the Reuelatioun maist meit for this our last age",¹⁷ and demonstrated that it dealt with state affairs, including the Armada. Furthermore, he saw a connection between the Spanish and the Turks. However, Antichrist had been overthrown by an alliance of secular and spiritual powers.

Similarly, in his book about the church's liberation from Antichrist from 1590, the French Protestant Jean Baptiste Morel saw the defeat of the Armada as a result of combined divine and human efforts, that had been prophesied in the Revelation; and once the papal Antichrist had been destroyed, the alliance should turn against the Turks and liberate the churches of the East. Elizabeth was an instrument of God's in the fight for the true faith and against Rome.¹⁸

Also, the mathematician John Napier's influential *A Plaine Discouery of the whole Reuelation of Saint John*, Edinburgh 1593, was written in the aftermath of 1588; in both dedication and text he called upon James and other

¹⁶ Schmuck 2005, 14.

¹⁷ In Ball 1975, 22–23. See also Christiansson 1978, 166–70.

¹⁸ Bauckham 1978, 179, Elizabeth was celebrated as, or compared to, the holy Virgin. They shared date of birth in Thomas Dekker's play *The Whore of Babylon* from 1607 Elizabeth is portrayed as Titania, the Fairie Queene, the greatest enemy of the Empress of Babylon, who suffers her severe defeat in a version of the Armada victory. She inflicts on the beast its final mortal wound.

princes “without pitie, ruth, and mercie to procede with all possible extremitie against that devilish seat [of Rome] to the utter extirpation thereof.”¹⁹

The Jacobean gaze

As King of Scotland James deliberately moved his politics in the English direction, including a rapprochement of the Scottish church to the English structure. After the completion of the French reign in 1560 – James’ mother, Queen of Scots Mary Stuart, was queen consort of Francis II who died that year – English books were spread among the population. John Foxe’s important work took a great number of its examples from Scottish ecclesiastical history and it was well known, also in Scotland. The Scottish reformation was much influenced by continental and English concepts.

In 1586 James entered a ‘league of amity’ with England which was formalized in the shape of a personal union at his accession to the English throne in 1603. In connection with his enthronement, a number of his texts were reprinted in England. For instance, his *Daemonologie* from 1597, echoed in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*,²⁰ and his interpretation of the Apocalypse. James’ book was just one title among a number of publications about the books of Daniel and Revelation by other authors. The general experience of living in pivotal times was reinforced by the passing of the throne from Tudors to Stuarts.

James was also a poet. In his poem, *His Maiesties Lepanto*, originally written in 1591, and re-edited in 1603, he inscribes the Battle in a cosmic historiography. James mobilizes the highest and the lowest forces, God and the Devil, in the battle about the true faith’s victory or defeat. It is the very power and credibility of God that is at stake. James’ fundamental ideas, as expressed in the poem, accord with the era’s general theological conceptions, including Antichrist as a powerful actor on the eschatological stage. Events are signs. They have a meaning. In the beginning of the poem the Devil mocks, scorns and ridicules God, referring to the Turk’s strength and power. God therefore sends his arch-angel Gabriel to rouse the Venetians to fight the threatening infidels. Like another Virgil, James sings the battle, which:

fought was in Lepantoe’s gulfe
Betwixt the baptized race
And circumcised Turband Türkeş
Rencountring in that place.²¹

¹⁹ Firth 1979, 138. About Muhammad ibidem, 143.

²⁰ See Holm 1999, 1–11.

²¹ Rhodes, Richards & Marshall 2003, 94. For a systematic introduction to the relation between Lepanto and *Othello* see Jones 1968, cf. also Matar 1999, 143–44. Matar is not crystal clear when he says that the radicalized formulations “were not in the original Scottish

The battle takes place as an encounter on life and death, a fight man against man, the good against the evil. Eventually, it turns out that God is stronger than the Devil, it all ends well with the defeat of the Turks and thereby – according to the *Chorus Venetus* and the final *Chorus Angelorum* which puts the event into its true cosmic perspective – with God’s victory over Antichrist!

As an emphasizing of his anti-Catholic and anti-Islamic sense of responsibility, James elaborated the ideological interpretation of the Battle in the re-edition of *His Maiesties Lepanto* in 1603. It was an important task. Both Scotland and England had been re-catholicised for a time in the sixteenth century, entailing both persecutions and exiles. James’ queen, Anne, was suspected of being Catholic – and probably was. In his preface to the London edition of the poem James therefore attempted to lay down a smokescreen on the slightly delicate matter that it was an alliance of Catholic powers led by Don Juan of Austria who fought the Battle, by underlining, that he does not write in praise of a foreign ‘Papist bastard’, and that it is not about one single person’s deed, but about the victory of God. He also draws a frontline to the predecessor’s, Elizabeth’s, more pragmatic policy towards Islamic Constantinople. After having been excommunicated by the Pope in 1570 Elizabeth looked for the commercial and military potentials – for instance against Spain – in a positive relation to the Ottoman Empire. In her letters to the Sultan, she referred to Protestantism and Islam as monotheistic religions, unlike Catholicism. Her trade treaty appeared even as an important promotion of Christianity! Furthermore, this took place in a context of a European discussion of a united campaign against the Turk, “this Babylonian nabugadnazar and Turkish Pharaoh so near in our noses.”²² The partly pro-Turkish line – but not the trade – was abandoned by James as soon as he took office as the ruler. He even considered approaching Spain for a united front against the Turks, the common enemy of Christendom.

The Turkish focus

James’ particular interest in the Turkish theme is reflected in a number of works that were published in the year of his ascension, for example, Richard

version but only in the English ‘translation’ that was prepared for the English press. At his accession, the king wanted to emphasize his anti-Muslim stance”. However, the ‘original Scottish’ version means the poem in its manuscript form, before it was printed for the first time in 1591. This was done in Edinburgh, and so far the poem is still ‘Scottish’, even though linguistically anglicised and supplied with the de-radicalizing formulations. A really ‘English’ version *His Maiesties Lepanto, or heroicall song being part of his poeticall exercises at vacant houres* was only published at James’ enthronement in 1603. See Cragie 1955–1958 for philological realia, and Rhodes, Richards & Marshall 2003, 94–106 for annotated text.

²² Augustine Curio, *A notable History of the Saracens*, published in English in 1575, cf. Burton 2005, 64–65.

Knolles' *The Generall Historie of the Turks, from The first beginning of that Nation to the rising of the Ottoman Familie: with all the notable expeditions of the Christian Princes against them. Together with the Lives and Conquests of the Othoman Kings and Emperours Faithfullie collected out of the best Histories, both auntient and moderne, and digested into one continuat Historie until this present yeare 1603*. The book was specifically dedicated to King James and refers explicitly to his interest in the matter. It describes the Turk as "the present terrour of the worlde".²³ Knolles praises James' poem about Lepanto:

and the rather, for that your Maiestie hath not disdained in your *Lepanto*, or *Heroicall Song*, with your learned Muse to adorne and set forth the greatest and most glorious victorie that euer was by any of the Christian confederat princes obtained against the *Othoman Kings* or Emperors.²⁴

And he emphasizes, that exactly James' vigilance is this barbaric enemy's greatest terror! Knolles depicts the Turk as a lurking greedy lion – the way the Bible describes the Devil – ready to swallow the entire world including "the famous illands of Rhodes and Cyprus".²⁵ He recounts the Battle of Lepanto meticulously, including the prelude, for instance the Venetian senate's debates about the perilous position of the island of Cyprus which by the way make up a major part of the first act of Shakespeare's *Othello*.

As a matter of fact, Knolles' work is one of Shakespeare's inspirations for *Othello* from 1604, the year of James' ceremonial entry in London, concerning both the backdrop of the plot, the Turco-Venetian wars, and the plot itself, Knolles' history of the Ottoman officer Ionuses Pasha and his irrational jealousy towards his wife, the Christian Greek woman Manto, which ends up in murder.

Another typical example is *The Ottoman*, the English version, published in 1603, of the Venetian Lazzaro Soranzo's an anti-Turkish treaty *L'Ottomano* from 1599. Soranzo describes the Turk's corruption, cruelty and despotism, with particular reference to the ruling sultan Mehmet III, with whom the Western powers at that time were engaged in a fierce war. The Turk is waging war not in order to obtain peace, as the Christians do, but simply for war's sake. If Venice gives in to his attack, it will mean a blow to the entire Christendom, which then is in danger of succumbing to the Evil Empire. The

²³ See Parry 2003.

²⁴ Cf. Jones 1968, 48.

²⁵ Vaughan 1994, 24. Brotton's dating, 7–8 d 274–89, of *Othello* to the late Elizabethan era is problematic, due to for instance Shakespeare's indisputable knowledge of Knolles' book from 1603. James put an end to Elizabeth's policy of alliance with the Islamic world, especially the 'Turks' – the threatening foe in the tragedy.

text concludes with a call for a preventive European campaign to conquer Constantinople.

Correspondingly, the domino theory was suggested by Abraham Ortelius in his *Epitome of the Theater of the World*, also from 1603: apart from the territories the sultan has already taken, he “threatens two doe wors if God inspire not the hartes of the Christian Princes vnitedlye two resistance testing him.”²⁶

Re-enactments

Militarily the Occident was not the stronger part, compared to the Ottoman Empire. The sixteenth century was marked by Ottoman victories – the conquest of Belgrade, Rhodes, most of Hungary, Cyprus – and the Turks’ dramatic pressure on Vienna, Italy, Corfu, Malta, Poland. In 1603, the year of James’ coronation, they controlled a considerable part of Eastern Europe. The Mediterranean Sea was a high-risk zone. The Turks dominated the eastern Mediterranean and harassed the western by means of institutionalized privateering that took vessels, cargoes and crews to be sold as slaves. The pirates sailed as far north as to the British Isles and even to Iceland where several hundred people were taken as slaves.²⁷ The military humiliation caused fear and demonization. England was no dominant maritime or commercial power. The English did not act from a position of superiority. Europe was indeed colonizing, expanding; but it was also the subject of colonization – Europe was *being* colonized.

Seen in that perspective, the construction of the enemy image was also a defensive reaction. Lepanto was an iconic motif in that connection, even in performative versions.

Already in 1572, the Battle of Lepanto was staged in a masque performance.²⁸ At James’ son Prince Henry Frederick’s baptismal celebration in 1594, the fundamental antagonism was performed in tournaments between Christian knights and Turks and Moors.²⁹ Also, *Othello* should be understood in that context. The first documented performance of *Othello* was for the royal court and took place in 1604. When in the ending the title character talks about: “a turbaned Turk [...] the circumcised dog”,³⁰ he apparently quotes his majesty’s poem, which describes the “circumcised Turband Türkes”.

Othello takes place during the fourth Venetian-Turkish war 1570–1573, between the Ottoman Empire and the Christian league, not least about the

²⁶ After Vaughan 1994, 23–24.

²⁷ Cf. Helgason 2018.

²⁸ Walsh 2015, 26–44.

²⁹ Bergeron 2010, 2.

³⁰ Shakespeare 2008, 396.

extreme Christian outpost Cyprus. The war reached its peak in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 that temporarily broke the Turkish military naval power. But, as seen above, Cyprus was lost to the Turks the following year and remained Turkish for 300 years. However, this is not what happened on the stage. In Shakespeare's tragedy, the Turkish fleet goes down in a furious storm, resulting in the salvation of the island of Cyprus from the devastating threat. What happens is that another iconic event interferes. The Spanish Armada had threatened the English island in 1588 – and subsequently in 1596, 1597 and 1598, in other words pretty close in time – and each time it had been scattered by storms and perished in the waves, all of which was seen as a divine intervention that wiped out the odious, Popish enemy: *Afflavit Deus et dissipati sunt*, 'God blew and they were scattered', according to a commemorative medal.³¹ The parallel to the description in *Othello* is striking. The writing of the story follows a scheme that represents a deeper truth than the actual events. Both Lepanto and the Armada lie behind *Othello*.³² In both cases, God proves his superior might. Implicitly the Pope and the Turk merge into the evil enemy of God's people, that is crushed by a superior force. Apart from the Turks, the evil force in *Othello* is represented by Jago, whose name has Spanish connotations – Santiago being the iconic Spanish patron saint.

Lepanto played a role in the regime's staging of itself. The religious significance of the Battle permeated various royal performative activities, including James' ceremonial entry in London in 1604. The staging of this significant event, which involved, among others, Ben Jonson and the Shakespearean actor Edward Alleyn, referred to both the Battle and the king's poem: on a triumphal arch Apollo pointed "his right hand with a golden wand in it [...] to the battel of Lepanto fought by the Turks, (about which his Maiestie hath written a Poem)."³³

The Battle was re-enacted in various connections, in re-coded appropriations of the event. James' poem was echoed in staged naval battles. In 1610 Henry Frederick's inauguration as Prince of Wales was celebrated in various spectacular ways, including Richard Burbage, the first interpreter of

³¹ In the Islamic view the Spanish were hit by "a sharp wind", sent by God, referring to the Qur'an's description of the divine wind that punished the polytheistic people of Aad; unlike Protestantism, Catholicism was understood as polytheistic, and the victory was interpreted by Ottomans and Moroccans as a sign that God was on Elizabeth's side. Cf. Brotton 2017, 149.

³² In the Spanish perspective, the two campaigns were literally seen as parallels, both of them being severe blows on the 'infidel' enemies, the Muslims and the Protestants. The ceremony used before the Battle of Lepanto was therefore repeated when the Armada raised its banner. See Brotton 2017, 146.

³³ Thomas Dekker, *The Magnificent Entertainment given to King James*, 1604, quoted in Bergeron, 1971, 78. See also Jones 1968, 49.

Othello, among the performers; moreover, that same spring *Othello* was performed at The Globe Theatre. During the celebrations, a battle between British and Turkish ships was fought on the River Thames, ending up in a magnificent pyrotechnical explosion of a Turkish fortress.³⁴ Apart from the political and religious message it appears to be a compensatory rewriting of the actual inferiority, given the devastating inroads, the Turks inflicted on the British Mediterranean traffic. Especially London and Bristol were haunted by loss of seamen. The representations of heroic Englishmen who defeated and enslaved the Turks were literally fiction.

James aimed at a unification with the continental Protestants against the Catholic Habsburgs and eventually a common front against the Ottomans in Central Europe. Princess Elizabeth's wedding in 1613 to Friedrich, Elector Palatine, was a strategical move in that respect. Six years later, Friedrich was crowned as King of Bohemia but lost his kingship after only one year in connection with the events that triggered the Thirty Years' War. After that brief reign, Elizabeth, known as the 'Winter Queen', became the ancestress of the Hanoverian English royal house.

Among the activities that preceded the magnificent wedding was a performance of *Othello* for the royal family, and during the wedding celebrations in London a naval battle was performed on the River Thames. It was introduced with a pyrotechnic performance of St. George defeating the dragon³⁵ – symbolizing England's crushing of the evil forces. Explicitly, the encounter referred to "the happy and famous Battell of Lepanto" that England strictly speaking had no part in, and implicitly to both James' poem and to the Spanish Armada.³⁶ The battle involved a number of 36 Christians ships and Turkish galleys, sailing out from "a Supposed Turkish or Barbarian Castle of Tunis, Algiers, or some other Mahometan fortification", and was attended by thousands of spectators – comprising the royal family from Whitehall. Four floating fireworks fortresses and Algiers city built on the shore were presented. The Turks took first the Venetian Catholic ships. But when the "English navie" appeared and was met with cheers, the Turk was fought all the way. The British vanquished the infidels' fortifications:

and tooke prisoner the Turke's Admirall, with divers Bahsawes [:pashas] and the other Türkes [...] which prisoners were [...] convoyed to the King's Majestie as a representation of pleasure, that to his Highness caused delight, and highly pleased all there present.³⁷

³⁴ Cf. Matar 1999, 145–48.

³⁵ Bergeron 1971, 96.

³⁶ Bergeron 2010, 6; Matar 1999, 146–50.

³⁷ Matar 1999, 148.

The ‘Turks’ were subjected to the royal supremacy. The construction of the naval battle cost staggering sums, which far exceeded the already costly court masques. Theme and message had the highest priority.

The celebrations continued in Bristol, the other city that was particularly plagued by Turkish piracy. Once again, a naval battle between Turks and Christians, the crescent and the cross, was performed, once again for an audience of thousands, and with Lepanto allusions and appeals to the Christian rulers to unite and expel the Turks from Europe.³⁸ Once more God – who is able to tame the wild sea and the Turk's fury as well – secured the valiant Englishmen the glorious victory. The purification effect of the subjugation of evil was completed when the defeated ‘Turkish’ prisoners were handed over to Queen Anne, “Which captives brought before here Grace, on bended knees did crave / For Mercy, which here Majestie with pardon granted them”. The conclusion was that those who will “undermine our state [shall end up] entrapped in the self-same snare, they did the others lay”,³⁹ with an implicit allusion to the Gunpowder Plot, also known as the Jesuit Treason, of 1605.

These re-enactments of the Battle are comparable to the counterfactual basic situation in *Othello* when the Turkish fleet perishes in a furious storm off Cyprus with the Spanish Armada's downfall by divine intervention as a subtext.

What matters is the fundamental antagonism, not the historiographical accuracy. The re-enactments imply an embodiment of the memory of the original event which thus is re-formed, passed on and kept alive. The royal performances were subsequently given an official design in panegyric publications – in short, the authorized, ultimate version which then became *the* historical truth, *the* memory of the event. In the official depictions, the performances appeared to be brilliant successes. Internal, un-official documents show however that not all went well in the 1613 re-enactment in London; participants were seriously injured, one got both hands blown off, another lost both eyes, several persons were burned or otherwise badly injured, and maybe even worse: it seems the king was not amused. The official report about the performative event involved a pre-existing matrix. The narrative was written a priori.

The given frame of interpretation is part of the context. When James eight years after the second staged naval battle actually attacked Algeria, it ended as an embarrassing defeat with an outrageous sequel when the British fleet in frustration in a pure pirate manner attacked and looted a French and a Dutch

³⁸ Bergeron 1971, 98–99; Matar 1999, 149.

³⁹ Bergeron 1971, 99.

vessel, in short, their Christian brethren. But it only went wrong on the actual battlefield. According to the official version, this was a story about “God assisting our labours”⁴⁰ – another glorious victory in the fight against the infidels was won. The historiographical matrix was active and effective.

Conclusion

In the Jacobean perspective, Lepanto merged with the Spanish Armada as an example of God’s actual and symbolic intervention in history, implicitly suggesting an assumption that king and country were elected and protected by providence, regardless of the fact that the Holy League who had defeated the Turkish Armada belonged to the papacy, as Veronese’s painting emphasized. Strictly speaking, the papacy was part of the unholy league of God’s enemies, the conspiracy with the Turk, which represented Antichrist.

The Lepanto event was part of a dynamic military and ideological trial of strength. From the Christian point of view, it was a turning point in the ongoing confrontation with the Ottoman Empire, and at the same time a point of no return in the eschatological drama about the second coming of Christ, preceded by the fights with Antichrist who according to the Lutheran interpretations of the Scripture was identified as the Pope and the Turk. Conversely, in the Catholic optics, Luther and the Reformation represented Antichrist.

A movement has been observed from event to interpretation of event, to performance of the interpretation of the event, to the description of the performance of the interpretation of the event, and even to interactions with proper theatrical stagings, like Shakespeare’s *Othello* – that by the way is just one out of a considerable number of ‘Turkish’ plays.⁴¹

The transformation of the event into a narrative could be termed a historiographical mythologization, and correspondingly the transformation of the event into stagings as a performative ritualization. The Shakespearean actors’ participation in the royal festivities and the performances of *Othello* during the celebrations suggests the blurring borders between theatricality, performativity and rituality.

Numerous signs indicated that the end was near, even natural disorders such as the Stella Nova, discovered in 1572 by Tycho Brahe. In England, it was seen as a reappearance of the Bethlehem star, this time announcing the return of Christ. In Germany and Denmark, the message was supposed to be that godless and heathen Turks, Tatars and Muscovites would gather against

⁴⁰ Matar 1999, 151.

⁴¹ Cf. Burton 2005, 11 and 257–58 (list of titles). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Travels_of_the_Three_English_Brothers_-_cite_note-0#cite_note-0

Christendom, acting as a scourge, with which God would punish us for our sins, so we should ask God for forgiveness, make penitence and renounce on sin.⁴²

Reality was, and is, also a matter of definition, including kaleidoscopic ideological, political, commercial, military etc. concerns. The real text about Lepanto was written by the context, in transformational processes from fact to truth.

That people nevertheless, at the same time as Time was about to run out, managed to live a normal life in a pragmatic reality, planning their future, deals, heritage etc. is not a contradiction, only a paradox.

⁴² Cf. Bauckham 1978, 151. For Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden see Fink-Jensen 2010, 72–81. God had created the stars once and for all. Obviously, the appearance of a new star heralds a new era.

Bibliography

- Ball, Bryan W. 1975, *A Great Expectation. Eschatological thought in English Protestantism to 1660*, Leiden.
- Bauckham, Richard 1978, *Tudor apocalypse, sixteenth century apocalypticism, millenarianism and the English Reformation: from John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman*, Oxford
- Bergeron, David M. 1971, *English Civic Pageantry 1558–1642*, London.
- Bergeron, David M. 2010, “‘Are we turned Turks?’ English pageants and the Stuart Court”, *Comparative Drama* 44,3, 255–75.
- Brotton, Jerry 2017, *The Sultan and the Queen*, New York.
- Burton, Jonathan 2005, *Traffic and Turning. Islam and English Drama 1579–1624*, Cranbury.
- Christiansson, Paul 1978, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War*, Toronto/ Buffalo/London.
- Cragie, James (ed.) 1955–1958, *The Poems of James VI of Scotland I–II*, Edinburgh.
- Dimmock, Mathew 2005, *New Turkes, dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in early modern England*, London.
- Fink-Jensen, Morten 2010, “Tycho Brahes supernova i 1572 set med samtidens øjne. Religiøse og astronomiske tolkninger hos Georg Busch og Rasmus Hansen Reravius”, *Fund og Forskning* 49, 57–82.
- Firth, Katherine R. 1979, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645*, Oxford.
- Helgason, Thorsteinn 2018, *The Corsairs’ Longest Voyage. The Turkish Raid in Iceland 1627*, Leiden.
- Holm, Bent 1999, “Shakespeare’s ambiguous magic in *The Tempest*”, *The Renaissance Theatre, Texts, Performance, Design* I, ed.: Christopher Cairns, London, 1–11.
- Holm, Bent 2014, *The Taming of the Turk. Ottomans on the Danish Stage 1596–1896*, Vienna.
- Jones, Emrys 1968, “Othello, Lepanto and the Cyprus Wars”, *Shakespeare Survey* 21, 47–52.
- Kenan, Seyfi (ed.) 2010, *Sosyal ve Kulturel Farkındalığın Sinirlarında Osmanlilar ve Avrupa, The Ottomans and Europe travel, encounter and interaction from the early classical period until the end of the 18th century*, Istanbul.
- Matar, Nabil 1999, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discoveries*, New York.
- Parry, V.J. 2003, *Richard Knolles’ History of the Turk*, Istanbul.

STAGING HISTORY

Renaissanceforum 13 • 2018 • www.renaissanceforum.dk
Bent Holm: Jacobean adaptations of the Battle of Lepanto

- Rhodes, Neil, Jennifer Richards & Joseph Marshall (eds.) 2003, *King James VI and I, Selected Writings*, London.
- Schmuck, Stephan 2005, "The 'Turk' as Antichrist in John Foxe's Acts and Monuments (1570)", *Reformation* 10, 21–44.
- Shakespeare, William 2008, *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, Oxford.
- Vaughan, Virginia M. 1994, *Othello. A contextual history*, Cambridge.
- Vitkus, Daniel 2003, *Turning Turk. English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean*, New York.
- Walsh, Michael J.K. (ed.) 2015, *City of Empires. Ottoman and British Famagusta*, Cambridge.

STAGING HISTORY

Renaissanceforum 13 • 2018 • www.renaissanceforum.dk
Bent Holm: Jacobean adaptations of the Battle of Lepanto



Fig. 1

Paolo Veronese, *The Battle of Lepanto*, 1572-1573 (Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice). Oil on canvas, 169 x 137 cm. Originally placed in the church of St. Peter Martyr on Murano, commissioned by Pietro Giustinian of Murano who took part in the Battle. Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons.