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Venetian-Ottoman Wars

EDITED BY STATHIS BIRTACHAS



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On the cover: lantern of an Ottoman galley captured at Lepanto.
Venice, Armory rooms of the Council of Ten at the Doge's Palace.
Topwar.ru website of Vjačeslav Špakovsky.



Venice and the Ottoman Empire as warriors. Source: [Roger PALMER, Earl of Castlemaine], *Das von den Türcken außs äusserst bedrangte, aber: Durch die christliche Waffen der heroischen Republic Venedig außs tapfferst beschützte Candia* [...], Frankfurt, Wilhelm Serlin, 1669.

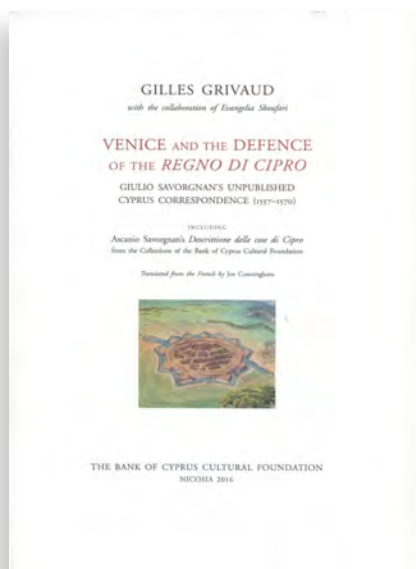


“Oltremarini” (Overseas) Regiments in Venetian service, nicknamed ‘Schiavoni’
(Vinkhuzen Collection, NYPL)

GILLES GRIVAUD (ED.), WITH THE COLLABORATION OF EVANGELIA SKOUFARI,

*Venice and the Defence of the Regno di Cipro.
Giulio Savorgnan's Unpublished Cyprus Correspondence
(1557–1570), including Ascanio Savorgnan's Descrizione
delle cose di Cipro from the Collections of the Bank
of Cyprus Cultural Foundation*

Translated from the French by Joe Cunningham,
Nicosia, The Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, 2016, pp. 684.



The author of the book, Gilles Grivaud, is a Professor of Medieval History at the Université de Rouen Normandie. He has systematically dealt with the social, economic and military history of Cyprus under its various Latin overlords (Franks and Venetians) and has published a large number of relative studies. Especially noteworthy are his important publications regarding the military organization of Cyprus. They deal with the ways in which the feu-

dal cavalry and the mercenary bands of stradioti light cavalry were organized and managed, the dispatch of Venetian engineers and military experts to the island in order to inspect and improve its defenses, and the overall military preparations of Venice aimed at facing the imminent Ottoman invasion. The events of the War of Cyprus (1570–1571) are analyzed in detail in an extensive chapter that he wrote for the *Ιστορία της Κύπρου* [History of Cyprus], Vol. 6, a collective work which has come out as part of the publications of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation.¹ The study in question enumerates, in chronological order, the military preparations of both Venetians and Ottomans, the military tactics and operations after the Ottoman forces had landed in the Saline of Larnaca (1570), the sieges of Nicosia and Famagusta, and the impact of the War on the two warring parties and on the local population.

The book presented here lies within the scope of the author's research into the defense organization of Cyprus during the final decades of Venetian rule. It focuses on the edition of the letters written by two important Venetian military experts, the brothers Ascanio and Giulio Savorgnan, who were sent to the island to inspect its defense organization and propose solutions either to improve existing fortifications or to construct new ones. At the same time, the author examines a series of letters written by other individuals who were also involved in this process. In addition, the book gives an appraisal of Giulio's moral, intellectual and technical education in order to shed light on some of the principles he used in his work in Cyprus, particularly in Nicosia. The analysis of the correspondence he sent from Cyprus, and the references in later writing, allow a better appreciation of Giulio's personality and character traits, which is essential to fully understanding his contribution to late-Renaissance military architecture.

Originally, the study was based on a manuscript kept in the Archive of the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation (BCCF B-197) which describes the situation that prevailed in Cyprus shortly before the invasion of the Ottoman forces (1570). The manuscript contains the report of Ascanio Savorgnan, who visited the island in 1562 along with his brother, Giulio. After the two experts conducted an on-the-spot investigation of the military organization of Cyprus, Ascanio drafted the report in question. He was the younger brother of Giulio, the military engineer who

1 Gilles GRIVAUD, «Η κατάκτηση της Κύπρου από τους Οθωμανούς», in Theodoros PAPADOPOULLOS (Ed.), *Ιστορία της Κύπρου*, Vol. 6, *Τουρκοκρατία*, Nicosia, Archbishop Makarios III Foundation / Office for Cyprus History, 2011, pp. 1-182.

planned the star-shaped enceinte of Nicosia.

The aim of Grivaud is to bring to light, through the publication and analysis of the letters of the two military experts, the organization of the defenses of the Venetian possession of Cyprus prior to the War of 1570–1571, their proposals on how better to fortify the island, the relative decisions of the Venetian administration, the military preparations and, finally, the evolution of the fortification of Nicosia under the guidance of Giulio Savorgnan during the period 1567–1570.

The introduction of the book contains a detailed presentation of the Savorgnan family history. They were part of the Friulian aristocracy from the High Middle Ages right up to the Napoleonic era and, after 1385, they developed close ties to the Republic of St Mark. It was then that Federico Savorgnan sought to insinuate himself into the Venetian patriciate, but failed to receive the title of Venetian nobility. Nevertheless, his family's position in Friuli became stronger – even more so when the region came under the control of the Serenissima (1420). Apparently, the efforts to integrate the family into the social elite of Venice went on, since Federico's son, Francesco, married Agnese, sister of Nicolò Marcello, who elected doge in 1473. However, as no children were born from this marriage, it did not lead to the Savorgnans being accepted into Venice's patrician circles.

Throughout the fifteenth century, on several occasions Venice utilized the services of the Savorgnan family, appointing some of its members in military positions: in 1487, when Nicolò Savorgnan del Torre was appointed captain of the militia (*cernide*); after that, the latter's son, Antonio, took care of recruiting and paying soldiers' wages during the war against the League of Cambrai (1508–1511) etc.

Extensive reference is made to the history of the family during the sixteenth century. Girolamo Savorgnan, father of the two military experts at the center of Grivaud's research interest, and his offsprings are selected for special mention. In 1508, Girolamo participated in the operations to push back the offensive of Emperor Maximilian I in the Cadore Valley, paving the way for new Venetian conquests in eastern Friuli, and for this the Signoria rewarded him with an annuity, the rank of collateral-general and the castle of Belgrado that had been taken from the enemy. In the following year, the Venetian Senate appointed him ambassador to Switzerland in order to recruit mercenaries there; furthermore, he was awarded with the title of supernumerary senator, an act that sparked off a negative reaction among the Venetian patriciate. However, his most important contribution to the organization of the military forces of Venice took place during the war of 1514. It

was then that Girolamo, who was with the military forces under his command in Osoppo, kept the troops of the Holy Roman Empire pinned down for six weeks, giving Venice the opportunity to recapture Udine and reoccupy nearly all of Friuli. This decisive resistance at Osoppo was a confirmation of Girolamo's skills as a military tactician and he was regarded as a loyal defender of Venice and its interests, which rewarded him with significant amounts of money.

As regards the family circumstances of Girolamo, the latter concluded three marriages within a short period of time (1493–1508) and fathered 12 children, nine of whom died young. In 1509 he concluded his fourth and final marriage, to the Venetian patrician lady Orsina di Girolamo Canal, with whom he fathered another 12 children, among them Ascanio and Giulio. Girolamo eventually died on March 30, 1529 in Venice.

Several of his sons filled military posts, thus following in their father's footsteps. Girolamo steered his sons towards a military career, in accordance with a seigneurial tradition that respected and aspired to the prestige of military leadership, which was even more pertinent to the Savorgnans, given that their family estates were located in a border area where armed combat was an essential duty. During their childhood, therefore, the boys were trained extensively in combat techniques, military tactics, offensive and defensive strategy. Giulio, Mario, Marcantonio and Ascanio joined the armies of Venice, while others offered their services to the duke of Ferrara and the king of France, such as Germanico and Ascanio as condottieri, taking advantage of the opportunities now presented by the Italian Wars, which enabled aristocratic elites to gain new titles in sphere outside Venetian politics.

As for Giulio Savorgnan, he was born in Osoppo on November 11, 1510. At an early age he served in the military forces of the Serenissima against the Holy Roman Empire in the Lombardy Wars, led by the duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria della Rovere, and allied with the French. He was also present during the capture of Lodi and Cremona (1526), and took part in various battles from Lombardy to Tuscany and Rome. Furthermore, the Venetian government posted him to its military forces in Friuli, where he remained until 1539. Then, for six years Giulio was posted to Dalmatia, where he was occupied with the fortification works conducted in Zara. Taking advantage of the experience he acquired while working on fortifications, in 1549 he oversaw the organization of the defenses of Peschiera, on Lake Garda. Subsequently, he was appointed governor in Corfu from 1551 to

1553, and he lived in Friuli until 1562, undertaking various assignments in Padua and Bergamo. In the summer of 1562, he received orders from the Senate to go to Cyprus and inspect its defenses. When this mission was accomplished, he settled on Crete for four years (1562–1566), then on Dalmatia (1566–1567) and finally returned to Cyprus, where he stayed from June 1567 to the summer of 1569 in order to oversee work on the island's fortifications in the face of an imminent Ottoman invasion.

In the case of Cyprus, for the first time Giulio was awarded by the Venetian Senate the privilege of absolute freedom in making decisions and acting upon them. In 1570 he was appointed governor-general of Dalmatia and in 1571 he was elevated to the rank of governor of the Venice Lido soldiers where he contributed to the organization of the defenses of the Venetian Lagoon. He reached the highest point of his military career in 1587, when he was appointed superintendent-general of Venice's artillery and fortress. He worked as consultant on defensive architecture and he contributed to the design of a project which he wished to work on for a long time, the Palmanova fortress (1593). Giulio became an expert on fortifications, and his opinion was sought on projects all across the Terraferma: in Padua (1548), in Peschiera (1549, 1557), in Verona (1557) and in Bergamo (1561); then, apart from the Italian Peninsula, in Zara (1547, 1566), on Corfu (1557, 1566), on Candia (1557, 1565, 1566) and on Cyprus (1557, 1558, 1562). His military career came to an end with his death at the age of 85 (July 15, 1595). After his death, the government honored him with an official funeral in the Santi Giovanni e Paolo church in Venice.

Ascanio Savorgnan was the seventh child of Girolamo and was born around 1520. Very little is known regarding his education. However, he probably received a combination of education in literature and in martial arts. In 1549, Ascanio developed close links to Ercole II of Este, duke of Ferrara, resulting in him joining the military forces of Ferrara, where he served alongside his brother, Germanico. In 1557 he entered the French court and fought in the French ranks against the Holy Roman Empire. Later, in 1560, he settled in Venice and two years later he went to Cyprus with his brother Giulio for the purpose of checking the organization of its defenses. After the War of Cyprus (1570–1571), Ascanio lived the life of a courtier and, at the age of 58, he married Bianca Giustinian (October 15, 1580), daughter of Giovanni Battista, the Venetian procurator of St Mark. This marriage offered him the opportunity to attach himself to a powerful patrician family and

to rise socially in the Venetian metropolis. Ascanio eventually died on the night of October 2, 1581, when his nephew, Germanico, savagely assassinated his uncle in the parlor of the Santi Cosma and Damiano monastery, in Giudecca in Venice, while the latter was visiting his sister, Felicita, a nun.

The first part of the book presents three letters by Giulio Savorgnan that pertain to the defense of Cyprus and were written between 1557 and 1558. The fourth and final letter of this part expounds the views of Venetian officials Sforza Pallavicino (condottiere and governor-general of the Venetian armies), Girolamo Martinengo (condottiere) and Astore Baglioni (condottiere) on the fortification of Cyprus. All three military experts agree that, due to the military supremacy of the Ottoman Empire, an assault on Cyprus would be difficult to deter. Therefore, the necessary decisions should be reached for construction work on fortifications to begin in various cities with a view to protecting them and ensuring the security of the local population.

The second part presents the exploratory mission of Giulio Savorgnan to Cyprus between June 9 and September 29, 1562. As it has already been noted, in the summer of 1562, having received orders from the Venetian Senate, Giulio and Ascanio Savorgnan went to Cyprus to inspect the kingdom's defenses. An analysis of the letters and reports sent from Cyprus by Giulio in 1562 demonstrate his capacity to fulfill as precisely as possible the series of duties he had been given. Giulio met Venice's expectations providing exact measurements of the enceintes and moats, and giving detailed reflections on the nature of the ground and the coastline. With regard to the fortification of Famagusta, he believed that, for an imminent attack to be pushed back, a significant amount of fortification work had to be done on the fortress, which also meant spending large sums of money. After his sojourn in Famagusta (July 22 – August 9, 1562), Giulio went to Kyrenia, where, on August 15, he penned three letters concerning the city's fortification project. These epistles were sent to the doge Girolamo Priuli (1559–1567), to Sforza Pallavicino and to the provveditori alle fortezze. Giulio claimed that the castle of Kyrenia could be used to build a new enceinte with a rectangular perimeter, around four kilometers long, and equipped with six bastions. At the same time, he proposed to the provveditori alle fortezze the further fortification of the city of Paphos.

The third part of the work includes the publication of the original report of Ascanio Savorgnan (*Descrittione delle cose di Cipro*), compiled during the summer of 1562, as well as photographic evidence documenting the entire archive depos-

ited in the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation. In 1562, Ascanio followed his brother Giulio on the mission entrusted to the latter by Venice, to inspect the island's fortifications. It was most probably Giulio who took the initiative of bringing his younger brother with him on his expedition. Maybe he wanted Ascanio to gain further experience in the field of fortification or to have his sibling with him as an advisor on technical problems related to military architecture. Ascanio wrote two dispatches: the first, dated June 25, 1562 in Famagusta, concerns the state of the latter town's enceinte, while the second, written on August 8, 1562 in Kyrenia, deals with the castle overlooking the harbor. He proposed the fortification of two or three sites, where local geomorphological conditions would favor the construction of defenses within a short period of time and at a reasonable cost. He then recommended stockpiling as many crops as possible at these sites and destroying whatever cannot be transported, in addition to rendering the water reserves unusable. Ascanio also added a description of the island, referring to its regional environment and the physical particularities of its eleven administrative districts. Ascanio considered seven potential sites and intended to examine their respective qualities in order to decide which was best suited to a fortification project. In addition, Ascanio made references to the island's population, at the same time posing the question of whether they should possibly be equipped with weapons – a policy which he himself thought to be unwise.

Three copies of the aforementioned report of Ascanio were produced within a short period of time. The first was produced in Venice by Giovanni Rossi/o who made emendations to Ascanio's text; the copy in question was delivered (on May 16, 1564) to Giudobaldo II Della Rovere, one of the Signoria's leading military chiefs and son of Francesco Maria, the duke of Urbino. The second copy was completed a month later, on June 8, and delivered to Gabriele Capodilista, a member of the Paduan aristocracy. On July 25 of the same year, the last copy was sent to Francesco de' Medici, the grand duke of Tuscany. No further copies of Ascanio's report were produced until the beginning of the War of Cyprus (1570). However, several copies of the report were printed after the War, due to its large impact. The copy preserved in the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation (catalogue n. B-197) is one of the series of copies Francesco Marcaldi implemented during the autumn of 1573 (November 20). The dedicatory letter is addressed to Cosmo Cini, an unknown figure from a family of wool merchants living in Pisa. Cosmo was the son of Giovan Battista Cini, a man of letters who was part of the entourage of Cossi-

mo de' Medici. The final and most extensive part of the work contains an edition of 58 letters written by Giulio Savorgnan. They were sent to notable personages of Venice, as well as to various authorities and officials of its state apparatus, and deal with the construction of fortifications that took place during the period when Giulio was in Cyprus (1567–1570). Furthermore, it analyzes 37 letters written by other individuals, such as Sforza Pallavicino, commander in chief of Venice's army, the doge Girolamo Priuli, Marco Michiel, captain of Famagusta, Francesco Barbaro, Proveditor-General, Giacomo de Nores, count of Tripoli, Eugenio Singlitico, count of Rochas, the archbishop of Cyprus Filippo Mocenigo etc. These letters highlight: the state of the defense organization of Cyprus prior to the Ottoman attack, the views held by military experts with regard to fortifying the island and their relevant proposals to the administration, as well as the positions of the island's upper class who fervently supported the view that the fortifications of Nicosia should be strengthened – an opinion which was diametrically opposed to those of Giulio Savorgnan and the other Venetian military experts. Finally, the author publishes the decrees of the Venetian administration pertaining to the evolution of the defense organization of Cyprus.

In conclusion, Gilles Grivaud's book is a significant contribution to the study of the military history of the later Venetian period in Cyprus and, more specifically, of the fortifications that were planned and constructed on the island during the final decade before the War of Cyprus (1570–1571) by Giulio Savorgnan, the Venetian state's military engineer who had a lead role in this effort. The author not only did he provide a critical edition and commentary of important unpublished documents on the subject, but he also placed them within the wider context of the defensive works and practices of the Republic of St Mark in the Venetian hinterland and the Mediterranean basin. Particular emphasis was placed on the evolution of the fortifications of Nicosia, constructed in the period 1567–1570 under the guidance of Giulio Savorgnan, as well as on the involvement of other military officials, the Cypriot aristocracy and the Venetian authorities, both local and metropolitan. In addition, the publication comes with an updated bibliography and a wide variety of photographic material.



Icon of the naval Battle of Curzolari (Echinades in Greek) islands, by the Cretan painter Georgios Klontzas, last decades of the 16th century; one of the most famous depictions of the naval Battle of Lepanto in post-Byzantine art. Courtesy of the National Historical Museum, Athens (cat. n. 3578).

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