

# Turkish Raids in Friuli at the End of the Fifteenth Century

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Four hundred ninety nine years ago the Ottomans raided Friuli for the last time. Friuli is a region in the north-eastern part of Italy. At the beginning of the fifteenth century it was almost completely under the rule of the patriarch of Aquileia but in 1420 (7 June) the Venetians conquered it. Venice was above all a naval power, but in that period spread its influence also on the mainland. Its men and its ships fought against the Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Greek islands but now the Ottomans had the chance of reaching its very countryside by land. This happened during the two Ottoman-Venetian wars of 1463-79 and 1499-1503<sup>1</sup>.

In June 1469 the Ottomans arrived as far as Gorizia, which was not under Venetian rule at that time, but they did not cross the Venetian border<sup>2</sup>. The raids of November 1471 are described only in Domenico Malipiero's chronicle<sup>3</sup> while archival sources of the period did not mention them at all, but speak of the possibility of an invasion<sup>4</sup>. In fact Ottoman raiders reached Friuli only during the following year. In autumn 1472 they entered Venetian Friuli for the first time. They were led by an unknown Albanian and by Hasan bey (perhaps belonging to the Evrenosoğulları family)<sup>5</sup>.

The Ottomans who reached Venetian Friuli in that year and in the following ones were *akıncı* and they were led by members of old Ottoman families. In November 1477 Ömer bey Turahanoğlu crossed the Venetian border and he repeated his attack the following year together with Ali bey Mihaloğlu, Bali bey Malkoçoğlu and İskender, *sancakbeyi* of Bosnia. They all are well-known to historians. The exploits of Ali bey were described by Suzi Çelebi from Prizren in a *gazavat-name*, where, however, Friuli raids are not quoted at all. There are two versions about the names of the *sancakbeyi* of Bosnia's parents. According to the first he was the son of a Genoese and a woman from Trebisonda, according to the other İskender was a member of the Mihaloğulları family and brother of Ali bey<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> M.P. PEDANI FABRIS, "I Turchi e il Friuli alla fine del Quattrocento", *Memorie storiche forogiuliesi*, 74 (1994), pp. 203-224; about the Turks and Friuli at the beginning of the XV c. cfr. P. PASCHINI, "Primi timori d'un'invasione turca in Friuli", *Memorie storiche forogiuliesi*, 8 (1912), pp. 65-73.

<sup>2</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASVe), *Senato, Secreti*, reg. 24, cc. 25-26v, 29v, 31, 36v, 40v; *Senato, Terra*, reg. 6, cc. 62v, 75; *Parlamento friulano*, a cura di P.S. LEICHT, 2/I, Bologna 1955, (Accademia dei Lincei, Atti delle assemblee costituzionali italiane dal Medio Evo al 1831, s. I, sez. VI), pp. XXXII, LIII-LV, C, XCIX; C.H. IMBER, *The Ottoman Empire (1300-1481)*, İstanbul 1990, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> D. MALIPIERO, "Annali veneti dall'anno 1457 al 1500", a cura di F. LONGO, *Archivio storico italiano*, 7/I (1843), p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> ASVe, *Senato, Secreti*, reg. 25, cc. 76-76v; *Senato, Terra*, reg. 6, c. 149. Cfr. also F. MUSONI, *Sulle incursioni turchesche in Friuli. Anni 1472 e 1477*, Udine 1890-92.

<sup>5</sup> MALIPIERO, "Annali", p. 77; A. MEDIN, "Un carne latino contro i Turchi dopo la prima incursione nel Friuli (1472)", *Nuovo archivio veneto*, 5 (1893), pp. 453-465; A. DE PELLEGRINI, "Note e documenti sulle incursioni turchesche in Friuli al cadere del sec. XV", *Nuovo archivio veneto*, n.s., 25 (1913), pp. 230-238; F. CUSIN, "Le vie d'invasione dei turchi in Italia nel secolo XV", *Archeografo triestino*, s. III, 19/47 (1934), pp. 143-156; E. PATRIARCA, *La terra di S. Daniele del Friuli nella lotta contro i Turchi*, Verona 1946, pp. 30-32; F. BABINGER, *Maometto il Conquistatore e il suo tempo*, Torino 1967, p. 406; I. MÊLIKOFF, "Ghâzi", in *Enciclopedia of Islam* (hereafter *EI*), 2, Leiden 1983, pp. 1043-1045; I. MÊLIKOFF, "Ewrenos", in *EI*, 2, p. 720; I. MÊLIKOFF, "Ewrenos Oghullari", in *EI*, 2, pp. 720-721; IMBER, *The Ottoman Empire*, pp. 123, 176, 212, 228, 244-245. Other writers do not speak of Hasan bey but of İskender, *sancakbeyi* of Bosnia, cfr. A. CREMONESI, *La sfida turca contro gli Asburgo e Venezia*, Udine 1976, pp. 110, 131.

<sup>6</sup> BABINGER, *Maometto*, pp. 51-53, passim; M. KIEL, "Livadya", in *EI*, 5, pp. 772-774; C.H. IMBER, "Mahmūd Paşa", in *EI*, 6, Leiden 1991, pp. 69-72; IMBER, *The Ottoman Empire*, pp. 162, passim; F. BABINGER, "Mikhāl

After the 1478 raids the Ottomans came back to Friuli only in 1499, at the very beginning of another Ottoman-Venetian war. These new raids took place between the 28 of September and the 5 of October and the Ottoman leader was again the old İskender bey. For this reason he can not have died in 1498 as some people say.

During the second half of the fifteenth century the Ottomans did not want to conquer Friuli in order to settle there. Their raiders had only the task of diverting the Venetians' attention from the Levant and from the real aim of the bulk of the army. Sometimes they wanted to open another front, sometimes only to frighten their enemy. For this reason in 1480 Mehmed II asked the Venetians to make an agreement against Ferrante of Aragona and informed them of the attack planned against Otranto; but also sent his men to Val Canale ready to cross the border and raid Friuli if the Venetians dared to tell what he had in mind<sup>7</sup>.

During the Ottoman-Venetian wars of this period the *akıncı* used in Friuli their usual tactics. The attacks lasted but some days: four days in July 1478, thirteen days in November 1477.

It is important to note that in this period, on the contrary, the Venetians changed completely their way of fighting the Ottomans by land. In 1469 in order to face some possible Ottoman raid they hired bands of mercenaries, as those of Deifebo da Anguillara<sup>8</sup>, Galeotto da Faenza, Ercole Malvezzi, Fontaguzzio da Bologna and the company of the *lance spezzate*<sup>9</sup> called from St. Mark's. Moreover, they sent men of the *cernide* from their lands of Bergamo, Crema, Brescia, Verona, Vicenza, Padova and Treviso. The members of the *cernide* were not real soldiers but peasants prepared to defend only their villages and their houses and, for this reason, ill-suited to fight in places they did not know. Moreover, these peasants, as well as the mercenaries soldiers, had never met Ottoman raiders and they did not know their way of fighting.

The Venetians rulers behaved in the same way in the following years. It was only during the attack of November 1477 that they realised that the 'Italian way' of fighting was of no use with the Ottomans. Then the first Venetian troops which met the Ottomans were immediately defeated. The Venetian commanders Girolamo Novello and Giacomo Badoer were killed; Giacomo Martinengo fled from the enemy while Zaccaria Barbaro remained in the stronghold of Gradisca. Another commander sent from Venice, Francesco Michiel, preferred to come back while the mercenary captain, Cola da Campobasso, arrived too late<sup>10</sup>.

In the following April the commander of the Venetian troops was the famous Carlo da Montone, and he had under his orders Giacomo da Porcia and Antonio di Pers. This mercenary captain realised that it was not possible to fight in the Italian way against the Turks and tried to use the same tactics of the enemy. He sent groups of few men for short attacks, waging a sort of guerrilla-war. He was shrewd and he did not accept to fight an open field battle against İskender bey who was camped in a place still called in the language of Friuli 'Ciamp dai Turchs', that is to say 'the field of the Turks'. In fact it was a trap, since Ali bey and Bali bey were ready to attack the Venetians. So Carlo da Montone remained in Gradisca while the Ottomans went northward. They reached Tolmino, Caporetto and Plezzo; then they crossed the Passo del Predil, to reach Coccau, Weissenfels and Villach. They crossed the Alps and they had to tie their horses with ropes and rags to make them go

oghlu", in *El*, 7, fasc. 115-116, Leiden 1990, pp. 34-35; A.S. LEVEND, *Gazavatnameler ve Mihaloğlu Ali bey'in Gazavatnamesi*, Ankara 1956, pp. 228-358.

<sup>7</sup> BABINGER, *Maometto*, pp. 436-437; M.P. PEDANI, *In nome del Gran Signore. Inviati ottomani a Venezia dalla caduta di Costantinopoli alla guerra di Candia*, Venezia 1994, pp. 107-112.

<sup>8</sup> "Anguillara, Deifobo", in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 3, Roma 1961, pp. 300-301.

<sup>9</sup> That is to say a special cavalry. A *lancia* was a unit formed by two horsemen who fought together; in a *lancia spezzata* every horseman fought by himself.

<sup>10</sup> ASVe, *Senato, Secreti*, reg. 28, cc. 56v-57, 71-73v, 76, 77-78, 81v, 86-88, 93, 107-108, 111v-112v, 114, 146, 148-148v; *Senato, Terra*, reg. 8, cc. 5-5v, 18; MALIPIERO, "Annali", pp. 115-117; G. LOSCHI, "Le incursioni dei Turchi nella Carniola e nell'Istria", *Archeografo triestino*, n.s., 18 (1892), pp. 487-503; PATRIARCA, *La terra di S. Daniele*, pp. 36-44; IMBER, *The Ottoman Empire*, pp. 235-237; CREMONESI, *La sfida turca*, pp. 128-132.

down from rock to rock. The inhabitants of the valley fled immediately since they had never imagined to see Turks coming from those mountains<sup>11</sup>.

After this experience the Venetians changed their troops completely; they summoned their light horsemen, called *stratioti*, from Durazzo, Zante and Morea and hired bowmen in Serbia. They created also new strongholds and restored and enlarged Gradisca<sup>12</sup>. They did the same during the following war. In 1499 the strongest opponents of the Ottoman raiders were the *stratioti* together with soldiers and men from Friuli who knew the place very well. In this year for instance the town of Spilimbergo was saved by its citizen Franco dal Borgo and his crossbowmen; Mortegliano by its inhabitants guided by the parish priest. Men from Udine succeeded in killing more than one hundred Turks whose heads they gave to the Venetian commander in exchange of money. The count Giacomo da Porcia, who had already fought the Ottomans twenty years before, saved his family and his peasants, shutting the drawbridge of his castle. The Venetian rulers had sent the nobleman Andrea Zancani as commander-in-chief in Friuli. They believed he knew the Ottomans very well since he had just been in Constantinople as an ambassador. But there he had paid a lot of money for a document of peace which was then considered of no value by the sultan since the *nişancı* had prepared it with formal mistakes. Andrea Gritti told Zancani that the document was null and void but the ambassador did not tell Venice what had happened. Then there was the war. In Friuli Andrea Zancani chose to remain in Gradisca. His soldiers invited him to go out and to fight but he answered them "I do not want to be killed" and thus finished his political and military career<sup>13</sup>.

In the meantime the Ottomans raided Friuli. The town of Aviano was captured and the prisoners were about two thousand. Among them there was Giacomo da Malnisio who was sold as a slave in Egypt; he became a Mamluk but then he succeeded in coming back home and he became a famous soldier in the Venetian army<sup>14</sup>. In Aviano the Turks captured also a beautiful woman of the Cristofoli family, an ancestor of p. Marco d'Aviano (the priest who blessed the Christian army guided by Sobieski from the Kahlenberg hill in 1683). She was brought to the imperial harem but after some years she succeeded in coming back to Friuli where she found her husband married with another woman<sup>15</sup>.

After 1499 the Ottomans did not come back to Friuli any more. In the following century the years of war were few, even if two other wars were fought against the Venetians and during the years of peace between the two empires the sultans used to send to the doge a *fethname* for every important battle they won<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> MALIPIERO, "Annali", pp. 117-120; PATRIARCA, *La terra di S. Daniele*, pp. 44-53; İ.H. UZUNÇARŞILI, *Osmanlı tarihi*, II/4, İstanbul 1983, pp. 208-209; İMBER, *The Ottoman Empire*, pp. 239-241; CREMONESI, *La sfida turca*, pp. 132-136.

<sup>12</sup> ASVe, *Senato, Secreti*, reg. 28, cc. 146, 148-148v; A. MOSSETTI, "Il torrione della campana nella fortezza di Gradisca", *Memorie storiche forogiuliesi*, 26 (1930), pp. 189-204; A. MOSETTI, "Le origini della città di Gradisca", *Memorie storiche forogiuliesi*, 27-29 (1931-1932), pp. 306-337; M. STRASSOLDI, "Città murate e abbazie: la difesa del Friuli prima di Palma", in *Palmanova fortezza d'Europa. 1593-1993*, Venezia 1993, pp. 3-6; P. MARCHESI, "Il Friuli e Venezia. 1420-1797: la difesa del territorio al tempo della Serenissima", in *Palmanova*, pp. 57-61.

<sup>13</sup> G. G. LIRUTI, *Due incursioni dei turchi narrate da Jacopo da Porcia*, Udine 1851; F. MUSONI, "Le ultime incursioni dei turchi in Friuli (Memoria)", *Atti dell'Accademia di Udine*, s. III, 1 (1894), pp. 99-125; G. GRION, *Guida storica di Cividale e del suo distretto*, Cividale 1899, pp. 191-217; A. DE PELLEGRINI, *Le incursioni turchesche in Friuli e i castelli di Porcia e Brugnera. Note e documenti (1470-1499)*, Udine 1911, pp. 41-97; G. COGO, "L'ultima invasione dei Turchi in Italia in relazione alla politica europea dell'estremo Quattrocento", Genova 1901 (estr. dagli *Atti della R. Università di Genova*, XVII), pp. 49-68; A. DE PELLEGRINI, *Monteale Cellina e l'invasione turca del 1499*, Pordenone 1931; PATRIARCA, *La terra di S. Daniele*, pp. 53-62; CREMONESI, *La sfida turca*, pp. 158-163.

<sup>14</sup> A. DE PELLEGRINI, *Di Giacomo da Sacile detto Mammalucco*, Venezia 1920; W. ZELE, "In Laudem Iacobi Mamaluchi ovvero Vita di Jacopo da Malnisio detto il Mamelucco", *Studi veneziani*, 26 (1993), pp. 255-281. About other prisoners cfr. I. VOJE, "Il riscatto dei friulani dalla prigionia turca", *Memorie storiche forogiuliesi*, 66 (1986), pp. 141-154.

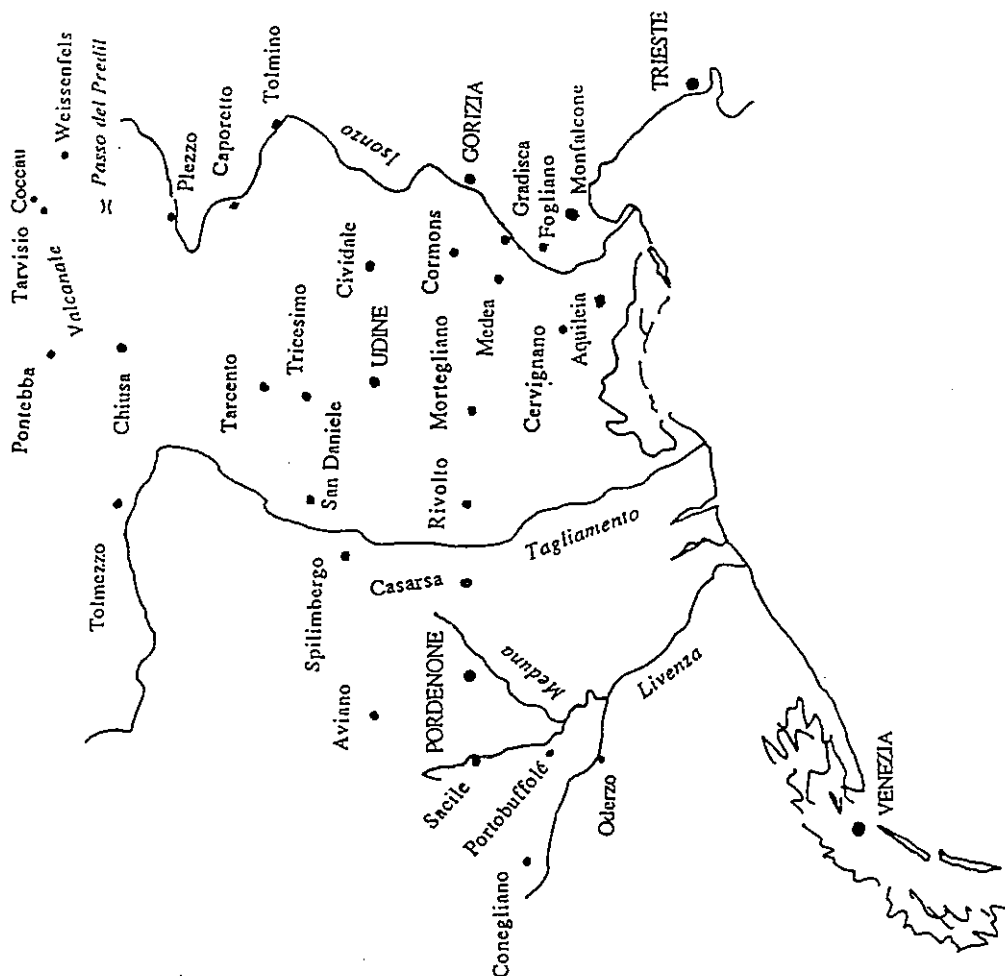
<sup>15</sup> M.P. PEDANI FABRIS, "I due volti della storia: padre Marco d'Aviano e lo şeyk Vani Mehmed efendi", *Metodi & ricerche*, n.s., 14/I (gen.-giu. 1995), pp. 3-10.

<sup>16</sup> M.P. PEDANI FABRIS, "Ottoman Fethnames. The imperial letters announcing a victory", *Tarih incelemeleri dergisi*, 13 (1998), pp. 181-192.

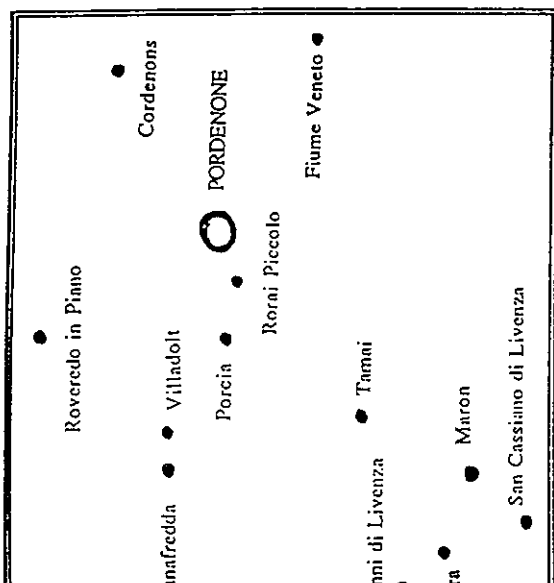
However, Friuli remained in the sultans' dreams. When the Ottomans thought to attack the city of Venice they thought of Friuli. In 1517 the Ottoman envoy Ali bey was accompanied to the top of St. Mark's bell tower, as a modern tourist is; there, sweet wine of Malvasia and cakes were prepared for him and, on looking at the lagoon and at the mainland, he asked his hosts how it was possible to attack Venice and where the Friuli region lay<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> PEDANI, *In nome*, pp. 125, 193. Cfr. ASVe, *Miscellanea di atti diversi manoscritti*, b. 154, fasc. 3/f (1571); PATRIARCA, *La terra di S. Daniele*, pp. 75-107 (about the years 1500-1683); A. DE PELLEGRINI, *Timori dei Turchi in Friuli durante la guerra di Cipro (1570-71)*, Pordenone 1922.



- 1469, June - Gorizia.
- 1472, Autumn - Isonzo river, Cervignano, Carnia and near Udine and near Cividale.
- 1473, November 1 - Near Gorizia.
- 1474, June 22 - Near Monfalcone.
- 1477, November - Isonzo river and Tagliamento river. San Daniele, Cordenons, Pordenone, Sacile.
- 1478, April 3 - Near Isonzo river.
- 1478, April 8 - Gorizia and Monfalcone.
- 1478, July 22 - Isonzo river. Cormons, *Ciamp dai Turchs* (between Cormons and Medea).
- 1499, September 28 - Isonzo river. Near Medea.
- 1499, September 29 - Rivolto.
- 1499, September 30 - Tagliamento river. San Giovanni di Casarsa, Fiume Veneto, Portobuffolè, Livenza river, *Campum Arctum* (near Consegliano), Porcia, Brugnera, Aviano, Pordenone, Spilimbergo, Mortegliano, Rorai Piccolo, Maron, San Cassian di Livenza, Villadoll, Fontanafredda, San Giovanni di Livenza, Tamai, Rovere.
- 1500, October 1 - Rovereto in PIANO.
- 1500, October 3, 4 - Tagliamento river.
- 1500, October 5 - Gradisca, Isonzo river.



MARIA PIA PEDANI-FABRIS, Turkish raids in Friuli at the end of the fifteenth century