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Battle Paintings After Lepanto by Giorgio Vasari and Matteo Pérez

d'Aleccio

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Abstract

This study focuses on the genre of military painting by comparing Giorgio Vasari's frescoes referring to the Battle of Lepanto of 1571 for the Sala Regia in the Vatican to the fresco cycle depicting the Siege of Malta of 1565 produced by Matteo Pérez d'Aleccio working for the Knights of the Sovereign Military Order of Saint John in Malta from 1577–1581. The visual analysis of the artists' frescoes encompasses a discussion of the style and iconography of their work. Further assessment of the reception of the paintings considers ideologies relevant to the

Christian Holy League and the knights of Malta involved in conflicts with forces from the Ottoman empire and theoretical issues related to Mediterranean studies.

Keywords: Giorgio Vasari – Battle of Lepanto – Knights of Malta – Matteo Pérez d’Aleccio – Sala Regia – military iconography

In discussing the Mediterranean, the sociologist Franco Cassano writes of the South as a place of diversity and ‘southern thought’ as an epistemological construct that allows for criticism of fundamentalism and the deconstruction of hostility.¹ Perhaps there is no genre of art that so directly embodies orthodoxies and hostilities as military painting, especially the art commissioned by the papacy and religious military orders representing decisive confrontations between Christian and Ottoman forces during the early modern period. Art that refers to such conflicts include Giorgio Vasari’s frescoes dedicated to Lepanto (**Figs. 1 and 2**) in the Sala Regia of the Vatican in 1572, painted within a year of the naval battle of 7 October, and Matteo Pérez d’Aleccio’s large fresco cycle (**Fig. 3**) from 1577–1581 depicting twelve events from the Siege of Malta—conducted from May to September of 1565—in the Sala de Consiglio of the Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of St. John in Valletta on the island of Malta.² Both fresco

¹ Cassano, ‘Southern Thought’, 5 and 7–8.

² The dating of d’Aleccio’s initial work on the fresco cycle to 1577 is proposed by Antonio Palesati and Nicoletta Lepri based upon the dates for some of his projects in Rome. See Palesati and Lepri, *Matteo Da Leccia Manierista Toscano*, 23.

cycles seem polemical, given their location within administrative centers for religious organizations concerned with the perceived threat of Islam and the possibility of military conquest by the Ottomans, first at the Siege of Malta in 1565, at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, and beyond. It is the historical context after Lepanto that suggests the images warrant comparison for the critical analysis and deconstruction Cassano proposed for Mediterranean studies.

Vasari's depictions of Lepanto were part of a propagandistic program for fifteen frescoes (**Fig. 4**) in the Sala Regia that were created by him and several other artists for Popes Pius V (r. 1566–1572) and Gregory XIII (r. 1572–1585).³ In assessing the subject matter, Alexandra Herz has noted that there were five frescoes that asserted the Church's claim to papal lands and forged relationships with temporal rulers, four frescoes that promoted papal supremacy, and six frescoes that represented victories over 'infidels without and heretics within', referring to the suppression of Protestants in France as well as the fighting against Moslems at Lepanto on 7 October 1571.⁴ The iconography affirmed papal absolutism over temporal rulers, expected to fight heresy. It was this mandate that accounted for Vasari's two surviving frescoes of the Battle of Lepanto: one of the frescoes (**Fig. 1**) represents the opposing Christian and Turkish fleets

³ Herz 'Vasari's "Massacre" Series', 45–46, attributes paintings in the Sala Regia to several artists who were involved in different facets of the project: Giovanni Battista Fiorini, Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta, Taddeo Zuccaro, Federico Zuccaro, Orazio Samacchini, Livio Agresti da Forlì, and Vasari. Herz, 46, notes that Lorenzino da Bologna was Vasari's assistant on the *Battle of Lepanto*. Vasari also painted scenes referring to the Protestants in France. See Herz, 42–43.

⁴ Herz, 'Vasari's "Massacre" Series', 41.

preparing for engagement; and the other (**Fig. 2**) portrays the naval battle. A third scene, which was removed and has been lost, was the *Consigning of the Standard to Don Giovanni*, referring to an event that took place before the armada's departure.⁵

One way that military paintings functioned as propaganda during this period was by combining battle scenes with allegorical imagery heralding triumph and at the Sala Regia, Vasari proved to be a master of this approach. In developing this epic style, Vasari referenced drawings, prints, and accounts of Lepanto that were available for study immediately after the battle.⁶

In the large scene of the opposing Turkish and Christian fleets of the Holy League, the galleys are shown with allegorical figures in the foreground (**Fig. 5**) flanking an aedicule framing a map. The composition is similar to Michele Tramezzino's engraving of *The Battle of Lepanto* of 1572, because in addition to the opposing fleets, the print includes an *altarino* with charts, crests, and allegorical figures.⁷ While the frame surrounding Vasari's map also resembles an escutcheon because it is laden with ornamentation, the other motifs are not conventionally heraldic: the text in the crest on the central pediment above the map refers to Greece, while the Gulf of Arta, the Gulf of Lepanto, and Morea, the name of the Peloponnese, are labeled on the map. The three figures to the left represent the chief proponents of the Holy League,

⁵ Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 144–146.

⁶ See Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 141–200, and also his earlier article, 'À me pare, che siano fatte con diligenza', 24.

⁷ Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 154 and 157–158.

specifically the Church, Venice, and Spain, while the large allegorical figures to the right (**Fig. 5**) were Vasari's invention.

Richard Scorza discusses the iconography of the three original figures outlined in a number of Vasari's writings, including his correspondence to Francesco I de' Medici, as follows:

In his letter to Francesco, Vasari explained that directly opposite he planned to depict three antithetical figures, also embraced, representing 'la lega de Turchi': *Timore*, *Debolezza* and *Morte*.

Morte is in the guise of a skeleton, scythe in hand, while appropriate to their gender, *Timore* and *Debolezza* are represented by a soldier and a frail elderly woman; their attributes the hare and a mouse, cling to their headgear like mock heraldic crests. Vasari evidently modified his original idea: they do not embrace, thus implying a lack of unity, and he added further figures to the scene to convey the enemy's sense of shock. His personal notes reveal that they represent *Rovina* and *Superbia*. The former, recoiling in terror, tramples on *Superbia*, depicted in armour, with a lion's head on the crest of her helmet. Counterpointing the League's *angeletti*, a trio of *diavoletti* hovering on insects' wings scatters evil and misery from an upturned metal vase resembling a turban, brimming with serpents and flashes of lightning.⁸

⁸ Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 160, refers to Vasari's statement '... saranno 3 altre figure che saranno abbracciate insieme per la lega da Turchi', quoted in *Der literarische Nachlass*, vol. 2, 647. Scorza also notes that the hare and mouse can be found in Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica* ... (Basel 1556, fols. 95^v,

Scorza clearly identifies the key figures and explains their meaning. The metal vase is indeed similar to the *taz* worn by the Ottoman Turks that had bands of white cloth wrapped around a felt cap and may have also functioned as a play upon Vasari's signature.⁹

This motif and the other innovative symbolism that Vasari described are indicative of an 'allegorical impulse' to combine battle scenes with motifs that promote ideological content.¹⁰ Art informed by this approach has been called *pittura mista*, a type of painting discussed by Giovanni Andrea Gilio in his *Errori de' pittori circa l'istorie* and described in sixteenth-century studies as 'minutely reconstructed historical facts and allegorical elements'. On the overall effect of such images, Jan L. de Jong has noted: 'they are not literal renditions of historical events, but representations which, through the addition of allegorical and fictive elements,

99') and that *Lo Zibaldone di Giorgio Vasari*, ed. del Vita, 315, refers to the symbolism of the dove and to *Rovina and Superbia*.

⁹ Vasari's treatment of the vase as an allusion to a turban and as a type of signature recalls the inventiveness evident in his use of an anamorphic portrait of one of his monastic patrons as a reflected image on a vase in *The Feast for the Wedding of Esther and Ahasuerus* of 1548. The painting is at the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna in Arezzo, Italy. For a description of turbans, see Madar, 'Dürer's Depictions of the Ottoman Turks', 160.

¹⁰ Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse', 203, refers to the allegorical impulse for postmodernism, but the term also seems appropriate for the late Renaissance.

raise the scenes from the level of renditions of particular incidents to the level of representations of events with universal importance'.¹¹

D'Aleccio would employ this approach, combining allegory with historical painting in his frescoes for the Grand Master Jean de la Cassière in 1577.¹² At the time of the commission, the Sala del Consiglio (**Fig. 3**) was used for ceremonial occasions and was to be decorated with a frieze of paintings around the entire room that would measure approximately 10 feet high and 238 feet long.¹³ The twelve scenes in the cycle record events from the Siege conducted by the army sent by Suleiman the Magnificent in 1565 to fight the Hospitaller Knights of the Order of

¹¹ De Jong, 'The Painted Decoration of the Sala Regia', 166.

¹² Bonnici, 'The Great Siege in Pictures', 103. Bonnici, 104, also provides a list of the images that given these titles:

Figure of Prudence, The Landing of the Turks, Figure of Justice bearing on its pedestal the coat-of-arms of G.M. Cassiere, The Attack on St. Elmo, Figure of Fortitude, Figure of Temperance, The Fall of St. Elmo, Figure of Faith, The Attack on St. Michael, Figure of Hope, The Arrival of the Little Relief Force, Figure of Charity, The Attack on the Posts of Castile and Germany, Figure of Religion, Figure of Nobility, The Attack by sea and land on Isola, (Allegorical Figure missing), The Attack on Borgo, Figure of Providence, The General View of Opposing Forces, Figure of Virtue, The Arrival of the Big Relief Force, Figure of Victory, The Defeat of the Turks, Figure of Fame, The Map of Malta with the Turkish Fleet in the background, and lastly the Figure of Felicity.

For general information and numerous illustrations of d'Aleccio's fresco, see *The Great Siege of Malta Exhibition*.

¹³ Bonnici, 'The Great Siege in Pictures', 110.

St. John on Malta in their attempt to conquer territory in the Mediterranean. Historically, the Siege was an important precursor to Lepanto, a battle that had only recently been concluded.

According to Theresa Vella, d'Aleccio followed the example of Vasari at the Salone dei Cinquecento in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence (**Fig. 6**) placing large figures in the foreground that were set against 'cartographic representation of the battle field'.¹⁴ To support her contention, Vella referred to John Gash's essay that briefly surveys the art of Malta and compared d'Aleccio's work with paintings by Vasari and Francesco Salviati. Commenting on the impressive nature of d'Aleccio's frescoes when viewed on site, Gash observed:

Yet the project's true quality only emerges in front of the frescoes themselves: a sequence of topographically decorative, multi-figure battle scenes (somewhat reminiscent in their high, panoramic viewpoint and patterned arrangement of figures of Vasari's battle scenes in the Sala del Cinquecento of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence) framed by large figures of virtues that confirm the allegiance to Salviati.¹⁵

D'Aleccio's style places him within the *scuola tosco-romana* and was informed by his affiliation with artists in Vasari's circle. During the 1560s, he was associated with the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, as were Jacopo and Taddeo Zuccari, who later created work for the Sala Regia. D'Aleccio worked with the Zuccari, first at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli as early as 1565 and

¹⁴ Vella, 'Turning History into Art', 168.

¹⁵ Gash, 'Painting and Sculpture in Early Modern Malta', 522.

between 1567 and 1568 at Trinità dei Monti in Rome. He was also friends with Jacopo Palma il Giovane, who drew a portrait of d'Aleccio as he began his career in Rome.¹⁶ In the 1570s, d'Aleccio contributed the *Defense of the body of Moses* on the wall opposite the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel after Luca Signorelli's painting of the same subject had been damaged. His

¹⁶ There are problems confirming biographical details because of the many variations of Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's name that seem due to his peripatetic career as he moved from Leccia near Volterra and subsequently to Tivoli and Rome in Italy and also abroad to Malta, Spain, and Peru. Palesati and Lepri refer to archival information to trace his movements, and their findings are used here. They also state that d'Aleccio was affiliated with the *scuola tosco-romana*. See Palesati and Lepri, *Matteo Da Leccia Manierista Toscano*, 23 and 36–37. Other scholars argue that d'Aleccio was from Lecce in Puglia, such as Maiorano, *Matteo Perez D'Aleccio Pittore Ufficiale*, 11. There are others who argue that his birthplace was the town of Alezio.

For a discussion of the early scholarship on the artist, see Ganado, 'Matteo Pérez D'Aleccio's Engravings of the Siege of Malta', 126. For his friendship with Jacopo Palma il Giovane, see Gere, 'A Drawing by Matteo Perez Da Leccio', 152, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1553178.152>. Additionally, as noted by Palesati and Lepri, Karl van Mander stated that the artist was arrested in Malta, but there are no other sources to support this claim: 'E siccome io avevo dato già parola e promesso di andarvi con un francese di Parigi, Stefano du Perac, il quale aveva famiglia, mentre aspettavamo conferma migliore, fummo informati che Mateo essendo caduto colà in un'avventura, era stato arrestato' (I had already given word and promised to go there with Stephen du Perac a Frenchman from Paris, who had family there, and while we waited for confirmation, we were informed that Mateo some misfortune and had been arrested). See his *Het schilder boeck* (Haarlem 1604, rist. anast. Utrecht 1969), cc. 193^{r-v}, quoted in Palesati and Lepri, *Matteo Da Leccia Manierista Toscano*, 211.

David and Prophet and Sibyl—located in the top center and top right section of the east wall (Fig. 7) of the Oratorio del Gonfalone in Rome, where he worked again with the Zuccari and Cesare Nebbia ca. 1575—were also indebted to Michelangelo’s frescoes in the Sistine Chapel.¹⁷ During this period in Rome, d’Aleccio is also credited with restoring the frescoes of the *Resurrection* and the *Descent of the Holy Spirit* at S. Maria dell’Anima by Salviati, one of Vasari’s closest friends. In a style that was similar to Salviati’s, d’Aleccio contributed allegorical figures to the program at the Oratorio del Gonfalone and, in his fresco cycle in Malta, juxtaposed

¹⁷ The frescoes *Ecce Homo* and *Crown of Christ with Thorns* below the work by d’Aleccio at the Oratorio have been attributed to Cesare Nebbia. See Vannugli, ‘L’Oratorio del Gonfalone’, 118. Giovanni Baglione’s biography discusses the Oratorio del Gonfalone as follows: ‘Dipinse egli nell’Oratorio del Gonfalone, sopra due historie dell’incoronatione di spine e dell’ecce homo di Cesare Nebbia da Orvieto, due figure per banda, che furono quattro Virtù, imagini maggiori del naturale con gran maniera portate. E nel mezzo della facciata sopra la porta v’è una figura grande, che rappresenta un Profeta, con gagliardissima maniera condotta, e mostra grandissimo rilievo, e forza sì, che pare, che voglia balzar fuori di quei muri; e credesi, che quest’uomo andasse imitando la terribil maniera di Salviati’ (In the Oratory of the Gonfalone, above the Crowning of Christ with Thorns and Ecce Homo by Cesare Nebbia da Orvieto, with two figures per band there are four Virtues, painted with great naturalism and power. In the middle of the façade above the door, there is a large figure, representing a Prophet, depicted in a grand manner with force and in great relief, as if leaping from the wall, and seems to imitate the awesome manner of Salviati). See Baglione, *Le vite de’ pittori, scultori et architetti dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII fino a tutto quello di Urbano VIII*, quoted in Palesati and Lepri, *Matteo Da Leccia Manierista Toscano*, 211.

allegorical figures with battle scenes.¹⁸ Indeed, some of his work resembles the *pittura mista* of Salviati's ambitious projects for the Sala dell'Udienza in the Palazzo Vecchio, ca. 1543–1548, and frescoes for the Sala dei Fasti Farnesiani at the Palazzo Farnese, ca. 1552 and the Salone of the Palazzo Sacchetti, ca. 1553–1554.

For Vella and Gash, it was Vasari's paintings commemorating Cosimo's victories over Pisa and Siena for the Salone dei Cinquecento (**Fig. 6**) that most influenced d'Aleccio while he was working in Malta. Vasari's *Victory over the Pisans at Torre di San Vincenzo of 1505*, from 1563–1565 (**Fig. 8**) illustrates Vasari's approach to the genre. It is a fresco of a panoramic landscape that is tilted upward to include detailed renderings of buildings and other natural prospects of the terrain.¹⁹ D'Aleccio would favor an aerial view and combine it with views from other vantage points while also depicting objects sometimes using hierarchic scale. In his *Capture of*

¹⁸ For his work in Rome between 1573 and 1576 restoring Salviati's *Defence of the Body of Moses* on the wall opposite the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, see Stastny, 'A Note on Two Frescoes in the Sistine Chapel', 778–779. Lepri and Palesati note that in 1582, after leaving Malta and briefly returning to Rome, d'Aleccio traveled to Florence and Arezzo, where he would have had the opportunity to view and study paintings by Vasari. After this sojourn, Vasari's paintings influenced the poses of d'Aleccio's figures in later religious commissions. See Lepri and Palesati, 'Matteo Da Leccia E Vasari', 25. They also state, 22 and 24, that d'Aleccio admired Flemish artists working in Rome and that he may have known Jacopo Stradano, who worked closely with Vasari at the Palazzo Vecchio.

¹⁹ The program includes the *Retreat of the Turks at Piombino*, a ceiling painting in a vertical format of the Turkish fleet allied with French and some Florentine factions opposed to Duke Cosimo de' Medici on 12 July 1555. See Capponi, 'Guns and Profit', 61.

the Fort St. Elmo, 23 June (Fig. 9), a pivotal event in the Siege as the fort fell and had to be recaptured, there is a view looking down into the fort of St. Elmo, and a panoramic view of the fort of St. Angelo and boats is shown in the distance. The landscape is filled with the hierarchic arrangement of cannons manned by Turkish soldiers. There is another shift in the vantage point used for the depiction of Turkish commanders in the right foreground.

Raphael Cali Bonnici discusses the multiple viewpoints characteristic of d'Aleccio's images:

... he carefully sacrificed the perspective and the proportional laws and other pictorial qualities in order to obtain the best illustration of the true events, the actual positions of batteries and men, and the configuration of the land on which the battles were fought. In so doing, he was forced to tolerate unrealistic proportions between men and trees, and buildings, etc. but he succeeded in giving the true facts concerning the various operations that are really difficult to represent in a purely pictorial way.²⁰

Bonnici notes that d'Aleccio shifted his perspective to document specific events that took place during the siege, subordinating a naturalistic approach to space with his use of different techniques so that the image would convey more information about the location of the defensive architecture, armaments, and soldiers. In contrast, Vasari limited the vantage point for his frescoes of military subjects to a landscape represented as a tilted plane filled with detailed images of the soldiers engaged in battle. The different actions that took place in a

²⁰ Bonnici, 'The Great Siege in Pictures', 105.

battle were depicted within a space that was internally consistent. Vasari was also more systematic in depicting the proportions of the objects within the painting; he did not favor using a hierarchic scale.

A number of cartographic sources were available to both artists in their effort to depict the battles with specificity regarding their location. An engraving of Malta by Antonio Lafreri from 1565 was referenced by Egnazio Danti to create a map for the door of a cupboard in the Guardaroba of the Palazzo Vecchio, a space designed by Vasari for Cosimo de' Medici that was completed in two phases from 1563 to 1586.²¹ The room was to have a freestanding globe in the center and fifty-three painted maps by Danti and Stefano Buonsignori that were related to the aspirations of the Duke to conquer territory and to amass knowledge.²² Danti also collaborated with Antonio Vanosino da Varese on maps that included one of Malta and one of Lepanto for the Gallery of Maps in the Vatican built for Pope Gregory XIII. In one of his frescoes, d'Aleccio may have referred to the fresco of the harbor of Malta, probably made solely by Danti, from the Gallery of Maps.²³

Beyond the cartography, the frescoes in the Vatican loggia and in the Guardaroba at the Palazzo Vecchio had limited value for d'Aleccio and Vasari because the images did not record military actions. Mark Rosen makes this point about maps from sites such as the Guardaroba and the Gallery of Maps that were devoid of references to warfare:

²¹ Rosen, *The Mapping of Power*, 14.

²² Rosen, *The Mapping of Power*, 15.

²³ *The Great Siege of Malta Exhibition*, 479–480.

Playing down Ottoman enemies and displaying a fascination with recently 'discovered' areas free of an Islamic threat, monumental illustrations of global geography could project a providential future in which the unknown opened up new possibilities for future dominion, prosperity, colonization, subjugation.²⁴

In contrast to such work, Vasari and d'Aleccio focused on warfare and did not downplay the hostilities. In representing the battles, they seem to have created paintings to forestall future possibilities of conflicts fought in response to the perceived threat of Islam.

D'Aleccio was particularly adept at referring to the past to address the present. Vella discusses the total visual effect of the entire fresco cycle in the Sala del Consiglio of events that took place over many months, calling it a 'time-bound sequence' of images that coalesce into a 'composite pictorial narrative'.²⁵ In her analysis, she argued that the allegorical figures (**Fig. 3**) were paramount and organized the figures into groups: three theological virtues *Fides*, *Spes* (changed from *Speranza*), and *Carita*; four secular virtues *Iustitia*, *Prudentia*, *Temperantia*, and *Fortitudo*; six figures that support victory, *Felicitas*, *Religione*, *Nobilitas*, *Perseveranza*, *Patienza*, and *Virtu*; and two figures, *Vittoria* and *Fama*, that refer to history.²⁶ The figures were to be read in tandem with the narrative scenes. *Fides*, for example, holds a chalice to underscore the

²⁴ Rosen, *The Mapping of Power*, 14–15.

²⁵ Vella, 'Turning History into Art', 168.

²⁶ Vella, 'Turning History into Art', 173–174.

martyrdom of those who died during the capture of St. Elmo (**Fig. 9**).²⁷ She is the only figure that has a small coat of arms of the Grand Master Cassière. A few of the others have small shields with a white cross against a red background, a variant of the Maltese cross without the eight-pointed design, to forge a connection to the Order.²⁸

While Vasari would include the single Virtue, *Fides* (**Fig. 2**) in his naval battle, he gave her a firebrand for igniting the turban and weaponry near the bound captives at her feet to emphasize triumph rather than martyrdom. Perhaps this is why Vella regarded Vasari's work decorating the Salone dei Cinquecento (**Fig. 6**), rather than his work at the Sala Regia, as an important source for d'Aleccio's Virtues. She compared d'Aleccio's allegorical figures with statues that were placed between paintings on canvas temporarily installed in the room then known as the Sala Grande when it was used for the wedding festivities for Francesco I de' Medici and Giovanna of Austria in 1565.²⁹ Statues installed in the room for Giovanna's entry included Prudence, a virtue deemed 'necessary to human action'.³⁰ Vella concluded that

²⁷ Vella, 'Turning History into Art', 173.

²⁸ Bonnici, 'The Great Siege in Pictures', 104.

²⁹ Vella, 'Turning History into Art', 73. For the program in the Sala Grande, see Starn and Partridge, 'Triumphalism', 190–191.

³⁰ See Van Veen, 'Cosimo I e il suo messaggio militare', 88. Van Veen, 88, refers to G. Cini's descriptions from 1566 of some of the statues that were part of the decorations for the wedding of Francesco I and Giovanna of Austria: 'La statua della "Prudentia Ducis" che stave al centro della sommità, era fiacheggiata a destra dalla statua della "Vigilanza", "tanto necessario in tutte l'umane azioni", e a sinistra da quella della "Pazienza" ...' (The statue of 'Prudentia Ducis' that stood at the center summit was

d'Aleccio adapted the format of allegorical figures alternating with narrative paintings for an effect that was theatrical: 'The figures fulfil a role similar to that of the actor-narrator within a play: mediating between scene and audience, the allegory/actor is the intermediary figure guiding the viewer to the interpretation of each episode of the Siege, towards which they gesture or turn'.³¹ In this way, the Virtues seem to dramatize the bravery, sacrifice, and resolve of the Christian forces.

I would like to put forth an alternative reading of the program at Malta, which proposes that the figures functioned as a parergon or a supplement in the Derridean sense.³² In framing the scenes, the figures were multivalent, with deferred meaning and ambiguity. Some of the virtues, especially those of faith and fortitude, applied equally to the Ottoman as well as Christian combatants. For example, in the battle scenes d'Aleccio placed emphasis on the fortresses that were built and maintained by the Order and that were repeatedly attacked by the Turkish forces. The defensive structures were given prominence while the knights and their allies were usually represented in the background in large formations. Individual soldiers from the Holy League only dominate paintings that refer to the Order's successes that took place in

flanked on the right by the statue of 'Vigilance', 'so necessary in all human actions', and on the left by that of 'Patience' ...). At the festivities, there were other features worthy of note as pertains to maps and mapping: views of the Habsburg cities were depicted in frescoes in the courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio that were part of the decorations of 1565 for the Giovanna's entry into Florence. See Rosen, *The Mapping of Power*, 7.

³¹ Vella, 'Turning History into Art', 172.

³² Derrida and Owens, 'The Parergon', 3–41.

September at the conclusion of the Siege.³³ Most of the other frescoes focus on the Turkish forces and their commanders and were to document Malta's defenses and serve a didactic purpose reminding the knights to prepare for future threats.³⁴ In contrast to d'Aleccio's critical assessment of the Maltese defensive fortifications, Vasari's frescoes are idealizing and celebratory. His work achieved these qualities and promoted the Christian faith by juxtaposing images of the fleets and the tumultuous battle with allegorical figures and religious imagery.

D'Aleccio's approach to the battle scenes was informed by the Grand Master's directions for him to represent events with accuracy, and to do so he would prevail upon the assistance of eyewitnesses.³⁵ In addition to his direct contact with eyewitnesses, d'Aleccio also had access to the contemporary account from 1565 published by Francesco Balbi di Correggio, which paid particular attention to the Turkish command. In one typical description of a battle, Balbi referred to the Commander in Chief Mustapha Pasha's plan to attack St. Michael with the Ottoman army upon arriving from the sea:

As soon as these assault parties were ready, a fire was lit on the platform at the Mandra, and at once another one answered it from the promontory of St Elmo. These were clearly the signals for the attack to begin. The sun was now up and we could see the

³³ See the quality illustrations for frescoes 10–12 in Maiorano, *Matteo Perez D'Aleccio Pittore Ufficiale*, 88–94.

³⁴ Hughes, 'The Architectural Development', 489–490.

³⁵ Bonnici, 'The Great Siege in Pictures', 111.

boats more clearly. Their sides were built up with sacks of wool and cotton, and they were lined with magnificent-looking troops. They certainly made a fine sight—almost beautiful, if it had not been so dangerous. Three thousand of the flower [*sic*] of the Turkish army, as we learned later, were embarked in these boats. With them were the best troops belonging to Dragut and the Ruler of Algiers. Even the rank and file wore scarlet robes, and there were many in cloth of gold, and of silver, and of crimson damask. Armed with the fine muskets of Fez, scimitars of Alexandria and Damascus, and magnificent bows, they all wore splendid turbans.³⁶

D'Aleccio's *The Assault of Isola by Land and Sea* (**Fig. 10**) about this attack represents a view of the galleys as if they are being commanded by a turbaned figure seen on the shore from the back facing the ocean. The dress and pose of this key figure captures the pageantry recounted by Balbi. With the dramatic depiction of turbaned figure set against the naval scene—reminiscent of Michelangelo's fresco of the flood on the Sistine Ceiling—d'Aleccio seemed to be equally enthralled with the Turkish forces, despite the fact that the knights suffered substantial losses at Malta.³⁷ In images such as this, d'Aleccio accorded respect to the Ottomans at a time

³⁶ Balbi di Correggio, *The Siege of Malta*, 111.

³⁷ The losses suffered in 1565 would resonate because the Order's very presence in Malta occurred after Rhodes fell in 1523 after a lengthy siege. See Crowley, *Empires of the Sea*, 21.

when contemporary observers acknowledged Ottoman piety.³⁸ It was generally known that even Sultan Selim II had attributed the Ottoman defeat at Lepanto to the 'will of God'.³⁹

To affirm the importance of Christianity for the victory, d'Aleccio, like Vasari, included religious imagery similar to *ex-voto* paintings in his work.⁴⁰ It has been noted that Vasari placed *Fides* (**Fig. 11**) holding a chalice and cross and crowned with laurel in his naval scene. She holds a firebrand and bound captives at her feet to indicate the enmity between the opposing sides and to reference the Christian triumph.⁴¹ Vasari also depicted Christ hurling thunderbolts (**Fig. 12**) at the enemy accompanied by Saints Peter, Paul, James, and Mark, the latter two armed with swords to refer to the involvement of Spain and Venice.⁴² The representation of Christ had classical resonance appropriate to the victory, for as Scorza notes, Vasari and his friend and advisor Vincenzo Borghini knew that the iconography of Jupiter in the mythic Fall of Giants had been used in Naples in 1535 to refer to Charles V's victories over the Turks.⁴³ In addition to the

³⁸ Pisani, *The Battle of Lepanto*, 17.

³⁹ Crowley, *Empires of the Sea*, 281.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Riccio, *Madonna della Flota* (Madonna of the Fleet), 1576, oil on wood in the Maritime Museum, Vittoriosa, Malta. The painting depicts the Madonna and Child with St. John and St. Lucia above a view of the fleet.

⁴¹ Vella, 'Turning History into Art', 173. For Vasari's *Fides*, see Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 188.

⁴² Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 184.

⁴³ Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 183–184.

armed figure of Christ, an angel in the center of the battle above Don Giovanni's galley was incorporated as another way to foreshadow the Christian victory.⁴⁴

The religious figures in Vasari's images are shown as orchestrating the efforts of the armed forces and the specific commanders engaged in the fighting. Of the commanders, Vasari would have known to reference the Venetian Agostino Barbarigo among the combatants, leading the League's left corner against Mehemet Sciauruk, known as Sirocco in Italy. Although these figures and many others are somewhat difficult to identify among the action, some of the men commanded galleys that were marked by flag standards. Don Giovanni (the illegitimate son of Charles V) would be located in the center of the painting, which shows Don Juan of Austria's ship *La Real* in conflict with Ali Pasha and his galley the *Sultana*. Uluch Ali, known as Occhiali in Italy,⁴⁵ would be among those in flight below the hurled thunderbolts. Throughout the fresco,

⁴⁴ As Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 188 notes, the angel was an invention Vasari wrote about in *Lo Zibaldone*.

⁴⁵ Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 167 and 170–173, recounts details from Uluch Ali's dramatic biography that would have made him a compelling opponent, as he was born in Calabria in 1519, was kidnapped by Algerian pirates, and served as a galley slave. He later converted to Islam and captained his own galley. In recognition of his service, he was given the title of Kildij (The Sword) by Sultan Selim II and made Supreme Commander of the Turkish navy. Despite his defeat, as acknowledged in the fresco, Uluch Ali won the battle standard of the knights and presented it to Sultan Selim II in Istanbul, where it was hung in the Aya Sofya mosque as a trophy. Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 171 cites Contarini, *Historia delle cose successe*, fol. 53v. See also Crowley, *Empires of the Sea*, 282.

which foreshadows the Christian victory, these individuals and those they commanded and fought against are lost in the tumult and experience the misery of warfare.

Vasari further underscored the providential nature of the battle by depicting a group of demonic figures whose significance was explained in an anonymous account of the painting from 1585:

On the left are fleeing demons and the like, things which, even if those who were there could not see them in the air, inform us well, because without divine help we Christians would never have been able to win; they were painted to maintain and increase devotion.

(Alla sinistra sono demonii e simiglianti che fugono, cose che, se bene raccontano quanti che ci si trovaro che non si vedessero in aria, nondimeno perchè senza l'aiuto divino mai noi cristiani havremo potuto vincere, ci si saranno depinte per mantere la divotione et accrescerla'.)⁴⁶

For this viewer, the demons attested to the evil nature of the enemy. The opposition of the religious figures with the demonic ones served to underscore the religious imperative of the conflict and, in suggesting that the blessed fight against the damned, evokes the Last Judgment. In contrast, d'Aleccio omitted references to malign forces in favor of divine figures, which he limited to one scene, the *Disembarkment of the Turkish Armada, 20 May* (**Fig. 13**), the second

⁴⁶ Lanciani, *Il codice Barberiniano XXX*, 89, 457, quoted in de Jong, 'The Painted Decoration', 161.

image in the cycle. In the album of engravings based on the paintings that d'Aleccio published in 1582, he commented on the religious symbolism, stating:

It may be piously believed that Malta was to be lost had it not enjoyed the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mother of Christ before the Most Holy Trinity, and had it not secured the prayers of St. John, St. Paul and St. Catherine who are entrusted with the protection and custody of this island.⁴⁷

It is noteworthy that, despite their importance as intercessors, d'Aleccio confined the religious figures to the top left corner of the fresco. The rest of this work and the majority of the other narrative frescoes in the Sala were devoid of religious imagery and concentrated on Turkish soldiers involved in offensive action.

D'Aleccio's concern with soldiery was such that he reflected on some of the actions of specific Turkish leaders in inscriptions that he added to his engravings of the frescoes, such as the one dedicated to the *Capture of St. Elmo*:

⁴⁷ D'Aleccio's engravings were in the album dedicated to Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici, titled *I veri Ritratti della Guerra & Dell'Assedio dati dalla alla Isola di Malta dall'Armato Turchesa l'anno 1565* (Rome, 1582); see Bonnici, 'The Great Siege in Pictures', 171. See Ganardo, 'Matteo Pérez D'Aleccio's Engravings', 125–136.

IN QVESTA FORTEZZA GLI TVRCHI VI TROVORNO 27 PREZZI DI BRONZO CHE SVBITO
INCORMINCIORNO I TALLA CIOE O DIO SE IL FIGLIOLO CHE E VESTA FORTEZZA SI
PIC[C]OLO CHI GRAN FURIA COMMANDO CHE A NESSUNO SI SAL-VASSE LA VITO (sic) ET
SVBITO NE AVISO IL GRAN TURCO CON DIROCO CORSARO.

(In this fort the Turks found 27 cannon of bronze which they immediately turned on Fort St. Angelo. When the Pasha entered the fort he expressed astonishment (at the great losses suffered) and cried: Allah, that is to say Oh God, if the son who is small has cost so much, what will the father cost, who is so great? And in a great rage he ordered that no lives be spared, and he instantly sent the corsair Siroco to the Grand Turk with the news that S. Elmo had been taken.)⁴⁸

The comments attributed to Mustapha refer to the great losses and bloodshed that were not documented in the fresco. One cannot discern the actual effects on the soldiers, but the foreground figure representing Mustapha Pasha (**Fig. 9**) displays emphatic emotion. In the largescale portrait, Mustapha is shown with a furrowed brow and eyes opened wide to convey his anger and surprise. Although most of the details in d'Aleccio's psychological portrait are clearly visible in the fresco, this work and the others have suffered damage and been partially restored.⁴⁹ In light of the poor state of preservation, it is important to compare the frescoes to

⁴⁸ *The Great Siege of Malta Exhibition*, 341.

⁴⁹ Bondin, 'Restoring the Cycle of History'.

d'Aleccio's later engravings and to eight *modelli* by him that are at the Royal Museum in Greenwich.⁵⁰ The oil painting of the capture of St. Elmo at Greenwich (**Fig. 14**) suggests that Mustapha and the other figures involved in the military actions experienced a wide range of emotions, ranging from stalwart determination to doubt, resignation, and fear. With the portrayal of emotion, d'Aleccio exhibits surprising empathy that may unwittingly challenge some of the ideologies about the Ottomans as enemies, depicting them as stalwart and brave.

D'Aleccio focused on leadership and depicted the living combatants rather than the wounded and the dead, even though at the Siege, conducted over four months from May to September 1565, the Ottomans were estimated to have had 30,000 casualties. Given the large number of forces, the inclusion of large groups of soldiers represented in the aerial views provide a sense of the scale of operations. Vasari was more attentive to the material destruction and human loss at Lepanto, a battle that took place on one day, 7 October 1571, with more than 50,000 combatants.⁵¹ Thomas Hogg from England, who served on a Neapolitan galley, described the battle of Lepanto in a way that seems to justify the *horror vacui* in Vasari's graphic depiction:

... there were broken spars and shattered oars.... Galley slaves were crushed between ships and left to hang in their chains. A man might walk across the water on the pieces

⁵⁰ The oil paintings were acquired by the Greenwich Museum in 1933 from Lord North at Wroxton Abbey. At one time they were in the collection of Charles I. See *The Great Siege of Malta Exhibition*, 462.

⁵¹ Capponi, *Victory of the West*, 263.

of ships and men and not wet his feet.... Amid the broken wood were bodies, many of them oarsmen still fastened to their oars, and soldiers, their garments sodden with blood. It was as if the Last Trump had sounded and the sea was giving up its dead, not receiving any more'.⁵²

Vasari's image shows the destruction of ships and the human loss combined with religious imagery that suggest the battle was apocalyptic. One may refer to d'Aleccio's *The Arrival of the Little Relief Force at Night, 5 July* (**Fig. 15**) for a comparable image of a naval action that involved several galleys transporting 600 soldiers.⁵³ D'Aleccio was interested in the valiant efforts of the soldiers sent from Sicily because their numbers were so desperately needed. A comparison of d'Aleccio's image with Vasari's suggests that d'Aleccio's overcrowding of the two vessels filled with soldiers in the foreground and the crowds that congregate on shore undermined the appearance of their strength. D'Aleccio depicted the group in such close quarters that they seem huddled together and vulnerable, while Vasari represented the naval battle using *horror vacui* to extoll the bravery of the Christian forces in the midst of heavy fighting culminating in success. The vulnerability of d'Aleccio's figures minimized the valor of the Christian soldiers being transported to the siege and distinguishes them from the agency of Vasari's figures that experienced so much destruction and bloodshed.

⁵² T.C.F. Hopkins, *Confrontation at Lepanto* (2006), 139 quoted in Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 141.

⁵³ Maiorano, *Matteo Perez D'Aleccio Pittore Ufficiale*, 75.

It is also worthwhile to compare d'Aleccio's image of the *Disembarkment of the Turkish Armada, 20 May* (**Fig. 13**) with Vasari's *Preparations for the Battle of Lepanto* (**Fig. 1**), because they both depict the Turkish fleet. D'Aleccio's represents a mass of Turkish forces landing on shore in disarray before the Siege, and Vasari renders the Turkish fleet opposed to the Christian galleys assembled in tight formation before the onslaught of battle at Lepanto depicted in the companion fresco (**Fig. 2**). D'Aleccio does not provide a subsequent image depicting bloodshed. Both artists were sensitive enough to the logistics to include depictions of the fleets, but only Vasari was committed to showing the brutality of battle. However, the large number of losses at Malta in 1565 and at Lepanto in 1571 must have created a sense of urgency for both artists to use religion to extol the military actions. Thus, the placement of devotional imagery in d'Aleccio's *Disembarkment* and in Vasari's battle scene, both of which depicted large groups of combatants, presented the Siege of Malta and the Battle of Lepanto as crusades, not for the Holy Land but for other Christian territories.

To conclude with a paragone or contestation that can be fashioned from viewing their work, one finds that even though d'Aleccio framed his narrative scenes with allegorical imagery, his images of battle focused on the quality of the Christian defenses on Malta; and Vasari alone, by foreshadowing the Christian victory with allegorical and religious imagery incorporated into his frescoes, conveyed a castigating moral judgment. Vasari's critical assessment was evident in his use of allegorical imagery that showed the Turks were harbingers of *Timore, Debolezza, and Morte* (Fear, Weakness, and Death) and also when he depicted Christ hurling thunderbolts and

demonic figures in the heavens above the naval battle.⁵⁴ D'Aleccio limited the religious references to the intercessors shown in one scene and favored detailed depictions of the offensive fighting that had the potential to make the viewer cognizant of Ottoman identity and to regard them with humanity. Vasari's work seems to be more effective propaganda, but as representations of the Mediterranean, it is d'Aleccio's work rather than Vasari's that seems to genuinely pose the question, 'whose space?'⁵⁵ In comparing d'Aleccio's work with Vasari's, we may ask to whom does the Mediterranean belong? Following in this vein, we can consider the Mediterranean as the locus of hostilities or continue as Cassano proposed in this scenario:

Or we could try to reverse this scenario by re-attributing to the Mediterranean the role of a new center, a paradoxical center, because it is situated on the borderline. To do this would be to wager a global bet on the possibility of all cultures coexisting even though they emerge with a head start on their shores. Instead of war grounds for others, the Mediterranean could try to bring to its surface the ancient knowledge embedded in its geography; it could give form to criticism of all fundamentalisms, deconstruct hostility between the principal points, and launch another page of history, in which land and sea, belonging and freedom, slowness and speed, are no longer at war with each other but,

⁵⁴ Scorza, 'Vasari's Lepanto Frescoes', 160.

⁵⁵ Brummett, 'Visions of the Mediterranean', 11.

respectful of balance and measure, together collaborate to bring about a higher form of life.⁵⁶

D'Aleccio may indeed provide such an alternative view. By foregrounding the Turkish combatants and framing them with allegorical figures, he employed the style of *pittura mista* to evoke the humanism that one can search for in Renaissance thought, which upheld many admirable ideals such as temperance and perseverance, virtues that were regarded as worthy aspirations for all of the participants as individuals and combatants. Thus, his work seems to acknowledge the Mediterranean as a place of paradox: as the site of warfare and a place for the contest over territory and faith, the Mediterranean became a theater for valor for all combatants. In portraying the efforts of Turkish combatants in greater detail than those of the Christian combatants, d'Aleccio's work 'deconstructed hostility', even if he did not intend for his portrayal of the Ottomans to be idealistic or an endorsement of Islam or Ottoman hegemony.

In this comparative study, we have found that the techniques for *pittura mista* used by Vasari and his circle at the Salone dei Cinquecento, the Sala Regia, and other sites were also employed by d'Aleccio in Malta. In the Sala Regia, Vasari provided two scenes: one of the fleets arriving at Lepanto; and another of a tumultuous battle with allegorical and religious figures that promoted and celebrated the Christian victory. D'Aleccio created more ambiguous allegorical imagery in the Sala de Consiglio because the patronage of a religious military order,

⁵⁶ Cassano, 'Southern Thought', 7–8.

interested in the intricacies of siege warfare, gave him scope to juxtapose the allegorical figures with narrative scenes. His references to the command of Turkish forces and the attack on military defenses focus on the humanity of the opponents for less celebratory images. It is remarkable that this change occurred after the battle of Lepanto, during a period marked by continuing conflict and that in assessing his work and comparing it with Vasari's work in Rome it is possible to call attention to the paradoxical nature of the Mediterranean and move toward a respectful balance of life.

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Captions

Fig. 1. Giorgio Vasari, *Preparations for the Battle of Lepanto*, ca. 1572–173, fresco. Sala Regia, Rome. Public domain: Wikimedia Commons:

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Fig. 2. Giorgio Vasari, *The Battle of Lepanto*, ca. 1572–1573, fresco. Sala Regia, Rome. Public domain: Wikimedia Commons:

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Fig. 3. Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, fresco cycle, ca. 1577–1581. Sala del Consiglio, Grand Master's Palace Valletta. Public domain: Wikimedia Commons:

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Fig. 4. Interior view, Sala Regia, Rome, ca. 1572–1573, fresco. Public domain: Wikimedia

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Fig. 5. Giorgio Vasari, detail foreground figures, *Preparations for the Battle of Lepanto*, ca. 1572–1573, fresco. Sala Regia, Rome. Public domain: Wikimedia Commons:

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Fig. 6. Interior view, Salone dei Cinquecento, 1563–1565, frescoes. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

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Fig. 7. Interior view, east wall, Oratorio di S. Lucia al Gonfalone, 1575, Rome. Public domain:

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Fig. 8. Giorgio Vasari, *The Rout of the Pisans at Torre San Vincenzo*, 1563–1565, fresco. Salone dei Cinquecento, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Public domain: Wikimedia Commons:

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Fig. 9. Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, *Capture of S. Elmo/La presa di S. Elmo, 23 June 1565*, ca. 1577–1581, fresco. Sala del Consiglio, Grand Master's Palace, Valletta. Public domain: Wikimedia Commons:

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Fig. 10. Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, *The Assault of Isola by Land and Sea, 15 July/ Assalto per mare e per terra al isola e S. Michele*, ca. 1577–1581, fresco. Sala del Consiglio, Grand Master's

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Fig. 11. Giorgio Vasari, Detail *Fides*, *The Battle of Lepanto*, ca. 1572–1573, fresco. Sala Regia,

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Fig. 12. Giorgio Vasari, detail of Christ, *The Battle of Lepanto*, ca. 1572–1573, fresco. Sala Regia,

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Fig. 13. Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, *The Disembarkment of Turks in Marsaxlokk Harbour 20 May*

1565, ca. 1577–1581, fresco. Sala del Consiglio, Grand Master's Palace, Valletta. Public domain:

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Fig. 14. Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, *The Siege of Malta, The Capture of St. Elmo, 23 June 1565*, ca.

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Fig. 15. Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, *The Small Rescue to the Village at Night / Il Soccorso Piccolo al*

Borgo di Notte Tempo, 5 July 1565, ca. 1577–1581, fresco. Sala del Consiglio, Grand Master's

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