

A Footnote to Lepanto:

The Confusing and Contradictory Adventures of Don Quixote, the Captive, Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, and Kılıç Ali Pasha, the Sultan's Admiral

On Sunday, October 7, 1571, a mighty European naval fleet under the command of Don Juan of Austria defeated an Ottoman Turkish fleet of similar size in the Gulf of Patras. The battle of Lepanto, as it was later called, was the first significant defeat of the Ottomans at the hands of Europeans since the founding of the Ottoman Empire in 1299. The battle was especially crucial in the fortunes of two combatants. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra was badly wounded and lost the use of his left hand; during his return to Spain he was captured at sea by pirates and spent 5 years in Algiers as a slave before being ransomed. Only one Turkish naval commander, Kılıç Ali Pasha, emerged from the Ottoman debacle victorious; he was to become admiralissimo of the completely rebuilt Turkish fleet, eventually building in Istanbul in 1580 a mosque that the American writer H. W. Dwight, in his book *Constantinople Old and New*, written in 1915, dubbed "The Mosque of Don Quixote."

The exploration of the purported relationship between these two figures is quite complex, because Cervantes introduces in the fourth section of *Don Quixote*, Part I (1605) a character called The Captive, who relates in considerable detail the story of his own imprisonment in Algiers, a story in which Kılıç Ali Pasha plays an important role. What is autobiographical for Cervantes in the Captive's tale and what is instead a romantic invention are easily confused, as Cervantes in his narratives often takes off one mask only to reveal another, with yet another underneath. Mr. Dwight, unable to distinguish between the Captive and Cervantes, felt that the ransom of the latter had helped to build the Turkish admiral's mosque.

In the important work of Cervantes scholarship entitled *Cervantes in Algiers*, published in 2002, Maria Antonia Garcés helps us to unravel the mystery. Cervantes and the Captive both suffered in captivity in Algiers under the Ottoman governor or *beylerbey* Hasan, known as Hasan Veneciano, an Italian convert to Islam who rose in the Ottoman bureaucracy thanks to the patronage of Kılıç Ali Pasha (referred to as Uchiali by Cervantes). But Cervantes never came closer to Kılıç Ali than the several hundred yards that separated his own ship, the galley *Marquesa*, from the Ottoman commander's galley at Lepanto in 1571. The introduction of Kılıç Ali into the Captive's narrative, where the Turk is conspicuously characterized as a noble and humane individual among the generally pejorative portraits of Ottoman and Muslim officials found in Cervantes' work, must therefore be a deliberate literary device used by Cervantes for a deliberate purpose.