

CHAPTER 4

The Mediterranean (A)bridged A View from Nafpaktos, Also Known as Lepanto

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Abstract

The Battle of Lepanto took place in 1571, when the allied naval forces of the Holy League engaged the Ottoman fleet at the gulf of Corinth–Patras, near modern Nafpaktos, a western Greek town of 20,000 people. The Catholic victory resonated across Europe, to capture the imagination of Renaissance composers and poets, to inspire important artwork, and to leave an indelible mark on Miguel de Cervantes, whose left hand ‘became useless at the Battle of Lepanto, to glorify the right one’, as he is quoted to have said. Today, Lepanto holds a prominent place in Islamophobic discourses and alt-right formations across Europe and North America. Yet, unlike commemorators who rejoice in divisions between the enlightened Christian West and barbaric Rest, my Nafpaktian interlocutors are more ambiguously positioned vis-à-vis these binaries. In fact, rather than celebrating Lepanto’s contemporary symbolism, Nafpaktos’s claim to the battle is premised on location, and on the town’s proximity to the site of the naval engage-

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ment. This chapter examines Nafpaktians' quests for a meaningful location-driven narrative on the Battle of Lepanto. Tracing the mutual co-production of relative location and historical event – Nafpaktos and Lepanto – the chapter draws attention to the different Mediterraneans afforded by such processes of creative synthesis.

Introduction

'For all the century of dreams that has gone into it, [the Rio–Antirio Bridge] looks a fine example of linking nowhere much to nowhere at all', wrote *The Economist* in July 2004.¹ The spectacular bridge crosses the Corinthian Gulf and connects the peninsula of the Peloponnese to mainland Greece. The bridge spans 2,880 metres and features a much-celebrated multi-span cable-stayed design – one of the longest of its kind in the world. Among the first to cross it were torchbearers of the 2004 Athens Olympics, including Otto Rehhagel, the German football coach who led Greece to the victorious final of the 2004 European Championship. The flamboyance of the early 2000s, however, soon gave way to relentless austerity, and national elation turned into fierce condemnation. Having cost the state a staggering €770 million, many considered the Rio–Antirio Bridge to be yet another culprit of the Greek economic crisis.

I first crossed the Rio–Antirio Bridge on 7 October 2017 on my way to Nafpaktos, into which the bridge opens. Nafpaktos, also known by its Venetian name Lepanto, is a town of 20,000 people. Its picturesque port features an impressive fortress, its central street is filled with shops, and its main square offers plenty of tavernas. Once outside the centre of the town, however, the sight of bankrupt businesses and decrepit buildings is common. Caught within the aftermath of the crisis, while also brimming with beauty, Nafpaktos resembles several other Greek coastal towns. And, yet, a large sign by the harbour leading to 'Cervantes Park' also gives sense of Nafpaktos's unlikeness. What brought the Spaniard to the 'land of nowhere' and what did he accomplish here to deserve an entire park in his honour? I followed the path indicated by the sign, and soon found myself in front of a statue of Miguel de Cervantes. His figure is slim and his posture proud. His left arm holds a sword, while his right arm is raised to the sky. The sign below reads:

To Cervantes (1547–1616), the universal literary spirit of Spain, who always carried with pride his wounds from the Battle of Lepanto.

To the eternal memory of the greatest battle in the history of the rowing navy, and the most solemn judgment of the Mediterranean people to reject war and collectively establish peace.

The Battle of Lepanto was the product of competing claims over the Mediterranean basin, at a time of westward Ottoman expansion and deep European divisions following the Protestant reformation. The Ottoman invasion of Venetian colonies in Cyprus in 1570 forced Venice to appeal for aid to the relentless reformer and inquisitor Pope Pius V. In spite of conflicting interests among parties, Pius V was eventually able to arrange a coalition for the protection of Catholic colonies and commercial hubs. The Holy League was a fragile alliance between the Republic of Venice, the Spanish Empire, the Papal States, the Republic of Genoa, and several other smaller states and military orders. It was led by Don Jon of Austria, half-brother of King Philip II. After an expedition past Naples, Messina, and Corfu, the allied Catholic fleet reached the island of Cephalonia on 4 October 1571, where they received news of the fall of the Venetian colony of Famagusta in Cyprus and of the Ottomans' movements in the Corinthian Gulf, near modern-day Nafpaktos, which at the time was under Ottoman occupation. Three days later, Sultan Selim II ordered Muezzinzade Ali Pasha and his fleet to leave their naval station in Lepanto. In the meantime, the Catholic armada had begun its journey eastwards. The two fleets met soon afterwards. The naval engagement resulted in the severe defeat of the Ottomans, as well as the death of some 40,000 soldiers and sailors from both sides.

The victory of the Holy League resonated across Catholic Europe, to capture the imagination of Renaissance composers and poets, to inspire artwork by Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese, and to leave an indelible mark on Miguel de Cervantes, whose left hand 'became useless at the Battle of Lepanto, to glorify the right one', as he is quoted to have said. Despite this immediate climate of elation, however, the long-term impact of the battle has been controversial. In *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Fernand Braudel writes that 'historians have joined in an impressively unanimous chorus to say that Lepanto was a great spectacle, a glorious one even, but in

the end leading nowhere' (1949, 1088). The weak and exhausted Catholic allies failed to repeat the triumph of Lepanto in the following year and eventually disintegrated. The Ottomans, on the other hand, were quick to restore their naval forces and continue their mostly uninterrupted raids across the Mediterranean for another decade. Yet Braudel sees the battle as having marked the end of Christendom's prolonged period of depression, driven by the Ottomans' supremacy (1949; cf. Hess 1972). In fact, Braudel writes that, 'if we look beneath the events, beneath that glittering layer on the surface of history, we shall find that the ripples of Lepanto spread silently, inconspicuously, far and wide' (1949, 1088).

In certain ways, the ripples of Lepanto continue to spread far and wide. A quick Google search leaves no doubt about Lepanto's contemporary symbolism and centrality in Islamophobic discourse (Betz and Meret 2009). The US invasion of Afghanistan is said to have taken place on 7 October 2001 in order to allude to the battle's stakes and outcomes. Matteo Salvini, leader of Italy's far-right League, often holds his press conferences against artwork that depicts the naval engagement. Plenty of alt-right and neofascist clubs across Europe and North America are named after the battle, as are several anti-Islamic mobilisations. The gathering of one million Catholics in Poland on 7 October 2017 to memorialise the event and protest against immigration is case in point (see also Buchowski 2017). In these commemorations, the Battle of Lepanto acquires mythological dimensions and features as a highly symbolic episode in the 'clash of civilisations' (Buttigieg 2007). Additionally, it draws a sharp division between the enlightened Christian West and barbaric Rest and allies the former against the latter in a war believed to be immemorial.

The material presented in this chapter also concerns the celebration of the Battle of Lepanto. Unlike commemorators who rejoice in cultural divisions and religious conflicts, however, my Nafpaktian interlocutors were more ambivalently positioned vis-à-vis these binaries. In fact, rather than celebrating the battle's contemporary political symbolism, Nafpaktos's claim to the battle is premised on location and, more specifically, on the town's geographical proximity to the site of the naval engagement. That the battle took place close to modern-day Nafpaktos, in the region that was once known as Lepanto, did not explain much on its own. I argue, instead, that it provided Nafpaktians with a riddle as to how the historical event was to be integrated within

a meaningful narrative that took location both as a point of departure and a destination.

In *Corsican Fragments*, Matei Candea challenges the assumptions of expansion and complexity that lie in original formations of multisited ethnography, on the basis that the displacement of the delimited field site in favour of multisitedness merely recasts and upscales methodological convictions in holism and closure (2010, 9–39; see also Moore 2004). The concept of the ‘arbitrary location’, by contrast, recognises that even the most bounded of field sites are enmeshed in multisitedness, since they are always linked to a variety of ‘wholes, elsewhere, and elsewhere’ (Candea 2010, 36), and thus constitute ‘relative locations’ (Green 2005; see [Chapter 1](#)). Additionally, ‘arbitrary location’ allows one to move a step further, and to invert the dominant logic that has been treating place as a mere avenue towards the study of abstracted Weberian ideal types. In Candea’s words,

While the ideal type allows one to connect and compare separate instances, the arbitrary location allows one to reflect on and rethink conceptual entities, to challenge their coherence and their totalising aspirations. ... If the ideal type is meaning that cuts through space, the arbitrary location is space that cuts through meaning. (2010, 34–35)

By Candea’s logic, there is no reason to assume that any location is more multisited or arbitrary than the rest. Nonetheless, I suggest that the commemoration of the Battle of Lepanto in Nafpaktos is a case study into the (un)making of meaning by means of geographical contingency and, indeed, arbitrariness. Absent from official Greek historiography, mass education, and dominant narratives of nationhood and Orthodoxy, the Battle of Lepanto generated space that begged to be attached to meaning. In the story I recount here, therefore, the almighty event does not constitute a historical backdrop or a reservoir of fixed meanings. Rather, in what follows, I examine the mutual co-production of relative location and historical event, Nafpaktos and Lepanto, and I draw particular attention to the different Mediterraneans afforded by such processes of co-production.

Drawing on interviews, participant observation, and Nafpaktos’s local press, I examine three different instantiations of this location-driven meaning-making process. First, I examine the institution of the battle’s annual celebration in the late 1990s and I trace the emergence

of two competing Marian icons that served to distil the relationship between town and battle, first in terms of divine causality and, second, in terms of secular retrospection. I then turn to ‘Roads of Lepanto’, an inter-town network that sought to frame the battle as cultural heritage, and I pay particular attention to tensions between evocations of pan-Mediterranean heritage and contemporary political configurations. Lastly, I examine the battle’s re-enactment and, more specifically, the dressing-up of Nafpaktians into 16th-century Ottomans and Europeans. This, I suggest, offers snapshots into what arbitrariness, as performance and spectacle, might look like.

The tripartite equation that Nafpaktians have had to work through in their quest for a meaningful narrative on the Battle of Lepanto, made of location, region, and event, has yielded different solutions over the years. In whatever way these three elements have come to be joined and arranged, however, they have also transformed in themselves. When the battle’s outcome is attributed to Nafpaktos’s Orthodox patroness, the town transforms into a determining agent of European and Mediterranean history. When the battle comes to be tailored to cultural policy schemes, the town is envisioned as an important hub of Mediterranean heritage. Lastly, when the battle transforms into spectacle, Nafpaktos provides a vantage point from where the event can non-combatantly be observed and Mediterranean history can be put into perspective. In each case, the Battle of Lepanto, its stakes, and its legacy become arranged concentrically – their centre, of course, being Nafpaktos, while the Mediterranean emerges as a set of variously conceived (dis)connections between shifting parts and wholes.

Lepanto of Miracles and History

In *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm (1983) writes of the invocation of factitious continuities with an (imagined) past. To invent a tradition, according to Hobsbawm, means to establish and ritualise historical perpetuity by way of repetition and invariance. The weekly newspaper *Embros* tells us a great deal about the tenacious efforts made toward the creation of what today constitutes Nafpaktos’s trademark tradition. While the presidential decree that established the annual anniversary of the historical event was passed in 1981 (Decree 599/1981), the first official commemoration of the event was not held until 18 years later, in October 1999. In the months preceding the celebration,

the local newspaper featured several articles dedicated to the event, its historical significance, and contemporary value. Translated excerpts from G. K. Chesterton's poem 'Lepanto' stood next to commentaries written by local connoisseurs, and copies of Renaissance artwork stood next to paintings made by some of Nafpaktos's elementary students.

Of particular interest is an article written by Yiannis Chalatsis, head of Nafpaktos's library, author of several books on the region's history, and invaluable interlocutor. The article, published on 30 April 1999 and titled 'Historical Void in Nafpaktos,' elaborates on the dangers entailed in failing to pay due tribute to the landmark event.² Scrutinising local authorities, 'who are unable to grasp the magnitude of the battle and its significance for our town,' Chalatsis makes a number of recommendations that will help fill this 'historical void.' Among others, he advocates the organisation of a scientific conference dedicated to the event, the installation of a monument, and the opening of a museum. Chalatsis concludes his article by noting that Nafpaktos's 'historical void' is so vast that others have been filling it to their advantage. It was the neighbouring town of Messolonghi, rather than Nafpaktos, that celebrated the Battle of Lepanto the year before, Chalatsis bitterly observes.

But, as it turned out, the first official commemoration was anything but a success. In the weeks following the event, Embros featured photographs of empty chairs accompanied by castigating commentaries on the absence of both residents and important local figures.³ This climate of failure appears to have stemmed from the unavailability of convenient narratives that would connect place and event in meaningful terms and, more specifically, from the battle's discordance with culturally salient registers of nationhood and Orthodoxy. As Mr Chalatsis explained to me, 'people thought "Neither did Greece exist in 1571, nor were the conquerors Orthodox, so what is point?" People back then couldn't see beyond their noses.' In short, despite the legitimacy granted by the town's geographical proximity to the site of the naval engagement, it was not clear what this 'historical void' should be stuffed with and how this 'invented tradition' should re-envision Nafpaktos's past and present.

But, while this general sense of confusion appears to have deterred some, it most certainly propelled others, for soon Nafpaktos's annual celebration of the Battle of Lepanto transformed into an object of contentious debate and conflicting visions. The local press of the early 2000s is replete with references to the bifurcation of the com-

memoration and the emergence of two competing celebrations. ‘The Municipality [celebrates] history ... the Monastery [celebrates] the miracle!’ reads the title of an article published by Embros in September 2001.⁴ The tension between ‘miracle’ and ‘history’ concerned two Marian icons, used in the respective events staged by the Municipality of Nafpaktos and the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour (henceforth the Municipality and the Monastery). On a more general level, the tension reflects the creative labour that went towards weaving meaning into an historical event that had previously been nested in opacity and ambivalence.

The fact that two Marian icons were at the heart of the dispute between the Municipality and the Monastery is not surprising. The figure of the Virgin Mary is intricately linked with the Battle of Lepanto. In the days preceding the naval engagement, Pope Pius V is said to have asked Catholics to pray to the rosary and to have led rosary processions in Rome. After accrediting the unexpected victory of the Holy League to the divine intervention of the Virgin Mary, the Pope instituted the annual feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The feast is celebrated up to date throughout the Roman Catholic world on 7 October. Links between the Battle of Lepanto and the Virgin Mary have also been established through a Marian icon that was carried by the mast of the galley led by Venetian admiral Sebastiano Venier. The origins and current location of the icon, known as *Madonna di Lepanto*, formed the topic of heated debate in Nafpaktos during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Additionally, they generated two competing narrativisations that distilled the Battle of Lepanto: first, as a matter of historiography and, second, as a deed of divine intervention, thus calling to mind Hirsch and Stewart’s distinction between ‘historicism’ and ‘historicity’. Whereas the former isolates the past and separates it from the present, the latter:

is not concerned with objectivity, accuracy and factuality in local accounts of the past, but rather with recovering all of the social and cultural assumptions with which a people imbue these accounts. In short, the ethnographer investigates social ideologies of history/the past and substantive representations of the past as cultural forms to be understood in relation to the social life of the community. (Hirsch and Stewart 2005, 268)

So far, the events organised by the Municipality have included talks, art exhibitions, sailing races, chess tournaments, the re-enactment of the event, and an annual procession and memorial service for the Catholics killed in battle. The Monastery, on the other hand, holds a separate celebration. This consists of a vigil, mass, and litany on the ‘day of the holy miracle’. At the centre of the events organised by the Municipality is the ‘Icon of the Battle’ (eikona tis Navmachias), depicting the Virgin Mary surrounded by angels and leaning over the Corinthian Gulf. The icon was commissioned by the mayor in the late 1990s and was partly funded by the concessionaires of the Rio–Antirio Bridge, who continue to sponsor the Municipality’s cultural initiatives up to date. At the centre of the Monastery’s celebration, on the other hand, is the ‘Icon of the Virgin Mary of Nafpaktos’, also known as eikona tis Panayias Nafpaktiotissas. Unlike the ‘Icon of the Battle’, which is often referred to as a ‘modern-day synthesis’, thus alluding to the retrospective addition of the Orthodox Mary in the scene of the battle, that of Panayia Nafpaktiotissa is claimed to have played a decisive role in the battle’s very outcome.

According to the Monastery, the icon of Panayia Nafpaktiotissa is closely related to Sebastiano Venier’s icon of Madonna di Lepanto. In some versions of the narrative, the two icons are claimed to be identical. In others, the latter is seen as a copy of the former.⁵ In the Monastery’s account of events, the Venetians only began to worship the Virgin Mary during their occupation of Nafpaktos between 1407 and 1499, when the area was a Venetian exclave in Ottoman territory. This was a decisive time for the Catholics not only because they were exposed to the Orthodox tradition, which places special importance on the Virgin Mary (e.g. Dubisch 1995; Hann 2011), but also because they were acquainted with the town’s patroness, who is no other than Panayia Nafpaktiotissa. In short, it was thanks to Venetians’ occupation of Nafpaktos that Admiral Venier decorated his galley mast with the Virgin Mary and the Pope attributed the Holy League’s victory to Her.

The official articulation of this discourse can also be found in the Wikipedia entry for Panayia Nafpaktiotissa, where we read that ‘the Virgin Mary of Nafpaktos became known not only in Italy, but also throughout Catholic Europe as Madonna di Lepanto’.⁶ In this alternative account of events, Madonna di Lepanto is no other than an exported version of Panayia Nafpaktiotissa. Unlike the Municipality’s icon, which constitutes an Orthodox interpretation of a Catholic event,

the Monastery's icon collapses differences between the two Virgin Marys and attributes the battle's outcome to Orthodox intervention-cum-location (see also Baeva and Valtchinova 2009; Seraïdari 2009). In what may thus be seen as an inversion of the dominant narrative, Catholic Europe did not merely disembark in Nafpaktos in 1571 but was rather formed there in the 15th century and later exported to where it belongs today.

In their recent call for an 'anthropology of history', Palmié and Stewart (2016) note that Western notions of history were largely established in opposition to eschatological and scriptural understandings of the past. They emphasise, however, that this did not eradicate 'inspired' historicising practices or historical accounts that do not comply with standard historiography. The dispute between 'miracle' and 'history', however, is also suggestive of the assumed incompatibility that frames relationships between the two. Several articles written by local politicians and readers of Embros condemn the Monastery for manipulating history for the sake of false impressions and ultimately profit.⁷ Some authors dissolve associations between Panayia Nafpaktiotissa and Venier's Madonna de Lepanto, by providing information on the icon's current location, which is speculated to be either the church of Santa Maria Formosa in Venice or the archaeological museum of Palermo. Others expose the fabrication of Panayia Nafpaktiotissa:

Where are all those churches, chapels, hymns and doxologies in honour of 'Panayia Nafpaktiotissa'? Had anyone heard of Her before the Hegumen decided to expand his business ventures? Where are the songs and local tales that worship the Virgin Mary in question?⁸

In short, the recasting of geographical location and proximity in terms of divine causality amounted to fraud. Yet, a similar criticism was made against the icon used in the Municipality's events. In an open letter titled 'Copy?', a reader of Embros asks, 'How can an "Icon of the Battle" transform into a "Holy Icon" in procession? By this logic, we should all frame a picture of the battle and display it for worship. Or is this arbitrariness justified by the participation of the Catholic fleet in the Battle?'⁹ The accusation directed against this icon is also one of fabrication, but here the opposite argument is in operation, namely that the location of the battle does not justify the Orthodoxisation of

the event. The author concludes that ‘these holy matters are not to be messed with.’

Whether seen from the perspective of the Municipality or that of the Monastery, the Battle of Lepanto appears to have animated a series of creative acts of bricolage (Shaw and Stewart 1994). Indeed, the Nafpaktian dispute of the two Virgin Marys is telling of the ‘inventiveness’ that went into what has since 1999 become an annual and unequivocal ‘tradition’, and the efforts made towards weaving meaning into location and geographical proximity. Insofar as the tension between ‘history’ and ‘miracle’ attached the battle to local concerns and wove the event within the symbolic universe of Orthodoxy, the battle had finally arrived home. Entangled with the deeds of local politicians, monastic authorities, and public figures, the battle had not simply taken place in Nafpaktos in 1571 but continued to unravel through its annual commemoration, its implication in competing histories, and contested representations. In this sense, inasmuch as Lepanto had been localised, location had been Lepantised, for place and event were now interlaced and joined in relations of mutuality and co-production.

Nafpaktos at the Forefront of Europe

My interlocutors’ accounts of previous anniversaries were packed with cynical remarks about the squandering that took place in the so-called ‘years of the fat-cows’, or what Dalakoglou and Kallianos (2018) term the era of ‘disjunctive modernisation’. This period lasted between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s and was marked by mega projects and events coupled with imaginaries of Westernisation and progress. The Rio–Antirio Bridge that crosses the Corinthian Gulf, and the 2004 Athens Olympics during which the bridge was inaugurated arguably constitute epitomes of this ‘golden era’ (Traganou 2010; Yalouri 2010) and are telling of both the hopes that were nurtured by spectacular stagings of modernity and the fury and disappointment that ensued once these became attached to waste, scandals, and eventually austerity. The commemoration of the Battle of Lepanto appears to have followed suit both in terms of spectacle and spending. In 2000 the Municipality’s ceremony was enhanced, first by the addition of a parade that takes place on the eve of the celebration, joined by locals dressed as members of the Holy League, and by the re-enactment of the battle, performed in Nafpaktos’s harbour on the following evening.

Echoing these developments, the pages of Embros gradually stopped hosting controversies between ‘history’ and ‘miracle’, and reflected instead the growing ostentation of the event, suggested by an ever-increasing number of honourable guests and fireworks. According to Manos, a 50-year-old radio producer, Lepanto’s celebration in the mid-2000s entailed a blend of kitsch aesthetics and corruption. Over coffee, Manos told me that the anniversary held in 2006 is rumoured to have cost an astonishing 500,000 euros. The money was spent on advanced lighting and sound technologies, a real-life-sized replica of a galley, and imported gondolas from Venice, which arrived with their gondoliers. It goes without saying, Manos added, that some of this money also found its way to organisers’ pockets. Drawing a comparison between the Rio–Antirio Bridge, which entails ‘a first world passage into the third world’, Manos described the re-enactment as ‘the one day in the calendar when Nafpaktos can spend like a Northern European town’.

Soon, however, the country’s booming ‘industry of spectacle’ came to an abrupt halt. The celebration of the battle turned rather humble in the years following the official declaration of the Greek economic crisis in 2010, but did not cease to motivate symbolic investment. In the pages of Embros the battle features as an allegorical device in analyses of the 2004 Cypriot Annan Plan referendums, Turkey’s European Union accession progress, and, later, the European debt crisis. In these publications, the events that unravelled in 1571 are shown to be pertinent to today’s world. Additionally, these publications entertain the idea that, courtesy of the decisive event that it once hosted, Nafpaktos has in certain ways always been at ‘at the forefront of European history’, as the title of an article published in October 2014 states.¹⁰ The article proceeds to inform readers of the foundation of an ambitious inter-town network named ‘Roads of Lepanto’.

With the benefit of hindsight, one might say that the network has been more successful in producing headlines than in bringing concrete benefits. In charge of the initiative is Charis Batis, a long-standing local politician in his late sixties who describes himself as ‘a guardian of Nafpaktos’ history and culture’. Batis recounted the conception of ‘Roads of Lepanto’ over a long coffee we had in October 2019. After becoming deputy mayor of cultural affairs in 2014, Batis focused his energies on securing cultural funds and soon made two important discoveries. First, the Battle of Lepanto was celebrated throughout the world, from Costa Rica to Indonesia, and from Arkansas to the Canary Islands.

Second, the battle never failed to ignite awe in his European counterparts. In short, Batis realised that the legacy of the 16th-century event would speak straight to EU policymakers' hearts, since 'there is no European official who does not get goosebumps at the mere sound of the word "Lepanto"'. In response, Batis began plotting a network that would connect several locations spread around the Mediterranean that would collectively commemorate the event, but also mobilise European cultural heritage funds.

Cris Shore observes that, over the years, the European Union has undergone 'a shift in emphasis from integration, perceived as a rational by-product of economic prosperity and legal harmonisation, to more recent concerns about integration as a cultural process, and "culture" as a political instrument for furthering that construction process' (2000, 1). EU elites' efforts at inventing Europe as a common 'civilisation' and constructing a shared European identity, took varied forms, ranging from the creation of new symbols to the dissemination of audio-visual materials, and the establishment of European-sponsored campaigns and events, such as public holidays, sporting competitions, and university exchange projects. Key to these endeavours was also the production of a robust body of EU historiography that sought both to combat divisive nationalist ideologies and to frame European culture in terms of 'shared heritage, moral ascendancy, and cultural continuity' (2000, 57). Shore's survey of related materials is illuminating. The rewriting of history from a 'European perspective' essentially involved the articulation of a highly selective tale of evolutionary progress and moral success that began with classical antiquity, narrated the spread of Christianity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, and concluded with the advent of liberal democracy. The end result, Shore argues, was a culturally racist reinvention of Europe as being 'set apart (and beyond) others by Christianity, science, the Caucasian race, and the Indo-European family of languages' (2000, 62), and as having successfully defended itself against variously defined significant Others, and most notably Islam.

The rationale behind the Roads of Lepanto, and Batis's faith that the historical event would bring Nafpaktos and other participating members a good fair of European resources, becomes all the more meaningful in light of Shore's analysis. As Batis remarked, pointing to the symbolic potency of the event, 'There exists no European city that hasn't named a square, a street, a station, or a museum after Lepanto.'

Indeed, the idea that others have been making better use of Lepanto was omnipresent throughout our conversations with Batis. Eager to show me celebrations from faraway places and to forward related articles published in the national newspapers of Spain, Italy, and Malta, Batis appeared convinced that Nafpaktos's Southern European counterparts were better at 'being' Lepanto than Lepanto itself. In addition, while Batis acknowledged that Nafpaktos had found itself at the centre of this (hi)story by mere chance, he also believed that the time to reclaim it had finally come.

The process of recasting Lepanto onto Nafpaktos, however, generated the need for a narrative that would be widely relevant, but also vehemently local (see also Papagaroufali 2008). In essence, this meant supplementing, if not dissolving, existing associations that obscure the location of the event. In short, for Lepanto to come home, the story needed to be retold and, rather than being a story about 'Europe' and the 'Ottomans', or Catholics and Muslims, it also needed to become one about Nafpaktos. In a triumphant article published in August 2016, Batis reports that dozens of Southern European towns, cities, and organisations expressed their interest in the Roads of Lepanto, as well as the cultural funds and tourist promotion the network promised to deliver. Batis concludes that 'it is of outmost importance that Nafpaktos, its culture, and needs extend beyond the borders of Rio-Antirio, to become known across the widths and lengths of the Mediterranean'.¹¹

The popularity of 'Roads of Lepanto', however, came at a cost. The project, which had thus far been tailored to EU imaginaries of cultural heritage, soon became entangled in the 'politics of memory' and its tendency to conflate history and nation, and map the former onto the latter (Boyarin 1994; see also Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). First came a phone call from the ambassador of Croatia, who reminded Batis of Croatians' heroic participation in the battle, which has also been immortalised in the form of an honorary plaque that has been erected 'in memory of Croatian soldiers and sailors who fought in 1571'. The plaque, which sits next to several others spread throughout Nafpaktos's Venetian fortress, was put up in 2006. Although Batis was not directly involved in the negotiations, he remembered that the plaque's installation was met by state officials' resistance. The problem, he explained, lay with Greco-Serbian ties and Greece's support of Serbia during the Yugoslav Wars. In short, the recasting of the 1571 event onto today's political map proved to be complicated, for an event that predated the

sovereign nation state had to accommodate to its logic and comply to contemporary alliances that, in Batis's view, did not reflect the associations of the past.

Then came phone calls, letters, and even visits from diplomats and ambassadors from Northern Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Ukraine, who provided proof of their countries' participation in the event and requested membership. Batis was instructed by state officials to avoid discussions with countries that do not belong in the EU, but struggled with this settlement; 'Can we reject these peoples only because they are not members of the EU?' he asked rhetorically. Batis was also approached by the 'representatives of the Ottomans', as he referred to ambassadors of Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya. His efforts to confine the network to EU Member States were met by the Egyptian ambassador's discontent: 'Can we have a conversation about the Second World War without the participation of the Germans? The defeated also deserve a place in the table.' Finally, Batis remembered being contacted by representatives of Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini, who 'were after a different, more dangerous message' that was undesirable not only because of its far-right and Islamophobic content but also because it did not serve the purpose of 'putting Nafpaktos on the map'. In short, Batis felt that what he had envisioned as an initiative premised on location had become co-opted by nationalist claims and religious fanaticism. The desired outcome, by contrast, would have been:

A Euro-Mediterranean alliance among all those towns soaked by the Mediterranean Sea, all those people who in 1571, found themselves in Lepanto by whatever chance. But as it happens, even 450 years later the Battle of Lepanto continues to ignite passions.

After several negotiations with representatives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other state officials, Batis was forced to confine the network to EU member countries. From now on, the network would be called 'From the Battle of Lepanto to the European Union.' The mission statement was signed in August 2016 in Messina, while the statute was signed on 15 October 2016 in Nafpaktos. Members of the board included towns in Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Slovakia, and Germany. The presidency would always be held by Nafpaktos. Unsatisfied with this

outcome, which obscured the pan-Mediterraneaness of Lepanto, Batis soon devised a new plan:

I am now exploring new avenues. Imagine a virtual museum of the Battle of Lepanto, spread throughout the Mediterranean. The image will be identical, the event happened here in Nafpaktos, but the narrator will be a hologram. How can I dictate the events to an Arab or Turk? The holographic narrator will narrate the Battle in whatever way he wishes. After all, semiologically, the Battle of Lepanto means everything and anything you can imagine.

As metaphor, the ‘hologram’ forecloses closure, insofar as it constantly changes depending on where one stands in relation to it, and thus challenges monolithic narrativisations (Bunzl 2003; Johnston 2016). Location, in this sense, is crucial in holographic representations. Indeed, more than anything, Batis’s envisioned holographic narrator appears to serve the purpose of showcasing location. If ‘Roads of Lepanto’ failed, then that was because the initiative was unable to outweigh dominant representations of the historical event and to detach it from European-Christian imaginaries of cultural heritage and the logic of the nation state. By contrast, in Batis’s holographic rendition of the event, interpretations of the historical event are allowed to multiply exponentially and thus lose their totalising aspirations. Seen from the perspective of Candeas’s ‘arbitrary location,’ ‘whose messiness, contingency, and lack of an overarching coherence or meaning serve as a “control” for a broader abstract object’ (2010, 34), Batis’s holographic vision can be understood as a manifesto of arbitrariness. The only fixed point in this otherwise deeply fragmentary story is the event’s location, which is no other than Nafpaktos.

Performing Lepanto

By seven in the afternoon on Friday, 6 October 2017, the traffic of Nafpaktos had subsided and hundreds of people had gathered by the pavements of the empty streets. Half an hour later, the local philharmonic orchestra arrived at the Town Hall under the sound of pompous march. The orchestra was followed by a long parade of people dressed in what looked like a carnivalesque parody of 16th-century European apparel, featuring colourful corsets, farthingales, and capes, and holding all



Image 4.1: Members of Nafpaktos' annual parade, dressed as members of the Holy League.

Photo: Lena Malm.

sorts of torches, flags, and banners, adorned with Christian symbols (see [Image 4.1](#)). The members of the parade, mainly women of varying ages, had a mix of embarrassment and indulgence on their faces. When I got the opportunity to ask them about their participation, their responses pointed to a certain light-heartedness: 'I only participate for the dress,' said a teenage girl glowing with pride. Less pleased, her younger brother murmured that his mum dressed him like that. Three middle-aged women hurriedly stated that they participated only because they wanted to support the municipality's initiative, and then asked me to take a picture of them. A young man smirked and said, 'Greeks never miss a chance to party!' Once the parade reached the local authorities and visiting politicians standing by the Town Hall's entrance, one of its members left the crowd and opened an oversized papyrus:

Hear hear! Tomorrow, 7 October, at the gulf of Nafpaktos, the United Christian forces of the Holy League and its 206 galleys, 6 galleasses, and 70 frigates, commanded by the Spanish admiral Don John of Austria, will encounter the Ottoman fleet, and its 200 galleys and 63 galliots,

commanded by Muezzinzade Ali Pasha. Tomorrow the future of Europe will be judged!

Two years later, in October 2019, I was introduced to Vassilis, the battle's crier since 2009. An actor of 50 years, Vassilis was eager to convey his left-wing convictions and activist past. He emphasised that he could not care less about the battle, or any other military event. When I probed him on his participation, he pointed that his only task was to announce the event. This, he said, made him a mere observer rather than an active participant in this 'kitsch and ahistorical fiesta'. He added that his training in acting had equipped him with a good understanding of the difference between performing and being. 'And anyway,' he added, 'we perform our liberators, not ourselves, since we did not even exist back then.' Vassilis's view was also shared by Andreas, a 30-year-old IT specialist, amateur photographer, actor, and enthusiastic participant in the battle's re-enactment. Andreas insisted that:

The event is irrelevant to any national consciousness, since it is neither taught in school nor celebrated like in the rest of Europe. The Greeks fought on both sides, but the Greeks, as such, do not exist in this story. We connect the event to our geographical history, but not our national history. We say, 'it happened here geographically, not nationally' and we play out the battle. I don't know how else to put it.

Both Vassilis and Andreas pointed to the fact that in 1571 Nafpaktos was an Ottoman province. Hence, the apparel worn by members of the battle re-enactment not only turned them into people of other times but also aligned them with European invaders on the one hand and Ottoman rulers on the other. According to Michael Herzfeld (1987, 111), 'Greek identity is caught between two extreme poles, each derived from the image of a conquering Other'. At one end stand the Europeans and on the other the Orientals. This 'disemia', which Herzfeld (1997) later reframed under 'cultural intimacy', has given rise to the contrasting identities of the 'Hellene' and the 'Romios', which are internalised and deployed at will in acts of collective foreign-directed self-display on the one hand and intimate self-knowledge on the other. Seen from this perspective, the annual spectacle of Lepanto can be understood as a staged encounter between the two extreme poles that Herzfeld spoke of. Rather than stimulating identifications with either

pole, however, I suggest that the performed altercations between the ‘Ottomans’ and the ‘Europeans’ merely provided a location, or a vantage point, from which disemia, now turned into masquerade, could be externally observed, and arbitrariness, now turned into geography-cum-history, could be viscerally guessed.

On Saturday, 5 October 2019, the fortress of Nafpaktos stood against a magnificent cloudy landscape. Some appeared concerned by the weather. ‘If it rains the celebration will fail... All this money, all in vain,’ I overheard a lady whispering to herself. Equipped with loudspeakers, headlights, and projectors, the port would serve as a theatrical scenery, and the grey tones in which it was embroiled made it all the more dramatic. By noon the boats and yachts moored at the port had sailed and only two remained. The one to the west was adorned with banners carrying Jesus Christ. The one to the east carried stars and crescents. By early afternoon, the main square was packed with people and street vendors, selling balloons and cotton candy. I made my way to the harbour to secure a good spot. Soon the two fleets would confront one another against a storm of fireworks and applause (see [Image 4.2](#)).



Image 4.2: The re-enactment of the Battle of Lepanto in Nafpaktos’ harbour.

Photo: Lena Malm.

I sat at one of the harbour's benches, and was soon joined by group of elderly women, who had arrived to Nafpaktos from a village of Karditsa on a daily trip organised by the local women's association. Their trip was unrelated to the re-enactment and, evidently confused, the women started asking questions among themselves: 'What are they celebrating?' 'Will it be in Greek?' 'See, it's the Christians and the Turks, today must be Nafpaktos's liberation [from the Ottomans]!' Indeed, the observation that many people are ignorant of the historical event was common among my interlocutors and was often followed by remarks on the importance of educating Nafpaktians on their history and heritage. In an article published in Embros in 2000, an elementary teacher quotes one of his students: 'Sir, if the Ottomans were defeated at the Battle, then why wasn't [the] motherland liberated in 1571?'

At nine o'clock and just when the moon had made its appearance in the cloudy sky and a light drizzle had started to fall, the lights of the port went off. Accompanied by grandiose music, the welcome speech was given in Greek, Spanish, and Italian. The story, told in great detail and performed over the course of an hour, ended as follows:

Ali Pasha fell. The sea was painted red. Forty thousand corpses; Europeans and Turks, Christians and Muslims. But the battle was over. What had happened was truly strange, almost metaphysical. The Christians had won. The battle was over. The sun set to the West. The Christians moored at the Greek coast.

Fireworks saturated the sky. One of the women turned to the rest and asked: 'And what is there to be celebrate? We had to put up with the [Ottomans] for another three hundred years,' she said, referring to the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire, which ended in 1829. 'At least we are now done with the Ottomans, now we only have the Europeans on our heads,' her friend responded. The women greeted me goodbye soon afterwards and, looking relieved that they would soon head back home, left.

Many Nafpaktians and those staying for the night stormed into the harbour's tavernas, or partied in some of Nafpaktos's bars until the early hours. I joined some of the actors, who, still wearing their flamboyant 16th-century costumes, departed from the official script. 'It's a good thing that the story was what it was, or else I would have destroyed you!' said Muezzinzade Ali Pasha to a sailor of the Holy League, to

whom the latter responded, ‘Go back to your byre, you yokel; this is Europe!’ The celebration was finally over. The only reminder of Lepanto the following day was the dozens of visitors having a quick breakfast before returning to wherever they had come from, and the signs, statues, and plaques scattered across Nafpaktos’s harbour, generously lending themselves to guesswork. ‘And who did we say Miguel de Cervantes was? He was a great Philhellene, a Spaniard who fought in 1821, in the Greek War of Independence here in Nafpaktos,’ a young man said didactically to his girlfriend, while getting the bill.

Conclusion

In 1971 the *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration* published an article titled ‘The Battle of Lepanto Search and Survey Mission (Greece), 1971–1972’. The authors concluded that:

The purpose of the Lepanto search and survey project was to conduct a surface reconnaissance to locate the site of the Battle of Lepanto, using acoustic and magnetometer equipment. A map of ‘targets’ has been produced which showed promise as possible sites of wrecks from the battle. The next step is to go down to the bottom and investigate the cause of the signal. (Throckmorton, Edgerton, and Yalouris 1973, 129)

Traces, according to Sarah Green, evoke the passage of time and ‘can be fragments of the whole entity, or a physical mark of it—the crumbs left from a loaf of bread that has been eaten, or footprints in the sand’ and, in this capacity, they also ‘leave much room for doubt, speculation, and interpretation’ (2018, 70). Put differently, being mere fragments of what once existed, traces may be arranged variously, they may enable different connections and disconnections, and yield multiple parts and wholes.

In this chapter, I have attended to the various meanings that have been attached to Lepanto’s traces, in the small town of Nafpaktos, and the different ways in which these have been envisioned to form parts of a whole. I have argued that the localisation of an event of considerable recognition in fields as varied as Mediterraneanist scholarship, Catholic belief, and Islamophobic discourse, has had important implications for what the event is taken to mean. In the commemorations

examined, location and event, Nafpaktos and Lepanto, are shown to be mutually coproduced. Yet the terms of their co-production vary. The Battle of Lepanto, I suggest, has been framed by narratives of secular retrospection and divine causality, tailored to EU cultural policy schemes, and transformed into disemic spectacle and masquerade. Nafpaktos, on the other hand, has transformed into a locomotive of European ascendancy, a centre of pan-Mediterranean heritage, and a vantage point from which the battle can be observed. Each of these renditions of place and event, are premised on different logics and refract different Mediterraneans. I want to suggest, however, that this does not make them incompatible or any less real. If ‘arbitrary location’ is ‘not an object to be explained, but a contingent window into complexity’ (Candea 2010, 180), then Nafpaktos, also known as Lepanto, affords a contingent window into the multiple Mediterraneans that come to be (un)made and (re)worked through situated evocations of location.

Notes

- 1 AP. 2004. ‘Construction: A Greek Lesson’, 29 July 2004. Accessed 20 June 2020. <https://www.economist.com/business/2004/07/29/a-greek-lesson>.
- 2 Χαλάτσης Γιάννης. 1999. ‘Ιστορικό κενό στη Ναύπακτο. Γιατί’. *Εμπρός*, 30 April, p. 13.
- 3 For example, Unknown Author. 1999. ‘Ναυμαχία...ναυαγισμένη’. *Εμπρός*, 15 October, p. 8.
- 4 Unknown Author. 2001. ‘Ο δήμος την ιστορία ... η μονή το θαύμα’. *Εμπρός*, 28 September, p. 8.
- 5 The links that the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour identifies between Panayia Panfpaktiotissa and Madonna di Lepanto have changed over the time. In the early 2000s, several articles published in Embros scrutinised the Monastery’s claim that the icon of Panayia Panfpaktiotissa is identical to the icon of Madonna di Lepanto, carried by Sebastiano Venier’s mast. Later, however, the Monastery’s account appears to have shifted its focus from the icon per se to the broader figure of the Virgin Mary, and its pervasive historical links to Nafpaktos. Today, the official website of the Monastery makes detailed reference to a byzantine parchment located in the archives of Regia Capella Palatina in Palermo, Sicily. The parchment carries a copy of an icon named ‘Hyperayia Theotokos Nafpaktissis’, which is claimed to have decorated an 11th-century monastery of central Greece, and a statute signed by members of a religious society that was established in 1048. The parchment is speculated to have been stolen from its original location during the Norman invasion of Thiva in 1147. In the Monastery’s account, the parchment points to Panayia Panfpaktiotissa’s widespread veneration prior to the 1571 Battle of Lepanto, and testifies to the

- modelling of Madonna di Lepanto on Panayia Nafraktiotissa. See also <https://www.panagialepanto.gr>. Accessed 21 June 2020.
- 6 Available at https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/Παναγία_Ναυπακτιώτισσα. Accessed 20 June 2020.
 - 7 For example, Πελέκης Διονύσιος. 2000. 'Όλιγα τινά περί Ναυμαχίας'. Εμπρός, 27 October, p. 11; Μητροπολίτης Ιερόθεος. 2001. 'Ιερόθεος προς Σπυρίδωνα: Δεν μπορώ να συνεργήσω στο διχασμό ... Καμία σχέση δεν έχει η «Παναγία Ναυπακτιώτισσα» με την «Madona de Lepanto»'. Εμπρός, 5 October, p. 11; Ράπτης Γιάννης. 2001. 'Η σκοτεινή πλευρά του θαύματος'. Εμπρός, 12 October, p. 12.
 - 8 Τσούμας Πανος. 2001. 'Κριτική στην εισήγηση του Νομάρχη για το "θαύμα"'. Εμπρός, 19 October, p. 5.
 - 9 Μαρία Φιλίππου. 2000. 'Αντιγραφή'. Εμπρός, 13 October, p. 12.
 - 10 Author Unknown. 2014. 'Στην αιχμή της Ευρωπαϊκής ιστορίας'. Εμπρός, 3 October, pp. 12–13.
 - 11 Ράπτης Γιάννης. 2016. 'Από τη ναυμαχία στους «Δρόμους του Lepanto»'. Εμπρός, 7 October, pp. 12–13.

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