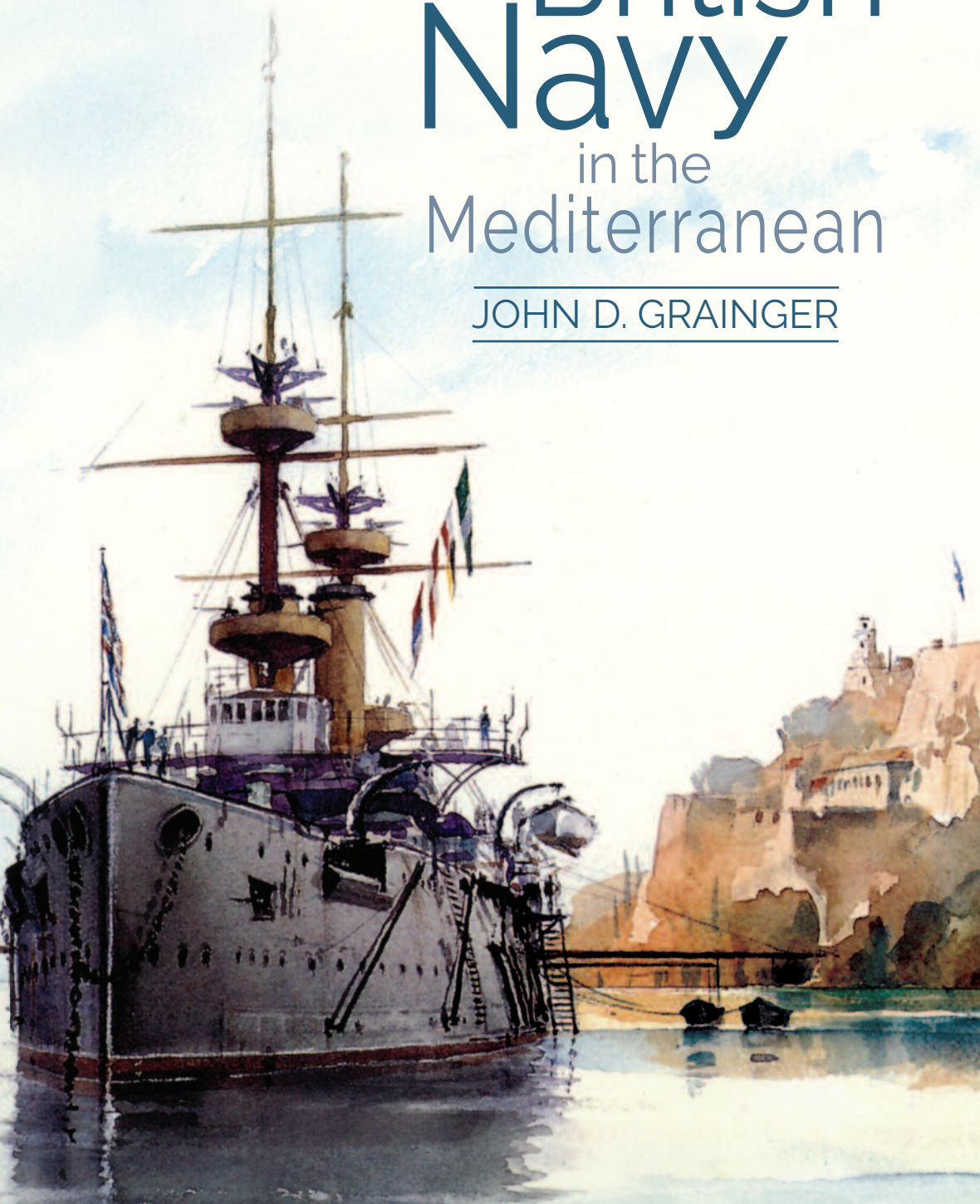# The British Navy

in the
Mediterranean

JOHN D. GRAINGER

THE BRITISH NAVY IN
THE MEDITERRANEAN

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John D. Grainger

Contents

Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
British Naval Documents	John B. Hattendorf, R. J. N. Knight, A. W. H. Pearsall, N. A. M. Rodger and Geoffrey Hill (eds), *British Naval Documents 1204–1960*, NRS 1993
Clowes, *Royal Navy*	William Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to 1900*, 7 vols, *London* 1897–1903
Corbett, *Mediterranean*	Julian Corbett, *England in the Mediterranean: A Study of the Rise and Influence of British Power within the Straits, 1603–1714*, 2 vols, London 1917
Hakluyt	Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, Glasgow 1903
James, *Naval History*	William James, *Naval History of Great Britain*, 6 vols, London 1902
MM	*The Mariner's Mirror*
NRS	Navy Records Society
Naval Chron.	*The Naval Chronicle,* ed. Nicholas Tracy, 5 vols, London 1999
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
Purchas	Samuel Purchas (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his pilgrims*, Glasgow 1905–1907
TNA	The National Archives, Kew

Key to the Maps

The maps, by noting the major battles and landings by British forces, are intended to demonstrate the range of British activity in the Mediterranean. They also, by their geographical distribution, suggest the location of particular strategic concerns.

Numbers indicate the locations of major battles involving British forces; *letters* indicate the same for landings on enemy shores.

Omitted are the convoy battles of 1940–1942, which stretch for most of the way from Alexandria to Gibraltar.

Places used as British naval bases are underlined.

British Naval Battles
(locations of major battles involving British forces)

1. Lisbon 1650
2. Cape St Vincent 1797 ('Moonlight') 1780
3. Lagos Bay 1693, 1759
4. Cape Santa Maria 1804
5. Trafalgar 1805
6. Algeciras 1801
7. Gibraltar 1705, 1779 – 83
8. Malaga 1704
9. Strait of Gibraltar 1590
10. Cape Spartel 1782
11. Sallee 1637
12. Santa Cruz 1656, 1797

British Naval Invasions
(locations of landings on enemy shores)

A. Lisbon 1147
B. Cadiz 1587, 1596, 1625
C. Rota 1702
D. Gibraltar 1704
E. Tangier 1662
F. 'Torch' 1942
G. Madeira 1801, 1807

■ British Naval Bases

(not shown: convoy battles of 1940–1942, Alexandria to Gibraltar)

PORTUGAL
SPAIN
Lisbon
Cadiz
Gibraltar
Tangier
MOROCCO
MADEIRA
CANARY ISLANDS

0 km 300
0 miles 200

Map 1 The Sea-entrance

British Naval Battles
(locations of major battles involving British forces)

- (13) Oran 1940
- (14) Algiers 1816
- (15) Bougie Bay 1671
- (16) Tunis 1655
- (17) Sicilian Narrows 1585
- (18) Malta 1798,1940 - 43
- (19) Cape Passaro 1719
- (20) Elba 1652
- (21) Livorno 1652
- (22) Genoa 1795
- (23) Hyeres 1794
- (24) Toulon 1707, 1744, 1793
- (25) Minorca 1756
- (26) Cape de Gata 1758

British Naval Invasions
(locations of landings on enemy shores)

- (F) 'Torch' 1942
- (H) Sicily 1943
- (J) Calabria 1806
- (K) Salerno 1943
- (L) Anzio 1943
- (M) Bastia 1794
- (N) Minorca 1708, 1798
- (O) Barcelona 1706
- (P) Alicante 1704, 1812

(not shown: convoy battles of 1940–1942, Alexandria to Gibraltar)

0   km   500

0   miles   300

Map 2 The Western Basin

British Naval Battles
(locations of major battles involving British forces)

㉗ Taranto 1940
㉘ Lissa 1811
㉙ Durazzo 1918
㉚ Navarino 1827
㉛ Matapan 1941
㉜ Crete 1941
㉝ Dardanelles 1915
㉞ Acre 1798, 1840
㉟ Aboukir Bay ('The Nile') 1798
㊱ Tripoli 1676

British Naval Invasions
(locations of landings on enemy shores)

Ⓠ Taranto 1943
Ⓡ Kotor 1813
Ⓢ Gallipoli 1915
Ⓣ Crimea 1854
Ⓤ Suez Canal 1882, 1956
Ⓥ Alexandria 1807, 1882
Ⓦ Aboukir Bay 1801

(not shown: convoy battles of 1940–1942, Alexandria to Gibraltar)

■ British Naval Bases

Map 3 The Eastern Basin

Introduction

The Sea and its Parts, and the Royal Navy

The Mediterranean is one of those seas which is instantly familiar to every European who has had any sort of education or has been on holiday. Its shape, its weather, its food, its waters, its beaches, are all as familiar to any European as his and her own homeland. Not only that, but it has long been one of the most important strategic regions of the world, a region of warfare from its earliest mention in history. Control of the Mediterranean has long been one of the keys to world power – as it still is; and that was one of the keys to the development and maintenance of the British Empire. This sea is the scene of this book, but there are certain additional points which must be made at the start.

The instrument of power used by the British in the Mediterranean was always the Royal Navy. For a century and a half from the defeat of Napoleon that force dominated the sea, and for three centuries before that English, then British, sea power was an intermittent intruder into the complex conflicts and relationships of the sea's other powers. The purpose of this account is therefore to consider the extent, the purpose, and the vicissitudes of British naval power in the Mediterranean. But it is first necessary to understand some of the geography of the sea and to modify to some extent the general understanding of that geography.

The geography of the Mediterranean is complex and intricate; it is an area of bays and gulfs, islands and peninsulas and subordinate seas, narrow passages and straits. It is well over 2000 miles long from west to east, but from north to south it varies from 600 miles between the heel of Italy and the Libyan coast of the Gulf of Sirte, to only sixty miles between eastern Sicily and Cape Bon. It is also much subdivided into distinct sections. Starting from the east there is the Eastern Basin, an open sea with only one island – Cyprus – which stretches from Syria and Egypt to the Sicilian Narrows, where Sicily and Malta and Tunisia compete for strategic importance and to control those narrows. There are gulfs leading off this main sea, all to the north: the island-busy Aegean Sea behind Crete, and then the Straits – the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosporos

– leading into the Black Sea and giving access to Eastern Europe and the steppes of Ukraine; the Adriatic Sea, a long, narrow, island-strewn sea stretching northwards into Central Europe, as far as the unique, yet also archetypal Mediterranean, city of Venice. The Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Adriatic are, of course, distinct seas in themselves as well as being parts of the Mediterranean system.

West of Sicily there is the Western Basin, defined by Italy-and-Sicily, the South of France, Eastern Spain, and North Africa; substantial islands separate off two sections – the triangular Tyrrhenian Sea and the Gulf of Lions – while the main part of the Western Basin stretches from Sardinia to Spain, with the coast of North Africa the border to the south and the Balearic Islands on the north. This basin narrows towards the west, forming a long gulf between Spain and Morocco, sometimes called the Alboran Sea. This leads to the only natural outlet of the sea into the wider ocean, the Strait of Gibraltar.[1] In the east, the Suez Canal is an artificial outlet to the Indian Ocean, only available in the past century and a half, so that the Red Sea became an adjunct of the Mediterranean.

In theory, the Strait of Gibraltar marks the geographical western boundary of the Mediterranean, and the sea to the west is technically part of the Atlantic Ocean. But in historical terms the ocean beyond Gibraltar is really a further extension of the Mediterranean, for there the lands and their associated islands form another partially enclosed sea which only eventually becomes part of the 'real' Atlantic. This region is bounded by the coasts of Iberia and Morocco from Lisbon in the north to Cape Bojador on the south, and by a discontinuous circle of islands – the Canaries, Madeira, Porto Santo, and some smaller islets – which enclose this part of the ocean to the south and west. In historical and strategic terms, this region is an extension of the inland sea; it has been the scene of many conflicts whose general aims were to prevent or force access to the Mediterranean proper. It does not seem to have been given a name. Part is referred to as the Gulf of Cadiz, but it seems to me too large to be a mere gulf; possibly the 'Moroccan Sea' might serve, but here I shall call it the 'Sea-entrance' in recognition of its strategic importance.

This is not, of course, the usual definition of the Mediterranean, which is normally described only in geographical terms as having Western and Eastern Basins, though it is worth noting that Spain and Portugal are generally considered to be 'Mediterranean' countries, as is Morocco, and one glance at any of the towns in the Canary Islands or at Funchal in Madeira shows that these are typically Mediterranean

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[1] This is often given in the plural – Straits of Gibraltar – but since it is a single passageway I have chosen the singular version, Strait.

in appearance, lifestyle, language, food, and climate. Strategically, this wide entrance gulf is an obvious geographical preliminary to the great sea itself. In naval terms control of this region provides a naval power with access to the whole Mediterranean. This is clearly essential for any major sea power, and the region contains a number of major naval bases and ports which have long dominated the region, even back to Roman and pre-Roman times – Cadiz, Lisbon, Gibraltar, Tangier, Rota.

Both shores have long been controlled by states with coasts on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar – Spain on the north, with the Canary Islands, Morocco on the south, and Portugal on the northwest with Madeira (and for a time much of the Moroccan coast). A long series of naval battles in this entrance region – Cadiz, Trafalgar, Cape St Vincent, Lagos, Algeciras, Gibraltar, Cape Spartel, Santa Cruz, Operation Torch, and more – testify to its importance in strategic terms. The area of the British naval command described as 'Mediterranean' normally extended 'out' as far as Lisbon, which was often the supply base for the ships inside the sea, and south along the Moroccan coast; Blake and Nelson both fought at Tenerife in the Canary Islands, while several battles were conducted in this entrance region during the great siege of Gibraltar (1779–1783). So in this account, the Mediterranean will be taken to extend out into the Atlantic as far as Lisbon and the Canaries and Madeira. This far western area may thus be counted as the third Mediterranean basin.

The Mediterranean, as a clearly defined sea, has been the subject of a number of studies, particularly since the ground-breaking work of Fernand Braudel in 1949, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Braudel was, of course concerned above all with the lands around the sea, rather than the sea itself, though much of his text inevitably has reference to the sea as well. (He also produced a less satisfactory *The Mediterranean in the Ancient World* – only published after his death – covering the history of the sea from prehistory.) Recently David Abulafia's *The Great Sea* covers the same ground, but aiming to work, so to speak, more explicitly from the water's perspective. Some studies of the ancient sea have also been recently produced, such as *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* by Philip Hordern and Nicholas Purcell, and the survey of the archaeology by Cyprian Broodbank.[2]

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[2] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. S. Reynolds, London 1972–1973; id., *The Mediterranean in the Ancient World*, ed. R de Ayala and P. Braudel, trans. S. Reynolds, 2 vols, London 2001; David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean,* London 2011; Philip Hordern and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford 2000; Cyprian

None of these accounts deal seriously or at any length with the subject of this study, which is the exercise of power in the Mediterranean by the Royal Navy on behalf of the British government from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. There are studies of particular periods of such power – by Sir Julian Corbett for the seventeenth century, for example – or particular wars, such as that by Piers Mackesy on the period 1803–1810,[3] and others will be referred to in the course of this account. There is, however, no study covering the whole of the period of British maritime interest in the sea. This 'gap' is what this book hopes to rectify.

Broodbank, *The Making of the Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World*, London 2013.

[3] Julian Corbett, *England in the Mediterranean: A Study of the Rise and Influence of British Power within the Straits, 1603–1714*, 2 vols, London 1917; Piers Mackesy, *The War in the Mediterranean, 1803–1810*, Cambridge MA 1957.

Prologue

The Crusades and After
1095–c.1550

Had events in 1066 turned out differently, Edgar the Aetheling would have been King Edgar II of the English. He was a grandson of King Edmund II Ironside and was briefly proclaimed King of the English between the death of King Harald II Godwinesson at the battle of Hastings and the arrival of Duke William the Bastard of Normandy in London, but William simply brushed him aside. Oddly for such a ruthless man, William did not kill his competitor, and Edgar – only a teenager at the time – faded into an existence as an occasional rebel leader, a minor landowner in Hertfordshire and an *habitu*é of royal courts. In the reign of William II Rufus, he was a friend of Robert of Normandy, the Conqueror's eldest son, who was twice excluded from the throne by his younger brothers. Edgar was employed on several tasks of a diplomatic or military nature, including an expedition into Scotland to sort out the Scottish succession (his sister was Queen Margaret, the wife of Malcolm Canmore), in all of which he performed quite competently; any political ambitions he might have entertained in England had clearly expired. One of the tasks he took on was to command a fleet of ships manned by Englishmen which took part in the First Crusade.[1]

Edgar joined the fleet at Constantinople. Its men were probably part of the Byzantine imperial guard of the Emperor Alexios I, which by this date was largely manned by English exiles – the emperor was anxious to ensure that the lands he had been promised by the crusaders were actually delivered, and the only way to make this happen was to have a force on the spot. Edgar's participation illustrates his ambivalent situation, for the exiles were men who had left England because of the Norman conquest and its brutal rule, while Edgar himself was a

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[1] *Domesday Book*: Hertfordshire; Frank Barlow, *William Rufus*, London 1983, *passim*; Nicholas Hooper, 'Edgar the Aetheling, Anglo-Saxon Prince, Rebel, and Crusader', *Anglo-Saxon England* 14, 1985, 197–214 (and in *ODNB*); Hooper does not accept the crusader story.

good friend of one of the Crusade's leaders, Robert of Normandy; the fleet was also carrying Italian pilgrims, many of them from the south of Italy, where Normans ruled (and where Edgar had led a Norman expedition several years before).[2] It also, more usefully from the point of view of the crusaders, carried a consignment of siege materials supplied by the Emperor Alexios in Constantinople. These materials were of considerable assistance in the capture of Antioch, where the long crusader siege was making little headway before these materials arrived. The fleet went on to capture Lattakia from a crusader force in the name of the Byzantine emperor, thus fulfilling at least part of the emperor's purpose.[3] Edgar then disappears, presumably to return with the ships to Constantinople and himself to England (by way of a visit to the German Emperor, who was his cousin). (He lived on for at least thirty years more; had he remained king from 1066, and survived, his would have been the longest English reign until that of the present queen.)

Once a semblance of order had been imposed in conquered Palestine, it became common for prominent men to travel to the region, partly as pilgrims, partly as warriors, often in both roles. The voyage from Britain to Syria was difficult, and most crusaders travelled by land, taking ship in Italy for the last stage of the journey. A romantic account of the journey of Earl Rognvald Kali of Orkney to Palestine includes fighting in Galicia and in the Strait of Gibraltar, a romance at Narbonne in southern France, and more fighting near Sardinia.[4] In 1147, as part of the Second Crusade, a fleet carried English, Fleming, Frisian, and German crusaders as far as Lisbon, where they helped the Count of Portugal to capture the city from the local Arabs; many of the crusaders decided that this achievement fulfilled their vow, and they thereupon settled in Portugal at the invitation of the count – he clearly needed military-trained reinforcements; others helped in the capture of Faro on the Algarve coast; only some went on to Palestine, so making the whole voyage.[5]

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[2] One of the crucial battles in the pre-Crusade period was at Durazzo in Albania, where the Normans of South Italy defeated the Byzantine guard (composed mainly of English exiles), in 1081.

[3] Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 1, *The First Crusade and the Foundation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem,* Cambridge 1951, 227–228 and 255; John France, 'The First Crusade as a Maritime Enterprise', *MM* 83, 1987, 389–397.

[4] *Orkneyinga Saga*, 86–89; Barbara E Crawford, *The Northern Earldoms: Orkney and Caithness, A.D. 870 to 1470*, Edinburgh 2013, 214–217.

[5] Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 2, *The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East 1100–1187,* Cambridge 1951, 258–259; Jonathan Philips, *The Second Crusade*, London 2007, ch. 8; Matthew Bennet, 'Military Aspects of the Conquest of Lisbon 1147', in Jonathan Philips and Martin

But the greatest English effort came with King Richard I Coeur-de-Leon. While Richard collected his army in France, his fleet sailed round Spain to meet him at Marseilles, so repeating in parts the voyages of Earl Rognvald and the Second Crusaders. The fleet stopped in Portugal to assist the locals in repelling a Moroccan invasion, apparently the only interruption to the fleet's voyage. It was thus intact for operations in the Mediterranean, where it was involved in fighting in Sicily, then in the conquest of Cyprus – both Christian countries – and at last in the partial recovery of Palestine from the Saracen conquest achieved under Saladin's command.[6] It seems unlikely that any of the ships returned to England, and probably most of the men did not return either. Certainly Richard himself went home by way of the Adriatic (and imprisonment for a year in Germany), and sent his sister and his queen home by way of Marseilles.

These intermittent adventures were not, of course, serious exercises in English sea power in the Mediterranean, though King Richard did show some appreciation of the available opportunities. Sailing from the British Isles to the Mediterranean was a major and perilous undertaking, costly in men and ships, and was particularly dangerous in having to sail for a considerable distance along Muslim-controlled coastlands. Once the Third Crusade was concluded, there were no obvious English interests in the Mediterranean which required the attention of an English government. The difficulty and expense of the voyage was deterrent enough, and later crusaders usually travelled by land – as did Prince Edward (later King Edward I) in 1270–1274. At the same time, the sea powers of the Mediterranean developed their great trading galleys, which were swift and powerful and seaworthy enough to reach the English Channel from Venice and Genoa. This pre-empted any English need to send ships to trade in the Mediterranean. After 1200, therefore, British interest at sea reverted to the waters about Britain, and this remained the case for the next three centuries.

On the other hand, knowledge of the Mediterranean and its surrounding lands among English and Scots was always extensive. Italy, especially Rome, and Palestine were constant destinations of bishops and priests and pilgrims, and had been since early Anglo-Saxon times – King Alfred and King Knut were only the most eminent visitors to Rome, though, once again, such journeys were mainly made by land. These visitors mainly returned home, and so

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Hoch (eds), *The Second Crusade: Scope and Consequences,* Manchester 2001, 71–89.
[6] Steven Runciman, *A History of the* Crusades, vol. 3, *The Kingdom of Acre and the Later Crusades*, Cambridge 1951, 36–47, 74.

conditions in the Mediterranean regions were thus generally familiar to large numbers of people at first hand, and to many more at second hand through stories and descriptions; in many cases the details were probably hazy and partial and inaccurate, but there was always a substratum of fact; the Hereford map of the thirteenth century, for example, shows a good outline of the sea.

The kings of England had no strategic interests in the Mediterranean before the late sixteenth century, and still less did the kings of Scotland. Their countries' trade was well catered for by the imports of eastern goods by the Venetians and by their own exports of wool and cloth and raw materials – their market in these goods was mainly in the nearby European continent. The English taxation system was relatively efficient, so allowing the kings to collect substantial monetary resources and then to waste those resources on extravagances such as the French and Scottish ('Hundred Years') wars; these wars invariably rebounded on the country, which dissolved into defeat and uncertainty and civil war in the fifteenth century. Such extravagances revived under the second Tudor king, Henry VIII, who pathetically invaded France more than once, disrupted English society with his religious policy, lost international friends, and left his country wide open to disaster. But when this came, it was not from war but from a collapse of trade. Fortunately, some in England had the imagination to seize the moment to strike out in new trading directions: the Mediterranean thus becomes at last a prime English interest.

Chapter 1

The Levant Company and the Assaults on Cadiz c.1550–c.1600

Direct English and Scottish interest in Mediterranean affairs began with the possibilities of trade and profit. The territorial advances of the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Basin caused great disruption to the Italian cities' trading systems, at first particularly that of Genoa, later of Venice, as the cities found themselves on the wrong side at various times in the frequent Ottoman wars. In the 1450s (about the time the Turks finally captured Constantinople) one British merchant, Robert Sturmy of Bristol, had attempted to trade there, carrying wool, cloth, tin, and wheat to Italy and the Levant, and purchasing spices and silk, and alum, in exchange – in effect copying the Venetian system in reverse. However, his two ventures both ended in disaster. In the first, his ship, having delivered 200 pilgrims to Jaffa in Palestine, was wrecked on the Greek coast on the return voyage; in the other, his ship was intercepted and looted by Genoese ships who disliked the competition; Sturmy was killed in the fighting.[1] This seems to have deterred other ventures, but also pointed up the possibilities. By the end of the fifteenth century voyages by English merchants to Italy and the Eastern Basin – to Crete and the Levant – were frequent enough for a consul to be appointed to Pisa by King Henry VII. This was a port city subject to Florence, and so it was outside the range of hostility from Genoa and Venice; there were English merchants in several other Mediterranean ports at this time also.[2]

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[1] E. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Adventurers*, London 1967, 67–71; Stuart Jenks (ed.), *Robert Sturmy's Commercial Expedition to the Mediterranean*, Bristol Record Society 58, 2006; Sturmy's partner collected legal depositions of what had happened, returned to England, and sued Genoese merchants there for complicity – Genoa had established a monopoly of alum which Sturmy was breaking. The Genoese merchants were punished, expelled, and fined.

[2] David Loades, *England's Maritime Empire, Seapower, Commerce and Policy, 1490–1690*, Harlow 2000, 30–31.

The voyage to the Mediterranean lay past Portugal and Spain, and in both countries there was a longstanding English political and mercantile connection. An alliance of sorts between England and Portugal had existed since 1398, but the connection went back to the Second Crusade centuries earlier; in Spain there was a fluctuating presence of English merchants, particularly in the Andalusian area, since the fourteenth century, centred on Seville, its outport of San Lucar, and at Cadiz. There, they knew of the discovery and settlement of the Canary Islands from the 1390s. English traders were familiar with the islands, where some settled and bought estates, and with Madeira, which was settled from Portugal in the mid-fifteenth century, eventually to be the source of sugar and a much-appreciated wine.[3] All this indicates some English merchants' familiarity with the whole of the Mediterranean's sections from Madeira to Palestine by the end of the fifteenth century.

These various ventures, never very numerous, productive, or determined, began to crumble from 1530, when relations between England and Spain began an erratic downward political spiral which eventually led to the long Anglo-Spanish War between 1585 and 1604. The merchants in Andalusia attempted to protect themselves by setting up the Spanish Company, but this was not very successful in the face of the Spanish political and religious suspicions; the merchants were also divided among themselves, into a Catholic group, a Protestant group, and a few who were Catholic in Spain and Protestant in England.[4]

The trade of English men and ships into the Mediterranean therefore faltered in the middle of the sixteenth century. The sea had become increasingly dangerous for all merchant ships with the long war between Spain and the Ottomans in the second half of the century, but the wider reason was the general breakdown of European political and economic affairs of which the Ottoman and English and Dutch wars were a part. The concentration of English exports in the hands of the Merchant Adventurers, who operated through London and Antwerp, was unable to cope with the rising violence in the Low Countries; shifting the trading staple to other centres was not a successful move. So, at the same time that the Spanish trade was failing, and the Mediterranean was becoming increasingly dangerous, the main English export trade in wool became disrupted. The result

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3   Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic 1229–1492*, London 1987, 171–217, and id., *The Canary Islands after the Conquest*, Oxford 1982, 168–169; G. V. Scammell, 'The English in the Atlantic Islands, c.1450–1650', *MM* 72, 1986, 295–317.
4   Pauline Croft, *The Spanish Company*, London Record Society, 1977.

was a severe economic depression; in addition, between 1540 and 1570 the English government went through several regimes, each of which was heavily preoccupied with religious matters, and was also frequently in weak hands; it was consequently scarcely able to help its merchants.

Those merchants, however, or some of them at least, were resilient. Alternative markets were found. The voyages to the White Sea which opened up contact with Russia and led to the formation of the Muscovy Company are the most famous, but other voyages penetrated into the Baltic, and to the south there were merchants and sailors who had already reached Brazil. In 1551 or thereabouts contact was made with Morocco, where two of the ports controlled by the Portuguese had been conquered by the sultan, and trade was thereby opened up to other European merchants; a useful trade developed with England, principally in sugar.[5] Not long after, trade along the West African coast further south developed, in which the English merchants in the Canaries participated. Both of these trades were developed in response to the difficulties the English found in Spain and later Portugal. These trades had been the source of many Mediterranean products for English merchants; the difficulties induced some merchants to explore other areas of the Sea-entrance; other merchants began to by-pass the Iberian Peninsula and go directly to the source for those products within the Mediterranean. The arrival, or return, of English and Dutch merchant ships in the sea was noted by Fernand Braudel and dated to the early 1570s, though his term for it, 'Northern Invasion', is an exaggeration and distortion of what actually happened.[6]

One of the by-products of the new trade with Russia, organised as the Muscovy Company, was a series of attempts to open up a trade with Persia. The goods being sought were mainly silk, in raw form, or as cloth or as yarn. The main explorations were by Anthony Jenkinson, who conducted the earliest attempts. The trade was never very satisfactory: the journey was long and dangerous; the trading opportunities were uncertain and intermittent, and always subject to changing political conditions in Russia and Persia. The trade was only undertaken because no other source of silk was available, since

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5 Hakluyt IV, 32–35; T. S. Willan, *Studies in Elizabethan Foreign Trade,* Manchester 1959, 92–106.
6 Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World,* 621–624; Ralph Davis, 'England in the Mediterranean, 1570–1670', in E. J. Fisher (ed.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England,* Cambridge 1961, 117–137; Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653,* Princeton NJ 1991, 12–13, 15–18.

access to the eastern trade was blocked at the time by Ottoman hostility, and it was a definitive Ottoman blockage on the Persian–Russian trade from 1580 which compelled the London merchants to seek another source of supply.[7] Eventually, of course, the East India Company's voyages to the Indian Ocean opened up the trade in eastern goods, not just in silk, but first a much easier alternative was to tap into the silk and spices trade at ports on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, the Levant; for this, however, Ottoman agreement would be needed.

The Levant is usually considered to be the coast of Syria, but it also could refer more diffusely to the whole of the Mediterranean coast from Constantinople and western Asia Minor to Egypt, and even including Greece. (Its counterpart, the Ponent, is the eastern coast of Spain.) There were several major sources of eastern goods available at major ports in the region: Alexandria in Egypt or Smyrna in Turkey, for example, as well as the Syrian ports, such as Alexandretta ('Scanderoon'), Lattakia, or Jaffa. Smyrna in particular developed as a major source in the seventeenth century, but for the English traders in the sixteenth century the main trading city was Aleppo in north Syria. This was the city at which the trade by way of the Persian Gulf and from Persia itself reached the Mediterranean region. The city was comfortably inland, away from sea-borne molestation, and it was well placed as an *entrepôt* from which goods could be despatched in several directions. The ships could also tap into the trade at the ports of (Syrian) Tripoli and Lattakia, or at Skanderoon, the main port for Aleppo.

The trade which had developed in the early sixteenth century was at first directed more at the eastern colonies of Venice or Genoa – the Ionian Islands, particularly Zante, Chios, Crete, Cyprus – than at the Turkish mainland. The original suppliers of eastern goods to England had been the Venetian galley fleets, but they effectively ceased to be sent with any regularity after 1509 (though the voyages intermittently revived for another thirty years or so); the obvious reply to their absence was for English ships to go to Venice and its colonies rather than wait to have Venetians come to England. But even this commerce failed from about 1535, except for the occasional ship; this was another contributory factor to the subsequent economic depression.[8]

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[7] The journeys are recorded in Hakluyt I, 397 398, 408–418, 438–463, and II, 9–53, and summarised by Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, Cambridge 1984, ch. 3.

[8] Alfred C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, Oxford 1935, 1– 2.

This disruption of the western markets in the mid-sixteenth century provided the incentive for merchants and sailors to return to the Mediterranean, just as it propelled adventurers to sail to Morocco and Muscovy and West Africa. But by the time they arrived in the sea conditions had changed. The conquering career of the Ottoman Sultans Selim the Grim and Suleiman the Magnificent between 1512 and 1573 extended Ottoman power throughout the Levant and Egypt, and well into the western basin along the North African coast, and then an increasingly serious quarrel with Spain preoccupied the English government. The Ottoman advance was checked at Malta in 1565 and the battle of Lepanto in 1571, but in 1566 the Genoese Aegean island of Chios (from where the alum monopoly was administered, and whence had come the Genoese ships which intercepted Sturmy) was taken by the Turks, and from 1570 to 1573 Venice and the Ottomans fought each other for Cyprus, a war which resulted in the Turkish conquest of the island, and caused great damage to Venetian trade.[9] English ships by this time were once again active in the Mediterranean, trading at Livorno ('Leghorn') in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. The place was developed by the Grand Duke into a free port, tolerant of all religions. The English also traded at Civitavecchia (ironically in the Papal States) for alum, a source of which had been found nearby. They sold woollens, especially kerseys, wheat, fish, tin, and lead, very much the same goods as had been purveyed by Sturmy. Woollens were especially prized in the Ottoman Empire, particularly those dyed red or purple.[10]

Spain and the Ottomans were mutually hostile, and once the Spanish market began to close to the English, the obvious ploy for excluded merchants was to by-pass Spain and contact the Turks directly, with a view to opening trade in the now-Ottoman east. Such contact had been made in the 1530s by France, when it was also fighting Spain, and French merchants from the southern ports had developed a profitable trade with the Ottoman ports; the rest of Europe had professed to be scandalised by the hospitality given to the Turkish fleet when it over-wintered at Marseilles in the 1530s, but it had proved both economically and politically helpful to France, though the arrogance of the Turks was distinctly unwelcome in the region. The ploy by the English was less blatant and less obvious, partly because of the distances involved, and partly because, while Queen Elizabeth was publicly hostile to the idea of contacting the Turks, privately she was quite willing to consider it, and even to encourage it; she went so far as to provide finance to help things

9   F. C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic*, Baltimore 1973, 369–374.
10 Davis, 'England in the Mediterranean'.

along, which for such a parsimonious lady was a sign of the issue's great importance. Her more subtle approach brought much less opprobrium than that on the French king. The contact was initiated by London merchants who were interested in developing a Levantine trade, but who had to determine first if the Turks would permit it; they carefully sounded out the English government's attitude first.

Two widely experienced London merchants, Sir Francis Osborne and Richard Staper, sent agents to Constantinople to negotiate the terms under which English merchants could trade. This was followed by the despatch of William Harborne to conclude a more permanent and more official agreement which laid down the rights of English merchants. The sultan was not happy that he was discussing the matter with a mere merchant, and the initial agreement was revoked, partly as a result of French pressure – the French merchants did not relish the idea of competition, and the French government did not like the prospect of a friendly relationship between England and the Ottomans. One can see why the London merchants involved Queen Elizabeth from the start – Harborne's expenses, for example, were paid by the queen.

In England the revocation of the first agreement caused a reconsideration of the whole issue. The merchants involved and the government decided to form a new merchant company, the Turkey Company, to regulate the merchants and the trade, with an official charter. This provided the merchants with the necessary official standing in the new negotiations with the sultan at Constantinople, and left the individual traders less open to pressure and intimidation; it would also provide the Ottomans with a single organisation with which to deal rather than many individuals. So the Turkey Company was organised, and Harborne was sent out again, this time with an official appointment as an ambassador, though the queen now insisted that this time the Company pay all his expenses – only reasonable since the Company, the driving force in establishing contacts with the Turks, would be the main beneficiary.[11]

The men who founded the Company were a group of wealthy merchants, mainly of London, a mixture of Muscovy Company members, who were interested in opening up the trade with Persia which Jenkinson had explored, and Spanish Company men who had found themselves increasingly shut out of their chosen trade by Spanish hostility – though many of the men were members of both companies.[12] They were wealthy men who were prepared to incur

[11] The charter of 1581 is discussed in M. Epstein, *The Early History of the Levant Company*, London 1908, as are its successors; also Wood, *Levant Company*, 11.
[12] Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 17–19.

the large start-up costs on the assumption that they would reap a rich reward. Their attention to detail and their insistence on English government assistance and participation, even if tendered with a long spoon, were testimony to both the attractions and the perceived dangers of the trade.

This curious, perhaps typically Elizabethan, process is not seriously misleading in implying both private and state participation. The Levant Company (as the Turkey Company became in 1592 when it united with the briefly active Venice Company) was both an independent organisation of merchants and an agent of the English state – the ambassadors at Constantinople and the consuls in the Turkish provinces were paid by the Company, an obvious indication of this joint element, and most of the work involved protecting the merchants and the Company against other Europeans' intrigues with the Turkish state, and against the depredations of Turkish officials. It was by no means the first such Company to be organised, for it is in a sense a version of the medieval Merchant Adventurers and Merchants of the Staple, and the participation of many of its early members in other similar companies brought the ethos of those organisations into the new one.

To the Turks the Company was a convenient organisation since such a group of foreign merchants would be at the Turkish state's mercy; at the same time, it was also a fragment of the English state, and so a useful diplomatic presence from London's point of view. It combined for the Turks a diplomatic contact with England (a known enemy by now of Spain), and an organisation which recognised the authority of the Turkish sultanate without demanding some sort of equality, which the sultan would never countenance. It was also a useful foil to the influence of France, whose ambassador had complained long and loud about the new agreement, to such an extent that the Turks became all the keener to conclude it.[13]

The capitulations, as the agreements were officially called, contained plenty of privileges for the Company's merchants, but these were only of use if the Company could get them accepted and enforced by the agents of the Turkish state, above all those in the provinces. The Company had to be assertive, appointing consuls at some places, including Smyrna, Aleppo, Alexandria, and Algiers – and an ambassador at Constantinople – and it had to display power, that is, naval power. This was something with which the English had

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[13] For all this, see Wood, *Levant Company*, ch. 1; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder*, 89–95; Harborne is the subject of studies in S. Skilliter (ed.), *Sir William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey, 1578–1582*, Oxford 1977; the basis of all these discussions is Hakluyt's documents: III, 52–72, 85–113.

become increasingly familiar in the previous half-century, and their success against the Spanish Armada during the development of the Turkish negotiations was a mark of their new prowess, duly noted by the Turks. At the same time, one of the main English weapons in the Spanish war had been privateers, raiding Spanish colonies and seizing Spanish ships – and increasingly the ships of anyone else as well. The ending of the Spanish war in 1604 left these men unemployed and, when the continued their raids, outside any English law. Privateering had been financed by the same group of men who had formed the Turkey Company and its successors; unlike the common sailors, they had become rich on the proceeds; now they looked to new opportunities to use and increase that wealth, but unlike the common sailors again, their wealth allowed them to operate within the law, more or less.[14]

The Levant Company was clear from the start that its ships would need to be able to do two things: carry substantial quantities of rich cargo, and defend themselves against attack. Also from the start it was clear that within the Ottoman Empire the capitulations granted by the sultan would take a long time to be accepted in the provincial ports, and even then the local Turkish authorities were fertile at improvising penalties and fines on the merchants (not just the English, but all Franks – every European ambassador was kept busy), and these could most easily be evaded by bribes (thus ensuring, of course, that the impositions and threats would be repeated). The Company was subject to heavy costs at Constantinople, where it was necessary for the ambassadors to be ever alert to resist pressure from a variety of sources, and to be able to offer gifts to high officials – the higher the official the more expensive the required gift. Further, the Company was regarded by the English government as a tax-cow, and in both its original charter (of 1581) and the new charter (of 1592) the requirement of paying regular and substantial contributions to the exchequer was included, not to mention that the individual cargoes were subject to heavy customs duties.

The Company therefore aimed to use the largest types of ship from the beginning and to put plenty of guns on board them, so that each voyage was made by a fleet of ships, and resembled a naval expedition more than a trading voyage. Each voyage was a projection of English state power into the Mediterranean – and so for the first time since the Crusades. A series of lists of ships reproduced in one modern account of the Company's origins shows that it used a

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[14] K. R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585–1604*, Cambridge 1964, ch. 10; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 19.

mixture of large and medium-sized ships, partly depending on their destinations.[15] In 1581 they sent fourteen ships to Zante, which was a main source of currants and a useful rendezvous point for the ships on their return voyages, and to Crete, a source of malmsey wine. These ships ranged in size from the *Royal Merchant* of 350 tons to the *Thomas Bonaventure* of 100 tons; three of the fourteen listed were 300 tons or more, but most of the rest were 200 tons or less; all were well armed. Each voyage included some of the largest ships for defence, but the generality of English shipping at the time consisted of vessels of less than 200 tons, and this was what the Company also used. (One result was that its ships were regularly conscripted into the naval forces when war arrived.[16])

The cargoes the ships carried were rich and profitable enough to permit the seeming extravagance of large ships and plenty of guns, and the Company's reward was to see that its ships were rarely even menaced, never mind captured. The real problem was the Ottoman provincial officials, at least at first. One of the Company ships, the *Jesus* (100 tons, and a crew of 25 men), visited (Libyan) Tripoli in 1583, right at the start of the Company's activities, and was there seized by the local governor, the cargo was confiscated, and the crew was enslaved. It took two years for Ambassador Harborne to get the men and the ship released.[17] Hakluyt's collection of documents includes a whole series of letters and instructions from the sultan to various provincial authorities requiring full attention to the privileges of the English Company, letters which could be flourished in the faces of recalcitrant officials. It is an indication of the difficulty which the sultan, 'the lord of the world', had in enforcing his own authority.[18]

One of the Company's captains was probably James Lancaster, who later commanded the earliest voyages of the East India Company to the east. He is not directly recorded as voyaging for the Company in the Mediterranean, but between 1595 and 1589 he was occupied as a merchant and a navigator, and captained several of the Company's ships which were taken up for naval expeditions – in Drake's Cadiz raid in 1587, in the Armada campaign, and in the retaliatory attack on Lisbon in 1589 – and it seems reasonable to conclude that he was in the Company's employ on these occasions and therefore

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[15] Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Newton Abbot 1971; Epstein, *Early History*, appendix V.

[16] The ships were thus not, at least at this stage, unusually large, though they were at the higher end of those available; later the Company certainly used ships of 500 or 600 tons.

[17] Hakluyt III, 139–159.

[18] Hakluyt III, 119–139.

also earlier; in 1591 it was a group of Levant Company merchants who financed his first voyage to the Indian Ocean.[19]

The formal outbreak of war with Spain in 1585 increased the hazards of the Levant voyages. A small fleet of five ships was already in the Mediterranean when the war began with the sudden Spanish seizure of all English ships and merchants in Spanish ports. It is not clear if the ships' captains knew of the war when on their return voyage off Sicily in November 1585, but they clearly prepared for trouble. The ships had separated to trade, the *Edward Bonaventure* and the *Susan* (or *Suzanne*) went to Venice, the *Tobie* to Constantinople, and the *Royal Merchant* and the *William and John* to Tripoli in Syria. They appointed a rendezvous for their return voyage, agreeing to meet at Zante in the Ionian Islands and then sail home as a fleet. (This may, of course, have been the usual procedure, but details are sparse.) Sure enough, when they re-gathered they knew that two Spanish galley fleets awaited them, one lying south of Sicily, the other in the Strait of Gibraltar. They organised themselves into a fighting fleet, appointed an admiral (Captain Edward Wilkinson of *Royal Merchant*) and a vice-admiral (*Tobie*) and set off.

They met a fleet of thirteen Spanish and Maltese galleys commanded by Don Pedro de Leiva near Pantelleria in the Sicilian Narrows on 13 July 1586. There was much discussion between the two admirals, in which the Spanish case was that the English ships were within Spanish waters (the state of war was not apparently mentioned); when the Englishmen rejected this proposition, the galleys attacked. In theory the galleys with their speed and their manoeuvrability had the advantage of the ships which depended on the wind. In fact, it was firepower which was decisive, at least where there was no flat calm, and even then determined resistance meant that the ships were usually successful. In their attacks on the high-sided, well-armed, English ships, the galleys made little impression. Only two men were wounded in the English ships, though what damage was done to the ships is not known; at least three of the galleys, including Don Pedro's flagship, were so damaged as to be close to sinking. The galleys withdrew; the English ships sailed on.[20]

The Spaniards had a good case for attacking this little fleet, since war with England had already begun, but they failed to make this point, at least according to the account included in Hakluyt's collection, no doubt hoping for a capture without fighting or without suffering (or inflicting) damage. Already preparations were being

[19] Michael Franks, *The Basingstoke Admiral: A Life of Sir James Lancaster*, Salisbury 2006, 43–45.
[20] Hakluyt III, 359–368.

made to constitute a great armed Spanish fleet, an Armada, to attack the English in their home waters and their homeland. The following year these preparations were disrupted by an English pre-emptive attack; Levant Company ships were involved.

The crucial ports for gathering the Armada were Lisbon and Cadiz, the main naval and mercantile ports at the entrance to the Mediterranean. Both were capacious anchorages, well defended by forts and garrisons, and both were major reception ports for goods and treasure from America (at Cadiz) and the east (at Lisbon). Portugal and Spain were united under the same king at this time, though they remained separate states. Supplies and vessels were gradually accumulated at these two ports during 1586–1587, much of both being brought from the Mediterranean. The English seaborne attack in 1587, led by Sir Francis Drake, avoided Lisbon after a menacing brief presence off the port, but made a successful raid into Cadiz harbour, where perhaps thirty ships were burned. Drake's personal defiance of King Philip II had now morphed into a full-scale war between his homeland and Philip's Spain. Drake used privateering tactics at Cadiz, where he led a ship-charge into the harbour, without any preparation. It was partly his sense of the needs of the Armada for supplies which had led him then to land on the Algarve coast of Portugal and intercept and destroy the small ships which were carrying supplies towards Lisbon.

Although Drake hardly thought of it in such terms, this adventure demonstrated that even temporary control of the Sea-entrance to the Mediterranean, which is what he had achieved briefly, could paralyse much of the local traffic, but a permanent presence was required for real power in the area. Until that was achieved the Spaniards at Cadiz would always have the long-term control.[21]

The Strait of Gibraltar was, of course, the easiest point at which to control the traffic, though the narrowness of the gap – the 'Gut' as the sailors called it – produced some difficult sea conditions. There was a constant current from west to east as Atlantic water flowed in to replace evaporated Mediterranean water, while the narrow channel funnelled the winds in either direction and increased their force, making sailing through the gap difficult, and sometimes impossible. It was not unknown for whole fleets to be blown through, or for ships to be becalmed as wind and current exerted equal force in opposite

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[21] For good descriptions of Drake's raid, see Hugh Bicheno, *Elizabeth's Sea Dogs*, London 2012, 212–228, James A. Williamson, *The Age of Drake*, Cleveland OH 1965, 294–303, K. R. Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, London 1967, 128–144, and Garrett Mattingly, *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, London 1959, 99–145, probably the best, and certainly the most entertaining, account; every biography of Drake and of Elizabeth I includes an account, generally brief, of the raid.

directions. This was an ideal situation for galleys, and the Spanish bases in the area, from Cadiz to Gibraltar and on to Malaga and Cartagena to the east, provided Spain with the permanent control of the Strait and the Alboran Sea which Drake's raid had briefly interrupted for a couple of weeks.

In 1590 this was the scene of a second well-recorded encounter between English ships and Spanish galleys. A fleet of ten English ships sailing back to England were attacked by a dozen galleys.[22] The report on the encounter emphasises that the galleys were full of men - 200 or 300 per galley, according to the English account. Their preferred means of attack was to approach at speed, fire their heavy bow guns, then come close alongside and board. The English ships therefore kept their distance, putting their four strongest ships in the rear of their formation, where they would be the first to be attacked. The first shots were fired by the rearmost Englishman, *Salomon*, and scored a direct hit on the leading galley, holing it 'as that she was ready to sink', and killing and wounding many of the men on board. The fight went on for six hours, until the galleys withdrew to their base at Gibraltar. The English heard later that at least two of the galleys were almost sinking, and all the rest had sustained serious damage; all the exhortations of the governor of Gibraltar could not persuade the galleys to mount a new attack even though the English ships were becalmed close to Gibraltar for three more days.[23]

After the fights between galleys and sailing ships the victorious English ships had gone into a North African port to make repairs and collect supplies. The five in 1586 used Algiers, and the ten in 1590 Tetuan. In both cases they were welcomed and feted by the local Muslims for their defeat of the common enemy. This was before these places became corsair bases.

These fights – there was another, in 1591, between a single English ship, the *Centurion* of 200 tons, probably a Levant Company ship, and five Spanish galleys, again in the Strait of Gibraltar, which *Centurion* won[24] – make it obvious that the decision of the Levant Company to use the biggest ships and to arm them well was the correct one. (*Centurion* had agreed to sail with a group of smaller ships, which in the event failed to support it, and some of them were taken.) The Levant Company was to be damaged in its reputation by the activities of English privateers and by the later careers of some of them as

[22] The ships are said to be returning from the Levant, but seem to be an *ad hoc* group; the most powerful ship, called *Salomon* by Hakluyt, may be a Levant Company ship – it had a *Solomon* in 1590; it would be unusual, however, for a Company ship to be sailing alone, which seems to be the case here.
[23] Hakluyt IV, 360–383.
[24] Hakluyt IV, 383–386.