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A Material Microhistory of the Sant Crist de Lepant (Barcelona, 1571–2017)

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## Objects that Made History

### A Material Microhistory of the Sant Crist de Lepant (Barcelona, 1571–2017)

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#### **Abstract**

This article charts the possible contributions of history to the cross-disciplinary theory and practice of critical archaeology. Focusing on a crucifix widely associated with the Battle of Lepanto (1571) on display in the cathedral of Barcelona, the article outlines a material microhistory. Microhistorians' sense for the complexity of the past, the problems of historical knowledge, the implications of doing history, and their experiments with narratives help to draft reflective and provocative narratives about the past life of objects – and their consequences for the present. The material microhistory of the Lepanto crucifix in Barcelona shifts traditional perspectives. Instead of assuming that the battle was an event of historical significance, the article reflects on how people's ways of object-related thinking made particular interpretations of the battle as an event of historical significance relevant to their past presence. By examining how objects shaped history and its inherent assumptions about power relations, the article reveals the problematic links between historical materiality and the material of history.

#### **Zusammenfassung**

Dieser Aufsatz umreißt die möglichen Beiträge der Geschichtswissenschaft zur interdisziplinären Theorie und Praxis der Kritischen Archäologie. Insbesondere wird eine „materielle Mikrogeschichte“ am Beispiel eines mit der Seeschlacht von Lepanto (1571) weithin in Verbindung gebrachten und heute in der Kathedrale von Barcelona aufgestellten Kruzifixes dargelegt. MikrohistorikerInnen zeichnet eine reflektierte Sensibilität für die Komplexität der Vergangenheit(en), die Probleme historischen Wissens, die Implikationen geschichtswissenschaftlicher Praktiken (doing history) sowie ein experimenteller Umgang mit Narrativen aus. Gerade dieses Gespür und dieser Reflexionsgrad helfen, reflektierende und provokative Erzählungen über das vergangene Leben von Gegenständen – mit all ihren Konsequenzen für die Gegenwart – zu entwerfen. Die „materielle Mikrogeschichte“ des Lepanto-Kruzifixes von Barcelona wirft neue Perspektiven auf traditionelle Sichtweisen: Anstatt vorauszusetzen, dass die Schlacht ein Ereignis historischer Bedeutsamkeit gewesen ist, wird in diesem Aufsatz untersucht, wie objektbezogenes Denken historischer Akteure spezifischen Interpretationen der Schlacht als Ereignis historische Relevanz für die vergangene Gegenwart zuschrieb und dadurch auch selbst generierte. Indem untersucht wird, wie Objekte Geschichte und ihre inhärenten Annahmen über Machtverhältnisse gestalteten, legt dieser Aufsatz das problematische Verhältnis zwischen historischer Materialität und dem Material der Geschichte dar.

#### **Keywords**

material microhistory; objects and the production of history; Battle of Lepanto; Barcelona

#### **Schlüsselwörter**

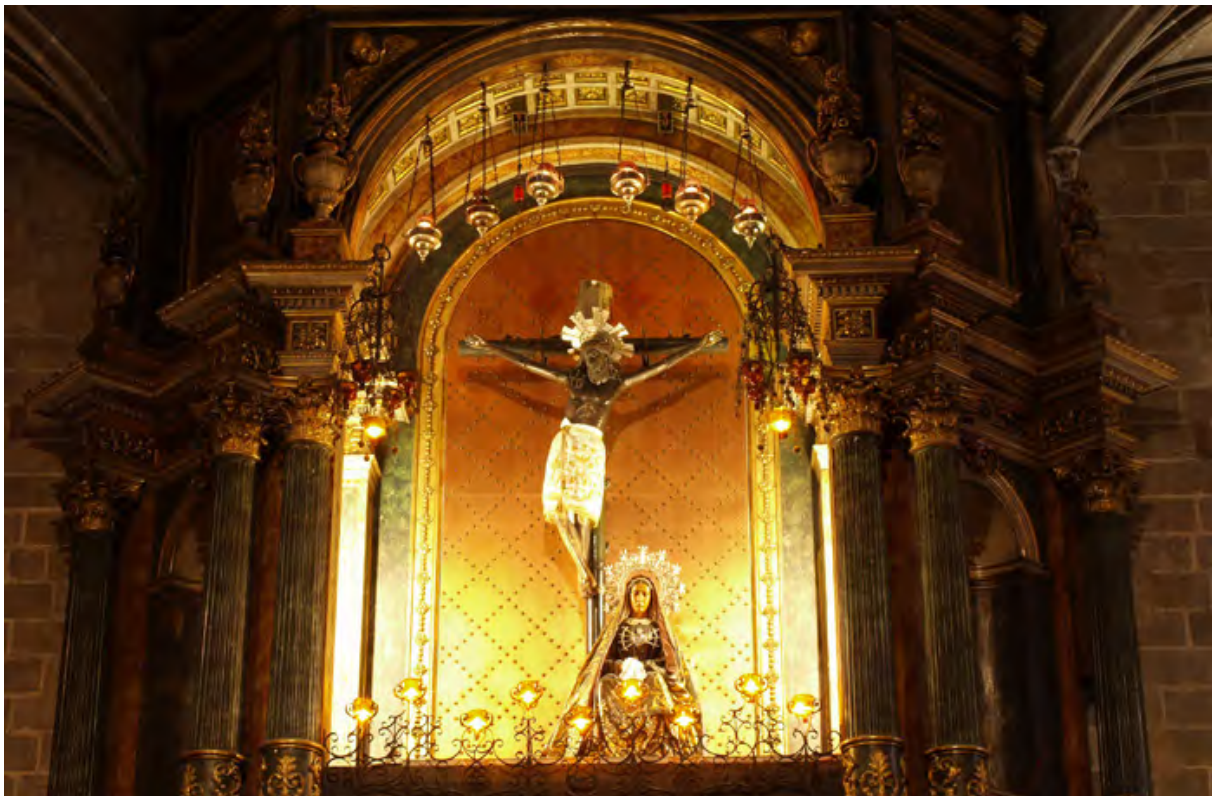
Materielle Mikrogeschichte, Objekte und die Produktion von Geschichte, Seeschlacht von Lepanto, Barcelona

## Material Culture and the Production of History

*La historia no es tan simple.*  
(Benedetti 2009: 49)

The theory and practice of critical archaeology, as it is debated in this journal, is an interdisciplinary enterprise. Deploying the concept of “material microhistory”, this article charts the possible contribution of historians to such debates by focusing on a single object on display in Barcelona. When entering the city’s Gothic cathedral, the visitor becomes aware of a crucifix that is on display in a separate chapel on the right, the so-called “Chapel of the Holy Sacrament and of the Holy Christ of Lepanto”. The *Sant Crist de Lepant* (fig. 1) is said to have been aboard the ship of Don John of Austria, supreme commander of the “Holy League” that fought and won against the Ottomans in the Ionian Sea on 7 October 1571. The Barcelona chapel is reserved for prayers, and people indeed assemble to speak their prayers, kneeling in front of the crucifix which is generally considered the most important devotional object of the diocese. The religious sentiments and emotional excitement that this object is able to evoke today can best be studied in online blogs. A man working in Health Care in Texas, visiting the cathedral during his third pilgrimage in 2010, went to pray in front of the crucifix in the early morning. When realising that he was alone with “this magnificent crucifix everyone had been venerating in such awe” the day before, he secretly took a picture even though this was not allowed. Later on, he realised what he had actually seen, an object deeply tied up with legends about the Battle of Lepanto, and posted the image online (fig. 2) with the following description:

“I noticed that no one was around so when I completed my prayers, I took this photo and I truly did not feel ashamed and demonstrated complete reverence, and truly felt the Lord wanted me to have this photo. What I finally realized from this moment, this crucifix was the actual crucifix used on the ship of Don Juan of Austria in the ‘*Battle of Lepanto*’ in October of 1571! This is the crucifix the Moslem Turks had seen coming straight toward them in one of the greatest battles in the history of the world! The reason why it is curved to the right is because it was constructed perfectly vertical but the Turks fired a canon ball towards it and by a miracle it curved to the right to avoid being hit! I can not believe I am actually kneeling in front of it. So now I want to share this magnificent gift with you all. Please feel free to copy, distribute, share with all, and display in your homes and office. I know the Lord wants us to have it to share and venerate” (What is Truth 2010).



**Fig. 1:** The *Sant Crist de Lepant* as it is presented online by the Cathedral of Barcelona. © Metropolitan Cathedral Basilica of Barcelona, [http://www.catedralbcn.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=32&Itemid=85&lang=en](http://www.catedralbcn.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=32&Itemid=85&lang=en), 2 July 2017.





**Fig. 2:** The *Sant Crist de Lepant* as it is presented online by a devout visitor. © What is Truth, <http://jn1838.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/crucifix-of-lepanto.html>, 19 April 2010/ 2 July 2017.

Hundreds of years after the actual battle was fought, this crucifix obviously evokes pure excitement amongst some of the visitors of the cathedral. It is an emotional response to remnants from the past that is instantiated through the material presence of this object and cultivated through the circulation of the object's devotional adoration and visual representation. On its website, the Metropolitan Cathedral Basilica of Barcelona praises the legend of the historical background of this devotional artefact and presents the battle in a similar way as the American visitor did in his online blog. Lepanto “was a decisive battle and victory meant that the Turks would not be able to advance on Europe. They were stopped at the gates of the Christian continent” (Metropolitan Cathedral Basilica of Barcelona 2017). Indeed, the diocese consciously promotes the devotional cult and quasi-tourism surrounding this artefact.

Visitors can buy cards that praise Christ Crucified as the redeemer of the world, and a shop also sells hundreds of little amulets coined with an image of the crucifix in front of two battleships. The galleys, departing for or returning from the Battle of Lepanto, prominently display a giant cross, the symbol of “triumphant Christianity” (my own observations, 2012 and 2016).

This article examines the history of the said crucifix in order to initiate a critical debate on how objects make history and how this process should be itself critically addressed. As anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot aptly wrote, “history begins with bodies and artifacts” wherefore “the materiality” itself “sets the stage for future historical narratives” (Trouillot 1995: 29). This observation urges historians to think about the production of history in relation to material culture (Hanß 2017b). The Battle of Lepanto, fought between the Ottoman Empire and an alliance among the Papacy, Spain, Venice, and a number of smaller Catholic principalities, took place in 1571. Yet, its memory is so longlasting that almost 450 years later visitors from across the globe venerate a wooden figure in a church in the Western Mediterranean that is connected to it. No wonder, one may say in light of the most common interpretation of the battle. Lepanto is widely considered a crucial moment in the history of the Mediterranean, a victory of a united Christian fleet that stopped the Ottomans’ expansionary ambitions (e.g. Benzoni 1974; Pierson 1999; Bicheno 2003). More than 30,000 Ottomans were killed or wounded and almost the entire fleet destroyed (Braudel 2001 [1949]: 278). The Spanish monarchy took a leading role in this battle by engaging more than 12,000 soldiers and 83 galleys for the service of the “Holy League” under the command of the half-brother of the Spanish king (Parker and Thompson 1992: 18).

However, “history is not that easy” (Benedetti 2009: 49) and this observation is particularly true for the Battle of Lepanto. Serious disputes between Spain and Venice in fact separated the allegedly unified Christian alliance from early on, and the quarrel did not stop with the league’s victory at Lepanto (Braudel 2001 [1949]: 258–264; Dragonetti de Torres 1931). Just a few months later, the defeated Ottomans managed to rebuild their fleet entirely (Imber 1996). Also throughout the battle the historical reality simply does not fit the widespread narratives. Muslims and Jews fought on the allegedly Christian side and Jews and Christians supported the Ottoman troops at Lepanto. Across the entire sixteenth-century globe, protagonists referred to the battle and re-interpreted its outcome for very particular and very different political and personal purposes (Hanß 2017b). From early on, however, the narrative of a Christian victory over Muslim Turks evolved as a story of a clash of civilisations (Huntington 1997). It is exactly this narrative that grants the crucifix in Barcelona such a prominent devotional character according to the above-cited statements. By examining the “cultural biography” and “social life” (Appadurai 2010; Kopytoff 2010) of the *Sant Crist de Lepant*, the present article shows how people’s constant engagement with artefacts shaped, perpetuated, and adapted the battle’s narrative of a dichotomy of a victorious Christian and defeated Muslim culture. As this paper’s argument unfolds, a particular moment in a thing’s biography served people throughout history as a focal point to narrate stories about the past. Such narratives, however, simplified complex realities and implied ideas about power that manifested themselves in the hierarchies of the values of people of Christian and Muslim faith. The history of Lepanto, which the crucifix helped to tell, was composed out of stories of victorious Christians whose act of murdering Muslims was placed beyond the realm of morals. At the same time, the object’s association with the battle and the stories surrounding it concealed the very political act of object-centred storytelling, which dehistoricised history itself. The popularity of the crucifix over the centuries made it a powerful object that was able to evoke associations with the past and generate ideas about history that made power relations an unquestioned reality. In the last decades, archaeologists have discussed widely the agency of objects and the matter of relationships between humans and things. Anthropology, philosophy and sociology are prominent references in these debates. Historians’ voices were hardly listened to though. By relating the discussions about practicing materiality (Van Dyke 2015) with those about doing history/archaeology and the production of history (Trouillot 1995), historians’ research may help to reconsider the critical study of the relationship between historical materiality and the material of history. In that sense, this paper sheds light on how complex historical realities were transformed into rather simple narratives about the past that implied profound power relations. It reveals how objects instantiated such interpretations about the past as a historical reality, and it also makes us aware of the concealed political and ideological implications that are inherent in this mode of the production of history.

Above all, I present a cross-disciplinary approach that makes exactly this material production of history a topic of historical research and critical enquiry. Whilst traditional memory studies focused on the remembrance of the past via the usage of objects such as memorials, for instance, more recently historians have started to examine how protagonists experienced their lives and the world through objects (e.g. O’Malley and Welch 2007; Rublack 2013). The status of devotional artefacts was particularly crucial to communicate, establish and perpetuate religious



atmospheres, emotions and practices (Ivanic 2016; Corry, Howard and Laven 2017). Such observations are, of course, very familiar to archaeologists and anthropologists who have produced fascinating scholarship on the relationship between objects and faith. However, historians' reflections on how this approach may change the perspective on the past as an historical engagement with objects that themselves "shape(d) history" have rarely been confronted with critical anthropology or archaeology (Riello 2009: 24). Anthropologists such as Robert Borofsky (1987) make us aware of the fact that "history" is a cultural concept that is deeply rooted in different mnemonic practices that themselves shaped communities and people's experiences of subjectivity. This approach not only invites historians to reflect on the social practices that made up the interactions between objects and memory; it also enables them to contribute to current debates on the heuristic and historical as well as epistemic and empirical status of objects in archaeology and anthropology.

It is a material microhistory, I argue by focusing on the Lepanto crucifix in Barcelona, that may contribute to the debates of critical archaeology. Microhistorical studies have flourished in the last decades, yet despite their diversity in topics and approaches, the authors share broader concerns about the status of historical knowledge and the implications of doing history. In particular, microhistorians critically engage with master narratives; united by the conviction of both the necessity of a decentering approach to the past and that "generalizations are [...] too important to be left to specialized generalists" (Subrahmanyam 1997: 742; Trivellato 2011). "Decentering", Davis argues (2011: 190), "involves the stance and the subject matter of the historian. The decentering historian does not tell the story of the past only from the vantage point of a single part of the world or of powerful elites, but rather widens his or her scope, socially and geographically, and introduces plural voices into the account". Microhistorians, as Thomas Robisheaux has pointed out in a roundtable discussion at St John's College, Cambridge (28 October 2016), address "the craft that underpins our discipline" by considering the extent to which a "thoughtfully crafted narrative" may function as "analysis" (for a fascinating example, see Ulbrich 2005). Above all, this methodological grounding is visible in microhistorians' deep commitment to archival studies and their reflectivity on both historical experience and the author's contribution to as well as the audience's participation in the story. The variety of different strands of microhistorical research (Robisheaux et al. 2017) is united by the shared notion of a *Detailgeschichte des Ganzen*, a phrasing that Hans Medick established in reference to Marc Bloch's *histoire totale* (Medick 1997: 24). Microhistorians' debates on the complexity of the past, the problems of historical knowledge, the implications of the doing of their discipline, their experiments with narratives, and their critique of coarse-cut master narratives resemble core questions of current debates on critical archaeology (e.g. Bernbeck 2017). By writing "material microhistories" (Findlen 2016), historians may draft reflective and provocative narratives about the past life of objects – and their consequences for the present. For instance, such a study of an artefact like the Lepanto crucifix in Barcelona changes traditional historiographical perspectives. Instead of assuming that the battle was an event of historical significance, we reflect on how people's ways of "thinking through things" (Hénare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007) made particular interpretations of the battle as an event of historical significance relevant to their past presence. Reconstructing the material microhistory of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* leads us from the immediate reactions to the Battle of Lepanto in Barcelona in 1571 via the eighteenth-century rediscovery of the crucifix to its ideological glorification in Francoist Spain. These different usages of the crucifix throughout history increase our awareness of the manifold political implications of the usages of objects for both the production of history and the legitimisation of ideologies and religions, an observation that makes the historian's critical approach to material culture itself a necessity in times of "post-politics" (González-Ruibal 2012). The question is how mute objects came to tell stories that transformed a certain interpretation of the past into history.

### Celebrating the Past: News and Festivities

News about the maritime strife reached Barcelona three and a half weeks after the battle was actually fought. On 31 October 1571, a messenger arrived who had been dispatched by order of the Spanish ambassador in Genoa. The envoy informed the council of Barcelona about the news (*nova*) of the victory against "the enemy of our holy Catholic faith." Further details about the battle, such as the considerable amount of booty taken from the Ottomans, also stirred up the councillors' excitement about the news. The records of the council, the so-called *dietari*, state that the urban elite of the city immediately wished to thank "our Lord for such a unique and considerable victory" which he had given to "entire Christianity" (AHCB, Deliberacions, 1B. II-80: fol. 99<sup>v</sup>–100<sup>v</sup>, Barcelona, 31 October 1571; Schwartz y Luna and Carreras y Candi 1896: 122–123). As the battle was considered a sign of God's mercy (RAH, 9/4247 [n<sup>o</sup> 139]: fol. 1<sup>r</sup>, Barcelona, 31 October 1571 copied in 1804), further arrangements were instantiated immediately. On the very same day, the local *fiesta col angel*, the council made arrangements for religious

ceremonies that would thank God for the victory which he had given to all Christianity: religious ceremonies and public celebrations were to be organised for the following days (AHCB, *Deliberacions*, 1B. II-80: fol. 100<sup>r-v</sup>, Barcelona, 31 October 1571).

Thus, the Battle of Lepanto was perceived from early on in Barcelona as a “Christian victory” (Olivari 2012). The ways authors reported about the battle in the very first news helps to explain the council’s profound religious reactions. Barcelona was a hub of communication in the sixteenth-century Mediterranean. The cathedral chapter, for instance, cultivated extensive information networks in Rome, Tuscany, Sicily, and Genoa (ACB, *Cartes rebudes*, vol. 8-9, 1571/72). News of Lepanto arrived in Barcelona from Venice via Genoa, and the prior of Barcelona soon replied, thanking the Spanish ambassador in Venice for the joyful news (AGS, *Estado, Venecia e Islas Jónicas*, leg. 1502, doc. 50, Prior Don Hernando to Diego Guzmán de Silva, Barcelona, 23 November 1571). The correspondence of Sancho de Padilla, Spanish ambassador in Genoa, reveals the contents transmitted by his colleague in Venice, Diego Guzmán de Silva. The news informed about the thousands of Ottomans killed and the hundreds of captured Ottoman ships as much as they conveyed details about the ceremonies that the Venetian Doge had ordered to take place in the churches of the Lagoon city. The Spanish resident in Genoa forwarded these handwritten newsletters with the comment that the day had come for which Christianity had waited for so long (AGS, *Estado, Génova*, leg. 1401, doc. 47, Sancho de Padilla to Philipp II, Genoa, 22 October 1571). Following the common rhetoric of crusade humanism (Hankins 1995), the political and religious elites of Venice had labelled Lepanto as a victory awarded by God in order to fashion themselves as a heavenly chosen Christian authority (Fenlon 2007: 175–191; Hanß 2011).

In light of the considerable disputes amongst the Spanish and Venetian allies, the Spanish ambassador in the Lagoon city tried to reinterpret the victory’s significance by adapting the very same discourses: Lepanto, he wrote to King Philip II, shows that the Habsburgs are monarchs chosen by God that shall be respected by other authorities. In one letter the ambassador emphasised that the victory “comes from the hand of God” who was thanked for his intervention in favour of Philip II, “minister for the defence of the Catholic Church” (AGS, *Estado, Venecia e Islas Jónicas*, leg. 1329, doc. 104, Diego Guzmán de Silva to Philip II, Venice, 19 October 1571; Hanß in press). To demonstrate the Spanish monarchy’s reputation abroad, he also dispatched laudatory poems on Don John of Austria, whom contemporaries praised in biblical terms as an invincible envoy sent by God (John 1,6; Benedetti 1571). In the sixteenth century, the genre of newsletters with their often prodigious content was conceptualised as a medium that served to decipher and transmit God’s deeds (Mauelshagen 2000). News about Lepanto consequently became very soon an information about a “Christian victory”.

The devout reactions in Barcelona, thus, were anything but an exception. The very same day of the arrival of the news in Barcelona, Guzmán’s report was also received at the court in Madrid. The Venetian ambassador, Lunardo Donado, was so overwhelmed when hearing the news that he lay down in order to kiss the floor and pray to God. He was granted access to Philipp II, who had already been informed by a Genoese envoy that arrived shortly beforehand. The monarch went to the chapel and sang *Magnificat anima mea Dominu[m] et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo*, the song that Mary is said to have sung after the annunciation (Lukas, 1,46–55). When the Venetian ambassador entered the chapel, Philipp was greatly anxious to hear more information, but Donado insisted on singing the *Te Deum laudamus* first. Only afterwards were the letters read aloud and news exchanged (ASGe, *Archivio Segreto*, 2413, fasc. 3, Marcantonio Sauli to the Genoese Governo, Madrid, 31 October and 7 November 1571; ASV, *Senato, Dispacci, Dispacci degli ambasciatori e residenti, Spagna*, filza 8, Nr. 62, Lunardo Donado to Alvise Mocenigo I, Madrid, 2 November 1571). The very act of information, the composition, content and transmission of newsletters as well as the practices with which they were received, openly favoured a Christian reading of the events. The news itself, which reported on Lepanto and its Venetian celebrations in Madrid and Barcelona alike, materialised the battle’s outcome as a “Christian victory” that necessitated specific reactions of devout Christians.

The arrival of news of Lepanto caused a general excitement in the city, an excitement that people staged in an elaborated celebrative culture. Philipp II sang another *Te Deum laudamus*, this time with the entire court. On All Saints’ Day, the entire court and the foreign ambassadors celebrated the victory in an impressive procession throughout the city of Madrid (ASV, *Senato, Dispacci, Dispacci degli ambasciatori e residenti, Spagna*, filza 8, Nr. 62, Lunardo Donado to Alvise Mocenigo I, Madrid, 2 November 1571; HHStA, *Staatenabteilung, Spanien, Diplomatische Korrespondenz*, 8, 2: fol. 15<sup>r</sup>–17<sup>v</sup>, Hans Khevenhüller to Maximilian II, Madrid, 7 November 1571). Philipp II ordered festivities to take place in all Spanish cities. In all churches of the diocese of Toledo, for instance, processions and funeral sermons were held (ASFi, *Archivio Mediceo del Principato*, 3081: fol. 219<sup>v</sup>, Venetian newsletters

from Rome, 28 November 1571, sent to Florence by Cosimo Bartoli; AGS, Estado, Venecia e Islas Jónicas, leg. 1328, doc. 73, Juan Gomez de Silva to Diego Guzmán de Silva, Toledo, 25 November 1571).

This is the context that shaped the perception of the news about Lepanto in Barcelona in late October and early November 1571. A Catholic reign that received letters informing about a “Christian victory” granted by God’s mercy reassured itself of this interpretation by conducting processions of thanksgiving. These celebrations staged and manifested the religious interpretation of Lepanto as a “Christian victory” in urban spaces by making use of a refined celebratory language that generated symbolic meanings through the usage of objects. Deducing from what we know about the festivities in Seville or Venice, for instance, we can easily assume formal processions, religious sermons, carnevalesque masquerades, and spontaneous festivities to have been taken place in Barcelona. For sure, church bells were ringing for hours over days, and the city’s most important streets were adorned with banners and garlands (García Bernal 2007; Hanß 2011; Hanß 2017b: 73–134).

The objects and speeches presented throughout this series of festivities guaranteed the religious interpretation of the Battle of Lepanto. In early November, for instance, the Minim Francisco Ribas preached a sermon on the occasion of the Battle of Lepanto that was printed soon afterwards. Referring to Exodus 15,1, Ribas interpreted Lepanto in biblical terms. Just as once the Egyptians had been drowned in the sea, now the Ottomans were drowned at Lepanto through the invincible Christian sovereign Philipp II. His half-brother Don John had proven to be a “new David” who won against Goliath and enabled the soon expected conquest of Istanbul and Jerusalem. For Ribas, the outcome of the battle was the result of God’s intervention that required people to thank the Lord for his mercy in religious services and good deeds. Such good deeds were, in fact, also more secular celebrations that took place in Barcelona: tournaments (*justas*), festivities (*fiestas*) and concerts (*galas*) were organised on the occasion of the “destruction of the enemy of the Catholic Church” (Ribas 1571: fol. 11<sup>v</sup>). In the cathedral, many further sermons and services praised Lepanto in the weeks of November 1571. Sometimes, Papal bulls – surely related to the battle – were read on such occasions (ACB, Liber resolutionum dictus de la civella ab anno 1501 ad 1624, t. 1: fol. 79<sup>r</sup>, 17 November 1571).

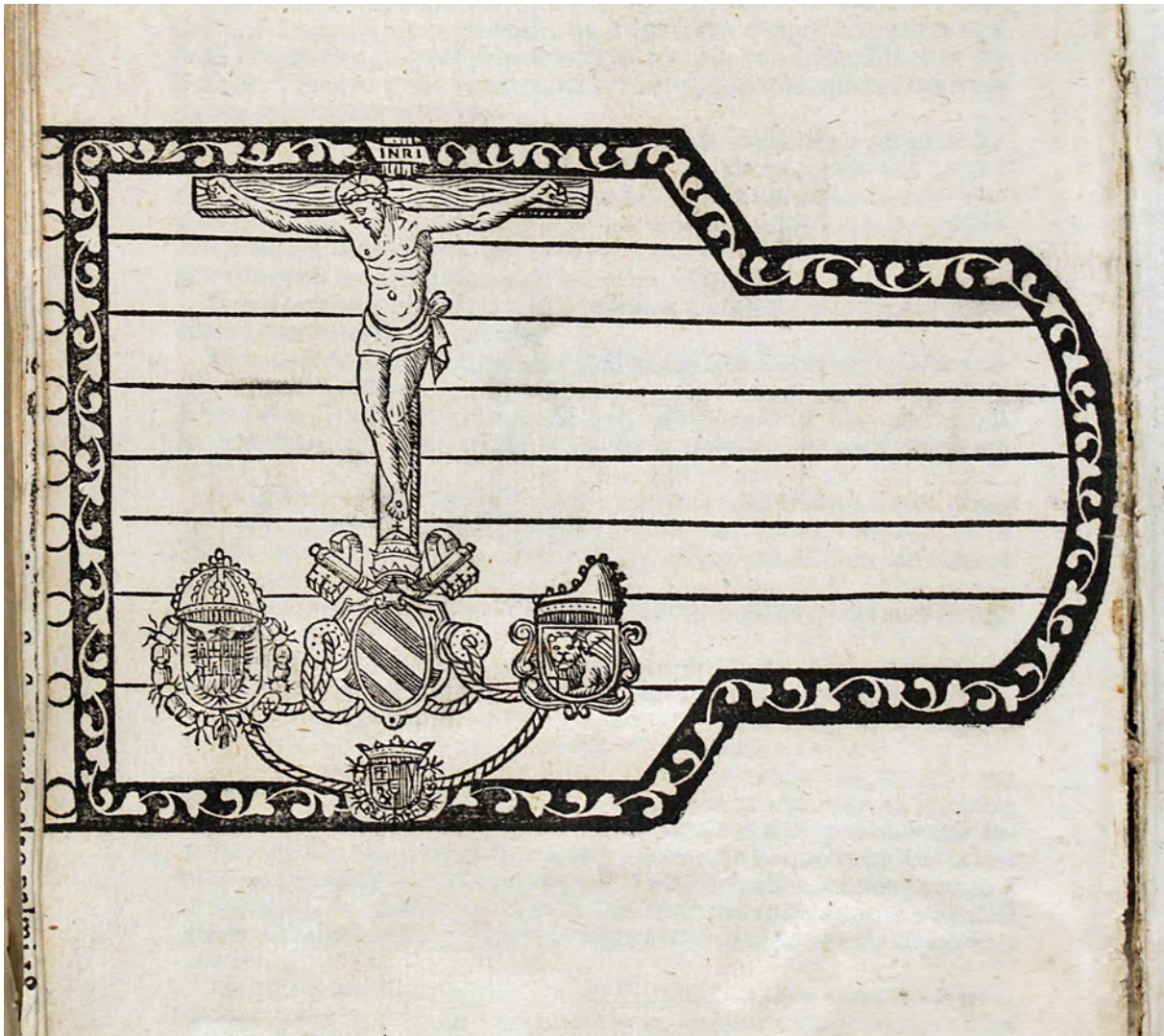
The celebratory enactment of the battle made Lepanto a “Christian victory”, an event that materialised in festivities, services, sermons, handwritten news, and prints. The many services held in Barcelona also consciously reinterpreted the “Christian victory” of Lepanto in local contexts. A funeral sermon held in the Cathedral of Barcelona on the occasion of the commemoration of the noblemen who died at Lepanto referred to the by-then standard narrative of the *Xpianissima, y Catholica jornada* to make sense of the men’s death as a contribution to a victory over the devil (Ribas 1571: fol. 11<sup>v</sup>–18<sup>r</sup>). As many noblemen from Barcelona had supported the Spanish troops, it can easily be imagined that family members assembled in the cathedral to listen to the glorification of their relatives (RAH, 9/4254 [n° 2]). By referring to the broader religious narratives, which were shared in transregional terms, such devotional practices shaped the memory of the Battle of Lepanto on a very local level (Hanß 2017b). Without doubt, the inhabitants will have remembered that the city council had already sent munition to fight against “the armada of the Turk” the previous year (AHCB, Deliberacions, 1B. II-79: fol. 33<sup>v</sup>, 24 February 1570). Just a few months before the battle took place, in summer 1571, Don John of Austria had made the galleys gather in the harbour of Barcelona. Here, they were equipped and armed; here, they departed for the maritime season that finally resulted in the victory over the Ottomans that contemporaries celebrated as an event caused by God. Already by then the ceremonial setting was well chosen. The departure of Don John’s galleys was embedded in the Corpus Christi processions, a fact that the inhabitants of the city surely remembered when celebrating Lepanto in religious terms only a few months later (ÖNB, Cod. 8949: fol. 260<sup>v</sup>, Rome, 30 June 1571; HHStA, Staatenabteilung, Venedig, Berichte, 11, III, Veit von Dornberg to the Imperial Court, Venice, 23 June 1571: fol. 3<sup>r</sup>). These are the very social settings in which Lepanto took on its Christian guise: The circulation of news and staging of festivities made Lepanto, in Barcelona and elsewhere, a locally shaped event of an imagined significance for the entirety of Christianity.

### **Making the Cross and Crucifix Emblematic**

The local glorification of Lepanto as a “Christian victory” set the stage for the veneration of the *Sant Crist de Lepant*. No archival documents seem to exist that refer to this item already in 1571. No wonder as Don John, at whose ship the crucifix was kept according to the legend, spent the winter following the battle with the Spanish fleet in Sicily. However, references to the crucifix in the documents that were issued in the following months are not traceable either.



What is well documented, however, is the fact that Don John of Austria consciously distributed both booty taken during the battle and objects that were aboard the Spanish galleys whilst the battle took place. Such actions were considered good deeds that stimulate piety, and the exchange and gifting of material keepsakes of the battle served as a means of community-making amongst the soldiers (Hanß 2017a: 287–404). In this context, crucifixes were particularly prominent keepsakes as news circulated already a few days before the battle that Don John had confirmed on oath in front of a crucifix to fight the Ottoman fleet (ÖNB, Cod. 8949: fol. 270<sup>v</sup>, Rome, 6 October 1571). A telling example is the crucifix kept in the Neapolitan Church dei Santi Severino e Sossio. It is said to have been on the ship of Don John during the Battle of Lepanto. Arrived in Naples, the legend tells, the commander gave the crucifix to Vincenzo Carafa who, in turn, gave it to his brother Luigi, the abbot of Santi Severino e Sossio. The same church also keeps a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century painting that is assumed to be another piece of memorabilia donated by Don John of Austria. Parts of his battle armour as well as Ottoman cannon balls and an Ottoman banner already disappeared in the early nineteenth century (Gatalani 1845: 143; Grimaldi 1857: V–VI; Conforti 1886: V–VI). Given the thousands of objects that circulated after the battle, institutions and individuals actively engaged in a market of goods associated with the battle that easily led to competition over the possession of such artefacts. In Naples, for instance, San Pietro a Majella also held an *ex voto* and Ottoman flag linked to the memory of the Battle of Lepanto (Grimaldi 1857: 276; Conforti 1886). It has thus to be stated that materials not only represented the battle’s religious interpretation, but that also Lepanto’s powerful imagination as a “Christian victory” stimulated the wish to possess and display objects associated with a conquest that was commonly referred to as the result of God’s action.



**Fig. 3:** The banner of the “Holy League”, here as an illustration in a contemporary print, prominently displays Christ Crucified. Figueroa 1571a: fol. 4<sup>v</sup>. BVR, S. Borr. Q. I. 301(9)). © Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Rome.

In this scenario of people's interest in a material culture that memorised the battle as a "Christian victory", the cross and crucifix became emblematic features. These symbols were stitched on many of the individual ships' standards (AST, Materie militare, Imprese, m. 1, n. 3: fol. 6<sup>v</sup>–17<sup>v</sup>, Barcelona, 18 July 1571). The official banner of the "Holy League" – consecrated by the Pope in Rome, later given to Don John in a solemn ceremony in Naples and finally run up at the galley of Don John of Austria (Fedele 1903) – showed the crest of Spain on the one hand and of the Republic of Venice on the other, both connected with a cord that leads to the emblem of the Papacy. The emblems are enthroned by a representation of Christ Crucified. Exactly this heraldic ensemble became a visual trope for the league's victory at Lepanto, and it is this reference that made the crucifix in Barcelona a visual quote of the most profound emblem of the league. Soon after the news started to circulate, a Spanish account was printed that contained an illustration of the banner (fig. 3). The author of the print was no other than Lope de Figueroa, the special envoy that Don John himself had dispatched to spread news about Lepanto in Italian and Spanish courts. The very same printed account states that after God had given the victory to Don John's flagship in the moment that the Ottoman commander was decapitated and another five hundred Ottomans were killed, Don John ordered the standard to be set up and the cross to be erected (Figueroa 1571a: fol. 3<sup>r</sup>; Figueroa 1571b: fol. 2<sup>v</sup>). This description may refer to the crucifix in Barcelona or Naples, or it simply points to the standard's iconography, but it doubtlessly illustrates the degree to which both the cross and Christ Crucified encapsulated the idea of a "Christian victory" caused by God's intervention. Already in their first reports from the battlefield, soldiers of the "Holy League" stated that they fought "against the major enemies of the Cross of Jesus Christ" (AST, Materie militare, Imprese, m. 1, Nr. 5, Report of Antonio da Canale, Astakos, 8 October 1571: fol. 2<sup>v</sup>). The crucifix was lauded in popular chants in Barcelona from early on and it soon decorated the title pages of prints on the "felicitous victory" (Caminete s.a.; Carignano s.a.). Indeed, entire poems on Lepanto were written in form of a cross (Seiano 1572: fol. 1<sup>v</sup>):

*Hostis ferus vincitur in hoc signo Crucis.*

<i>Dextera furem Sensit amicum.</i>	<i>Crux Natum Superum sustinuit Paris, Qui lauti proprio sanguine crimina.</i>	<i>Leuaq[ue] contra Sensit iniquum.</i>
---	--	---

*Sub pede ligni  
Flentes funera dira  
Staba[n]t Discipulus, Pare[n]s.  
Crux hæc modis constat sacris.  
Flexo genu procumbite.  
Crux Sancta Salve dicite.*

Poems like this and other prints alike literally *made* the cross the *in hoc signo vinces* which they describe. A print of the ducal congratulatory letter sent to Don John, for instance, ends with a woodcut showing a prelate worshipping a crucifix (Anonym 1571a: fol. 4<sup>v</sup>). The laudatory sermon held on the occasion of the Battle of Lepanto in Barcelona in November 1571 also shows the adoration of Christ Crucified on the title page (Ribas 1571: fol. 1<sup>r</sup>). The same woodcut adorned the title page of an account of the battle's order of events, printed in Barcelona in November 1571 (Anonym 1571b: fol. 1<sup>r</sup>). Popular songs, distributed in print directly after the arrival of the news, also contained prominent illustrations of Christ Crucified (Granado 1571: fol. 1<sup>r</sup>). Handwritten notes on a print that praised "our Redeemer Jesus Christ" in 1572 furthermore prove that such prints were bought in Barcelona soon after their publication (Brabo 1572: fol. 4<sup>v</sup>: *fue vendida la p[rese]nte obra al miercolº a 29 de abril 1573 [v]endida en la p[rese]nte ciudad de barcº*). It is this material culture of laudatory prints that transformed the crucifix and cross into a visual and mnemonic feature that materialised the reading of the battle as a victory granted to Christianity by God.

If we take the oral legend around the *Sant Crist de Lepant* seriously and confront it with the written documentation, it demonstrates nothing less than that the cathedral's crucifix is the very same one that Figueroa described as the ultimate symbol of the victory: in the moment the battle was won, the crucifix was erected as the sign of God's intervention. Unfortunately, a closer material examination of the actual object seems to be impossible due to its exceptional veneration. We have thus to rely on early descriptions that state that the artefact was presumably carved in the fifteenth century (Mas 1906: 36). The first reference to the *Sant Crist de Lepant*, thus far unknown to research, dates to 1589. In this year, Miguel de Rosers, citizen of Barcelona, published a poem that praises the "cross of Jesus Christ, our redeemer." The print lacks any direct reference to the Battle of Lepanto but a close reading reveals its local context. The last line states that the vicar read the poem before its publication, a sentence that clearly shows that the poem was written with the local church in mind – maybe even commissioned by its clerics (De Rosers 1589; no reference was found in ACB, Liber resolutionum dictus de la civella ab anno 1501 ad 1624, t. 1: fol. 150<sup>v</sup>–151<sup>v</sup> [1589]). The poem praises the Holy Cross that defeated the "serpent", "cruel animal", and "enemy". In the tradition of biblical metaphors (Daniel 7), all these words were commonly attributed to the Ottomans in sixteenth-century crusade rhetoric (Wolter 1992; Andermann 2000). In addition, the poem mentions the "bright and admirable standard", a line that refers to the emblematic standard of the Holy League that shows a crucifix itself. Also the brocade, which still today adorns the crucifix, is mentioned in the poem. Above all, however, the last page of the print states that a ship brought the cross along with a variety of treasures (De Rosers 1589):

*[Q]ual muy pujante linda y rica naue,  
trahe a buen puerto el fruto delicado,  
ansi madero dulce y muy suaue,  
en ti el sagrado trigo esta guardado.  
Hallamos baxo desta clara llaue,  
las perlas, oro, joyas, y el brocado,  
mirandonos en este lindo espejo,  
limbre de gracia lleno y de consejo.*

*O sacra planta y Cruz bien esmaltada,  
en campo fértil puesta real pomposa,  
en ti queda el alma empapada,  
como en fuente rica y abundosa.  
Mas que el puro crystal eres preciada  
resplandesciente clara y poderosa  
por ti aquel summo Rey de gloria eterno,  
nos librara del fuego del infierno.  
Amen, A[me]n.*

I consider this poem the first textual evidence of the veneration of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* in Barcelona, eighteen years after the battle. What remains a mystery is when and how exactly the object entered the cathedral. The lack of textual evidence cannot be taken as a proof of the falsehood of the artefact's traditional association with the Battle of Lepanto given the existence of crucifixes on Don John's galley as well as his above-described interest in the strategic distribution of objects related to the battle and his own allegedly heroic deeds. Barcelona's outstanding significance for the fleet's departure, in fact, would make it a highly suitable place for the gifting of such a symbolic devotional object. The poem of De Rosers documents the veneration of a crucifix in relation to the Battle of Lepanto in Barcelona in the late 1580s. Whether the crucifix arrived already directly after the battle, if so most probably in 1572, or only in 1589, the year when the poem was printed, cannot be stated for sure. Later historians assumed that the crucifix might have arrived in Barcelona together with further booty taken from the Ottomans at Lepanto (Solà i Moreta 1950). However, the poem may simply have been distributed on the occasion of a sermon. The fact that the poem was printed almost two decades after the actual battle also might point to the fact that the local clerics wished to revitalise the cult around the object. The Cathedral Archive's documentation makes it evident that the sixteenth-century veneration of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* has to be contextualised in very local terms. Just a few months before the Battle of Lepanto, clerics debated possibilities of increasing the local cult of relics (ACB, Liber resolutionum dictus de la civella ab anno 1501 ad 1624, t. 1: fol. 78<sup>v</sup>, 7 July 1571). Even though it cannot be proven that the object actually was on the ship of Don John of Austria during the Battle of Lepanto, it is clear that the *Sant Crist de Lepant* was already related to the battle by its contemporaries. The arrival and veneration of the crucifix, however, has not only to be considered as a conscious and strategic decision of the commander of the league, but also of local religious elites who wished to foster the importance of the cathedral.



## The Maintenance of Memory in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Barcelona

*Por baixo do sol vemos um homem nu atado a um tronco de árvore,  
cingidos os rins por um pano que lhe cobre as partes a que chamamos  
pudendas ou vergonhosas, e os pés ternos assentes no que resta de  
um ramo lateral cortado, porém, por maior firmeza, para que não res-  
valem desse suporte natural, dois pregos os mantêm, cravados fundo.*  
(Saramago 1991: 1)

Saramago's mundane perspective reminds us that a crucifix, in order to keep its power as a venerated object, has to be interpreted as a crucifix. The very same is true for the *Sant Crist de Lepant*: For the special veneration of this particular religious object, it was integral to ensure the continuity of the artefact's association with the memory of the Battle of Lepanto. Print culture was a means to achieve this goal in the seventeenth century. In 1623, Antonio de la Fay published three *romances* in Barcelona that reminded the inhabitants of the city of the "golden standard" in Don John's galley. The "figurative Christ," according to the folk chant, led the commander of the league to victory. The very same poem stated that Don John gave thanks to God for the victory with his eyes fixed at the crucifix. The soldiers killed during the battle had died "in defense of faith" and "for Christ Crucified" (De la Fay 1623: fol. 1<sup>v</sup>–2<sup>v</sup>), a reference that local readers surely associated with the crucifix of the cathedral. The publication of this laudatory poem, decades after the battle, may indicate that the memory of Lepanto was particularly vivid in a place like Barcelona where the veneration of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* generated an imaginative presence of the battle even years after the actual event. However, the print can also be taken as a sign that early seventeenth-century protagonists considered it important to remember an audience of the special biography of this artefact. Thousands of Ottoman objects were taken during the battle and flooded the market afterwards. First prominently displayed in cabinets or churches, many of them were sold later on (Hanß 2017a: 341 for an example from Pisa). It is thus by no means self-explanatory that the crucifix in Barcelona kept its association with the memory of the battle throughout the centuries. The object's evocative potential – a crucifix, materialising a widely praised and memorised "Christian victory", erected in the local cathedral – is for sure crucial in this context as the crucifix was able to enact people's emotional engagement with this particular object over centuries.

Prints, such as the one of Antonio de la Fay, kept this artefact's biographical memory alive. Furthermore, the clerics of the cathedral ensured the crucifix's continuous religious veneration by the foundation of a religious confraternity (Solà i Moreta 1950: 37–42). The statutes of the *Congregació del Sant Crist de la Galera de la Seu de Barcelona*, written down in 1762 and preserved in the holdings of the archive of the cathedral, document the eighteenth-century attempts to codify the biography of the crucifix in a century when contemporaries became increasingly suspicious about religious legends. It was emphasised that the crucifix was venerated for a "long time". 1651, however, is presented as the year of the foundation of the confraternity. After a plague epidemic, Barcelona faced a new intensification of the cult around the Lepanto crucifix in the mid-seventeenth century. In this particular context, the key goal of the confraternity was seen as the perpetuation of the veneration of the devotional artefact in regular festivities (ACB, *Llibre de la Congregació del Sant Crist de la Galera de la Seu de Barcelona*, t. 1: 1–8).

The confraternity's textual documentation has to be understood as a codification of the stories surrounding the crucifix. This enterprise of fixing oral memory into written form was clearly based on the established sixteenth-century narrative of a "Christian victory", won by heavenly-chosen Habsburgs over Muslims. The "Great Turk" (*Gran Turch*) and the "Barbarians" (*Barbaros*) that had terrorised the entire Mediterranean, the confraternity's book states, had been defeated by a union "of all Christian potentates." When the battle was about to begin, Don John of Austria, "son of the invincible Charles V", raised "a large *Sant Christo*, which he carried in his *Capitana* [galley], and other images of Our Lady." The statutes re-tell the story of the Battle of Lepanto as a clash of Christian and Muslim civilisations. The Barcelona crucifix, described as the one object that the supreme commander had raised at the beginning of the battle and gifted to the clergy of Barcelona afterwards, is presented as the guarantor of a victory over an outnumbering Ottoman fleet (ACB, *Llibre de la Congregació del Sant Crist de la Galera de la Seu de Barcelona*, t. 1: 2–3).

The *Sant Crist de Lepant*, according to that logic, was an object that visualised God's deeds. In fact, the religious conception of this artefact made the object also *materialise* the battle's interpretation as a victory achieved and granted by God. The confraternity's book states that the unusually curved form of the crucifix is itself the result of God's actions during the battle. Christ was said to have avoided an Ottoman cannonball, which explained his curved posture. According to this interpretation, the object itself materialised the battle's historical interpretation as an event and presents the "secrets of God". This made the crucifix an object that deserved special devotional

rites, performed by the members of the confraternity that had to ensure the artefact's veneration in devotions and processions (ACB, *Llibre de la Congregació del Sant Crist de la Galera de la Seu de Barcelona*, t. 1: 2–5).

The eighteenth-century registers of the confraternity recorded ideas about the sixteenth-century past of the crucifix and the seventeenth-century foundation of the confraternity. A reference shows that prints were consulted in order to add written evidence to the oral legend surrounding the object. Members of the confraternity consulted a print on the lives of the saints, written by the Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira and published in 1688, in order to add stories about Pope Pius V, who was beatified in 1672, to their local story-telling (ACB, *Llibre de la Congregació del Sant Crist de la Galera de la Seu de Barcelona*, t. 1: 4; Ribadeneira 1688). This print's prominent introductory illustration surely also prompted the members of the confraternity to draw a telling sketch at the beginning of their records (fig. 4). The members of the confraternity, singing and praying, kneel in front and aside the richly adorned altar with the Lepanto crucifix. A galley reminds the viewer of the battle, and painted banners contain the sung verses. The image prominently states Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” The quote from the Bible clearly contextualises the image as a visual representation of the confraternity's liturgical actions. Exactly these liturgical practices and their visual representation ensured the veneration of an object which was considered to represent the mysteries of God's actions in the world. The most important document of the confraternity thus portrays the religious institution itself as the crucial memory-bearer. By upholding a tradition of liturgical practices, the confraternity perpetuated the memory of the object's biography as being of devotional significance. Centuries after the Battle of Lepanto, the crucifix thus stirred people's imaginations and prompted them to care about how the object was treated, displayed and transmitted.



**Fig. 4:** An eighteenth-century sketch of the veneration of the *Sant Crist de Lepant*, which was inserted into the book of the confraternity. ACB, *Llibre de la Congregació del Sant Crist de la Galera de la Seu de Barcelona*, 1695–1762, t. 1: fol. 1<sup>r</sup>. © Arxiu Capitular Barcelona, Drets Reservats. Prohibida la reproducció total o parcial.

## The Dis/Continuity of the Production and Material Memory of History: The Lepanto Crucifix in Francoist Barcelona

*Cristo  
tenía un espejo  
en cada mano.  
Multiplicaba  
su propio espectro.  
Proyectaba su corazón  
en las miradas  
negras.  
¡Creo!*

Federico García Lorca, *Símbolo* (García Lorca 2001: 54)

The poem of García Lorca, one of the most important Spanish authors and a main figure of the memory of Spain's Republic past, reminds us about the multifaceted perspectives that turn objects, such as a representation of Christ, into a symbol like the Lepanto crucifix. Christ, García Lorca writes, may take "a mirror in each hand", multiplying his shadow and projecting "his heart through his black visions" (García Lorca 2001: 55). It is time for historians to reveal the dark shadows of the mirrors of the *Sant Crist de Lepant*, which lead us to Spain in summer 1939, three years after fascist troops had killed the gifted poet.

When fascist troops captured the city of Barcelona, itself a lighthouse of Republicanism, in 1939, the crucifix was deeply rooted in local memory. Since the turn of the century, printed leaflets had been spreading the legend of the crucifix's prodigious quality resulting from its association with the Battle of Lepanto (ACB, *Llibre de la Confraria del Santo Cristo de Lepanto*, t. 2). Cheaply produced and easily distributed during ceremonies, such prints canonised the confraternity's textual tradition and made the devotional artefact a locally memorialised object of religious significance. With the Francoist conquest of Barcelona the biography of the crucifix of Lepanto made it an ideal artefact to claim and stage new interpretations about Spain's past, present and future (Lannon 2002; Payne 2004, 2006, 2012). The *Falange Española* consciously used the locally established veneration of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* for the sake of self-fashioning: During a quasi-religious fascist ceremony, Francisco Franco offered his sword to the crucifix whilst he drank "Holy Water" and received the blessings of Bishop Leopoldo Eijo y Garay. Throughout this and further processions and speeches in the direct aftermath of the conquest of the city, Franco presented himself as a new Don John whose nationalist troops fought the "new Ottomans", the communists (Aronna 2009: 165-166). Photographs document the degree to which such ceremonial self-fashioning took place. An image from 1939, for instance, shows a parade of clerics and soldiers in front of the gate of the cathedral (fig. 5). Surrounded by men in religious vestments and military uniforms, soldiers performed the Roman salute in front of the Lepanto crucifix that was surrounded by fascist flags (Anonym ["Gonlor"] 2010). Another image, taken only some years later, in 1944, shows the huge audience which such processions were able to attract (fig. 6). As



**Fig. 5:** (left) A fascist-clerical procession of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* after Barcelona was taken from the Republican troops in 1939. © Anonym ("Gonlor") 2010, <http://rayosycentellas.net/guerracivil/?p=231>, 7 March 2010/ 30 September 2014. **Fig. 6:** (right) A crowd of people adoring the *Sant Crist de Lepant* in Barcelona in 1944. © González 2014, <http://blogs.publico.es/fuera-de-foco/2013/04/19/la-barcelona-mas-oscuras-los-anos-de-posguerra/>, 30 September 2014.



the photograph is taken from behind the crucifix and as fascist soldiers clearly regulated access to space in front of the crucifix, we have to take the ideological purpose of the image itself in mind. In fact, a comparable picture was published in the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia* on 8 April 1944, reporting about the crucifix's veneration during Easter processions. Taken by a Francoist soldier, cleric, or journalist, it places the crucifix in the very centre of the setting. This visual composition stages the fascists, who adopted the devotional cult around the artefact, as a movement that reaches the masses (González 2014).

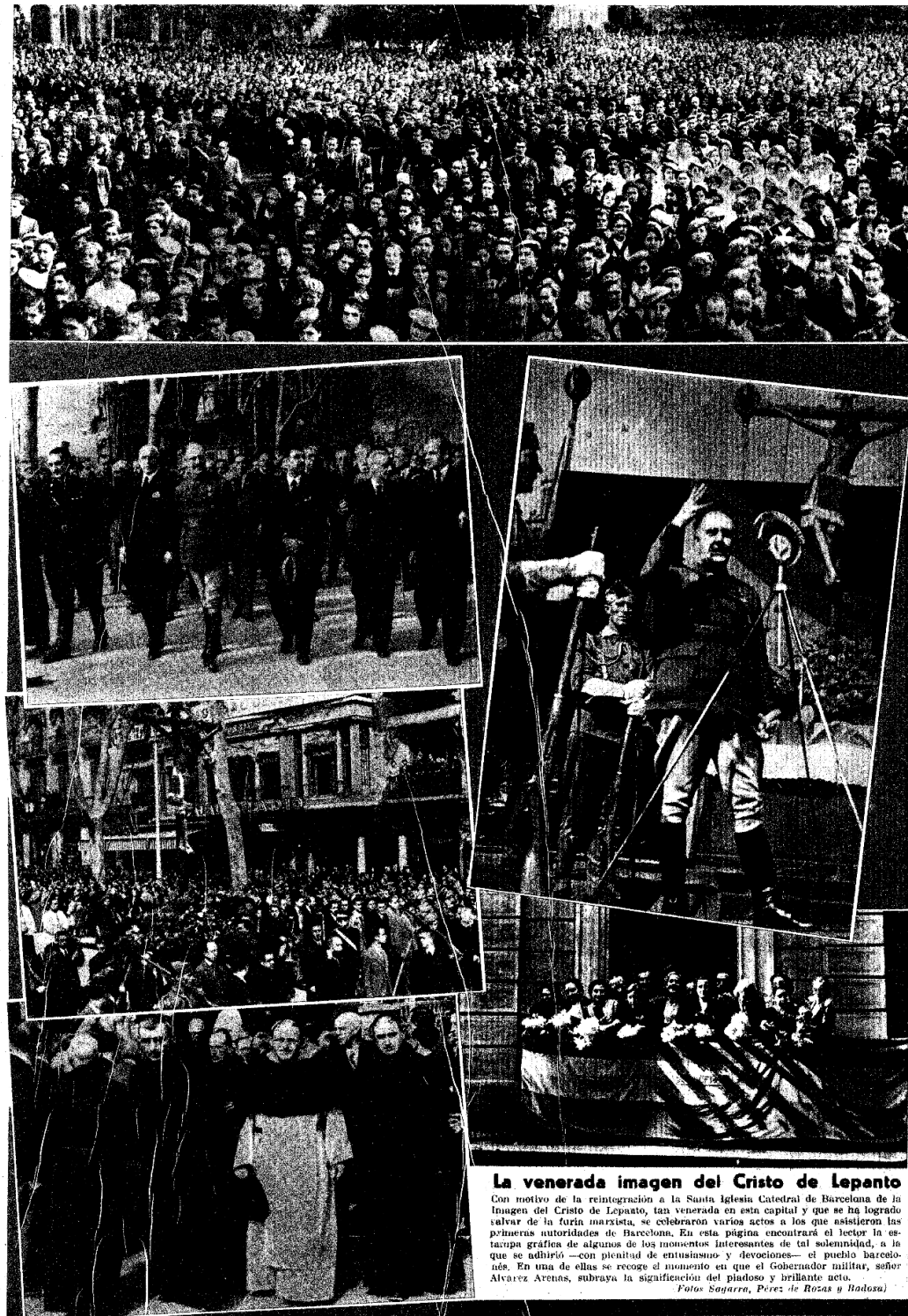


Fig. 7: Franco speaking in front of the *Sant Crist de Lepant*. *La Vanguardia* 55 (12 March 1939): 2. © Hemeroteca – *La Vanguardia*, <http://www.lavanguardia.com/hemeroteca>.

Such enactments were based on a long-established rhetoric. Around 1900, nationalist, monarchical, and clerical circles “remembered history” as a “sacralization of the national past” (Boyd 1997: 99–121). Christian (1992) has also shown that the rural parts of Spanish society faced a new intensification of the local veneration of a number of crucifixes in the early twentieth century. On several occasions, believers saw visions that centred on crucifixes, stories that widely circulated amongst church officials, journalists, and the public. The re-vitalisation of the veneration of the Lepanto crucifix in late nineteenth-century Barcelona has to be situated in the very same context. Solà i Moreta (1950: 84–85) gives an impressive list of offerings donated to the crucifix in the 1870s. In the early twentieth century, the crucifix was prominently associated with the period of Lent (Solà i Moreta 1950: 97–99). A monograph from Francoist Barcelona, published in 1950, describes the Lepanto crucifix as “the first victim” of the uprising in July 1936. The author states, in clear ideological tones, that the crucifix was “rescued” together with other items of the treasury of the Cathedral from the socialists, anarchists, and communists (Solà i Moreta 1950: 103). George Orwell’s report reminds us that many churches in Barcelona had been looted, and religious images were burnt in the months before the fascists had taken the city (Orwell 2000 [1938]: 3, 33). Yet Orwell also recalls the value of a photograph in this time, carefully kept but nevertheless stolen, and what it actually meant that media consciously served ideological purposes (Orwell 2000 [1938]: 17, 137). Based on his experience as a soldier fighting the fascist troops in the service of the Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification in Catalonia in 1936/37, Orwell stated the following: “When you are taking part in events like these you are, I suppose, in a small way, *making history*, and you ought by rights to feel like an historical character. (...) If this was history it did not feel like it” (Orwell 2000 [1938]: 126–127). It might have felt like “history” or not, only a couple of months later fascist Francoists clearly *made history* by using the Lepanto crucifix: The Francoist troops staged their own views about the past for the sake of fashioning themselves as a movement of historical significance. In conscious contrast to the previous neglect of religious material culture, Franco and his followers used the locally established material memory of the Battle of Lepanto for reinterpreting their own combat during the Spanish Civil War as a “new crusade” (Payne 1987: 197–209). In March 1939, Franco gave a speech in front of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* (fig. 7). The Catalan newspaper then praised the fascist who saved the crucifix from the “Marxist fury” (*La Vanguardia* 55 [12 March 1939]: 2; detailed description of the festivities in Solà i Moreta 1950: 104–106). Franco himself even ordered the crucifix to be transported to Madrid in the very same year. Here, the crucifix was on display in the Church of Santa Bárbara for festivities commemorating the Battle of Lepanto (Solà i Moreta 1950: 109–111). Just two years later, around 300,000 people are said to have assembled in order to venerate the crucifix, which was carried through the city in a splendid procession. The ceremonial act was defined as “ritual purification”: “Barcelona purifies its streets”, a newspaper described the celebrations in which the mayor publically begged for the crucifix’s pardon for its neglect in the years of late Republicanism, and a benediction was said. A newspaper article illustrates the new symbiosis of a Francoist-Christian interpretation of Lepanto by showing an image of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* with an armed soldier on the newspaper’s front page (fig. 8, *La Vanguardia* 57 [25 March 1941]: 1). All this evidence should prompt historians to reconsider the political implications of what Orwell described as “making history” (Orwell 2000 [1938]: 126), in this particular case the production of the history of the Battle of Lepanto throughout the past in reference to specific artefacts. Franco clearly fashioned himself as a saviour of the object that was thought to have saved Christianity. As a consequence, it is time to uncover the microhistories of objects that seem to encapsulate narratives – and their implicit ideologies – that describe the Battle of Lepanto as a clash of civilizations.

As the public benedictions, processions as well as the blessings of Leopoldo Eijo y Garay demonstrate (Aronna 2009: 166), the Francoist self-fashioning in regard to Lepanto relied on and ensured the support of clerical elites. During the Civil War, high-ranking clerics like the archbishops of Valladolid and Córdoba as well as the bishops of Tui and Tenerife praised the fascist troops as crusaders. In October 1937, the archbishop of Granada even claimed that “we find ourselves once more at Lepanto” (Payne 1987: 206). As can be spelled out in detail for the memory of the Battle of Lepanto, Francoists consciously adopted clerical strategies of self-fashioning in order to memorialise the fascists’ combat in ideological terms. When the *Falange Española* organised a celebration of the conquest of Barcelona in June 1939, the *Fiesta de la Confirmación*, a gigantic cross was erected in front of the palace of the former Generalitat de Catalunya (fig. 9). Adorned with the Francoist banner, hundreds of children clad in white mirrored the form of the cross in the crowd of people. This symbolism, centred on the cross, transformed the conquest of Republican Barcelona ideologically into a “Christian victory” and made the narratives of Lepanto, encapsulated in the material presence of the Barcelona crucifix, applicable to a completely different historical situation (Lannon 2002: 68; Di Febo 2002: 97–101). In that context, the object not only represented a past but actively shaped the interpretation of the historical present, as it was able to mobilise emotions and to grant interpretations about the past plausibility. Exactly because the city was such a symbol of Republicanism, it served the Francoist









Fig. 9: The *Fiesta de la Confirmación* staged at the Plaça Sant Jaume, Barcelona, 16 June 1939. © González 2014, <http://blogs.publico.es/fuera-de-foco/2013/04/19/la-barcelona-mas-oscura-los-anos-de-posguerra/>, 30. September 2014.

This rhetoric classified the current combats as being of historical significance by adopting the historical narratives that characterised Lepanto as a decisive moment for the following centuries of the history of “the Christian occident”. This narrative was widely shared, also internationally. The British conservative journalist Arthur F. Lovejoy, who published an interview with Franco in the very same year that Barcelona was taken by the fascist troops (1939), dedicated the volume “to Spain. The Savior of Western Europe. From The Crescent, Lepanto, 1571. From the Sickle and Hammer, 1936–1939” (Dietz 2012: 259).

After 1939, the reference to the Battle of Lepanto became a crucial element of Spanish fascist ideology. Luis Carrero Blanco, “the grey eminence of the Franco regime” (Tusell 1993), published a monograph on the battle in 1948. Modern researchers have called Carrero Blanco’s text a “plagiarized digest” of sixteenth-century descriptions of the battle (Aronna 2009: 166). Consequently, he portrays the Ottomans in accordance with early modern narratives as a “terrible peril” that threatened “Europe (...) and the Christian civilisation”. However, he explicitly sketches the situation in 1571 in relation to the one in early Francoist Spain: “a mysterious, barbarous, anti-Christian” power, a tyranny that enslaves people, would fight against Christianity, which is in a state of agony and quarrel. In 1571 just “as now” again, Carrero Blanco continues, “militant Catholicism” is facing “the enemies of faith” in a struggle between lie and truth. In the volume’s preface, Carrero Blanco explicitly identifies the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire with twentieth-century communism that, according to the author’s logic, had threatened “Christianity”. The fascist states that Stalin and the Soviet politburo are “fight[ing] for world domination”, as were once the Ottoman Sultan and his admirals. It is the old story of the “Turkish menace”, that was integral for Catholic and national ideology (Höfert 2003), which now took on its fascist guise. Carrero Blanco also parallels Franco in accordance with this logic as “saviour of Christianity”. Like once Philip II and Don John won fame for their fight against the Ottomans, the Spanish “crusader” of the twentieth century, Carrero Blanco states, kept the “spirit of Lepanto” (*espíritu de Lepanto*) alive (Carrero Blanco 1948: 9–10, 12, 214).

What Franco’s second man called the *espíritu de Lepanto* was the idea of a Christian crusade against infidels that derived from sixteenth-century interpretations of Lepanto as a Spanish victory through which God managed the

course of history for the following centuries. A poem of Manuel Machado, printed in a Catalan newspaper in 1940, illustrates this idea with the slogan “one faith, one captain, and one victory.” Just as in Lepanto, the poem reads, the current victory of the fascist troops in the Spanish Civil War will reshape history (La Vanguardia 56 [31 March 1940]: 3). This narrative now prominently featured Francoist ideology. It was spread via popular film productions such as *Jeromín* (1953) that praised Don John of Austria as a hero for his fight against Muslims (Sánchez-Marcos 2012). The main encyclopedias labelled Lepanto as *Auxilium Christianorum* (Lepanto ó Naupaktos 1967: 61), and schoolbooks also disseminated the idea of a “Turkish threat” that the Spaniards had stopped in “defence of faith” (Blanco Hernando 1963: 557; Álvarez Pérez 1962: 469; *Nueva enciclopedia escolar* 1975: 375). Carrero Blanco’s concept of the *espíritu de Lepanto* thus had a profound impact on the cultural memory of the Battle of Lepanto and it was clearly associated with the crucifix in the cathedral of Barcelona. Carrero Blanco entitled his monograph *The Victory of the Christ of Lepanto* (Carrero Blanco 1948). An introductory illustration shows galleys that are enthroned by exactly the *Sant Crist de Lepant* that is venerated in Barcelona. The image proves the eponymic character of the Lepanto crucifix in Barcelona for the propaganda book (fig. 10).



**Fig. 10:** An illustration of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* in Carrero Blanco’s propaganda book (1948).



Consequently, the Francoist regime carefully orchestrated the battle's 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1971. A national committee was installed which, under the leadership of Núñez Iglesias, planned the organisation of this day (La Vanguardia 87 [7 October 1971]: 3). The schedule of the urban festivities in Barcelona was published in the local newspaper well in advance. On the morning of 7 October, a "solemn act" was organised in the *Salón de Ciento*, the historic seat of the municipal council of Barcelona. In the presence of the Prince of Spain and high-ranking ministers of the Franco regime, the mayor praised the city for its most venerable trophy of Lepanto, the crucifix which is on display in the cathedral. Juan Carlos and Sofía of Spain then attended a special service held in the cathedral of Barcelona in the presence of fascist militaries at 11 AM. The following day, the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia* reported that the archbishop had preached a sermon about the importance of "maintain[ing] the *espíritu* that animated the historical moment of Lepanto." The reference point for this sermon is clearly Carrero Blanco's monograph, in which he outlined Spain's imperial ambitions in regard to the memory of the Battle of Lepanto: "*Meditemos y, con confianza ciega en la Santa causa de España, sepamos conservar el espíritu de Lepanto*" (1948: 12). In front of the altar with the Lepanto crucifix, archbishop González Martín traced the victory to heavenly intervention and praised "the profound piety and affection that the simple folk of Barcelona has for the *Cristo de Lepanto*." In the afternoon, the crucifix was carried to the shipyard in a royal procession on the occasion of the inauguration of a memorial. Here, a reconstruction of Don John of Austria's galley, which is still on display today, was consecrated and a memorial exhibition opened (La Vanguardia 87 [7 October 1971]: 3, 27, 39; La Vanguardia 87 [8 October 1971]: 1, 3, 4; ABC Sevilla (9 October 1971): 5). The battle's anniversary thus coincided with a whole series of celebratory events. The Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia* charts the local perception of these events and shows that these celebratory acts centred on the *Sant Crist de Lepant* in Barcelona. On that occasion, articles reminded the readers of a Spanish victory of decisive quality for the course of the following centuries. Honorary medals were distributed, special stamps issued and warships named after the battle (La Vanguardia 87 [7 October 1971]: 5, 47; La Vanguardia 87 [8 October 1971]: 39; La Vanguardia 87 [10 October 1971]: 10).

The Lepanto celebrations in 1971 followed a logic that Franco himself had established already several decades earlier. On the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Miguel de Cervantes (29 September 1547), Franco linked the birth of Spain's most famous poet with the Battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571), where Cervantes had fought and lost his hand in military service. On 7 October 1947 the regime celebrated Cervantes in the Museo Naval in Madrid, where the Lepanto crucifix from Barcelona was on display (Solà i Moreta 1950: 114–115). In the very same year, Carrero Blanco's monograph won the Premio Nacional de Literatura "José Antonio Primo de Rivera", named after the founder of the *Falange Española*. Víctor María de Solà's ideological monograph on Lepanto (1947) was likewise awarded (Gobierno de España 2017). On the occasion of the battle's 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1971, Carrero Blanco's monograph was reissued. The author again presented the battle as a clash of "two groups of nations, two civilisations, two ethnic currents and two moral conceptions" (Carrero Blanco 1971: 9). It is the old narrative of a clash of civilisations, a crude oversimplification of complex historical realities that served to underpin fascist ideological claims. In the second edition, the volume clearly relates this narrative to the Lepanto crucifix in Barcelona. The monograph even contained a photograph of the league's banner as well as the *Sant Crist de Lepant*. A caption states that the crucifix is venerated in the cathedral of Barcelona (Carrero Blanco 1971). Parts of the contents of the book, including the image of the *Sant Crist de Lepant*, were reprinted in popular magazines (*Magazin Estafeta literaria: revista quincenal de libros, artes y espectáculos* 477 (1971): 20–27). Thus, the Lepanto crucifix in Barcelona was a central material component of the fascist ideology in Spain over decades. Carrero Blanco's reinterpretation of historical narratives transformed the Francoist victory over the Republican troops into a religious victory over infidels. It was the crucifix that transformed the ideology into a convincing interpretation of the past and a widely accepted narrative of the present.

### The Sant Crist de Lepant: An Object that Made History

*La respuesta es la misma  
pregunta disfrazada.*

Federico García Lorca, Reflexión (García Lorca 1998: 128)

This article has presented a material microhistory of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* in order to problematise the deep entanglement of objects from the past and narratives about the past. By talking about the continuities and discontinuities of history in regard to one particular artefact, this paper discusses how historians may address objects that actually made history in dense and reflective narratives. Throughout the centuries material culture clearly served to



establish, communicate and perpetuate a simplified idea of complex past realities. As a consequence, this particular mode of the production of history affected ideas about history as it established invented traditions about the past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The myth of Lepanto, materialised in the cultural biography of the crucifix from Barcelona, shaped the “biography of the myth” that surrounded Franco himself (Cazorla Sánchez 2015). The idea about Lepanto as an event of historical significance, which was deeply rooted in the sixteenth-century narrative of a clash of civilizations, also served the Francoist regime to fashion itself as a movement of historical importance. The Lepanto crucifix thus became an integral element in materialising central claims of fascist ideology. This is the moment in which the object’s power to shape history becomes most visible: As early modern contemporaries had made the cross emblematic for a battle’s outcome, the crucifix not only materialised but furthermore instantiated ideas about a Christian victory with all this narrative’s inherent power relations. The artefact mobilised emotions and political actions. Therefore, the object shaped history as it granted narratives about the past a historical presence that affected the course of future events.

The veneration of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* exemplifies a continuity of the production of history through the staged reference to historical artefacts, something that has to be addressed by historians, archaeologists and anthropologists alike. Even though the religious, nationalist, and fascist interpretations of the Lepanto crucifix varied throughout the centuries, the continuous reference to this particular object as miraculous matter (Bynum 2011) shaped history as it helped to grant religious and political ideologies and ideas about the past a material presence in everyday life. The crucifix’s significance for the production of history relied on the repetition of cultural practices. Exactly these practices ensured that the narratives that were told by referring to this particular object were taken for granted and thus were surrounded by an ahistorical aura. Processions, sermons, prayers, and further devotional acts granted the object a religious status as all these references *made* the crucifix an artefact that instantiated the idea of Lepanto as a “Christian victory”. Due to the repetition of these citational practices throughout the centuries, the object’s biography became an integral part of local memory that was communicated and spread through further material means such as texts and images. Exactly because of the repetition of cultural practices surrounding such objects, the presence of things mattered in crafting normative narratives about history on the one hand. On the other, it is precisely this character that granted the crucifix the power to likewise present and shape history and its power relations. The material culture of the Battle of Lepanto thus provided narratives that enabled future protagonists to claim reinvented traditions and also to continuously reinvent traditions. With reference to this particular artefact, history was shaped. Or in other words: Exactly because of the history of this particular artefact, this object shaped history.

In the light of these problematic traditions, we have to reconsider the status of historians as storytellers who engage with materials from the past. In 1950, Fortià Solà i Moreta reflected on his own “position as a historian” when writing in Catalan about the *Sant Crist de Lepant*. He wrote about the crucifix in order to illustrate the “glory of the city” as well as the religious and patriotic “national enthusiasm” throughout Francoist Spain (Solà i Moreta, 1950: 51, 53, 109, 111). The alarming longevity of this approach becomes evident in Spanish and Catalan encyclopaedias. In the Franco Era as well as today, the Lepanto crucifix is a prominent feature in encyclopaedic entries. On a narratological level, the reference to the crucifix serves to claim fame in the fight against the Ottomans on a local *and* national level. Catalan encyclopaedias emphasise the Catalan contribution to the victory, obviously silencing the fact that Catalonia was part of the Spanish monarchy at that time, as much as Francoist encyclopaedias praised the monarchy as a “saviour of Christian Europe”. Both interpretations, in the end, rely on the very same logic: the production of history through the reference to and usage of artefacts that are taken as material evidence for unquestioned historical narratives (Lepanto ó Naupaktos 1967: 58–61; Anguela i Dotres 1993: 606; Lepant, Sant Crist de 1987 [1974]: 436; Lepant, batalla de 1987 [first edition I 1974]: 435–436).

If we continue to talk about the Battle of Lepanto as a “Christian victory”, which is allegedly evident in objects such as the crucifix in Barcelona, we miss the chance to problematise the political implications of the production of history in reference to the material heritage of the past. As the narrative of a “Christian victory” makes Lepanto one of the most important reference points for neo-fascist groups throughout Europe today (Betz and Meret 2009), historians have to face the challenge and necessity to reveal the political implications of stories that surround early modern material culture. The *Sant Crist de Lepant* became a symbol for his multiplied shadows (García Lorca 2001: 54–55) that have to be addressed themselves. If historians take the narratives surrounding this artefact simply for granted, our responses will always tell the same stories of masked faces (García Lorca 1998: 128). Material microhistories of particular objects associated with the battle, however, decentre the prevalent narratives of the victory as much as they reveal the shockingly unquestioned continuity of material references that shaped history:

The Lepanto crucifix of Barcelona, for example, coined the iconography of illustrations in fascist publications as much as the iconography of amulets sold in the cathedral still today.

In 2011, Ai Weiwei painted a Coca Cola logo on the surface of a two-thousand year old Chinese vase from the period of the Han Dynasty (fig. 11, *Sotheby's* 2014). Widely seen as the destruction of ancient heritage, the performance problematises the relationship between craft and mass consumption as much as it created an emotional response to the material layers of history. In fact, the very act of painting also illustrated the caricaturing violence and imperial implications of the production of narratives about history by the usage of materials from the past. Historians may take this piece of art/history as a starting point to reconsider the performative aspects of past materials and the production of history. Instead of simply referring to the *Sant Crist de Lepant* in order to state that Lepanto was a Christian victory, it is time to examine how people throughout history experienced the past in relation to its material heritage. For this purpose, it is necessary to experiment with new narrative forms that present the past and its material culture(s) (Bernbeck 2010; 2015). This approach helps to historicise an historian's as well as an archaeologist's perspective on objects, too. Why is this crucifix praised so much by devout Christians throughout the centuries? It is praised as it is thought to exemplify God's action in the "heroic deeds" (Solà i Moreta 1950: 19) of Don John of Austria and his soldiers. Exactly these "heroic deeds", however, are nothing more and nothing less than the killing of thousands of people in the name of God. It is the precarious status of life that has to be problematised in such narratives about history (Butler 2006). Such power relations, both enacted and concealed in the object-centred act of the production of history, are the reasons why we have to reconsider the ability of objects to shape history.



**Fig. 11:** Ai Weiwei, *Coca Cola Vase* (2011), 30 x 30 x 27 cm. © Sotheby's, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.56.html/2014/contemporary-art-evening-auction-114024>, 17 October 2014/ 20 July 2017.

The only efficient way to do so is to "mak(e) things public" (González-Ruibal 2007: 203; González-Ruibal 2016): The stories surrounding this object deserve visibility in public space. It is worthy and necessary to think about possibilities to inform believers and visitors to the Cathedral in Barcelona as well as Notre Dame de la victoire de Lépante (St Raphaël, France), which holds a copy of the Lepanto crucifix (fig. 12). Information should be provided on how *Sant Crist de Lepant* was used by various protagonists throughout history – by clerics, fascists, and local patriots – in order to claim the legitimacy of power by talking about an allegedly "Christian Europe". In that

sense, a material microhistory of how objects shape(d) history may help to name those responsible for ideological misinterpretations of history and their severe, bloody consequences. As the veracity of the narrative of a “Christian victory” was staged by the usage of objects, the display of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* should also be related to the commemoration of the people killed throughout the battle, both of Christian and Muslim faith. It is time to address the material presence of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* and its impact on the production of history in different terms, most suitably in those that Walter Benjamin used to describe Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* (fig. 13):

“A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress” (Benjamin 2015: Theses on the Philosophy of History, IX).

The eyes and mouth of the *Sant Crist de Lepant* are still closed, yet he is similarly facing the catastrophes of the past, with arms widely spread, whilst his back is turned to the future. It is upon us to open our eyes to the “pile of debris” that accumulated whilst the crucifix staged past futures throughout history (Benjamin 2015: Theses on the Philosophy of History, IX; Koselleck 1979).



**Fig. 12:** (left) A copy of the Barcelona crucifix on display in Notre Dame de la victoire de Lépante, St Raphaël, France. © Beraudo 2017, <http://www.saintraphael-catho.com/2011/bilan-du-1er-colloque-de-saint-raphael-et-de-la-fete-de-saint-raphael/>, 19 July 2017. **Fig. 13:** (right) Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus* (1921), The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. © wikimedia commons, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Klee,\\_paul,\\_angelus\\_novus,\\_1920.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Klee,_paul,_angelus_novus,_1920.jpg), 19 July 2017.

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- AGS, Archivo General de Simancas.
- AHCB, Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona.
- AL, Arcadian Library, London.
- ASFi, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.
- ASGe, Archivio di Stato di Genova.
- AST, Archivio di Stato di Torino.
- ASV, Archivio di Stato di Venezia.
- BAV, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
- BC, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Barcelona.
- BMB, Biblioteca de Montserrat, Barcelona.
- BVR, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Rome.
- HHStA, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna.
- ÖNB, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.
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