

2007

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Recommended Citation

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BEDLAM IN BEIRUT: A BRITISH PERSPECTIVE IN 1826

THEOPHILUS C. PROUSIS¹

Foreign consuls from European states compiled countless communiqués about the state of the Ottoman Empire during the turbulent early nineteenth century, a period fraught with internal and external crises triggered by war, revolt, sectarian tension, the breakdown of once effective governing institutions, and European rivalries associated with the Eastern Question. Consular records offer firsthand information and a treasure trove of detail on economic, commercial, social, political, and military conditions in the Ottoman world. By relating specific incidents, episodes, and situations, eyewitness commentaries by consuls provide insight into urban and rural affairs and shed light on the human dimension of everyday life in Ottoman society during a time of chronic disorder and unrest. These advantages largely explain why scholars have tapped consular writings as a valuable resource for studying such topics as the Smyrna rebellion of 1797 and Ottoman reprisals against Greek Orthodox Christian subjects in Smyrna and Thessaloniki after the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821.² The unpublished document presented here, composed in 1826 by British consul John Barker in Aleppo, describes a failed Greek naval assault on Beirut and the harsh response by regional authorities against local Christians in this multi-confessional Levantine port. Barker's account merits attention and

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² For a British consul's view of an urban riot in Smyrna, provoked by a lack of discipline in the janissary corps, see Clogg 1983 and 1976:15-17. For consular descriptions of the turmoil and disorder in Smyrna and Thessaloniki in 1821-22, see Clogg 1972, Prousis, 1991, a translation and analysis of the unpublished diary of Russian consul-general Spyridon Destunis, and Lascaridis 1943.

commentary by historians of the Greek revolt and Ottoman society and exemplifies the usefulness of consular reports, widely dispersed in the archives of Britain, France, Russia, and Turkey, for examining specific aspects of the Ottoman Levant.

Beirut and Mount Lebanon formed part of Ottoman Syria, an expansive administrative region encompassing the contemporary lands of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank and divided into *pashaliks* (provinces) which included the key towns of Aleppo, Damascus, Acre, Tripoli, and Sidon. With the collapse of effective centralized rule, regional governors such as Ahmad al-Jazzar Pasha (1775-1804), Sulayman Pasha (1804-19), and Abdallah Pasha (1819-31) exerted sweeping power in their territories, relying on tax agents to collect tribute dues from urban and rural populations and on armed retinues comprised of regular and irregular forces to crush opposition and to maintain control. In Lebanon, Emir Bashir II enjoyed a long and successful stint (1788-1840) as chief tribute collector and local leader, preserving his command by supporting the nominal authority of the sultan and, more importantly, working closely with the principal powerbrokers in the Levant, above all Abdallah Pasha of Damascus and Acre. Bashir curbed threats from Lebanon's tribal chieftains, sheikhs, and notables who coveted his position, and the emir crushed a tax revolt in several districts that opposed the heavy tribute payments imposed by Abdallah Pasha.³ Bashir also collaborated with the upstart governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, the rebellious Albanian officer who transformed Egypt into a virtually independent entity and founded a dynasty that reigned well into the twentieth century. When Sultan Mahmud II called on Muhammad Ali's army and navy to subdue Greek rebels on Crete and in the Morea, Bashir pledged to supply Egypt's modernizing governor with 10,000 troops to assist in the anti-insurgent expedition (Salibi 1965:26).

It was during the tumultuous emirate of Bashir II that the relatively small and insignificant town of Beirut began to experience a growth spurt as a commercial center. Inhabited by nearly 8,000 residents in the mid-1820s, Beirut blossomed into a bustling

³ For an introduction to Ottoman rule in Syria in the early nineteenth century, including Lebanon during the emirate of Bashir II, see Fawaz 1983 and 1994, Harik 1968, Issawi, 1988, with an extensive bibliography, Polk 1963:1-82, Salibi 1965:xiv-xxvii, 3-39, Hitti 1967:317-432, and the essays by Khalaf 1982 and by Chevallier 1982.

international emporium with a population of around 120,000 by 1900 (Fawaz 1983:1,30,127). Bashir promoted and financed roads, bridges, and other public works projects, all of which contributed to the production and marketing of silk, Lebanon's major export to the West (Fawaz 1983:39-43,63). Beirut's commercial potential largely explains why European consulates established themselves on a permanent basis in the 1820s and 1830s. Consuls interceded for their countries' merchants, expedited business transactions, provided notary services, and compiled summaries on the prospects and results of local trade.⁴

Consulates went hand in hand with capitulations — commercial and legal privileges granted by the Ottoman government to consuls, traders, and travelers from European states which had signed treaty agreements with the Sublime Porte. These concessions included reduced customs duties, immunity from Ottoman laws and taxes, diplomatic protection, and guarantees of personal security.⁵ While not always observed by sultans, or automatically binding on regional and port authorities, capitulations were manipulated by European states in pursuit of strategic and economic gain in the Ottoman Empire. For instance, by distributing *berats* (patents or licenses of protection) to Ottoman subjects, European envoys and consuls extended capitulatory privilege to Greeks, Arab Christians, Jews, Armenians, and others whose skills and services helped to advance European interests. By the early nineteenth century, Ottoman beneficiaries of the capitulations — known as *protégés* or *beratlis* (holders or owners of *berats*) — numbered in the thousands throughout the Ottoman realm, including scores of Maronite and Eastern Orthodox Christians in Beirut (Fawaz 1983: 23-

⁴ Frangakis-Syrett (1992) makes excellent use of British, French, Dutch, and other European consular papers in her analysis of commercial activity in the Ottoman Levant. Kremmydas (1972) draws on French consular records in his study of commerce in the Peloponnese. For a Russian perspective, introducing Russian consular resources on trade and shipping in the Ottoman Empire, see Prousis 2000-2001, 2003, and 2004. Arsh (1970:27-76) relies on Russian consular dispatches in his depiction of social, economic, and political circumstances in the Ottoman world in the early nineteenth century. On the various functions and duties of consuls in the Levant, see Platt 1971:124-79.

⁵ On the capitulations and their repercussions in the Ottoman Empire, see van den Boogert 2005; van den Boogert and Fleet 2003, a collection of essays which originally appeared in *Oriente Moderno*, 2003, 12/83, no. 3, pp. 575-714; Hamilton, de Groot and van den Boogert 2000; Ahmad 2000; Goffman 1986 and 1990; Inalcik 1971; Susa 1933:1-173; Inalcik and Quataert 1994:188-95,480-83,517-26,724-42,837-42; Rey 1899.

24; and 1994:73-75, 85-88).⁶ Exempt from Ottoman taxation and justice, protégés served as interpreters, business agents, suppliers, ship captains, and middlemen for European merchants anxious to expand their operations and to increase their countries' economic influence in the Levant.⁷ Capitulatory status also gave protégés a competitive edge over non-protégé Ottoman subjects in trade and business ventures.

The Smyrna-born John Barker (1771-1849), as British consul in Aleppo from 1799 to 1825 and then in Alexandria from 1826 to 1833, witnessed many of the significant events and developments that shaped the Ottoman Levant during the early nineteenth century. His long-time consular service gave him the opportunity to record his observations, impressions, and experiences in myriad letters, notes, and papers on Syria, Egypt, and adjacent areas. Edited and published by his son, who summarized and excerpted his father's writings, John Barker's correspondence and communiqués covered a wide range of topics—topography, climate, commerce, agriculture, silk production, consular functions, capitulations and protégés, great power intrigues, and relationships between the region's different religious and ethnic groups. Along with firsthand vignettes of notable figures, such as Muhammad Ali of Egypt, Barker detailed some of the salient problems in the administrative and governmental affairs of Syria, including the extortion, arbitrary rule, and other abuses associated with Abdallah Pasha (Grant and Milne 2004, Barker 1876).

In the dispatch of April 1826 featured below, addressed to Stratford Canning, British ambassador in Constantinople, Barker recounted an event that had occurred the previous month. A Greek naval attack on Beirut had been thwarted by hastily arranged defense forces, the invaders had tried but failed to incite Christians and Druzes to join their cause, and regional governor Abdallah Pasha had exacted revenge.⁸ Barker had already received word of his new appointment as consul in Alexandria, but unrest at sea caused by the ongoing conflict between Greek rebels and Ottoman-Egyptian forces, not to mention

⁶For more on *berattis*, also see Mazower 2005:119-21.

⁷On the role of protégés in European trade networks in the Ottoman Empire, especially their prominence in Russia's burgeoning trade in the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean, see Arsh 1970:129-66; Prousis 2002:1-14; Kardasis 2001; Harlaftis 1990.

⁸Barker's report to Canning can be found in The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), FO 352/12A, ff. 413-14a.

fear of piracy, kept Barker and his family ensconced in Aleppo for the time being. Barker thus did not witness the incident in Beirut, nor its tragic consequences, but he gleaned information from letters sent to the French, Austrian, and Spanish consuls in Aleppo from their agents and vice-consuls in Beirut. Barker's subsequent notes to Canning discussed the ongoing warfare "in Greece and throughout the Archipelago" and the disorders in Syria triggered by the despotic rule of Abdallah Pasha of Acre.⁹ Ambassador Canning (1786-1880), whose career diplomatic service featured several stints as British envoy to the Sublime Porte (1810-12, 1825-29, 1841-57), relied on a steady flow of messages from Barker and other British agents and representatives in the Ottoman Empire to craft his own communications with the British Foreign Office and the Ottoman government on the Greek issue. Canning worked closely with his French and Russian counterparts to mediate the conflict between insurgent Greece and the sultan's regime, to prevent the fighting from escalating into a wider Near Eastern war, and to guarantee autonomy for the Morea and some of the nearby Greek islands (Chamberlain 2004).¹⁰

According to the information Barker gathered from his European sources, on 18 March 1826 a flotilla of around fifteen Greek ships anchored at the harbor of Beirut and landed about 500 troops.¹¹ Assailants scaled part of the defense walls, while "ships cannonaded the town." Caught off guard, "in the absence of all regular military force" and with "a very scanty supply of firearms and ammunition," the fort that was supposed to secure the town from sea invasion "was as ill provided as the inhabitants." Resistance surfaced, however, thanks to a local *mufti* (judge or interpreter of Muslim law), who "distinguished himself in instructing and animating the townspeople" to defend Beirut. The fighting resulted in casualties: "the loss sustained by the besiegers was in all 40 or 50 [persons]," while the besieged suffered "14 killed and 20 wounded." The town incurred damage "from 500 [cannon] balls, of which 2 struck the French consular house and 3 that of the Austrian agent." Although rebuffed, Greek invaders did not immediately depart but took refuge near the seashore, occupying "a

⁹ TNA, FO 352/12A, ff. 423-24a, 447-59.

¹⁰ On British policy toward the Greek War of Independence, see Cunningham 1993a, Crawley 1930.

¹¹ The summary and quoted passages come from the featured document.

number of detached houses in the silk grounds, but that being chiefly inhabited by Christians,” the Greeks “did not injure them.” The attackers, according to one of Barker’s sources, appealed to the Christians “to rise and join them.” “It is also said they sent an invitation to the chief of the Druzes to unite his forces to the Christian standard; but however that may be, it is certain some thousand armed mountaineers were put in motion by Emir Beshir in aid of the Turks...”

A few days later, on 23 March 1826, after the departure of the Greek aggressors, a lieutenant of Abdallah Pasha arrived with nearly 500 Albanian irregular forces and wreaked havoc among Beiruti Christians. “The inhabitants suffered more in their property from these undisciplined troops than the invasion of the Greeks had inflicted upon them, and the Christian part of the population, without distinction of Latin, Maronite, or Greek, was pursued and persecuted in a most merciless manner by the established authorities, while the Europeans themselves were not secure as well from the effects of the insolence and rapacity of the soldiery...” A French merchant and an American missionary under British protection felt the direct impact of random violence when local troops forcibly entered their dwellings—“these gentlemen and their families were put in fear of their lives, maltreated, and robbed.” Only with great difficulty did European consuls “repel” the “insolent attempts” of the attackers and “protect the *rayahs* in their service from sharing the fate of the other Christians, whose houses and silk plantations were confiscated, and all that could be seized were reduced to beggary after having been tortured for the purpose of extorting from them sums, which it was impossible for them to raise by the immediate sale of all their effects.”¹²

Barker’s account of the Greek naval raid touches on several topics that bear importance for the study of the Ottoman Levant, such as the issue of Greek piracy in the eastern Mediterranean. For centuries Muslim corsairs from the Barbary Coast as well as Christian corsairs from Malta had attacked European and Ottoman shipping in the Mediterranean, but by the early nineteenth century Greek piracy had become the main threat to European and Ottoman merchant vessels in

¹² The term *reaya* (sometimes cited as *rayahs*) originally designated all tax-paying Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman sultan, but from the eighteenth century the concept primarily described Ottoman Christians who paid taxes. European consuls and merchants recruited protégés, including domestic servants, from the *reaya*. See Faroqhi 1994, Shaw 1976:150-63, Sugar 1977:43-55.

the Levant.¹³ Moreover, Greek corsairs as well as Albanian, Serb, and Bulgarian fighters often served as auxiliaries in tsarist Russia's military and naval campaigns against the Ottoman Empire. Some of these warriors fought in Russian operations in the Aegean and the Levant, including Russia's naval siege and capture of Beirut during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74.¹⁴ As successful privateers, Greek corsairs menaced yet also contributed to the Mediterranean maritime economy, especially since the lines between legal and illegal trafficking remained obscure at sea. For instance, respectable Greek traders often loaned money to finance privateering expeditions, and Greek merchants then purchased and resold the stolen goods delivered to them by pirates. Some privateers, when they raised enough money, participated in legal trade networks as skippers or part-owners of ships (Frangakis-Syrett 1992:70-74,108-10). In these and other ways, seafaring Greeks became not just professional pirates but legitimate traders, shippers, and sailors for the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Britain, France, and other countries involved in Balkan and Levantine commerce.

The Greek War of Independence exacerbated problems of piracy in Ottoman waters, as evinced in British consular records from several ports which experienced disruptions in British merchant shipping caused not just by corsairs but by insurgent naval sorties.¹⁵ Already in the early stages of the Greek struggle, naval actions against the Ottoman fleet threatened to degenerate into piracy, or so thought Francis Werry, Britain's consul in Smyrna. In May 1821 Werry wrote: "All the minor islands in the Archipelago have hoisted their new flag and swear to die or conquer under it. This is all very fine, but as they have no foreign power to assist them, no trade to support them, nor provisions to subsist for any length of time, I see this Grecian affair must end in piracy" (Clogg 1972:323). Indeed, as one scholar has asserted, the Aegean Archipelago "became almost impassable," as Greek privateers targeted Ottoman, European, and even American merchant vessels (Frangakis-Syrett 1992:72; Pitcairn Jones 1934). Werry's dispatches from the mid-1820s detailed the "nefarious traffic" and "depredations"

¹³ Earle 1970, Platt 1996, Panzac 2005, Mazower 2005:121-23; Harlaftis 2004:114-16, with numerous Greek-language sources on Greek piracy.

¹⁴ Pappas 1991:74. This entire work provides extensive coverage of Greek, Albanian, and other Balkan recruits and volunteers who served with Russian, French, and British forces.

¹⁵ TNA, FO 78/136, parts 1-3, ff. 1-313.

of Greek corsairs, while British traders petitioned the consul for protection from the “crying evil of Greek piracies” which preyed upon British-flagged cargo vessels in the Aegean.¹⁶ In May 1826, one month after his report of the Beirut foray, consul Barker in Aleppo anticipated danger on the sea voyage to his new consular posting in Alexandria, “exposing myself and family to the insults of the Greek corsairs and my household effects and property to the depredations of that band of freebooters, who daily commit the most daring acts of piracy, without the English or other flag being any security to those who may be so unfortunate as to fall into their power...”¹⁷ It should be pointed out, however, that the combined fleets of Hydra, Spetsae, Psara, Syros, Samos, and other islands played an important role in the Greek revolt. They controlled access to key ports and passages along Greece’s coastline, severed Constantinople’s sea communications with insurgent areas, and forced the Ottomans to mount a costly land invasion from Rumelia and Macedonia instead of a more direct maritime attack from the Aegean.¹⁸

The naval assault and Ottoman retribution depicted by Barker offer insight into the nature of the Greek-Ottoman conflict of the 1820s, a struggle that escalated into a war of revenge as both sides perpetrated excesses. The prominent Balkan historian Leften Stavrianos has argued that large-scale massacres against the defenseless represented “an inevitable accompaniment, perhaps, of a struggle that pitted, at one and the same time, Greek subjects against Turkish overlords, Greek peasants against Turkish landowners, and Greek Christians against Turkish Moslems” (Stavrianos 1958:284). This assessment remains generally accurate for the fighting in mainland Greece and on the Aegean islands, but additional factors help to explain the situation in Beirut. Abdallah Pasha sent a military detachment to punish the town’s Christian communities, suspecting them of collaborating or at least sympathizing with Greek rebels. Envy, jealousy, and social-economic tension may also have fueled Ottoman reprisals. Maronite and Eastern Orthodox Christians included among their ranks protégés of European

¹⁶ TNA, FO 352/12A, ff. 32-36, 43-49, 122-24; FO 352/12B, ff. 2-2a.

¹⁷ TNA, FO 352/12A, ff. 418-19.

¹⁸ Greek naval actions during the Greek revolt receive attention in general histories of the Greek War of Independence: Dakin 1973, Woodhouse 1952, Clogg 1999:7-46. Works on the Greek merchant marine also cover naval events: Leon 1972, Kremmydas 1985, Harlaftis 2004.

states, former Ottoman subjects who had become honorary European nationals exempt from Ottoman financial and legal jurisdiction and with a commercial advantage over non-protégé Ottomans. Abdallah Pasha's abuses of power compelled some of the most prosperous and successful merchants in Beirut and Acre to seek shelter elsewhere in Lebanon (Fawaz 1983:25,46,105; Fawaz 1994:24,40-42). Beirut may have had the potential to develop into a flourishing commercial center, but the town and its inhabitants required public order and economic security before those prospects could be realized.

To be sure, Abdallah Pasha's repression of Beirut's Christians pales in comparison to the massacres and outrages committed in Constantinople, Smyrna, and Thessaloniki in 1821-22, including the public execution of Ecumenical Patriarch Grigorios V in the Ottoman capital in April 1821 (Prousis 1991, Clogg 1972, Mazower 2005: 125-30, Prousis 1994: 55-56). Random attacks against Greek Christian churches, shrines, shops, and persons, often in retaliation for Greek atrocities against Turks in the Morea and the Danubian Principalities, not only intensified hostilities between Greek and Turkish communities but transformed the Greek revolt into a religious war driven by the quest for sacred revenge. Ironically, the reprisals in Beirut served to erode the tolerance, coexistence, and interaction that characterized relationships between the town's diverse sectarian groups in the early nineteenth century. Maronites, Druzes, Orthodox Christians, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and others comprised a mosaic of pluralistic but segmented communities; they lived in relative peace and harmony, shared allegiance to an emir, yet managed their own community affairs and retained separate identities (Fawaz 1983:44-48,103-06).

The excesses in Beirut as well as in Smyrna and Thessaloniki exemplify the crisis of Ottoman imperial authority and the breakdown of law, order, and security in Ottoman urban centers during times of war and provocation. Indeed, Barker relates that Beirut's military defenses and coastal fortifications failed to prevent a naval attack in the harbor. The ensuing abuse and aggression evokes the alarm, anguish, and anxiety felt by all those residents who had to endure the arbitrary and oppressive rule of unruly pashas in the provinces. The specific case of Beirut in March 1826 provides a vivid reminder that the potential for social and political violence lurked just beneath the surface of Ottoman society, especially when the central government faced growing internal

and external pressures. Further, the episode clearly reveals the urgent need for governmental and administrative reform that would restore effective centralized rule, protect private property, maintain public security, and guarantee individual safety. Toward this end Sultan Mahmud II destroyed the anti-reform janissary corps in 1826 and launched a series of institutional and political reforms, but Ottoman Syria remained a dangerous place until the latter part of the nineteenth century, with chronic feuds between rival factions of local elites and bloody sectarian clashes (Khalaf 1982).

Barker's note to Canning echoes conventional images and prevalent biases in European perceptions of the Ottoman Empire and Islam during the period of imperial decline and institutional collapse. European pens painted mostly negative pictures of "the oriental other," "the barbarous East," and "the sick man of Europe" in travel and consular writings, accentuating episodes of oppression, extortion, cruelty, and related abuses of power by regional potentates.¹⁹ Barker's scenes of Adballah Pasha's reprisals against Beirut's Christians may have faithfully reflected "the effects of the insolence and rapacity of the soldiery" in this particular case, but his choice of words alludes to commonly accepted European perspectives on the state of the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century.

I have used the unpublished complete text of Barker's consular report, located in London's National Archives; a brief summary of this document appears in the two-volume collection of Barker writings edited and published by his son.²⁰ I have rendered consul Barker's narrative into idiomatic language without altering the essential spirit or meaning of the document. Although in a few spots I have made slight changes in Barker's sentence structure, syntax, and punctuation for the sake of fluidity, I have generally remained faithful to the particulars of the consul's spelling, style, and perspective. My own emendations appear in brackets, and I have added an occasional explanatory note:

¹⁹ For an introduction to the perceptions of European travelers and consuls in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Cunningham 1993b. Also useful on European attitudes toward Muslims in general and the Ottoman Turks in particular are Said 1979, Daniel 1966, Wheatcroft 1995.

²⁰ Edward Barker's summary and excerpts can be found in Barker 1876, vol. 2: 36-38.

“Aleppo the 9th April 1826

To His Excellency [The] Right Honorable Stratford Canning, His Majesty’s Ambassador Extraordinary at the Sublime Porte
Sir,

On the 29th past [March] I had the honor to inform your Excellency that a Greek squadron, composed of 12 or 18 ships, had attempted to take Bairut. That troops, to the number of 1000, or 1500, had been landed; that they had penetrated into the heart of the city, had been compelled to retreat, and were, at the time of the reporters’ quitting Bairut, in possession of some small towers and houses in the suburbs.

The substance of this intelligence was fully confirmed last night by letters addressed by the foreign European agents at Bairut to their superiors here, the French, the Austrian, Spanish and Neapolitan consul-generals; and by a great number of private letters, dated the 30th and 31st March. The points, in which all accounts pretty nearly agree, are that on the evening of the 18th March, a Greek squadron of 11 ships (afterwards joined by 4 others) was perceived and recognized by the inhabitants of Bairut. No doubt being entertained of the meditated attack, in the absence of all regular military force, the citizens were immediately called to arms, and the night was passed in great disorder and preparations for the defense of the place.

There was a very scanty supply of firearms and ammunition, and the fort, which defends the town from an invasion by sea, was as ill provided as the inhabitants. The *mufti* [judge or interpreter of Islamic law] is the chief person who is represented as having distinguished himself in instructing and animating the townspeople.

At 3 o’clock in the morning of the 19th [March], a body of 500 men in a uniform resembling the Albanian costume²¹ was landed and was marched directly upon a part of the walls that the assailants had no difficulty in scaling. But they had scarcely got a footing within the

²¹ “Albanian costume” refers to the dress often worn by Greek and Albanian Orthodox Christian bandits, rebels, and mountain warriors who resisted Ottoman authority: a kilted skirt with pistol and dagger tucked into a wide belt (Pappas 1991:26). Modern concepts of ethnicity and nationality did not really apply to these Balkan brigands who struggled against Ottoman rule. Loyalty to clan and region and a shared Eastern Orthodox faith trumped ethnic differences and brought Orthodox Albanians into much closer contact with Orthodox Greeks and Slavs than with Muslim Albanians. The majority of Albanians embraced Islam in the Ottoman era.

ramparts and taken possession of one house, when they were compelled to retreat, leaving the dead bodies of 3 or 4 of their companions on the spot. One of the vice-consuls' reports states that the number of Turks opposed to them at this point did not exceed 8 and consequently that the invaders were repulsed by that handful of volunteers. The ships cannonaded the town at the time it was attempted to be taken by assault, and the fort fired upon them occasionally. Some damage was suffered by the town from 500 balls, of which 2 struck the French consular house and 3 that of the Austrian agent. It was ascertained, through an Ionian captain, that one ball from the fort killed 13 men on board one of the ships and that the loss sustained by the besiegers was in all 40 or 50. That of the besieged is represented to be 14 killed and 20 wounded. Upon their repulse, the Greeks did not immediately take to their boats, but established themselves in a little ruined tower near the seashore; and it appears [they] were masters of a number of detached houses in the silk grounds, but that being chiefly inhabited by Christians, they did not injure them. It is even stated in one account that they exhorted them to rise and join them. If so, they must have entertained a most erroneous idea of the number and power of the Christians in Bairut. It is also said they sent an invitation to the chief of the Druzes to unite his forces to the Christian standard; but however that may be, it is certain some thousand armed mountaineers were put in motion by the Emir Beshir in aid of the Turks, and that notwithstanding a report prevailed [that] His Excellency had severely bastinadoed the bearer of a letter to him from the Greeks, the proffered assistance was peremptorily refused, and not a Druze was permitted to enter the town.

After the Greeks had taken up their position at the tower on the beach, the firing of the musketry continued, but it seems with very little effect on either side. Early on the 23rd [March] the Greeks embarked, and the whole squadron disappeared. In the afternoon of the same day the Kheya Bey [lieutenant] of Abdulla Pacha of Acri arrived with 500 Arnouts,²² when the inhabitants suffered more in their property from these undisciplined troops than the invasion of the Greeks had inflicted

²² An officer of Abdallah Pasha of Acre arrived in Beirut with a detachment of Albanian Muslim irregular forces referred to as Arnouts or Arnaouts, derived from the Ottoman designation of them as *arnavud* or *arnavutlar*. These local auxiliaries formed part of the armed retinues hired and organized by Ottoman pashas to maintain regional power. Pappas (1991) includes many references to Albanian troops which served Ottoman authority and helped to subdue Greek and other Balkan rebellions. Also see Mazower 2005:100-03.

upon them, and the Christian part of the population, without distinction of Latin, Maronite, or Greek, was pursued and persecuted in a most merciless manner by the established authorities, while the Europeans themselves were not secure as well from the effects of the insolence and rapacity of the soldiery as from the arrogant prepotency of the governor. A party of Arnouts entered forcibly the dwelling houses of Monsieur Pourrière, a French merchant, and Mr. Goodell, an American missionary under British protection. These gentlemen and their families were put in fear of their lives, maltreated, and robbed. Their habitations were without the walls of the city. The officers of the government, in their eager pursuit of the helpless Christian natives, violated the French convent and some Frank houses,²³ and it was with great difficulty the consuls themselves were enabled to repel their insolent attempts to carry their search into the interior of their own dwellings and protect the *rayahs*²⁴ in their service from sharing the fate of the other Christians, whose houses and silk plantations were confiscated, and all that could be seized were reduced to beggary after having been tortured for the purpose of extorting from them sums, which it was impossible for them to raise by the immediate sale of all their effects.

Monsieur Henri Guys,²⁵ the French consul at Bairut, positively states that three of those unhappy people were carried out of the presence of their inhuman tormentors in a dying state, and one had been tortured till he embraced the religion professed by his atrocious oppressors.

I have the honor to be with the highest respect, Sir, your most obedient humble servant,
John Barker”

September 2006

²³ The French convent belonged to the Capuchins, Franciscans, or Jesuits, Catholic missionary orders which had established themselves in Lebanon by the eighteenth century. “Frank houses” refers to dwellings owned and inhabited by “Franks,” the term used by Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians of the Near East to describe the inhabitants of Western Europe, especially Roman Catholics. For most Greek Christians, “Franks” evoked the Latin Christian crusaders who sacked Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204.

²⁴ See note no.12 above on the term *reaya*.

²⁵ Fawaz 1983:26. Guys (1787-1878) served as French consul in Beirut in 1808, 1810, and 1824-38 and published several works based on his experiences, including 1850 and 1862.

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