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## Rebellion, Unrest, Calamity: British Reports on Ottoman Syria in 1821-1823

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## REBELLION, UNREST, CALAMITY: BRITISH REPORTS ON OTTOMAN SYRIA IN 1821-1823

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THEOPHILUS C. PROUSIS<sup>1</sup>

“...extortions and vexations practised by the pasha of Acre.”

“...a most awful calamity which has befallen [Aleppo]...”

“...the dreadful earthquake that has desolated the whole *pashalik*...”

“...heaps of stone and rubbish...” “...scenes of horror...”

“...the crush of falling walls—the shrieks, the groans, the accents of agony and despair of that long night...”

“...a greater mass of human misery has seldom been produced by any of the awful convulsions of nature.”

“...the aggressions and violence which British commerce and navigation (even the most innocent and legal) are now suffering in consequence of the audacity of the Greek cruizers on the coast of Syria...”

“...the cholera morbus has made its appearance among the wretched and houseless population, and...its ravages were daily encreasing...”

These sharp observations by British diplomats posted to the Ottoman Levant described the turbulent state of affairs in parts of Syria in the early 1820s, a time of rebellion, unrest, and calamity symbolized by the devastating earthquake of 1822 in Aleppo. The turmoil in Ottoman Syria reflected the multiple dimensions of the larger crisis confronting Sultan Mahmud II's realm at a tense but pivotal moment in Ottoman history. The Empire had to deal with daunting internal and external pressures triggered by war, revolt, sectarian strife, the breakdown of once effective ruling institutions, and European intervention. The Greek insurrection against the Sublime Porte broke out in 1821 in the Danubian Principalities, the Peloponnese, and other Greek-inhabited areas, resulting in a prolonged and costly conflict between Ottoman troops and Greek rebels on both land and sea. War between

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Russia and Turkey loomed, largely over Ottoman actions that abrogated Russian-Ottoman treaty stipulations, including agreements that protected Greek Christians from Ottoman reprisals. Ottoman restrictions on shipping disrupted European trade in the eastern Mediterranean, which in turn fueled an upsurge in piracy against Ottoman and European commercial navigation.<sup>2</sup> Ottoman administrative disorder heightened public uncertainty; government factions and regional notables contested the sultan's centralized rule; and border disputes sparked hostility between Turkey and Persia.<sup>3</sup> Against the backdrop of these escalating and intertwined challenges, British dispatches from Constantinople and Aleppo chronicled a volatile situation in Syria. Messy realities in this spacious and strategically located Ottoman territory featured not just the shattering aftereffects of the 1822 earthquake and the onset of a cholera epidemic but also the repercussions of the Greek War of Independence, the rebellious activities of Abdallah Pasha of Acre, and the impact of the Turkish-Persian War of 1821-23.

Ottoman Syria encompassed the present-day lands of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank and included key ports and population centers, such as Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Damascus, Jerusalem, Acre, and Aleppo. Divided into *pashaliks* or provinces, this fertile region for centuries had generated significant trade and agricultural revenues for the state treasury; moreover, as an important starting point for the *hajj* or annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Syria benefited economically and enjoyed dynastic prestige under the sultan-caliphs. But the early nineteenth century brought growing disorder and chaos. With the collapse of stable centralized rule from Constantinople, provincial governors such as Cezzar (Djezzar) Ahmed Pasha (1775-1804), Sulayman Pasha (1804-19), and the notorious Abdallah Pasha (1819-31) exerted sweeping power in their respective *pashaliks*, relying on tax agents to collect tribute dues from urban and rural populations

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<sup>2</sup> On the Greek revolt and its consequences, see Aksan 2007: 285-305, Brewer 2003, Pizaniyas 2011, Dakin 1973. On the "war scare" between Russia and Turkey in the early 1820s, see Prousis 2010: 32-33 and 1994: 26-30, 185-87 and 2002: 25-27, Jelavich 1991: 49-75. For disruptions in trade and the increased threat of piracy in the Levant, see Prousis 2010: 28-32 and 2008: 33-36, Panzac 2005, Frangakis-Syrett 1992: 70-74, 108-10.

<sup>3</sup> On the administrative, institutional, and other challenges that destabilized and thus restructured the Ottoman Empire at this time, see Aksan 2007: 180-342, Finkel 2005: 289-446, Faroqhi 2006: 81-117, 135-206, Prousis 2010: 23-24. On the Turkish-Persian War of 1821-23, which diverted Ottoman troops to the eastern frontier and thus helped Greek rebels in the initial stages of their insurrection, see Williamson 2008.

and on armed retinues of regular and irregular forces to silence opposition and to maintain control.<sup>4</sup>

Violence and factionalism characterized Syria's politics in a three-way struggle for power. Obstreperous janissaries supported or resisted, depending on circumstances, local warlords and notables (*ayan*), and competing alliances among clans and tribes exacerbated this political infighting. Some of the locally entrenched notables opposed imperial sovereignty, while others tried to implement Mahmud II's centralized rule. Although the sultan sought to strengthen the central government through military and administrative reform, provincial elites continued to hold sway. No doubt the Turkish-Persian War and the Empire's intensifying conflict against Greek insurgents stymied the sultan's efforts to impose order in politically fragmented Syria. Indeed, according to Bruce Masters, the Ottoman-Greek war became "seemingly an all-consuming concern for the state."<sup>5</sup> The Porte requested extra funds, resources, and recruits from the cities and provinces of Syria, and these strains contributed to sectarian tension between rival religious communities—Maronites, Orthodox Christians, Sunni Muslims, Druzes, others. On one occasion, Abdallah Pasha of Acre dispatched a military expedition to punish the Christians of Beirut because he suspected them of collaborating or at least sympathizing with Greek rebels.<sup>6</sup> Aleppo in particular suffered a marked decline in overall security and prosperity primarily because of political factionalism, social discord, commercial dislocation, and population loss attributed to the natural disasters of earthquake and cholera.<sup>7</sup>

The documents presented below, from Britain's ambassador at the Sublime Porte (Lord Strangford) and his embassy secretary (Terrick Hamilton)

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<sup>4</sup> On the unsettled situation in Ottoman Syria, including local notables and regional warlords, see Philipp 2001, Fawaz 1983 and 1984, Khalaf 1982, Harik 1968, Polk 1963: 1-82, Salibi 1965: xiv-xxvii, 3-39, Hitti 1967: 317-432. Also see the relevant essays in Sluglett and Weber 2010. On Aleppo in particular, see Marcus 1989: 73-101, Bodman 1963: 55-139, Meriwether 1999: 18-68, Eldem, Goffman, and Masters 1999: 62-78.

<sup>5</sup> Eldem, Goffman, and Masters 1999: 64.

<sup>6</sup> On this incident, see Prousis 2007, based on the report of John Barker, British consul in Aleppo.

<sup>7</sup> According to Bruce Masters (Eldem, Goffman, and Masters 1999: 64-65), "[t]here had been previous earthquakes in the city's [Aleppo's] long history, but none seemed to have produced the wide-scale destruction of property and loss of life wrought by the 1822 tremors." Unlike in previous centuries, population losses "were not made up with new arrivals from the villages as those villages themselves were largely depopulated."



and from the British consul in Aleppo (John Barker), illustrate the advantages and limitations of primary sources written by Europeans in the Ottoman world.<sup>8</sup> The passages clearly suggest the treasure trove of underutilized material on Ottoman affairs available in British and other European archives. Envoys and consuls relied on various channels of information, gathering intelligence from merchants, travelers, protégés, agents, and *dragomans* or interpreters; from high-ranking as well as local Ottoman officials; and from other European diplomats. These diverse accounts allowed dispatch-writers to address, not just the most pressing realities in Constantinople, but a range of topics beyond the confines of the capital and beyond the purview of the central government. Rich in texture and detail, these snapshots related specific incidents and episodes in an embattled region and evoked the human drama at the grassroots level of Ottoman society. The very specificity and urgency of these excerpts deepens our understanding of at least some of the problems that precipitated mayhem in the Levantine provinces of the sultan's vulnerable but resilient Empire.

To be sure, diplomatic communiqués echoed conventional Western views of the Ottoman Empire, perceptions that stigmatized the Ottoman “other” with occasional distortion, bias, and exaggeration. Envoys and consuls—and not just British representatives—portrayed Ottoman officialdom in a mostly negative light, accenting episodes of oppression and abuse by pashas, janissaries, and customs officers. Through anecdote and choice of words, Western records alluded to prevalent European images of the Ottoman Empire, fast approaching what became known as “the sick man of Europe”

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<sup>8</sup> I am completing four volumes of Lord Strangford's correspondence from his ambassadorship at the Porte (1821-24). For volumes one and two, see Prousis 2010 and 2012. On Terrick Hamilton, Strangford's embassy secretary, see Prousis 2012: 255-342 *passim*. The Smyrna-born John Barker, 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 in the Ottoman Levant. His long-time consular service gave him the opportunity to record his observations, impressions, and experiences in myriad letters and notes 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, great power intrigues, and relationships between the region's diverse 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. See Barker 1876 and the relevant pages in Prousis 2008 and 2010 and 2012.

in Western political discourse and public opinion.<sup>9</sup> Because these narratives often described rapidly unfolding happenings in a fragmentary manner, they lacked sufficient perspective for a fuller picture or more elaborate analysis. Despite these flaws, the featured documents underscore the essential value of British and other Western archival resources for investigating the issues that marked an age of upheaval in the Ottoman Levant. A crisis in Ottoman imperial authority eroded security in urban centers and spawned unease among all those residents who had to endure the arbitrary actions of powerful pashas. These excerpts thus serve as a reminder of the potential for social disorder and political violence that lurked just beneath the surface of Ottoman society during the Near Eastern crisis of the 1820s.

All of these sources are located in the Foreign Office holdings of The National Archives, Kew (TNA, FO).<sup>10</sup> When the manuscript has a word or phrase underlined for emphasis, I have placed this item in bold print. In most matters of wording, grammar, punctuation, and citation of numbers, I have retained the original format, including archaisms and inconsistencies. All explanatory material in brackets is mine. For each document, introduced with a Roman numeral, I have specified folio numbers, date of composition, and numerical sequence in that particular archival collection.

I. TNA, FO 78/100, ff. 144-46a, 18 August 1821 (No. 96)

[Lord Strangford (British ambassador to the Porte) to Lord Castlereagh (British foreign secretary) re: the repercussions of the Greek revolt in the *pashalik* of Aleppo and the surrender of the town of Antab to the Turks.<sup>11</sup>]

...I learn from Aleppo [from Consul John Barker] that the pasha [Mustapha Pasha] received from the Porte (immediately after the breaking out of the [Greek] insurrection) a *firman* [imperial decree], which armed him with the most extensive powers over all the inhabitants of his *pashalik*. He contented himself with levying a moderate contribution upon all classes of

<sup>9</sup> On European perceptions and impressions of the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century, see Turhan 2003, Laidlaw 2010, Cunningham 1993b: 72-107.

<sup>10</sup> The passages from 1821 and 1822 are published in Prousis 2010: 180-81, 227-29, 294-96 and Prousis 2012: 119-23, 148, 178-79, 200-01, 234-35, 290-93, 306-13, 330-32, 339-41.

<sup>11</sup> On British policy toward the Greek insurrection and the Ottoman Empire during the era of Lord Castlereagh (foreign secretary until 1822) and George Canning (foreign secretary, 1822-27), see Webster 1934: 349-86, Temperley 1966: 319-26, Crawley 1930. Antab (Gaziantep today), located in southeastern Anatolia, belonged to the Ottoman *pashalik* of Aleppo.

Christians, including Armenians and Maronites. Matters were perfectly quiet at Aleppo. The Greeks are not numerous, and the Turks not fanatical; and from the feelings with which the latter regard the Ottoman government, it is not likely that any reverses which it may sustain, would (as at Smyrna and elsewhere) have the effect of rousing their vengeance.<sup>12</sup> These feelings are so strong, and the pasha is so well aware of them, that on receiving an order from the Porte, some weeks ago, to raise three thousand cavalry, and send them to the capital, he was obliged to declare that he could not attempt it, without incurring the risque of a general revolt.

The pasha of Antab has at last succeeded in reducing that town. Its inhabitants had refused to acknowledge his authority, and he had vainly besieged it during three months, with an army of four thousand men. The town having finally surrendered at discretion on the 20<sup>th</sup> ultimo, it does not appear that the Turks shewed more mercy towards their brethren, than they had displayed in other places, towards the Greek insurgents...

II. TNA, FO 78/101, ff. 151-56a, 25 September 1821 (No. 122)

[Strangford to Castlereagh re: the mild and humane conduct of Mustapha Pasha of Aleppo.]

...My letters from Aleppo are of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ultimo, when perfect tranquillity prevailed there, and where all classes were satisfied with the mild and humane conduct of the governor, which forms a strong contrast to the extortions and vexations practised by the pasha of Acre [Abdallah Pasha]. The severities of the latter had compelled almost all the Christians to retire into the mountains of the Druzes...<sup>13</sup>

III. TNA, FO 78/102, ff. 184-87, 10 December 1821 (No. 170)

[Strangford to Castlereagh re: the impact of the Turkish-Persian War on the *pashalik* of Aleppo.]

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<sup>12</sup> On Turkish reprisals in Smyrna, and on the cycle of mutual atrocity and excess that characterized the Ottoman-Greek struggle in the Peloponnese, Asia Minor, Constantinople, Chios, and other areas, see Prousis 2010: 25-28, 329-31 and Prousis 2012: 10-11, 358-59.

<sup>13</sup> On Abdallah Pasha, see Philipp 2001: 85-93, 131, 166-69, 181-85. Barker's consular reports from Aleppo detailed cases of extortion and rapacity by Abdallah Pasha and the relationships between the various religious groups that resided in Ottoman Syria. Maronite Christians periodically sought haven in the Chouf district near Mount Lebanon, home to the Druze communities of the region.



...Mr. Consul Barker writes me from Aleppo, on the 9<sup>th</sup> ultimo, that the effects of the Greek insurrection were gradually subsiding in that part of the Turkish Empire, but that great discontent was generally manifested in consequence of the sultan's orders for the levying of troops to act against the Persians. No funds are assigned for their equipment or pay, so that the execution of his imperial commands is scarcely practicable. Where a thousand men are required, money cannot be raised sufficient to equip two hundred; and exhausted as the *pashalik* is by accumulated acts of oppression of every kind, the attempt to enforce the orders of the Porte will probably, in many places, drive the Turkish population to insurrection. At Aleppo, the contingent demanded is of three thousand men, half of that number to consist of cavalry.<sup>14</sup> A report which had been circulated at Aleppo, that Russia had actually declared war, was received with the greatest joy by the people, "whose feelings," Mr. Barker adds, "go with the enemies of the Porte, for they are sure that any change of government must be better for them than their present deplorable condition." ...

#### IV. TNA, FO 78/108, ff. 1-4, 10 May 1822 (No. 63)

[Strangford to Castlereagh re: the current relations between Persia and the Ottoman Empire and the Porte's suspicion that Russia instigated both the Persian war and the revolt by Abdallah Pasha of Acre.]

...Letters from Baghdad of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March state that some attempts had been made to accommodate matters between Turkey and Persia, and that it was confidently believed that peace would be the result of the more moderate dispositions now shewn by both parties. The merchants of Mosul write to the same effect. But the language of the Turkish ministers with respect to the Persians is as violent, and their belief that the late aggressions were encouraged by Russia, is as frequently and as strongly expressed as heretofore. The Porte, ever seeking for new grounds of suspicion when that power is concerned, has now taken up the idea that the revolt of Abdallah Pasha of Acre, is also the effect of Russian intrigues. This notion is founded upon the circumstance that lately, on Abdallah's exacting three hundred purses from the small town of Taberia, he did not compel a number of Polish Jews who are living there, nominally under the **Russian** protection, to contribute towards the payment of that sum, though of all the inhabitants of the place, they were the most able

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<sup>14</sup> See Bodman 1963: 136.

to have done so...<sup>15</sup>

V. TNA, FO 78/108, ff. 22-27a, 10 May 1822 (No. 65)

[Strangford to Castlereagh re: the imprisonment of an Aleppo merchant.]

...On the 1<sup>st</sup> instant, Nasry Delal, an Aleppo merchant of considerable wealth and excellent character, was sent to the prison of the *bostangi bashi* [Ottoman chief of police]. This person whose fate excites much interest among the Christian merchants residing here, is banker to the rebellious pasha of Acre, and according to the usual practice of this government, he will probably pay the forfeit of his employer's misconduct, by the sacrifice of all his property...

VI. TNA, FO 78/108, ff. 161-62, 10 June 1822 (No. 83)

[Strangford to Castlereagh re: the Turkish-Persian War.]

...On the 2<sup>nd</sup> instant, the *reis efendi* [Ottoman foreign minister, Mehmed Sadik Efendi] sent to inform me that intelligence had been received at the Porte of a signal victory obtained over the Persians on the side of Baghdad—that Sulaimaniyah had been retaken—that Abdallah Pasha, whose defection had been the original cause of the Persian war, had fled to Persia, owing his life solely to the swiftness of his horse, and leaving his camp, his family, and his treasures to the mercy of the conquerors—and that a dreadful and just visitation of the divine vengeance had filled the measure of the Persians' calamities—an earthquake having taken place at Kermanshah, which swallowed up five thousand houses.<sup>16</sup>

I have seen a letter from Aleppo, of the 24<sup>th</sup> instant which gives a very different picture. It speaks of the "*laicheté des troupes ottomans*

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<sup>15</sup> Taberia (Tiberius today)—a venerated site in Judaism—attracted Polish Jewish settlers from the 1780s and after, at least some of them emigrating from the Russian Empire after the Partitions of Poland. Several factors explain the Porte's Russophobia in the early 1820s: a series of Russian-Turkish wars since the eighteenth century, Russia's deep-seated religious, cultural, and commercial ties to the Greeks, and Russia's alleged (but misperceived) complicity in the Greek insurrection. See Pizaniyas 2011: 225-39, Prousis 1994: 3-24. In addition, Russia fomented antagonism between Persia and the Ottoman Empire, at the expense of both Islamic states and for the benefit of Russian expansion in the Transcaucasus. Border clashes hatched the Turkish-Persian War of 1821-23, thus diverting Ottoman forces from the revolt in Greece and the Russian threat in the South Caucasus. See Williamson 2008: 89-90, 99, Atkin 1980: 156, Bitis 2006: 200-01.

<sup>16</sup> Sulaimaniyah, a town in Ottoman Mesopotamia, was part of the contested border with Persia. Kermanshah, a town in western Persia, was near the disputed frontier of Ottoman Mesopotamia.

*envoyées au secours de Bagdad, qui après s'être enfuies devant l'ennemie, sans combattre, ont presque toutes, vendu leur armes pour se repatrier*" ["cowardice of the Ottoman troops sent to rescue Bagdad, who after having fled before the enemy, without fighting, almost all have sold their weapons to repatriate"]. The writer also adds, "*Il paroît qu'une espèce de traité ou d'armistice est maintenu entre les Turcs et les Persans du côté de Bagdad. On parle d'un tremblement de terre à la Mecque, qui doit avoir englouti les deux tiers de la Cité Sainte. Peut-être le Prophète veut-il mettre à la raison ses coréligionnaires*" ["It appears that a sort of treaty or armistice is maintained between the Turks and the Persians on the side of Bagdad. We are talking about an earthquake in Mecca, which must have engulfed two-thirds of the Holy City. Perhaps the Prophet wants to bring to reason his coreligionists"].

It is certain that whatever may be the real state of matters in the direction of Bagdad, the Persians have gained considerable advantages on the Erzerum side. By the last accounts received at the Porte, Kars was in great danger, and if it had not been for the arrival of Husrev Mehemmed Pasha with a powerful body of troops, that town and its governor, Osman Pasha, would have fallen into the hands of the enemy...<sup>17</sup>

VII. TNA, FO 78/109, ff. 8-13, 10 July 1822 (No. 103)

[Strangford to Castelreagh re: the rebel Abdallah Pasha.]

...Consul Barker is now at Antioch. He writes to me from that place, under date of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ultimo, that Mustapha Pasha of Aleppo had entered Damascus on the 10<sup>th</sup>, at the head of a force consisting of six thousand men. No opposition was made by the *kiahya* [deputy or lieutenant] of the rebel pasha of Acre, who was encamped under the walls of the city, and who made a precipitate retreat. I had the satisfaction of being the first to communicate this agreeable intelligence to the Porte, which was subsequently confirmed by the arrival of a courier from Mustapha Pasha...

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<sup>17</sup> Husrev Mehemmed Pasha held various positions in the Ottoman ruling hierarchy, including governor of Trebizond and military commander of the Ottoman eastern frontier against Persia. See Philliou 2011: 97-100, Prousis 2012: 148, 162, 177, 222, 298, 329, 367. Areas of Turkish-Persian fighting included Kars (in northeastern Turkey) and Erzerum (in eastern Anatolia). See Williamson 2008.

VIII. TNA, FO 78/109, ff. 126-29, 10 August 1822 (No. 121)

[Strangford to Castlereagh re: the defeat of Abdallah Pasha.]

...I have seen private letters from Damascus which reached this place on the 6<sup>th</sup> instant, and which state that Abdallah Pasha of Acre, after having been defeated by Dervish [Darwish] and Mustapha Pashas, had shut himself up in the fortress of Acre, where he is closely besieged by the imperial forces...

IX. TNA, FO 78/110, ff. 34-38a, 3 September 1822 (No. 146)

[Strangford to Castlereagh re: the devastating earthquake in and around Aleppo.]

...I beg to refer Your Lordship to the enclosed copy of a letter from the Prussian consul at Aleppo [Raphael de Picciotto] to the Prussian chargé d'affaires [Baron Miltitz], for the particulars of a most awful calamity which has befallen that city, two-thirds of which, and between thirty and forty thousand of its inhabitants were destroyed by an earthquake on the 13<sup>th</sup> ultimo. Many of the neighbouring towns shared the same fate, and in particular, those of Antab—Kiliz—Payas—Riha—Hama—Haris [Haritan, a village southwest of Aleppo]—Beylan—Merash—and Adana, are said to have been totally demolished. The Porte received intelligence of this dreadful catastrophe on the 28<sup>th</sup> ultimo—but it was kept from the knowledge of the public during the festivities of the Bairam...<sup>18</sup>

X. TNA, FO 78/111, ff. 23-29, 25 September 1822 (No. 6)

[Terrick Hamilton to Lord Bathurst re: the various challenges facing the Porte and the public's reaction to these events. Hamilton, secretary at the British embassy in Constantinople, served as minister plenipotentiary during Lord Strangford's trip to Verona and Vienna to consult with European diplomats on the Greek question. He sent several of his reports to Henry Bathurst, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Bathurst, Britain's secretary of state for war and the colonies from 1812 to 1827. This particular dispatch detailed the array of problems facing the Empire at a critical time.]

...Accounts from Syria describe the rebel pasha, Abdallah, as deprived of much of his power and influence, and reduced to the necessity of defending himself in his strongholds against the forces of the sultan.

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<sup>18</sup> Bairam or Bayram, from the Turkish word for religious festival during the Ottoman era, was often used for the celebration that marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting.



The inroads of the Persians continue. They do not attempt to take towns, nor even to make prisoners—having stripped the people of their property and having ravaged the country, they retire with their booty. There was a report that they had even reached Sivas [a town in central-eastern Turkey]. The Turkish troops had succeeded in capturing the Persian town of Yerevan. They made the governor prisoner. The place was unprovided with troops who were gone to join the army opposed to Gelaeddin Pasha.<sup>19</sup>

I have the honour of enclosing a copy of a report, transmitted by M. Raab to His Excellency Lord Strangford, giving the most frightful details of a fire that had destroyed a considerable part of the town of Jassy. All accounts agree in stating that the provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia are in the most deplorable condition.<sup>20</sup>

A fire burst out in a Greek quarter of the town of Constantinople a few nights ago, and consumed a great number of houses.

The plague has appeared both in Pera and in several villages on the Bosphorus, likewise in the Turkish camp at Büyükdere.<sup>21</sup>

It is expected that, as soon as the *kapudan pasha* [grand admiral and commander of the Ottoman navy, Kara Mehmed Pasha] has supplied the fortresses in the Morea [the Peloponnese] with a sufficient quantity of provisions to last out the winter, the fleet will be ordered to return to Constantinople.

There can be no doubt but that, at present, an unusual uneasiness pervades all classes of the Turkish nation. Calamities of more than common magnitude press upon them. Their superstition always leads them to attribute to irresistible fatality every peculiar circumstance, good or bad, that effects their situation through life—and they are thus accustomed, in general, to regard the passing events with the utmost indifference and composure. But

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<sup>19</sup> On Gelaeddin Pasha, an Ottoman commander in the Turkish-Persian War of 1821-23, see Prousis 2012: 162, 222, 234, 286, 292, 298.

<sup>20</sup> On Joseph de Raab, Britain's acting consul in Moldavia, see Prousis 2012: 46, 125, 138, 205, 292, 348. The status of the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia preoccupied British negotiations at the Porte in the early 1820s. Strangford made abundant reference to the evacuation of Ottoman troops from the provinces and the appointment of new governors. On the contentious issue of Moldavia and Wallachia, see Philliou 2011: 65-104, Florescu 1963 and 1997: 123-47, Prousis 2010 and 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Pera (Beyoğlu today) is located on the European side of Constantinople, north of the Golden Horn. European ambassadors at the Porte had their summer residences in Büyükdere, a district on the Bosphorus. On plague outbreaks in Constantinople, Smyrna, and other parts of the Ottoman Empire, see Panzac 1985.



in contemplating the variety of ills that now surround them, they indulge the darkest apprehensions and imagine that Providence intends to visit the Ottoman Empire with some awful catastrophe.

The reports of serious troubles in Upper Egypt—the continuance of the revolt in Syria—the dreadful earthquake that has desolated the whole *pashalik* of Aleppo—the predatory incursions of the Persians before whom the Ottoman armies have been obliged to fly—the revolution among their Greek subjects which all the exertions of the Empire have not, as yet, been able to quell—the late disaster that has checked the progress of the pilgrims to Mecca—the dilapidated state of their finances—even the drought of almost unexampled duration throughout the country—the spirit of disaffection that prevails amongst the janissaries, rendered more fearful by a corresponding feeling among some of the pashas on the Persian frontier...—the suspicion that the officers and men now serving with the insurgents are thus engaged if not with the approbation of their respective sovereigns, at least with their connivance—the possibility of a Russian war—and, above all, the alarming certainty that the powers of Europe are now assembled in congress at Vienna in order to deliberate on the affairs of Turkey<sup>22</sup>—such are the subjects that agitate the counsels of the Divan and occupy the attention of the populace—and naturally as this combination of untoward events presents to their minds a gloomy prospect for the future, and strongly as it, just now, works on their solemn and unbending habits, yet it is probable that the first accidental turn of fortune in their favour will efface all these impressions, and induce them to anticipate the happiest results...

XI. TNA, FO 78/111, ff. 87-104, 9 November 1822 (No. 15)

[Hamilton to George Canning (British foreign secretary) re: the dreadful consequences of the earthquake in Aleppo; the state of affairs in Syria; and the latest information on the Persian war.]

...I have the honour of transmitting the account Mr. Barker has communicated to His Excellency Viscount Strangford, of the dreadful earthquake at Aleppo. As it appears to be the most detailed statement of that catastrophe that has been received here, I have thought it of sufficient interest to be forwarded to you. In a subsequent letter, Mr. Barker mentions that even

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<sup>22</sup> See Nichols 1971: 48-54, 244-58, on the European great power discussions at Vienna and Verona to resolve the Greek affair and other disputes in the Near East.

on the 19<sup>th</sup> ultimo there was another very severe shock, and that the alarm was still great throughout the country.

Affairs in Syria wear a more favourable appearance. Berber, the rebel governor [of Tripoli] who had kept possession of the castle of Tripoli after the surrender of the town, has delivered himself up under a promise of pardon and personal safety. The whole of the country has now submitted to the authority of the sultan with the exception of Acre, in which Abdallah Pasha still remains; he is besieged by a large army, which has hitherto made no attempt to take the place by assault, probably waiting the slow but sure effects of treachery and bad faith.

I also enclose an extract of a letter from Baghdad, sent here by Mr. Barker, who in a dispatch, dated 10<sup>th</sup> October, states that, "letters from Baghdad of the end of last month represent the consternation into which the people of that city had been thrown by the advance of a Persian army to within ten leagues of that town—the *kiahya bey* [deputy or lieutenant of Dawood (Daud) Pasha of Baghdad] not having a sufficient force to oppose the enemy, had retreated within the walls of Baghdad."

The Persian troops under the command of the prince royal on the northwestern frontier...are withdrawn, after having suffered greatly from the cholera morbus. As all direct communication with Persia is now suspended, and as the Porte preserves its usual silence, it is impossible to conjecture whether the warlike preparations on the side of Baghdad, or the pacific overtures on the opposite frontier will influence the future measures of the two countries...

[Hamilton attached this copy of a dispatch from Barker, consul in Aleppo, to Lord Strangford (TNA, FO 78/111, ff. 101-04).]

Copy of a Dispatch from Mr. John Barker of Aleppo, to His Excellency the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Strangford..., His Majesty's Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, at the Ottoman Porte<sup>23</sup>

Near the Ruins of Antiochia, the 13<sup>th</sup> September 1822

...My reports to Your Excellency of the war in Palestine have been interrupted by an event, which has thrown me into domestick difficulties and

<sup>23</sup> Another version of this letter appears in Barker 1876, vol. 1: 321-29, with minor corrections by Barker's son and editor, Edward Barker. All of the locations cited in John Barker's letter are in modern-day Syria or Turkey. The document mentioned the well-known English historian Edward Gibbon, author of the multi-volume *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88). For more on the earthquake of 1822, see Knost 2010, Bodman 1963: 136, Meriwether 1999: 27.

sufferings, that left me no leisure from the most pressing and indispensable business of providing for the lodging and subsistence of my family.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> August at half-past nine in the evening, Aleppo, Antiochia, Idlib, Riha, Gisser Shogr, Darcoush, Armenas, every village, and every detached cottage within the *pashalik* were in 10 or 12 seconds entirely ruined by an earthquake, and are become heaps of stone and rubbish; by which, at the lowest computation, twenty thousand people, about one-tenth of the population, were destroyed, and an equal number maimed and wounded. The extreme points [where] this terrible phenomenon was violent enough to destroy the edifices seem to be Diabekir [Diyarbakir today] and Merkab (12 leagues south of Latachia), Aleppo and Scanderoon [Iskenderun today], Killis [Kilis or Kiliz] and Khan Shekoon. All within those points have suffered so nearly equally, that it is impossible to fix on a *foyer*, or central point. The shocks were sensibly felt at Damascus, Cyprus, and Adana. To the east of Diabekir and north of Killis, I am not well informed how far the effect extended. It was felt at sea within two leagues of Cyprus! The flashes of volcanick fire were perceived at various times throughout the night at Aleppo, Antiochia, Suedia [Samandağ today], and Scanderoon, resembling the light of the full moon; but at no place, to my knowledge, has it left a chasm of any extent, although in the low grounds, slight crevaces are everywhere to be seen; and out of many of them water issued, but soon after subsided. There was nothing remarkable in the weather, or state of the atmosphere. Edifices on the summit of the highest mountains were not safer than buildings situated on the banks of rivers, or on the beach of the sea.

Although slight shocks of earthquakes had been from time to time felt in this country, it is certain, that for several centuries none had done any material damage, except one 27 years ago, when a single town, Latachia, was partially thrown down.

In 1755, an earthquake was felt at Aleppo and Antiochia, which so much alarmed the inhabitants, that they all abandoned their houses for forty days, but very little injury was sustained.

The appearance of some very ancient edifices render[s] it probable, that this country has not suffered from earthquakes since the memorable one, about sixteen centuries ago (I speak from a very bad memory), recorded by [Edward] Gibbon, in which one-third of the inhabitants of Antioch perished, when that celebrated city contained a population of 700,000 or 800,000 souls.

It is impossible to convey an adequate idea of the scenes of horror, that were simultaneously passing on the dreadful night of the 13<sup>th</sup> August.

Here, hundreds of decrepid parents, half buried in the ruins, were imploring succour from their sons. There, distracted mothers were frantically lifting heavy stone from heaps that covered the bodies of their unconscious infants. The awful darkness of the night—the continuance of the most violent shocks at short intervals—the crush of falling walls—the shrieks, the groans, the accents of agony and despair of that long night cannot be described.

When at length the morning dawned and permitted people to quit the spot on which they had been providentially saved, a most affecting scene was displayed.

You might have seen many unaccustomed to pray, some on their knees, some prostrate adoring their Maker. Others there were running into one another's arms rejoicing in their existence. An air of cheerfulness and brotherly love animated every countenance. In a public calamity, wherein the Turk, the Jew, the Christian, the Idolater, were indiscriminate victims, or preserved by the Divine Hand of an impartial Providence, equally benevolent to all, everyone forgot his religious animosities; and what was a still more universal feeling in that joyful moment, everyone looked upon the heaviest losses with the greatest indifference. But as the sun's rays encreased in intensity, they were gradually reminded of the natural wants of shelter, and of food; and were at length alive to the full extent of the dreary prospect before them, for a greater mass of human misery has seldom been produced by any of the awful convulsions of nature.

A month has now elapsed, and the shocks continue to be felt and to strike horror into every heart night and day. The fear that they may not cease before the rainy season commences has obliged those whose business cannot allow of their quitting the ruins of their towns, to build huts of wood without the walls; and many, who thought themselves before this dreadful calamity, straitly lodged in a dozen...apartments, are happy now at the prospect of passing the winter in a single room, twenty feet square.

The spacious house, that has been the residence of the British consul at Aleppo for 230 years, is completely ruined, though not entirely fallen, and would require £10,000 to repair the damage.

The houses of all the other public agents, and private European individuals at Aleppo have been likewise entirely destroyed.



At Aleppo, the Jews suffered the most on account of their quarter of the town being badly built, with very narrow lands. Out of a population of 3,000, six hundred lives were lost; chiefly women and children. Of the Europeans, only one person of note, Signor Esdra de Picciotto, Austrian consul, and ten or twelve women and children have perished. But the greater part are now suffering from ophthalmia, and dysenteries, occasioned by their being exposed to excessive heat in the day, and very cold damp in the night.

Since my last report, nothing new has occurred in Palestine or Tripoli and Beirut, except that the Emir Beshir [Bashir II], after having been rejected by the people of Beirut, embarked for Egypt, and arrived safely in Damietta, where he is supposed to be secure under the protection of the viceroy [Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt].<sup>24</sup>

Berber still keeps possession of the castle of Tripoli, but the people have submitted, and opened the gates of the town to Ali Bey Assad [former governor of Tripoli].

All the coast and the whole of Palestine is now in subjection to the authority of the Porte, except only the castle of Tripoli, and the town of St. Jean d'Acre, to which it does not appear that the pashas have the means of laying siege, nor has the rebel Abdallah a force sufficient to oppose them in the field...<sup>25</sup>

P. S. Kept to the 27<sup>th</sup> September, for want of a conveyance sooner. The shocks continue to be felt to this day, the 45<sup>th</sup>, since the principal one; and no change has taken place in the desolation it has produced.

I annex for Your Excellency's information [a] copy of an extract from an official French letter dated Baghdad the 19<sup>th</sup> August, where the people were alarmed at the prospect of not being able to resist the Persian army that was marching upon Baghdad.

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<sup>24</sup> Emir Bashir II enjoyed a long and successful stint as chief tribute collector and local leader in Lebanon, preserving his command by supporting the nominal authority of the sultan and, more importantly, working closely with the principal powerbrokers in the region, such as Abdallah Pasha of Acre and Muhammad Ali of Egypt. Bashir curbed threats from Lebanon's tribal chieftains, sheikhs, and notables, many of whom coveted his position, and the emir crushed a tax revolt in several districts that opposed the heavy tribute payments imposed by Abdallah Pasha. Prousis 2007: 90-91.

<sup>25</sup> Acre (Akka or Akko today), a town in Ottoman Syria along the Mediterranean coast, was also called St. Jean d'Acre, St. John of Acre, and St. John d'Acre from the period of Crusader occupation.



## XII. TNA, FO 78/111, ff. 165-68a, 10 December 1822 (No. 27)

[Hamilton to Canning re: recent reports from Syria and Mesopotamia.]

...Letters from Aleppo announce the probability of peace having been concluded between the Persians and the Turks. A Persian plenipotentiary had been at Baghdad, and as the enemy had removed his troops, the inhabitants were in expectation of the most favourable results. A caravan was about to commence its journey to Aleppo, a circumstance from which they argued that there was no apprehension for its security.

The cholera morbus after making great ravages at Orfa, had spread as far as Beer [Bir, in Ottoman Mesopotamia] on the Euphrates, and there were some alarming reports its having infected a town close to Aleppo.<sup>26</sup> The consternation excited by the progress of this calamity is very great—and the Aleppines were preparing to retreat from its approach into the distant cities of Syria.

The siege of Acre continues in the same position on both sides...

## XIII. TNA, FO 78/111, ff. 198-202a, 24 December 1822 (No. 30)

[Hamilton to Canning re: the onset of plague in Aleppo.]

...The cholera morbus has appeared at Aleppo, but letters from that place state that it had been checked, and there were hopes that it would not make much progress in that country.

## XIV. TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 268-69, 10 April 1823 (No. 42)

[Strangford to Canning re: the aftereffects of the earthquake in Aleppo.]

...There are deplorable accounts from Aleppo, of the continuance of the dreadful calamity which has since August last, afflicted that city. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, an earthquake yet more violent than the preceding, completed the destruction of Aleppo and the misery of its inhabitants...

## XV. TNA, FO 78/115, ff. 104-06, 10 June 1823 (No. 64)

[Strangford to Canning re: the lingering shocks of the earthquake in Aleppo.]

...Consul Barker writes to me from Aleppo under date of the 19<sup>th</sup> ultimo, that shocks of earthquake still continued to afflict that city...

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<sup>26</sup> Orfa, a town in southeastern Turkey, on the Euphrates River; Urfa or Şanlıurfa today.

XVI. TNA, FO 78/115, ff. 108-08a, 10 June 1823 (No. 65)

[Strangford to Canning re: Greek piracy against British shipping in the Levant, in particular off the coast of Syria.<sup>27</sup>]

...Referring to the case of the British vessel *Nancy*, which I had the honour of mentioning to you in my dispatch No. 60, I feel it to be my duty to transmit to you a copy of a letter which has been addressed by Mr. [Peter] Abbott, the British consul at Acre, to the commander in chief of His Majesty's ships on the Mediterranean station.

This letter contains a deplorable account of the aggressions and violence which British commerce and navigation (even the most innocent and legal) are now suffering in consequence of the audacity of the Greek cruizers on the coast of Syria...

[Strangford attached this letter of 26 March 1823 from Peter Abbott, British consul in Beirut and Acre, to the commander in chief of the British navy in the Mediterranean (TNA, FO 78/115, ff. 110-11a).]

...I have the honour to inform you, that on Sunday morning the 23<sup>rd</sup> instant, the Maltese brig the *Nancy*, Francesco Barbara master, came into this bay [Beirut], from St. John d'Acre, without her master.

From the deposition of the mate, or *nostramo* [shipmate], it appears that the *Nancy* had been freighted at Larnaca in Cyprus by M. Vondiziano, British vice-consul, for account of the local government of that island, and having there taken in eight groups, containing about 10,000 Spanish dollars to my consignment, proceeded to Famagusta to take in 600 cannon balls, to be conveyed to Caiffa [Haifa].

On the 9<sup>th</sup> instant, while lying at anchor under Cape St. Andrew, she was boarded by the boat of a Greek schooner, which had come to anchor near her, under English colours.<sup>28</sup>

The Greeks, after pillaging every passenger, 14 Turks and 18 Armenians, as well as the captain, carried on board their schooner the 14 Turks, and all

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<sup>27</sup> British consular records from Smyrna and other ports in the Ottoman Empire reported cases of piracy in the Aegean Archipelago. TNA, FO 78/138, ff. 52-59; 78/142, ff. 20-26, 37-40, 60-72; 78/143, ff. 139-44, 197-213; 78/145, ff. 301-05; 78/153, ff. 244-45; 78/172, ff. 207-10; 78/173, ff. 15-20, 33-38; 78/175, ff. 30-37.

<sup>28</sup> Larnaca and Famagusta were ports on Ottoman Cyprus. Cape St. Andrew, or Apostolos Andreas, is the north-easternmost point of the island. Anthony Vondiziano served as British consul on Cyprus. Spanish dollars circulated in the Near East and became almost a global currency by the late eighteenth century.

the money and cannon balls, leaving eight or nine of their own crew on board the *Nancy*. The next morning, the 10<sup>th</sup> instant, the Greek [schooner] made sail with all her prey for St. John d'Acre, where she landed the passengers and cannon balls, and gave up the *Nancy*.

On account of the bad anchorage, the *Nancy* having cut a cable there, Captain Barbara gave orders to his mate Giuseppe Scasciata, to take care of the brig, and make sail for this place, whither he purposed following, as soon as he could prepare necessary documents relative to the above transaction. I have the honour to enclose you an authenticated copy of Giuseppe Scasciata's deposition, which fully explains the particulars of this audacious violation of the British flag, and pretty accurately describes the lawless depredator.

On the same day, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, I received an express from Sour [Tyre, in southern Lebanon, on the Mediterranean coast, about fifty miles south of Beirut], informing me, that on the 21<sup>st</sup> at noon, Captain Barbara put in there from Acre, in a small craft, bearing English colours, and was instantly seized, with the master of the craft, and every other person on board, and conveyed into prison. The vessel with the money and other effects found in her were seized and sequestered. I instantly dispatched a confidential agent to claim the British subjects, and the property lawfully belonging to them; in which, I trust, I shall not meet with difficulty; having the following day received an express from the pasha commanding the army besieging Acre, to inform me of these events, and that the persons detained at Sour, had been ordered to be conducted to the camp, until I should recognize and claim them.

It is lamentable to contemplate the situation in which the British flag is placed, in these seas, by the audacity of the Greek cruizers. **Since the commencement of their hostilities with the Turks, not a single British man of war has appeared on the coast of Syria**, with the exception of the *Medina*, which brought me to Acre last December twelvemonth. Emboldened by this; and countenanced by the rebel pasha, the Greeks have annoyed and infested this, and the adjacent harbours so much, within these six months—**boarding and visiting our ships even at anchor in this harbour**; that all confidence in our flag is destroyed in the opinion of the natives. Even previous to the above stated outrage, the *Levant*, a Liverpool vessel, having been engaged with a valuable freight for Malta and Algiers, was given up by the freighters without indemnity owing to the uncurbed audacity of

the Greek cruisers. Four other English vessels are now riding here under these disagreeable predicaments. But for such humiliating circumstances, many British vessels would earn valuable freights from this harbour alone. And an extensive intercourse might be carried on for the vent of our home manufactures, and colonial produce in the neighbouring markets.

I submit to the consideration of the commander in chief of His Majesty's naval forces, to adopt such measures as he may judge proper, not only for effectually protecting our trade from these disagreeable insults and depredations, but for re-establishing the preeminence of the British flag in the estimation of the people of these countries...

XVII. TNA, FO 78/115, ff. 113-14a, 10 June 1823 (No. 66)

[Strangford to Canning re: the British ambassador's favorable review and recommendation of Consul John Barker.]

...In taking the liberty of respectfully laying the subject of this dispatch before you, I am aware that it may appear irregular in me to recommend to your favourable notice a person who though during many years the faithful and zealous servant of the British nation, has not the honour of being employed under the immediate authority of His Majesty's government.<sup>29</sup>

But the very distressing circumstances attending the case of Mr. Barker, the British consul at Aleppo, and the extent of ruin and desolation brought upon him by the late awful calamity in Syria, will I hope, be admitted as some excuse for this appeal in his behalf.

Mr. Barker has lost nearly the whole of his property during the earthquake at Aleppo, when with a total abandonment of his own concerns, his active and humane exertions were exclusively employed for the succour of his fellow sufferers.

If my testimony to the general merit and good conduct of Mr. Barker can be considered as strengthening his claim to the benevolent notice of His Majesty's government, I will beg leave to say that among the multitude of consular agents employed in the Levant under the direction of this embassy,

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<sup>29</sup> The Levant Company selected and supervised most of Britain's consular officials in the Ottoman Levant until the government of George Canning dissolved the company in 1825, with the result that the Foreign Office now directly managed and regulated all consular appointments in the Ottoman Empire. See Prousis 2008: 46-48, Temperley 1966: 278-82, Wood 1964: 179-204, Gunning 2009: 13-58, 90-100.



I know not one who exceeds that gentleman in zeal, integrity, or activity—or who executes his duties in a manner more calculated to do honour to the British name and nation...

XVIII. TNA, FO 78/116, ff. 1-4, 11 August 1823 (No. 97)

[Strangford to Canning re: the refusal of the Ottoman government to accept the Aleppo earthquake relief funds raised by the subscription campaign in London; the ravages of the cholera morbus in Aleppo.]

...The state of irritation into which the affair of the Greek subscription in London, has thrown the Turkish ministers, has of late been very perceptible upon almost all occasions when I have had to contend for the interests, or to support the claims of His Majesty's subjects residing in this country.<sup>30</sup>

This feeling has, moreover, recently manifested itself in the shape of a determination which is fatal to the design so generously entertained by the Levant Company, of contributing to the relief of the unfortunate sufferers from the earthquake at Aleppo.

I have received an official communication from the *reis efendi* purporting, that the most positive orders have been sent to the Turkish authorities in that *pashalik*, not to suffer the money remitted from England to Mr. Consul Barker, to be distributed among the **subjects of the Porte**, whether Mussulmans or *reaya* [tax-paying Christian subjects of the Porte, in particular Eastern Orthodox believers].

As, when the benevolent intentions of the Levant Company were announced by me to the Porte in March last, the Turkish ministers testified a just sense of the munificence and liberality of that body, and a grateful willingness to accept of its bounty, I thought it right to require from the *reis efendi* an explanation of the ungracious message which was subsequently transmitted to me.

His Excellency stated in reply, "that the sultan did not comprehend the **double nature** of the proceedings, termed subscriptions, now instituted in England for the purpose of distributing money among his subjects—that while one of those subscriptions has for its avowed object, the purchase of

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<sup>30</sup> Brewer 2003: 220-25, 289-96, on the philhellenic subscription campaign in Britain to raise funds for the Greeks' liberty and independence. This public drive in support of Greek rebels angered Ottoman officials and prompted their doubts and questions about the validity of British assertions of Britain's neutrality in the Greek insurrection.



arms for the use of the Greek insurgents (in open encouragement and support of a rebellion carried on by the subjects of a friendly power against their lawful sovereign), another is undertaken with the apparently charitable and innocent design of relieving the distresses of a portion of those subjects who have not engaged in the revolt—that the sultan does not choose to sanction these contradictions—or to admit the principle that a foreign state, whatever its intentions may be, has a right to scatter its money, and with it to extend its influence, among his subjects—that in short, he does not wish to have anything to do with English subscriptions—that he is much obliged to the Levant Company for the benevolent dispositions which it has manifested—but that he cannot now avail himself of them—and that he hopes that the collected sums so liberally subscribed for his Syrian subjects, will be returned forthwith to the donors, and distributed among the poor of Great Britain; if indeed there be (what the unexpected and unsolicited munificence of the British nation towards the inhabitants of a foreign and distant country, forbids him to suppose) any persons of that description in His Majesty's dominions."

I received this morning letters from Aleppo of the 21<sup>st</sup> ultimo. Mr. Barker informs me that in addition to the other calamities which desolate that unfortunate city, and to the dreadful effects of the earthquakes which continue to be frequently felt there, the cholera morbus has made its appearance among the wretched and houseless population, and that its ravages were daily encreasing...

August 2013

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