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REPORTING FROM THE CITY: VIGNETTES FROM CONSTANTINOPLE IN THE DISPATCHES OF LORD STRANGFORD DURING THE EASTERN CRISIS OF THE 1820s

THEOPHILUS C. PROUSIS¹

The tangled web of the Eastern Question became the single most explosive force in European great power politics during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Constantinople became the epicenter of this contentious dispute in Ottoman-European relations. Eyewitness commentaries by diplomats, travelers, residents, and others who visited this fabled city conveyed images and episodes about various topics, including European interactions with the Ottoman Empire, European designs on contested lands, and Ottoman politics and policy. These scenes and stories not only shed light on the geopolitical heart of the Eastern Question but also reinforce the centrality of this volatile issue in the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Europe.

The Eastern crisis of the 1820s provides the setting for this selection of vignettes from the correspondence of Lord Strangford (LS for short), Britain's ambassador at the Sublime Porte from 1821 to 1824. At a tense but pivotal moment in Ottoman history, his prolific letters to the London Foreign Office detailed the intertwined challenges facing the regime of Sultan Mahmud II and rendered colorful anecdotes on the atmosphere in Constantinople, the Empire's crown jewel situated on two continents. Rebellion erupted in Greece. War loomed between Russia and Turkey. Restrictions dislocated European trade. Sectarian reprisal and religious violence spread. Janissaries undercut the sultan's political and military

¹ Department of History, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida. I presented part of this essay as a conference paper at the Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, San Antonio, Texas, November 2014.

authority. And border clashes sparked a Turkish-Persian war. In depicting these and other pressures confronting the Ottoman Empire, LS chronicled an increasingly unstable situation.² His descriptions of the ramifications of the Greek War of Independence and wider Near Eastern upheaval underline the essential importance of diplomats in the history and historiography of the Eastern Question, that precarious maze of European intrigue, penetration, and power which embroiled the receding but resilient Ottoman Empire, still possessing strategic lands and waterways in the Levant.³

An invaluable resource on the diverse manifestations of the Eastern crisis, the copious dispatches of LS probed Russian-Ottoman relations, Black Sea commerce, the Danubian Principalities, Ottoman-Persian affairs, and a host of related matters. Not only did he represent and defend British interests in the Near East but, in the aftermath of the severance of Russian-Ottoman official contacts in July 1821, he interceded on behalf of Russian concerns regarding the evacuation of Ottoman troops from Moldavia and Wallachia, the restoration of unimpeded commerce in the Black Sea, and the protection of non-combatant Ottoman Greeks who did not take part in the Greek uprising. With patience, tenacity, and tact, and with the trust of Tsar Alexander I, the British ambassador averted a Russian-Turkish war and sought to resolve unsettled Russian-Ottoman differences, a precondition for the renewal of diplomatic exchanges between the two countries. In cooperation with fellow European envoys, he called for restraint and leniency on the part of the Ottoman government, advocating reconciliation with Russia and moderation toward the Greek insurgency. He filed regular reports on his protracted negotiations at the Porte—a treasure trove of underutilized archival material on the central disputes and disorders of the 1820s, resources that enhance not just our understanding of the multi-

² LS's diplomatic correspondence, located in The National Archives, Kew, UK, inspired the design of my Strangford project, a four-volume compilation and analysis of his writings from Constantinople. The first three volumes have already appeared: Prousis 2010, 2012, 2014a. These works, with the relevant bibliography, include ample coverage of the combination of circumstances that produced and escalated the Eastern crisis of the 1820s. Also see Aksan 2007: 180-342, Finkel 2005: 289-446, Faroqhi 2006, Anscombe 2006, Philliou 2011.

³ On the Greek revolt and its reverberations, see Aksan 2007: 285-305, Brewer 2003, Pizaniyas 2011, Dakin 1973. With emphasis on the repercussions of the Greek uprising for Russian-Ottoman relations, see Prousis 1994 and 2002, and Frary 2015. For the most recent examination of the Eastern Question, see the collection of essays edited by Frary and Kozelsky 2014. Also see Schumacher 2014, and Prousis 2014a: 341-42 (note #37), for additional sources.

faceted Eastern conflict but also our perception of Ottoman politics.⁴

Partial success crowned his steadfast efforts, as war clouds between Russia and Turkey seemingly passed and diplomacy facilitated the rebuilding of stable bonds. The sultan vowed to repair damaged Greek churches and to safeguard the life and property of non-combatants; he gave public testimonies of respect for the Greek ecumenical patriarch and amnestied rebels who submitted to Ottoman jurisdiction. The Porte also promised to lift Ottoman restrictions on Russian shipping in the Black Sea and to withdraw at least some Ottoman troops from the Danubian Principalities. Indeed, Russia's foreign secretary (Karl V. Nesselrode) acknowledged that the Ottoman government had removed the major hurdles to the return of a Russian envoy to Constantinople.⁵ No other European diplomat did more to eliminate virtually every cause of Russian irritation and to satisfy Russia's legitimate claims, and the staunch exertions of Britain's ambassador continued to pave the way for the rekindling of direct Russian-Ottoman ties.

In addition to his lengthy accounts of his diplomacy, LS commented on daily events and human interest stories, observations that capture some of the drama at the grassroots and policy-making levels of society. These impressions of ordinary and extraordinary occurrences in the Ottoman capital, such as prophecies, fires, janissaries, and factions, attest to the range and clarity of his narratives, not to mention the breadth of topics addressed in his communiqués. Rich in texture, nuance, and specificity, his snapshots illumine the overlapping problems at the crux of the Eastern crisis and evoke the flavor of life at a tumultuous time in the biography of Constantinople, that metropolis on the Bosphorus which stood for centuries as an imperial crossroads and battleground.⁶

⁴ On the various issues in LS's extended deliberations with Ottoman officials and other European envoys, see Prousis 2010, 2012, 2014a. Also see Cunningham 1993a: 188-232, Florescu 1997: 123-47. See Nichols 1971: 48-54, 244-58, on the discussions of the great powers at Vienna and Verona to resolve the Greek disturbance and other quarrels in the Near East. It was at the Congress of Verona in November 1822 that the tsar entrusted LS, who left his post to attend these talks, with the delicate task of negotiating with the Porte on behalf of Russia. On British policy toward the Greek rising and the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s, see Webster 1934: 349-86, Temperley 1966: 319-26, Crawley 1930.

⁵ Cunningham 1993a: 223, Prousis 2014a: 9.

⁶ For three excellent portrayals of the Ottoman capital, drawing on multi-layered resources such as diaries, letters, memoirs, travel literature, diplomatic accounts, and other contemporary writings, see Mansel 1998, with a good section on the reign and era of Sultan Mahmud II (233-60), Kelly 2005, Freely 1998 (especially 253-65).

In a fascinating account of 28 February 1823, LS shared a prevalent Ottoman view that the unfolding troubles of the Empire perhaps came from none other than the Prophet Muhammad, whose sacred relics in Constantinople underscored the supremacy of the sultan-caliph in the Ottoman world. “The events which most commonly embellish our existence at Constantinople,” LS wrote, “have, during the last fortnight, been remarkably abundant and diversified. We have had several storms—an earthquake—much strangling of janissaries—various fires—and not a few cases of plague. To these may be added the novelty of a direct communication from Paradise, in the shape of a letter from the Prophet Mahomet to Sultan Mahmud [II].” Discovered at the sacred tomb in Mecca, the letter bore the address of the sultan and the signature of the prophet. Presented to the sultan by the conductor of the religious pilgrimage to Islam’s holy cities, this missive “declares [the prophet’s] indignation at the mismanagement of his imperial vicegerent—represents in strong terms, the decay of true Islamism—advertises to the indescribable horror and confusion which he felt on being abruptly, and somewhat unkindly, informed by the Angel Gabriel, that of seventy thousand Musulmans who had perished in battle within the last two years, only forty-seven had been allowed to enter the gates of heaven.” The prophet concluded with a grim warning, “which has often (and in other quarters) been made before, and to which the sultan must now be pretty well accustomed, that the Empire of the Crescent cannot possibly last thirty years longer.” Many versions of this letter supposedly existed, but “the one which I have the honour to transmit, is probably as near to the truth as any of the others.” Because “this ridiculous story” would probably appear in European philhellenic periodicals, “under the head of authentic intelligence from Constantinople,” LS felt compelled not to withhold this incident, “however trifling and absurd,” from the knowledge of the Foreign Office.⁷

A prophecy of another sort pervades part of the LS message of 10 March 1823, which opens with the statement that “[one] of those sudden changes which so frequently take place in the administration of this country, has this

⁷ All the LS documents for this essay are located in the Foreign Office holdings of The National Archives, Kew (TNA, FO). In most matters of wording, grammar, punctuation, and citation of numbers, I have retained LS’s format, including his archaisms and inconsistent spellings. When the manuscript has a word underlined for emphasis, I have placed it in bold print. On plague outbreaks in Constantinople, Smyrna, and other parts of the Ottoman Empire, see Panzac 1985 and Bulmus 2012. On the purported letter from the Prophet Muhammad to Sultan Mahmud II, see TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 140-42a, 28 February 1823 (No. 20). Prousis 2014a: 61-62.

day occurred.” The appointment of a new grand vizier, Silahdar Ali Pasha, boded well for a beleaguered Empire because “[this] individual is considered to be gifted with remarkable talents, and to possess such activity, energy, and resource (and no small portion of these qualities is requisite at this moment) as amply fit him for the dangerous dignity to which he has been raised.” But we learn that the hasty dismissal of the former grand vizier (Deli Abdullah Pasha), and the selection of a new one, resulted from the prediction of Turkish and Jewish court astrologers. Some extraordinary but unspecified change, the astrologers envisioned, would take place in the Empire on this very day. By way of “rendering this prophecy as harmless as possible,” the sultan decided to select “this fated day for the deposition of his vizier. The skill and foresight of the astrologers have thus been completely justified and confirmed—and it may be supposed that they are not among the persons least satisfied with the recent change.”⁸

Bad weather, natural disasters, and fires signified omens of disarray and divine disfavor in the realm of the sultan. On the night of 3 February 1823, “one of the most violent hurricanes ever known in this city” blew down two minarets of the Grand Mosque (Hagia Sophia), “a circumstance well-calculated to alarm the superstitious inhabitants of Constantinople.”⁹ Five months later, in early July 1823, the environs of the capital were “ravaged by prodigious quantities of locusts—a visitation which had not occurred here for nearly fifty years.” Not surprisingly, the “Turks look upon this calamity as peculiarly ominous, and recourse has been had to public prayers in the chief mosques.”¹⁰ Recurrent fires erupted in the capital, but “[the] most tremendous conflagration which has ever been known in this residence, took place” on 1 March 1823. “The weather being uncommonly tempestuous, the flames raged with the utmost violence for twenty-six hours,” enveloping the Tophana, Galata, and Pera neighborhoods. Ottoman estimates of destroyed dwellings and other buildings ranged from twelve thousand to over fifteen thousand. “The houses of all the foreign ministers [ambassadors and envoys] were more or less threatened, and our anxiety and alarm are not to be described, as the slightest change of wind to the northward, would have wrapped this quarter in flames.” Remarkably, according to LS, “not one house belonging to, or

⁸ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 169-71a, 10 March 1823 (No. 24). Prousis 2014a: 65.

⁹ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 41-43a, 10 February 1823 (No. 7). Prousis 2014a: 46.

¹⁰ TNA, FO 78/115, ff. 196-99, 10 July 1823 (No. 82). Prousis 2014a: 142.

occupied by Christians, suffered in the late terrible conflagration,” a fateful happening that “has produced a very strong impression upon the Turks.” The general population loudly proclaimed “that this calamity is a visitation of Providence, in vengeance for the atrocities committed at Chios; and even the ministers of the Porte avow that they consider it as a mark of divine displeasure.”¹¹

A less extensive fire, on 13 July 1823, caused much more damage, especially in the area near the Imperial Arsenal. Raging for ten hours without interruption, and at the mercy of a violent wind, the conflagration spread to “the dockyards, where it consumed a quantity of ship timber” and several naval vessels. The fire’s path “on this side of the harbour was at last checked, by the stone walls which surround the *kapudan pasha*’s [grand admiral’s] garden.” What caused this disaster? “The fire broke out in the cottage of a poor woman, who had incautiously thrown a piece of lighted touchwood, which she believed to have been extinguished, into a press, where some linen and clothes were deposited.”¹² At least some of the fires in the capital were “the work of the janissaries, among whom a more than usual degree of discontent and turbulence prevails at this moment.”¹³ On another occasion (11 August 1823), the dissatisfaction of the janissaries manifested itself in “the various attempts which are continually made to set fire to the city. Several fires evidently not accidental, have lately broken out in different quarters of Constantinople.” The incendiaries in general escaped, but a Greek, who had recently converted to Islam, was not so fortunate: “detected in the act of placing combustibles in one of the bazaars, [he] was, after a very summary process, put to death.”¹⁴

¹¹ On the frequency of fires in Constantinople, largely caused by all the structures built of wood, see Mansel 1998: 186, 224-25, 239, 249, 286, 365, Kelly 2005: 26-27. On the conflagration of 1 March 1823, see TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 165-67a, 10 March 1823 (No. 23). Prousis 2014a: 63-64. This blaze swept through Pera, Galata, and the nearby Tophana, site of the Imperial Foundry and Arsenal, and destroyed the bulk of supplies destined for Ottoman troops fighting on the Greek mainland. See the vivid sketch by the chaplain at the British embassy, Walsh 1836, vol. 2: 119-26. Finlay 1861, vol. 2: 5-6, stated that the fire paralyzed the sultan’s preparations for the military campaign of 1823. LS recorded many observations on the Chios catastrophe of 1822 and its tragic aftermath. See Prousis 2012, 2014a, 2014b, Frary 2014.

¹² TNA, FO 78/115, ff. 319-21, 16 July 1823 (No. 93). Prousis 2014a: 163. Husrev (or Khosref) Mehmed Pasha served as *kapudan pasha*, or grand admiral and commander of the Ottoman navy. On his naval exploits during the Greek-Ottoman war, see the sources in Prousis 2014a: 344 (note #14).

¹³ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 165-67a, 10 March 1823 (No. 23). Prousis 2014a: 64.

¹⁴ TNA, FO 78/116, ff. 25-28, 11 August 1823 (No. 103). Prousis 2014a: 172.

Of all the domestic disturbances facing the Porte in the early 1820s, threats from the janissary corps were the most frequently cited danger, second only perhaps to the Greek uprising itself, in the writings of Britain's ambassador. In late February 1823, numerous *ustaas*, or leading officers of the janissaries, were "banished or secretly put to death" because of their harassment of the ecumenical patriarch (Anthimos III). The "seizure and exemplary punishment of these wretches" demonstrated the Porte's protection of "the security and dignity of the head of the Greek Church." The "utmost extremities" awaited all Muslims, "whatever their rank or office might be, who should fail in their respect to [the patriarch's] sacred person."¹⁵

The sultan's appointment of a new aga or chief of the janissary corps convinced LS of an imminent showdown between the sultan and the fractious officers. The recently chosen commander, Huseyin Aga Pasha, "whose measures of severity are so extraordinary, and have so much the appearance of system," stirred the ambassador to imagine "that we are at the eve of some important crisis, during which the authority of the sultan and the power of the janissaries will be committed in actual conflict."¹⁶ A subsequent note by LS (26 March 1823) praised the aga for displaying "the utmost vigour, ability, and resolution, in the execution of his office. At no period, perhaps, of...Ottoman history, have the janissaries been so completely humbled and subdued as at the present. The banishment of the refractory *ustaas*, still continues, and one by one, Constantinople will be delivered from those authors or promoters of all the mischief and all the disgraceful scenes which occurred here some months ago, and of which the sultan retains a very strong recollection."¹⁷

The seditious spirit and overweening reach of the janissaries permeated many of the epistles by LS, yet on 11 August 1823 he expressed confidence in "the great and essential services which [the aga] has rendered, in keeping that turbulent body under restraint—in suppressing the abuses practised by the *ustaas*—and, above all, in powerfully contributing to the success of those plans of reform in the military constitution of the janissaries, of which the sultan has never lost sight." Promoted to "the rank of a pasha of the first class," the aga aroused "as much discontent as alarm" among the janissaries. Indeed, he "has

¹⁵ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 136-39, 28 February 1823 (No. 19). Prousis 2014a: 60.

¹⁶ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 165-67a, 10 March 1823 (No. 23). Prousis 2014a: 64. Aksan 2007: 315, on the newly chosen commander of the janissaries, who buttressed the sultan's modernizing aspiration to subdue the unruly units of this once elite corps.

¹⁷ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 213-15a, 26 March 1823 (No. 32). Prousis 2014a: 75.

exhibited fresh proofs of his determination to enforce the strictest discipline among the troops under his orders. The slightest offence is punished with death, and even so late as yesterday, three *ustaas* who were the principal leaders of the malcontents in their respective corps, were **publicly** strangled.”¹⁸ By the end of the year, the janissary aga received a strategic appointment, as pasha of Bursa and commander of the Bosphorus. This nomination, LS wrote on 24 December 1823, related directly to “that plan of subjugating the janissaries of which the sultan never loses sight, and which, I believe, occupies him more than any other consideration.”¹⁹ With the abolition of the janissaries in 1826, the sultan achieved his goal of ending the janissary threat as a precondition for initiating more systematic military and institutional reforms.

Rivalries and divisions among top officials in the Ottoman government, another common theme in the LS reports, influenced the ambassador’s negotiations at the Porte. Based on his discussions with Ottoman authorities, and his close ties to several of them, LS voiced insider information on Divan debates and disagreements over the appropriate response to the stalemate in Russian-Ottoman transactions. Seeking to avoid a Russian-Turkish war and to restart Russian-Ottoman official relations, he found a natural ally in the moderate or peace faction in the Divan. Yet the escalating Greek insurgence, and Russian complaints about Ottoman troops still occupying the Danubian Principalities and about Ottoman violations of commercial accords, gave the Divan’s belligerent or war party leverage with the sultan, at the expense of LS’s painstaking diplomacy to satisfy both Russian and Ottoman grievances. For example, in early February 1823 he cooperated with the *reis efendi*, or foreign minister, Mehmed Sadik Efendi, to advance a policy of conciliation with Russia. But the *reis efendi* “is strongly opposed by Husny Bey [director of the Imperial Mint], who is thought to be aiming at the post of *reis efendi*, and who is paying his court most assiduously to the sultan, by flattering the monarch’s pride, and by declaiming against everything which may look like a concession to Russia.”²⁰

¹⁸ TNA, FO 78/116, ff. 25-28, 11 August 1823 (No. 103). Prousis 2014a: 172.

¹⁹ TNA, FO 78/118, ff. 45-49, 24 December 1823 (No. 180). Prousis 2014a: 275. For more on the janissaries, including the sultan’s assault on them in 1826, see Aksan 2007: 306-42, Kelly 2005: 253-60, Freely 1998: 260-65; Mansel 1998: 220-39.

²⁰ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 15-24a, 10 February 1823 (No. 3). Prousis 2014a: 41. The letters of LS from 1821 through 1823 (Prousis 2010, 2012, 2014a) repeatedly mentioned the high-ranking officials—the *reis efendi*, the *kapudan pasha*, the *kiahya bey* (minister of the interior), and others—with whom the ambassador conducted regular talks on Eastern affairs.

At the very same time, LS worked closely with the *kapudan pasha*, Husrev Mehemmed Pasha, exclaiming in their private and confidential conversation that “the deplorable and unpromising appearance of the affairs of this Empire” did not bode well for Ottoman success in a conflict with Russia. Additionally, “the progress made by the Greeks” and “the now proved insufficiency of the Turkish marine to cope with the naval armaments of the insurgents” constituted strong reasons “for hastening a reconciliation with Russia.” The return of Russia’s ambassador to Constantinople, LS affirmed, would deflate and discourage the Greeks, “inducing them to submit, deprived as they would then be of the hope of that powerful diversion in their favour, which a Russian war would have created.” Receptive to this line of argument, the *kapudan pasha* had “very little inclination to measure his strength with the insurgent fleet” and did all that he could “to prevent the Porte from sending him to sea, and to try, in preference to a continuance of hostile operations, the effect of negotiation and a conciliatory policy, upon the minds of the Greeks.”²¹

LS developed amiable connections with perhaps the key spokesperson for the aggressive camp, Gianib (Salih) Efendi, the head of the sultan’s palace police service. Opposed to the adoption of a mollifying system in foreign policy, Gianib was “incomparably, the ablest, though the most impracticable and intolerant, member of the Divan.” Even his discharge from office in August 1823 did not dissuade LS of his prominence and sway in the Ottoman ruling establishment. “I fear that Gianib Efendi is too strongly fixed in the favour and confidence of his sovereign to be altogether excluded from his councils at this moment.”²² The prolonged miseries and misfortunes of the intensifying Greek-Ottoman war, and the still unresolved restoration of a formal relationship between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, only deepened the ambassador’s frustration. This anxious and precarious situation, he apprehensively relayed on 4 November 1823, would become “a complete triumph to Gianib Efendi and to that party in the Divan who have always maintained the existence of a real connection between the Greek revolt and the policy of the Russian cabinet.”²³

²¹ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 26-28a, 10 February 1823 (No. 4). Prousis 2014a: 42.

²² TNA, FO 78/116, ff. 85-86, 25 August 1823 (No. 113). Prousis 2014a: 181.

²³ TNA, FO 78/117, ff. 182-85, 4 November 1823 (No. 156). Prousis 2014a: 243. See the British ambassador’s many comments on the influential Gianib Efendi in Prousis 2010, 2012, 2014a.

The deadlock between Russia and Turkey fueled the Porte's "ill-humour," a mood exacerbated by the acute sense of danger felt by those Ottoman ministers who had recommended a conciliatory stance to the sultan. After pursuing this policy, declared the LS letter of 26 May 1823, the sultan seemed to regret a course of action that "led to useless and unproductive sacrifice of his dignity. I have the means of positively knowing that the sultan spares neither reproaches nor menaces in his language to his ministers, whom he accuses of having deceived him by false assurances of the readiness of Russia to rekindle her friendly relations with this Empire provided, he (the sultan) made the first advances in the way of conciliation—and that in particular, some intelligence (whether true or false I know not) which has lately reached the Porte, of a change in the Russian councils...has taught the Ottoman government to believe that the hopes of a cordial good understanding being effected between the two countries, are more distant than ever." The ramifications of this rift proved alarming, as the ambassador cogently claimed. "The angry feelings of the sultan and the fears which they excite in his ministers, are, I am persuaded, the true causes of the late violent and unjustifiable proceedings towards the [four] Russian ships" confined in the harbor of Constantinople. Equally troubling, the Divan members who advocated compromise and concession "now tremble before the vindictive despot, who reproaches them with subserviency to Russia—and to escape from that reproach, and with the fear of the bowstring before their eyes, they are now advising a line of conduct decidedly opposite to that which has placed their lives in peril."

Any favorable change, LS continued, depended on Russia furnishing "the only proof which will suffice to convince this government that she is sincere in her desire for peace," namely, the swift return of a Russian ambassador and the resumption of direct contacts between the two countries. Without this encouragement and support, the ministers who "have hitherto listened to the friendly counsel of the allies, and pledged themselves for its good result," would be unwilling to continue to do so, "now that they perceive that the sacrifices which they have prevailed upon their master to make, are ineffectual, and that their own lives are endangered by the advice which they have given. On every ground of honour, policy, and interest, I conceive that Russia is bound to do something for those who have risked everything for her."²⁴

²⁴ TNA, FO 78/115, ff. 64-70a, 26 May 1823 (No. 59). Prousis 2014a: 113.

Factional strife seemingly worsened a fortnight later when LS reported on 10 June 1823 the sudden dismissal of the *kiahya bey*, or minister of the interior (Seydaa Efendi). This action validated the ambassador's apprehensions "that the ministers who have supported the opinions and advice of the allied missions at this residence, and who in consequence of that advice have urged the adoption of a conciliatory policy towards Russia, are now placed in a situation of extreme personal danger, by the utter failure of the expectations (in which they had taught their sovereign to indulge) that Russia would have met this change of system in a corresponding spirit of conciliation." The removal of the *kiahya bey* amounted to "an irreparable loss" because of "the talent, energy, and good principles, which distinguished him, and which are no longer available to the cause of peace" and because of "the discouragement which his fall must produce in the minds of those members of the Divan who have hitherto supported his opinions in the council." A casualty of factional politics, Seydaa Efendi lost his position as a result of "the vehemence with which he insisted upon the release of the four ships under the Russian flag, at present detained here. The strong language which he held in the Divan upon that subject, supplied his enemies with a fresh opportunity of representing him to the sultan as the devoted slave of Russia and of the Christian powers."²⁵ But Seydaa Efendi, and the moderate party, made a comeback by year's end. The impending arrival of Russian diplomatic representative Matvei Minciaky, LS recounted on 14 November 1823, would provide Ottoman ministers "with an opportunity of **proving** to the Divan and to the people, that there does really exist a disposition on the part of Russia to renew her ancient relations between the two countries."²⁶

Throughout his correspondence on Ottoman-Greek hostilities, LS discussed one of the striking realities of the Greek struggle for independence—discord among Greek warriors and politicians. Fractures and cleavages, along regional, social, political, and ideological lines, precipitated internecine strife, eroded national unity, and confounded the process of nation-state building.

²⁵ TNA, FO 78/115, ff. 100-03, 10 June 1823 (No. 63). Prousis 2014a: 119-20.

²⁶ TNA, FO 78/117, ff. 206-09, 14 November 1823 (No. 158). Prousis 2014a: 246. On Minciaky (Minchaki in Russian bibliography), Russia's recently appointed consul-general in the Danubian Principalities, see the references in Prousis 2012, 2014a. Before he even started his consul-generalship, Minciaky received a new assignment as commercial attaché in Constantinople. Attached to the Russian embassy, he would supervise Russian trade interests, resolve commercial and other disagreements between Russia and Turkey, and expedite the renewal of their official relations.

“Fresh and most serious dissensions,” he wrote on 26 March 1823, “have broken out among the chiefs at Missolonghi. Only four of the Greek blockading vessels have remained off Prevesa, and they have refused to continue there longer than fifteen days, unless the arrears of pay due to the crews should be discharged.” This same dispatch described the disorder and confusion in Nauplion, where a mob of Greeks plundered the town’s treasury, housed in a local mosque. “The populace broke into the mosque...and seized everything which it contained, declaring that as the spoils of Tripolitsa, Navarino, and Corinth, had been divided among the chiefs of the insurgents, it was but just that the common people should now have their share. I am assured that the amount of the property thus plundered, would have sufficed to maintain the Greek fleet for twelve months.”²⁷

LS and other European envoys, according to this letter of 25 April 1823, endeavored “to divest the war of its character of ferocious barbarity, and to engage the Porte to cause its military operations against the insurgents to be preceded by offers of amnesty for the past and of security and clemency for the future.” These efforts by Ottoman authorities had only limited success because of the Greeks’ contradictory responses. “In every quarter where the amnesty proclaimed by the Porte has not been rejected by the Greeks, its conditions have been faithfully and honourably fulfilled.” But the districts that acquiesced to this mercy were only “those which are removed from the immediate influence and controul of the unprincipled chiefs, who with singular indulgence, are considered throughout Europe as patriots, heroes, and sages, engaged in the glorious task of giving liberty and happiness to their country—while in that country they are well known to be men who have no object in view beyond the gratification of their own ambition, and the advancement of their own interests.” The Greeks in general would willingly submit, “were it not for this fatal influence, and gladly would they return to their allegiance, and purchase by an unqualified acceptance of the Turkish proposals, an exemption from the miseries which this most deplorable insurrection has drawn down upon their suffering country.” LS based this perspective “upon the information which reaches me, from every quarter, and which describes the Greek revolt, in its present stage, not as the effort of the

²⁷ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 224-27, 26 March 1823 (No. 34). Prousis 2014a: 77-78. Concise explanations of Greek military disunity and political fractiousness during the Greek revolt include the relevant sections of the studies by Dakin 1973, Beaton 2013.

general will—not as the struggle of the Greek nation to emancipate itself from Turkish oppression, but as the desperate game of ambitious individuals. I am well aware that this is not the light in which the Greek question is popularly considered, surrounded as it is with so many illusions of imagination and sympathy.”²⁸

With Ottoman forces launching another offensive in the region of Acarnania, LS stated on 11 August 1823, “the cause of the Greeks will certainly be again placed in the utmost danger.” Any exertions that they might make to defend this area “would be rendered ineffectual by the unceasing jealousies and dissensions which distract their councils, and which subsist, as in ancient times, among the inhabitants of almost every separate township.” Not confined to mainland Greece, these disputes “have lately again broken out at Hydra, where a conspiracy was formed by one of the contending parties, to deliver up the island to the Turkish fleet.”²⁹ This “spirit of faction and disunion,” LS asserted on 7 September 1823, “had never risen to such a pitch as now.” The Greek military chieftain Theodore Kolokotroni faced charges from the Greek provisional government “for having embezzled the greater part of the booty at Nauplion,” while Prince Alexander Mavrocordato had been obliged “to take refuge in Hydra, in consequence of his life having been endangered by the rivalry of his colleagues.” Meanwhile, the Hydriote navy “is absolutely unable to put to sea, and the utmost discontent prevails among the sailors, who have received no pay from the government. The main hopes of the Greeks now rest upon the speedy arrival of money and arms from England.”³⁰

So many episodes emerge from the LS manuscripts, imparting to readers at least some of the human drama at the grassroots level of the Eastern crisis. In place of a conclusion, I will share three of these vignettes. On 20 March 1823, “a numerous assembly of all the Jews resident at Constantinople, was held at the house of a principal banker of that nation, to consider the means of escaping from a severe infliction of the sultan’s displeasure with which they were menaced.” Their worry stemmed from the action taken by some of the Jews in Salonica: they passed along to the Greeks of that city letters from fellow Greeks in the Morea, “urging them [Salonica’s Greeks] to

²⁸ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 288-99, 25 April 1823 (No. 46). Prousis 2014a: 97-99.

²⁹ TNA, FO 78/116, ff. 29-32, 11 August 1823 (No. 104). Prousis 2014a: 173-74.

³⁰ TNA, FO 78/116, ff. 161-62, 7 September 1823 (No. 127). Prousis 2014a: 205. For more on Kolokotroni and Mavrocordato, two of the major leaders of the Greek struggle, see the references in Prousis 2014a: 350 (note #6) and 361-62 (note #12).

engage in the insurrection, and containing offers of speedy assistance from the government at Argos.” Fearful that this circumstance would give the Porte a pretext for confiscating their property, the Jews of the capital “determined to avert the danger by a voluntary sacrifice. They have accordingly offered to rebuild at their own expense the three barracks, and the other public offices” destroyed by the previously cited conflagration that swept parts of the capital on 1 March 1823.³¹

On the predicament of commercial restrictions affecting European navigation, Britain’s ambassador expressed a glimmer of hope on 11 September 1823. “Almost all of those perplexing and vexatious regulations, and that multitude of petty (but in the aggregate) onerous charges on ships passing through the Bosphorus, which have hitherto operated as positive impediments to the free exportation of Russian produce, are now abolished.” This measure implied that Ottoman ministers “appear to have acted with a cordial and sincere desire to remove all grounds for just complaints on the part of Russia and the other European powers.”³²

Lastly, in late October 1823, the British embassy successfully interceded for the release of eleven Russian monks detained in Adrianople, a clear sign of LS’s defense of Russian interests in the absence of an official Russian diplomatic mission at the Porte. The British consul in Adrianople (Pietro Duveluz) informed the embassy that eleven Russian monks, “belonging to one of the monasteries on Mount Lebanon, having arrived [in Adrianople] on their way to Russia, unprovided with Turkish passports, had been seized by order of the pasha (who supposed them to be Greek spies) and conducted them to prison.” The consul pressed the pasha, who “permitted the unfortunate men to be released from prison” and then awaited orders from the Porte for the continuation of the monks’ journey to Russia. After LS conferred with the *reis efendi*, the grand vizier authorized the pasha of Adrianople “to give the requisite passports to the Russians, and to facilitate their journey to the frontier.” The Russian passports, “and other proofs of nationality, which were in the possession of the eleven priests, . . . left no doubt of their being Russian subjects.”³³

³¹ TNA, FO 78/114, ff. 213-15a, 26 March 1823 (No. 32). Prousis 2014a: 75. On Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire, see the scholarship cited in Prousis 2014a: 350 (note #3). For the Jews of Constantinople, also see Mansel 1998: 15-16, 123-28, 141-42, 265, Mann 1982, Cohen 2014.

³² TNA, FO 78/116, ff. 169-72, 11 September 1823 (No. 130). Prousis 2014a: 208.

³³ TNA, FO 78/116, ff. 296-99, 25 October 1823 (No. 145). Prousis 2014a: 229.

The vast majority of LS documents, not just the selections for this essay, widen our lens on the Eastern Question—from a purely great-power military, naval, and diplomatic rivalry to a more complex, multi-dimensional contest. Indeed, European strategic, commercial, and religious objectives entwined with the unpredictable circumstances of the Ottoman Empire, including the shifting balance between moderate and militant factions in the Ottoman government. By suggesting the dynamics of Ottoman-European exchanges, the LS memoranda depict a more varied and animated picture of Europe's assorted interactions with the Ottoman Empire. By relating precise incidents of janissary unrest, Greek sedition, commercial disarray, and public insecurity, his writings offer insight into Ottoman politics at a crucial juncture in Ottoman and Balkan history. Precisely because of LS's access to highly placed authorities in the central government and his knowledge of their sustained deliberations, his reports reveal how Ottoman officialdom perceived and reacted to the Greek insurgency, the subsequent impasse in Russian-Ottoman affairs, and other aspects of the Eastern crisis. These descriptions also convey lively imagery of daily life in the capital. Their very specificity and urgency sharpens our focus on the multiple issues that marked an age of upheaval in the Ottoman Levant. In all these ways, the LS files highlight the value of archival discoveries for investigating the most significant happenings in Balkan, Ottoman, and Eastern Question history.

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