

## The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 9 (2012)

Seas, Islands, Humanists

The *H*istorical Review  
La Revue *H*istorique



VOLUME IX (2012)

Département de Recherches Néohelléniques  
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Department of Neohellenic Research  
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

**Sinan Kuneralp (ed.), Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on the Origins of World War One: The Final Stage of the Cretan Question, 1899-1913 / Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on “the Eastern Question”: The Cretan Uprising, 1866-1869**

*Rosie Randolph*

doi: [10.12681/hr.296](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.296)

### To cite this article:

Randolph, R. (2013). Sinan Kuneralp (ed.), Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on the Origins of World War One: The Final Stage of the Cretan Question, 1899-1913 / Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on “the Eastern Question”: The Cretan Uprising, 1866-1869. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 9, 233–248. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.296>

# Critical Perspectives

---

## Approches Critiques

Sinan Kuneralp (ed.),

OTTOMAN DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS ON THE ORIGINS OF WORLD WAR ONE:

THE FINAL STAGE OF THE CRETAN QUESTION, 1899-1913,

Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2009, 609 pages.

OTTOMAN DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS ON “THE EASTERN QUESTION”:

THE CRETAN UPRISING, 1866-1869,

Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2010,

Part 1: *May 1866 to September 1867*, 620 pages,

Part 2: *September 1867 to June 1869*, 660 pages.

The current thaw in Greek-Turkish relations is particularly welcome to those of us with an interest in history.\* Edhem Eldem wrote a fine article for *The Historical Review*, in which he said,

I find it impossible even to think of my area of study without referring to the multiple layers of Greek history that lie embedded in the fabric of late Ottoman history, and vice versa [...] the kind of intimacy and total overlap that I find to be lying at the base of the complex relationship between Greek and Ottoman [...] history.<sup>1</sup>

The Isis Press of Istanbul is gradually publishing an extensive series of volumes of Ottoman diplomatic documents of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and this is an initiative to be celebrated. It is possibly the first time that we in the West have been treated to hearing the Ottomans in their own words, and a variety of views and personalities emerge, making for an engaging and lively read. These were people grappling with problems in real time, with all the pressures of international relations, rumour, uncertainty and compromise that diplomatic work involves.

The volumes under review here have excellent introductions. The index of writers reads like a *Who's Who* of the Ottoman diplomatic world, and the indices of names and subjects facilitate navigation by theme. Sinan Kuneralp

---

\* Ottoman proper names are spelled in this review as per nineteenth-century usage.

<sup>1</sup> Edhem Eldem, “Greece and the Greeks in Ottoman History and Turkish Historiography”, *The Historical Review / La Revue Historique* VI (2009), pp. 27-40, at p. 27.

has made a fine job of editing these books. He collected material scattered across many files in order to arrange it chronologically. This works well: the Porte would send a circular to its various representatives abroad, who would then send in their replies, covering not only the points raised, but how public opinion towards Turkey was faring, as well as advice and reflections on major issues of the day and local news. We thus get a comprehensive overview of events as they were unfolding throughout Europe. Another factor in their favour is that they are being published for the first time almost in their entirety, and have not been subjected to the selective processes imposed upon the Blue Books, Yellow Books or Red Books of other nations. On this process, George Finlay was particularly scathing, describing the British Blue Book on Crete as “full of padding to mystify Parliament and [omitting] important Russian and French Papers”.<sup>2</sup> The Ottoman diplomatic papers were mainly for internal consumption. The language, whilst always deeply respectful, seems less formal than that of the British Blue Books, though this may be because they are in French.

As sources to work with, these volumes give us a time frame of what was happening, and thus an accurate base line for cross reference, which may not necessarily be apparent in existing books or in the documents they were based on. Ottoman intelligence was impressive – from diplomatic and press sources, and

from informers. The documents provide us with useful information even now and are a delight to read. We get a day-to-day overview of gradually evolving and changing relationships: for example, France’s fears of Prussia, which drove her towards an entente with Russia, to the puzzled dismay and bewilderment of the Porte, something which must have been difficult for the diplomat A’ali and Bourée, who were friends.<sup>3</sup>

\*

The two volumes covering the years 1866-1869 provide a new and valuable prism through which to view the Cretan Revolt. This significant collection of documents offers us real insight, and you feel you come to understand the diplomats themselves and appreciate the difficulties they faced. If the Ottomans were feeling slightly overwhelmed, by clandestine Greek help for the Cretan Revolt, by the pouring in of volunteers and supplies, by the pouring out of refugees, by the frontier episodes in Thessaly and Epirus, by the creation of committees in favour of the Cretans in cities all over Europe, the United States and Russia, and by Great Power pressure to show moderation in pacifying the island, none of this shows in the documents. The Ottomans were no strangers to revolutionary uprisings, and they may well have thought that this revolt would burn itself out, providing there was no Great Power interference.

The Ottoman response took place on two levels: events on Crete and its

---

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mowbray Morris, 23 January 1868, British School at Athens, Finlay Archive, E28.

---

<sup>3</sup> John Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869*, Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1978, p. 319.

military reaction to them, and its own political and diplomatic agenda. The Porte's concerns were to achieve the pacification of the island, resist border incursions and deal with the refugee situation; at a diplomatic level, they needed to fend off the collective note with its call for an international commission of inquiry, to assess and manipulate public opinion, and to take advantage of the shifting alliances in Europe. Finally, pushed to the limits of its patience, the Porte confronted Greek intransigence over refugee repatriation by issuing the ultimatum which led to a rupture in diplomatic relations.

The Ottomans had much to be wary of, which led to the constant claims of the total pacification of the island. There were the qualms of the governor-general that his failure to achieve pacification would lead to his dismissal, that the sultan's displeasure would lead to ministerial changes; fears of foreign intervention at a diplomatic or even military level, fears of losing Crete to Greece, fears that this could indeed lead by a domino effect to the dismemberment of the empire. The constant mantra of "total pacification" proved counter-productive as it undermined Ottoman credibility, and European public opinion became sceptical.

It is remarkable how disciplined and ordered Ottoman diplomats were, often under very trying circumstances. There were frequent calls for instructions as to what line they should take, and what language they should hold. Some of the most vivid reports came from Russia, and for the St Petersburg scene we are much indebted to, and enriched by, the verbatim reports of Conéménos Bey. A Greek from Epirus, he held only the rank

of chargé d'affaires, the post having been downgraded in the 1860s, according to Kuneralp "as a gesture of protest for Russian attempts to throw off the Paris Peace Treaty stipulations". This meant that he did not enjoy as much respect as he would have had as a minister. At first Russia was cool about the Cretan Uprising, but as Conéménos was to write, "Arkadi changed everything." Russia became enthusiastic, raising funds, sending corn via the Black Sea, and helping to transport refugees to Greece. An added incentive was the engagement of the young King George I of Greece to Olga, daughter of the Grand Duke Constantine, an event that cemented Greece to its Russian co-religionists. Since the Ionian Islands had been ceded by Britain on the accession of the young king, there was hope that Crete might yet become their dowry.

For Conéménos, shunned by the Russians, aware of their monetary and moral support for Crete, with the imperial family and public opinion openly antagonistic to the Porte, life cannot have been easy. His was a hostile environment – the Russian Foreign Minister Gortschakoff, initially bullying, would demand to see him, sometimes getting him up from his sick bed in order to shout at him. Afterwards, his tone changed to one of silky forced amusement, the Russian cat playing with the Ottoman mouse. Later, possibly as Russian priorities changed from Cretan cession to Panslavism, there became space for friendship, and the daily enquiries after the health of Conéménos' 11-year-old daughter, who hovered for a month between life and death with

typhus fever, have something genuinely moving about them. Although Crete and Greece were ultimately left without Russia's active backing, it was still Gortschakoff who supported Greece's bid for a deliberative voice at the 1869 Paris Conference.

Syros was the entrepôt at the hub of revolutionary activity. War materials, food, clothing and grain came in and were re-exported, the grain by now milled into flour. European volunteers made their way to Crete, often, like J. Hillary Skinner and Gustave Flourens, doubling as journalists. To begin with, men and goods were few and were transported by caique, an enterprise that became dangerous after the implementation of the blockade in September 1866. In the wake of the flood of sympathy following the siege of Arkadi, subscriptions were collected in London for the purchase of one of the blockade runners of the American Civil War, which had been returned for resale to the shipyard that had built her: the *Dream* became the *Arkadi* and arrived at Syros in February 1867.

On Syros, Danich Bey was serving as consul-general. He was a Roman Catholic, born Antoine Denis Dallegrio to a family which had emigrated to Istanbul from Tinos or Naxos with the formation of the Greek State. His was an unenviable posting – the whole island of Syros was in patriotic uproar, and on several occasions he went in fear for his life. Although his reports are graphic in their descriptions and in the difficulties of his situation, he was an efficient information gatherer. After these apprehensive years, he was posted to Corfu. In one of his last communications he expressed bitterness that the Porte

had not confirmed his new position, which, if cancelled, would have left him in severe financial straits.

Britain had been a staunch supporter of the Ottoman Empire from the time of their alliance in the Crimean War, but since then had adopted a strictly non-interventionist policy. For Musurus Pasha, the long-serving Ottoman ambassador to the Court of St James, life was much easier than for Conéménos and Danich Bey. He had very little hostile opinion to deal with, and his frequent interviews with the then foreign secretary, Edward Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby, were a way of testing the firmness of British policy, of seeking advice for pressing problems, and for probing the British foreign secretary's opinion on what was happening in Europe – all to be faithfully relayed in his dispatches to the Porte. It is only through Stanley's mildly exasperated diary entries that we learn that Musurus' visits, several times a week, were too often and too long.<sup>4</sup>

Musurus' two periods of heightened activity were in trying to get the blockade runner *Arkadi* seized before she left London, in which he was unsuccessful, and in making plans for the impending visit of Sultan Abdülaziz. The sultan's visit to the Exposition Universelle in Paris in the summer of 1867 was much trumpeted – it was the first time a sultan had travelled beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire. He went on to visit London and Vienna, and his trip was a public relations triumph. People became intoxicated with the splendour and exoticism of the East. It was hard work

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 280, 309, 312.

for Mehmed Fuad Pasha, who acted as both minister of foreign affairs and interpreter. Unfortunately, no record remains of the private conversations that took place with Napoleon III or with other statesmen. Europe became less condemning of the Empire, and Abdülaziz returned from his tour keen to implement further reforms.

Djémil Mehmed Pasha was serving in Paris for a third term. His first was after the Crimean War, when he was one of the Turkish delegates at the Congress of Paris in 1856. He was a man of great experience, sent to keep a finger on the pulse of French foreign policy initiatives which tended to waver, as Kuneralp tells us, between Napoleon's personal sympathy for nascent nationalities and a state policy which supported the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. It is touching that Djémil, in one of the *longueurs* of the Paris Peace Conference of 1869, caused by the political crisis in Athens to form a cabinet prepared to accept and sign the conference stipulations, went to Nice to visit the dying Fuad.

In September 1866 Safvet Pasha, then Ottoman Ambassador to Paris, had been recalled to Istanbul where he later became acting minister of foreign affairs. He covered Fuad's absence whilst the latter accompanied the sultan on his journey to Europe, a period of five months in which A'ali was on Crete making his investigation and report, which ended in the application of Organic Law; and again in the months when Fuad, nominally still minister of foreign affairs, was incapacitated by heart disease and had moved first to Florence and then to Nice. Safvet was fully aware of the Paris diplomatic scene and of the finely nuanced

positions of his former colleagues, and his dispatches to Djémil, who had replaced him, are full of advice and concern. The crisis that led to the rupture between Greece and Turkey had developed over the repatriation of refugees. During the conflict on Crete, many families had been forced to leave their homes because of the fighting, in some instances because their villages had been burnt and in others because of fears of reprisals, and in cases where villages had submitted to Ottoman authority. Another cause was starvation, due to two years of uncultivated land and unharvested crops, and to marauding troops from both sides who were living off the land.

The Ottomans were against taking people away from Crete, but the fears and rumours had become too great for the Powers to ignore. (The former would have been surprised to hear that their views were shared by the great American philanthropist and philhellene Samuel Gridley Howe, who raised money, bought food and clothes, and came to Crete to oversee their distribution.)<sup>5</sup> The Porte asked that the refugees should be

---

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Gridley Howe, *The Cretan Refugees and their American Helpers: A Statement Addressed to the Contributors for the Relief of Cretan Refugees*, Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1868; Greek transl. as *Κρήτες πρόσφυγες και οι Αμερικάνοι ευεργέτες τους*, Athens: Ekati, 2010; *id.*, *Appeal to the People of the United States to Relieve from Starvation the Women and Children of the Greeks of the Island of Crete*, Boston: George C. Rand & Avery, 1867; Laura E. Richards (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe*, Vol. II: *The Servant of Humanity*, Boston and London: Dana Estes & Co. and John Lane, 1909, pp. 537 ff.

transported to other parts of the empire, but the Powers transported them to Greece, a fact greatly resented by the Porte as interference in their internal affairs. Greece had to take out a loan to support the refugees. Numbers are normally quoted as being about 60,000, but the more accurate figure, based on an attempt to count their numbers in different localities, is in the region of 40,000.<sup>6</sup> As the months went by, the refugee situation became more wretched. Although they were away from the fighting and from trying to survive in caves on the mountains or by the shore, they were away from their homesteads and living at subsistence level on an allowance that would barely keep them in bread and water. Gradually there were petitions to return. The Powers were in no mood to help, and it was left to the Ottomans to charter ships. What was unexpected, and to some extent inexplicable, was the opposition this engendered. Refugees were not given free passage to the ships. Their repatriation was strongly opposed, often violently, and Fotiades Bey, the Ottoman minister at Athens, was reduced to arranging embarkations at night. The constant scuffles were blamed on agents of the Greek Central Committee.<sup>7</sup>

Financially it would have been in the interests of Greece to divest itself of the refugee burden as soon as it could,<sup>8</sup> but the Central Committee possibly contended that having a large population of Cretan refugees in Greece was a step towards annexation and proof that the insurrection was still alive.

It was the constant battle of trying to repatriate refugees, despite Greek government promises that help was at hand, that finally made Fotiades lose patience and suggest to the Porte the need for an ultimatum. Greece refused to accept its five points, which led to a rupture in diplomatic relations. The various diplomatic papers relating to the conditions under which the Paris Peace Conference would be held make fascinating reading. Greece, given only a consultative voice and not a deliberative one, refused to participate. Gortschakoff worked hard to try to get this changed, but it was one of the conditions the Ottomans had stipulated for their own participation. Even Lord Clarendon, writing to William Gladstone, felt that this had been a mistake.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> For refugee numbers, see Kuneralp (ed.), *The Cretan Uprising, 1866-1869*, Part 2, no. 1140, p. 342.

<sup>7</sup> Finlay, in an article published anonymously in the *Levant Herald* (2-12-1868), Finlay Archive, E35, p. 51, put the original enthusiasm for emigration down to an attempt to "cause an intervention of the European Powers". This sentence appears only in the ms. version, Finlay Archive, E28, pp. 194 ff, and has been edited out of the printed version.

---

<sup>8</sup> On 1 November 1867, Stanley wrote in his journal, "Erskine writes...that the Greeks are getting tired of having to feed the Cretan refugees, of whom there must between 30 and 40,000 in Greece. They cost £20,000 a month, or one-fourth of the whole revenue of Greece."; cited in Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party*, p. 320.

<sup>9</sup> London, British Library, Add. MSS, 44133, Gladstone MSS, Clarendon to Gladstone, private, 16 January 1869. Cited in Domna Dontas, *Greece and the Great Powers: 1863 to 1875*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966, p. 147.



Some of the most thoughtful dispatches were written by Rustem in Florence, who always gave sympathetic and considered advice. This contrasts with Aristarchi Bey in Berlin, who had no interest whatsoever in Cretan affairs, and Glavani Effendi, chargé d'affaires at Brussels, with his virtuoso overviews of world politics. Blacque Bey had been sent to Washington to counter the influence of William J. Stillman, the American consul on Crete, and the strong streak of philhellenism in the United States, especially in Boston, where Howe published a paper called *The Cretan*, which ran to seven issues. Blacque Bey had the difficult task of trying to find out about, and block, the sale to Greece of ships from the plentiful supply of blockade runners and monitors left over from the American Civil War. His reports on a nation that was healing its wounds and moving forwards are interesting.

Greece was a small country with very little infrastructure, a young and inexperienced king, a rapid turnover of ministries, and a belief in the Megali Idea. It had a view to expanding its borders to absorb Crete, Epirus and Thessaly – Macedonia was to follow – and it was almost bankrupt. It had great difficulties in raising loans, partly as no payments on the 1824 and 1825 loans had been made, and in fact could not be made until the redemption of the 1832 loan.<sup>10</sup> A loan of 28 million drachmas

was raised for the purchase of ships and war materials in 1867,<sup>11</sup> and a further loan of 12 million drachmas to support the refugees was contracted in 1868.<sup>12</sup> The financial burden could be said to

---

made in November 1868 to put one million drachmas towards the 1824-1825 loans, "dictated by the necessity imposed on Greece of restoring the credit of her Government", this caused Great Power protests, and the proposed payment had to be withdrawn. All payments on earlier loans were suspended until full payment of the 1832 "Bavarian Loan" had been completed. This, however, did not prevent Greece, after some difficulties, from contracting the 1867 loan. *The Times* (16-11-1868); see the Finlay Archive, E35, p. 50, and E28, p. 88, for the ms version.

<sup>11</sup> For the 1867 loan, see *The Times* (19-4-1867), in which Finlay stated, "The proceeds are expressly set apart for the purchase of ships and materials of war.", Finlay Archive, E34, p. 115. War expenses were said to be running at one million drachmas a month, "about half the net receipts of the Greek Government during 1866", the source of which Finlay ascribed largely to Russia; *The Times* (11-5-1867), Finlay Archive, E34, p. 116. See also Panayiotis Petrakis, *Public Borrowing and the Development of Some Basic Bank Figures, 1844-1869*, Athens: MIET, 1994, p. 47 [bilingual Greek-English publication].

<sup>12</sup> For the 1868 loan, see Petrakis, *Public Borrowing*, p. 48. By the spring of 1867, expenses for refugee support were already £500 per month, as reported by the Anglo-Greek Committee in *The Times* of 10 May, Finlay Archive, E34 p. 115, and by November 1867 they were estimated to be £20,000; see note 8 above. Much of the money was raised by private subscription. Howe himself collected \$37,000 for refugee relief; see Richards (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe*, p. 540.

---

<sup>10</sup> "In their present note the Three Powers expressly forbid the disposal on the part of the Greek government of any of the resources of the State towards the settlement of the said loans of 1824-25.", *The Times* (28-1-1865), Finlay Archive, E34, p. 7. When an attempt was



have been the first nail in the coffin of the uprising.

It was an undeclared war, fought surreptitiously against superior odds, by people who used every means at their disposal. It is remarkable with what panache the uprising was carried out, with clandestine help from the Greek government, from Russia and the Greek diaspora, in total contravention to treaties and to international law. The uprising had begun quite legally with a petition to the sultan in May 1866. Had this been answered promptly, fully redressing the grievances which had been aired, might the whole episode have been avoided? Probably not. The two months' delay, during which time troops were brought in and a negative proclamation was issued, did not help, but neither did the Cretan desire for annexation, which was bubbling irrepressibly to the fore.

Finlay, as *Times* correspondent, took a more distanced and acerbic view, striving after truth, trying to cut back on what he considered exaggerated reports of fighting, of atrocities, of numbers – constantly chiding Greece for its shady political and financial dealings. As a young man he had fought in the Greek War of Independence and, now in his sixties, he criticised the strategic incompetence of the central committees, with plenty of warlords but no clear leadership, and a constant waste of resources.

The extent of Turkish forbearance, often under very trying circumstances, is remarkable. Despite constant provocations, the diplomats were able to separate the substance of what was happening from the noise and babble that accompanied it. They managed never to lose their calm and measured tones, and their decisions

were always carefully considered. Of course, questions remain, but they remain unanswerable. Might Crete have got a better settlement, and might more bloodshed have been avoided, if they had accepted A'ali's offer of almost anything short of annexation? If Russian pressure had lasted a little longer, might Stanley have changed his mind in favour of Crete? Some of his diary entries hint tantalisingly towards it.<sup>13</sup> Despite everything, it is a story of hope, which

---

<sup>13</sup> On 21 July 1867 Stanley noted that on the occasion of the sultan's visit to London, Fuad had said that whilst Turkey would not give up Crete, "they might yield it to force, if the Great Powers chose to use force..."; Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party*, p. 314. On 16 September 1867, "[T]he idea of Cretan annexation appears at last dropped by Gortschakoff... due partly to the Emperor's interview with Fuad"; *ibid.*, p. 317. On 28 October 1867, "Buchanan writes that the Russian Foreign Office...talks of non-intervention in Crete"; *ibid.*, p. 320. On 4 November 1867, "Fuad is supposed to think, that if it comes to cession, there will be less loss of dignity in yielding to an intervention of all the Great Powers than in offering fresh terms to the insurgents..."; *ibid.*, p. 321. On 5 November 1867, "The Greek Minister [called], who seems convinced that Crete will be at last annexed to Greece: in which I suspect he is right."; *ibid.*, p. 321. On 1 December 1867, "Ignatieff once again holds violent language, saying that Crete must be annexed to Greece, nothing else will now settle the question. I begin to think he is right."; *ibid.*, p. 324. In a short aside on the Eastern Question, Vincent wrote, "Russian pressure ceased at almost the same time as Stanley had first shown himself willing to consider the cession of Crete to Greece as practicable."; *ibid.*, p. 330.

ended with the promulgation of Organic Law, which gave fairer representation to the Christians and led to a decade of peace. It was a valuable first step, even though it took almost another 50 years, until the settlement following the Balkan Wars, for Crete to achieve annexation.

\*

The volume on the Cretan Question covering 1899-1913 has been published ahead of the one that will cover the years 1870-1898, so for the moment there is a gap of some 20 years during which time much changed. Leadership and participation was based less on central committees, warrior priests and volunteers, and more on the "bleeders and pleaders"<sup>14</sup> of the nascent middle class. By now the Cretans were marginally less inclined to resort to revolt (though the threat remained) and more likely to seek political solutions for their grievances. Chania was beginning to be transformed into a prosperous Neo-classical town.

These final Ottoman diplomatic documents on the Cretan Question have an uneven distribution and thin coverage for the early years. Just at the point at which we hope for fresh insight on the final steps leading to annexation in 1913, the volume finishes with a flurry of correspondence about raising quarantine regulations. The last document is dated 18 February, a full ten months before the end of the story. This is not, however, the fault of the editor – the documents are simply missing from the files. It is to be hoped that if they reappear we might

be offered a slim addendum. The editor also draws our attention to the fact that "Intradepartmental memoranda and notes to and from foreign missions in the Capital are not available." [p. 8]. Although it leaves the denouement still unresolved, there is enough interesting material to make the book well worthwhile. The documents are useful in confirming dates, but at no point do they tell us the whole story. Momentous events take place during these years, such as the deposition of the sultan and the coming of Atatürk, troubles in Albania, Bulgaria and Yemen, Goudi, and the Balkan Wars, but these happen largely off-stage with no more than a glancing mention in the text.

Whilst too sparse to give us the full Ottoman narrative, this volume does provide a unique window on fluctuating Ottoman thought. Since Crete had been placed under the control and jurisdiction of the Powers in March 1897, and following the departure of the Ottoman troops in 1898, the Ottomans had been deprived of any real power. Their role had devolved into preventing the island's annexation to Greece, complaining vociferously to the Powers at the creeping Hellenisation that was taking place, and trying to protect, with a certain amount of indignation, Ottoman sovereign rights and *amour propre*. For İhsan Bey, minister plenipotentiary at Madrid, "le succès de notre cause est étroitement lié à la juste ténacité avec laquelle nous soutiendrons nos droits" [no. 411]. If tenacity was the basis of Ottoman strategy with regard to Crete, it was, however, also the forte of the Greeks.

Prince George of Greece, newly appointed as high commissioner, arrived

---

<sup>14</sup> R. A. H. Bickford Smith, *Cretan Sketches*, London 1898, p. 119.

on Crete on 9 December 1898. His overriding aim was to achieve *enosis*, or union, with Greece. Initially he was wildly popular as the Cretans embraced the appointment of a Greek prince as an important first step towards annexation. The first documents of the book inform us of the prince's travel schedules, as he went cap in hand to Europe to plead the cause of annexation to his wider family, the king of England and the tsar of Russia, and their governments. His travels turned out to be disappointing, as neither ministers nor monarchs were keen to upset the status quo.

The princely pursuit of *enosis* was shortly to conflict with the views of the emerging Eleftherios Venizelos, who in 1898 had been part of the committee which had drawn up the Cretan constitution. With hindsight this had invested too much power in Prince George, who acted as "central agent of the state, *and* the main executive officer, *and* an important member of the legislature".<sup>15</sup> Clashes between Prince George and Venizelos began in 1901, with the prince insisting on pursuing *enosis*, which Venizelos thought premature. As Prince George began to take advantage of the constitution and to reduce the hard-won privileges that had been granted in the Halepa Convention of 1878, the relationship between the prince and a few of his politicians became increasingly acrimonious. We

thus have a situation in which, on the one hand, Greek national hopes were for *enosis*, with the royal family working hard towards achieving it, whilst, on the other, Turkey was trying equally hard to block any progress towards annexation. The Greek government, meanwhile, was being remarkably quiescent, and several documents comment on its correct behaviour. The position of the Powers was no less fraught. Following the 1898 massacre at Heraklion on 6 September, which led to the forced removal of the remaining Ottoman soldiers on 5 November, Crete had been placed under the protection of the Powers, in what has been called "the first real 'peacekeeping' operation of the modern idiom".<sup>16</sup>

The deteriorating situation led to Venizelos' 1905 Theriso Uprising, taken by Prince George as a personal attack. It led the Powers to take seriously Cretan complaints about the regime and to put an end to the repeated abuses engendered by the administration. The petulant prince threatened to resign, and on 21 December 1905 Naby Bey wrote to Tevfik Pasha from Paris that, at the instigation of Britain, a financial commission would shortly depart for Crete to study what reforms could be implemented. The results of the report were anxiously awaited in Turkey, and a copy was obtained "not without difficulty" by Rifaat in Athens and sent to Tevfik on 28 May 1906 [no. 313]. Turkish anxieties focused on the

<sup>15</sup> A. Lilly Macrakis, "Venizelos' Early Life and Political Career in Crete, 1864-1910", in Paschalis M. Kitromilides (ed.), *Eleftherios Venizelos: The Trials of Statesmanship*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Holland, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and the Concert of Europe: The Case of the High Commissionership of Prince George of Greece in Crete, 1898-1906", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 17 (1999), pp. 253-276.

political complications that might arise should the commission overstep its mandate. Although to some extent it did, the ensuing report covered only economic and administrative measures and, to the relief of the Turks, did not put forward any recommendations towards a definitive solution.

The Powers, sympathetic to the difficulties which had come to light in the commissioners' report, made a statement, reported by Rechid to Tevfik from Rome on 12 June 1906, "que l'Angleterre aurait promis ses bons offices à la Grèce en vue de régler la situation de la Crète dans un sens favorable aux aspirations helléniques..." [no. 314]. From this moment the Powers had effectively backed themselves into a corner. Having hinted at an eventual annexation to Greece, it was impossible to come up with any compromise by which Turkish sovereign rights could be guaranteed, although Turkish suzerainty was not in dispute. Thus began a seven-year prevarication, which became the dominant theme in these reports. It caused great frustration to Greece and Turkey, and also to Crete, which began to take the law into its own hands through a gradual process of Hellenisation, to which the Powers for the most part had an uneasy tolerance, with the occasional swift redress, as when they sent "4 bâtiments de guerre pour procéder abaissement drapeau Hellénique hissé à Candie" [no. 566].

The Turkish position could only be defensive. Since the jurisdiction of Crete had been taken over by the Powers, which had undertaken to respect Turkish suzerainty and to protect the lives and goods of the native Muslim population,

there was little that Turkey could do but suggest alternative solutions, and complain at Cretan transgressions as the pace of Hellenisation accelerated. The protests were impassioned and instantaneous, usually with the aim of preventing or obstructing the latest Cretan "impertinence": the raising of the Greek flag, the issue of coinage with the image of King George, the recruitment of Greek ex-army officers for the gendarmerie, the hearing of court appeals in Athens, the issue of Greek postage stamps, the application of new recruitment laws, the threatened application of the new Greek constitution, and the appointment of Greek engineers, and also of a judge from the Court of Appeal in Athens. In one instance the official papers of an incoming Ottoman ship were confiscated and replaced by new documentation bearing the legend "Government of King George".

The most serious violation was the way in which Muslims were prevented from taking up the public offices to which they had been elected because they refused to take an oath in the name of King George. This was to have a knock-on effect, as, without Muslim functionaries, the religious tribunals could not operate. Thus in Heraklion, the newly appointed *naib* was by-passed, and Muslims had to go to Rethymnon or Chania for a hearing, which led to additional expenditure of time and money, and which could put them into a life-threatening situation. There were also the questions of the occupation of Heraklion's Muslim quarter and the transformation of a mosque into a church, though, in an earlier incident, the accidental damage of a mosque was

put down to high spirits on the last day of carnival, and not to malicious anti-Muslim provocation.

The Muslim situation caused real grounds for concern. The Ottomans had been against the withdrawal of the international troops in July 1909, fearing that this would lead to general anarchy and problems of Muslim security. The Powers agreed to leave a naval presence and a small contingent of troops. Though there were sporadic murders, mainly in the Rethymnon area, the numbers had not increased substantially since the troop withdrawals. Of the eighteen murders of Muslims in the following two years, nine had been committed by Christians, seven by Muslims, and two were unsolved. Both British and French ministries of foreign affairs felt the issue of Muslim security to be exaggerated, though the emigration of Muslim families and a general movement towards the cities tell their own story. The Ottoman argument was that the murder of Muslims made a bad impression on public opinion in Turkey, and weakened the confidence of the population in the justice and equity of the Powers, who had assumed responsibility for safeguarding Muslim lives and possessions.

The relationship between Ottoman diplomats and the Powers is interesting. The Ottoman diplomats seem to have been well liked, though the various foreign ministers had a tendency to make reassuring noises rather than reach for solutions. This is partly because the Ottomans were being continually asked by their own foreign ministry to seek reassurance. If it were given verbally, they were pressed to get it in writing,

or have statements made in the House of Commons or in the press. In one instance the incumbent refused, saying he could not ask for further reassurance in writing when this had just been given verbally. While this insistence is understandable, given that the issue was to probe the Powers' commitment to continuing Ottoman sovereign rights on Crete, it also became a myth to which the Ottomans clung, but neither side fully believed in. Only Sir Charles Hardinge challenged it, suggesting "*Il faudrait mieux envisager les choses au point de vue pratique et ne pas se montrer trop intransigeant.*" [no. 406]. The situation was one in which it was quicker and easier to offer reassurances than to tackle the deeper issues, which would lead to Ottoman disillusion, lengthy negotiations between the Powers, and additional expense: in other words, the Eastern Question complications everyone was so anxious to avoid. As a result, courteous diplomatic relationships prevailed, and reassurances appear to us as shorthand for non-intervention in a situation deemed too complex and dangerous to unravel. The moment was always "inopportune", either because of internal factors – if Crete is quiescent then leave it be – or because of external factors, obliquely referred to but not spelt out, as diplomats were trained to write about one subject per dispatch. Hence, Crete sometimes appears to have been operating in a vacuum with regard to what was happening in the outside world.

Ottoman diplomats, perhaps because of their powerlessness, appear to have become warily on edge and ready to jump down the throat of any rumour, as when Hardinge expressed "*son étonnement*

de voir que nous nous inquiétons à tout propos et nous basons nos démarches si non sur des suppositions du moins sur des nouvelles erronées” [no. 687]. In another example, the Ottomans feared the arrival of a Cretan commission to purchase 12 large calibre cannon to protect the Cretan coast. Mallet said it was absurd, as they had no money for such a venture. Tevfik reported that this “a été surement mise en circulation en vue de nous impressionner.” [no. 915]

We get another, more honest and exasperated view of the impasse and the contradictions within it from the Turkish ambassador at Rome. The hawkish Hakky, who from time to time ironically recommended shooting the flag or sending in troops, wrote to Rifaat on 3 August 1909, “D’ici là la Crète me paraît destinée à rester un pays unique en son genre: L’Europe maintiendra un ‘statu quo’ mal défini, Souveraineté Ottomane pour nous, union avec la Grèce pour les Crétois et Dieu sait quel mélange d’espoirs et désespoirs pour le Royaume” [no. 521]. Nearly a year on, Osman Nizami Pasha wrote to Rifaat from Berlin to report the German view of the Cretan Question. Germany foresaw a loss of accord among the Powers, and revolt in Greece on the day that a full autonomy under Turkish sovereignty was declared, which would be likely to cost King George his throne. Osman Nizami commented, “C’est là-dessus que comptent les quatre Puissances pour esquiver une solution définitive qui les obligerait de se mettre ouvertement en contradiction avec les promesses faites dans le temps à la Grèce.” [no. 817]. In ten months no progress had been made, and it was no wonder that Turkey, Crete

and Greece were suffering from an overwhelming sense of frustration.

All parties saw the solution as straightforward. For Turkey, it was a matter of full autonomy under Turkish sovereignty. Ottoman diplomats put forward a variety of alternative solutions, but they were not seriously discussed. These were for Crete to become an autonomous principality like Samos, or to have a status “similar either to pre- and post-1885 Rumelia, or pre-1908 Bosnia and Herzegovina” [p. 13]. One diplomat put forward the case for partition. The Ottomans even rejected the idea of Crete being leased in exchange for tribute, which had worked for Egypt in the 1860s.

For Greece and Crete, it was simply a case of annexation, though for Venizelos it was a question of timing; he preached autonomy and patience, and annexation in due course. This, however, caused him personal difficulties, as he came to be considered a traitor to the cause. When he came out in favour of annexation rather than autonomy, the Turks recognised it as a necessary political move, a recognition possibly facilitated by Venizelos’ personal friendship with the Turkish chargé d’affaires, Ghalib Kémaly Bey. Turkish fears were that any “amputation” would have a domino effect in the Balkans and possibly lead to the loss of their territories in North Africa. It could also have a negative effect on public opinion in Istanbul, which could destabilize the new Turkish regime. It was certain that if autonomy under Ottoman sovereignty were to be promulgated, the Cretans would continue their struggle: “L’autonomie n’a jamais empêché l’annexion, et leur caractère turbulent fera le reste.”

[no. 817]. As the English foreign secretary warned, it would be unwise to force on the Cretans any solution that was unacceptable to them. Cretan impatience was punctuated by periodic announcements of annexation, of which the Powers took very little notice, and an occasional rise in tension which spilled over into the Theriso Uprising of 1905 and threatened to do so again in 1910. This led the Powers to send down warships, with troops whom the consuls could call upon if they thought the situation demanded it.

The two issues which caused the Turks the greatest anxiety were Muslim security and the manipulation of Cretan election dates to coincide with those of Greece, in order to send deputies to the Greek parliament. To the Ottomans, it was *casus belli*, and in the documents they considered a retaliatory reoccupation of Thessaly. The dangers were well recognised by the Greeks, who did their best to keep the Cretans out of the parliament. The Cretans sent their deputation in tiny groups to avoid detection and at one stage succeeded in entering. The atmosphere was electric – a few cheers, and a stunned silence. Venizelos granted an interview to the Cretan deputy, General Lympritis, in which he explained that they could not be recognized as representing the population of the Hellenic Kingdom and thus for reasons of internal order, and to avoid external complications, he could not permit them access. Should they persist in trying to gain entry, the government would be obliged to oppose them by force. These events were reported by Moukhtar Bey to Assim Bey on 1 June 1912, and, to dodge further

trouble, Venizelos immediately suspended Greek parliamentary proceedings until 1 October, to encourage the deputies to return to Crete.

The Powers' relationship towards Turkey, Greece, each other, and towards public opinion, is also revealing. At one point, Hakky mentioned that they should never forget that European public opinion favoured Greece, "inexplicable et bizarre mais réelle" [no. 503]. France was considered philhellenic under Clemenceau, but by July 1910 Deville had had enough. He affirmed confidentially that "le sens de réalité faisant totalement défaut aux Hellènes il ne pouvait être leur ami...". Naby assured him that the new regime had already recognised the strength and sincerity of the French attitude towards Turkey.

Italy fluctuated much more, at some times being openly pro-Greek, as when she suggested that Greece should consolidate her relations with Crete, and that Italy would help in case of complications. At other times she leant towards a solution favourable to Turkey. Although La Consulta, the Italian ministry of foreign affairs, was very much at the centre of events as the meeting place of the ambassadors in Rome, and thus as a conduit for information, Italy, as a small Power, was unwilling to take the initiative and was ready to fall in with the prevailing mood of the Powers. Despite the Italo-Turkish War which broke out in September 1911 when Italy attacked Tripoli, Crete remained neutral and Italy continued to participate in Cretan affairs. The gendarmerie was efficiently run along Italian lines, with Italian officers in charge.



Austria and Germany had no wish to be involved in negotiations, surmising that these would be protracted, and that their presence would merely complicate the issue by unleashing rivalries and raising secondary questions. They were prepared to go along with any solution acceptable to Turkey. German non-involvement was a disappointment to Turkey, given that by the first decade of the twentieth century Germany and Turkey had many interests in common, such as the German reorganisation and training of Ottoman military forces, and the construction of the Berlin-Baghdad railway. Meanwhile, Britain, despite a little *froideur* which was corrected with fulsome statements to the House of Commons, remained resolutely pro-Turkish, the only country to follow faithfully the stipulations of the Treaty of Berlin.

Russia played a close hand. Although Husny Pasha, Ottoman ambassador to St Petersburg, reported delightedly that Prince George's "projet n'aurait pas rencontré un accueil favorable à Livadia" [no. 21], it was wishful thinking, as the tsar had "accepted the Bosnian model for Crete".<sup>17</sup> However, this did not prevent Russia from acting firmly in support of the status quo. Together with the other Powers, she had rejected the proposition for the introduction of a Greek administration to the island, and said she would do the same again. Although Djévad believed "que la Russie est nécessairement favorable aux Grecs" [no. 395], Greek public opinion

was despondent. The journal *To Áστυ* complained, "La Grèce était en droit d'espérer protection de la Russie, mais elle a été détrompée." [no. 272]. It was said that Russia was *not* pro-Greek because of Greek hostility towards the Slavs, yet as an Orthodox country neither could she come out in favour of Turkey. The Russians also claimed that the dowager empress (King George's sister) and Queen Olga blocked their liberty of action. None of this prevented Russia from an occasional swipe at "les procédés enfantins et agacants des Crétois" [no. 668] or describing their movement as "théâtral" [no. 1062]. If Russian support seemed to lean towards Turkey, the latter was never entirely convinced that Russia was not giving Greece clandestine encouragement [p. 12].

Greater freedom of the press in Turkey gave rise to a volatile public opinion, which was taken into account by the foreign ministry when it suited them. The diplomats were not above their own press manipulations, as when it was suggested that the rich and influential American press magnate James Gordon Bennett should be lavishly entertained in Paris, in order to counter his anti-Turkish stance, which was thought to have emanated from the dethronement of the Sultan Abdul Hamid, who had once received him in Istanbul. On another occasion, Osman Nizami suggested guiding public opinion by asking "whether or not there was any advantage" in hastening a definitive solution. By insinuating doubt, whilst at the same time giving strong official assurances as to the efforts that were being made to reach a rapid solution, he felt the government was covered for either eventuality. In

<sup>17</sup> Robert Holland and Diana Markides, *The British and the Hellenes: Struggles for Mastery in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1850-1960*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 111-112.

the meantime, in Greece, King George entertained the financial commissioners who had reported on Crete at the palace, to try to influence them towards annexation, and possibly also to try to restore some of the prestige he felt Prince George had lost on Crete.

\*

A review is too short to be able to analyze the many interesting themes that are suggested by these documents, such as the evolution of the internal political situation on Crete, or Venizelos' rising influence in Greece. Suffice it to say that there is enough useful material for these books to be of great value, but there are lacunae. Some occur through the chance survival of some documents over the random loss, misfiling or destruction of others. There is, however, also the editorial decision not to print enclosures and, for what would probably have amounted to less than 50 extra pages, the reader is deprived of many contemporary nuances.

The books are valuable for the insight they give us of the Ottoman mindset, specifically the frustration at trying to achieve a restitution of Crete to the Ottoman fold through the retention of their sovereign rights, despite knowing that their power over it could never be restored. We can see Crete slipping ineluctably through their fingers even whilst the echoes of the Powers' resolution to leave their ships "*comme une manifestation de leur resolution de maintenir le statu quo*" [no. 1186] ring on. These books are both feast and famine. If you do not expect them to answer specific questions, you will be well rewarded by this useful addition to our knowledge of the workings of Ottoman diplomacy

as the Cretan Question reached its final stage. The complete Isis series on the Eastern Question and on the origins of World War I will be a useful and lasting tribute to turbulent times, and a fine complement to the commemorations that will take place in 2013 for the centenary of Crete's annexation. These are valuable books, and they deserve a wider readership than they will probably get. What is important is that they should be taken into account by anyone trying to write the history of this period. Until now we have experienced the hand of the Porte as a shadowy and overshadowing dimension, seen only in propaganda and usually disadvantageous proclamations. Now we have the chance to set the record straight. Our view has been dramatically enhanced by the publication of these diplomatic reports: intelligent, thoughtful, full of insights and well-gathered intelligence, which answer many long-pondered questions.

In conclusion, I would like to feel we are working towards a time when sources can be shared freely and writing can take into account both sides of a given narrative. Sinan Kuneralp is doing admirable work in making such sources available. It now remains to see how historians come to reappraise the past, and to see if their readers can come to accept that their previously received views may not tell the whole story. Each era needs its own interpretation of history. The next generation of historians will be able to carry this work forward to new levels of understanding. Only then will we be able to see both sides of the picture.

Rosie Randolph

*Researcher,  
Cretan Revolution of 1866-1869*