

# MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES

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# UNWANTED HEROES? BRITISH PRIVATEERING, COMMERCE, AND DIPLOMACY IN THE MID- EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article argues that the legitimacy and the effectiveness of privateering in the mid-eighteenth-century Mediterranean were determined by high politics beyond the indispensable war status. After the presentation of four distinctive privateering stories involving individuals of different backgrounds, there follows an analysis of the Ottoman, French, and British factors that determined national and private interests in wartime Archipelago (the Aegean Islands). As the Ottoman Empire was the major commercial partner and a potentially desirable ally for both the French and the British, especially for the Levant Company, privateers were trapped between conflicting interests, beyond their own comprehension.*

**KEYWORDS:** *privateering, Britain, France, Mediterranean, Ottoman Empire, eighteenth century, Seven Year War, commerce, Aegean Archipelago*

## INTRODUCTION

Privateering should not be confused with piracy. According to *Webster's New World Dictionary* and the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*,<sup>1</sup> a privateer was a privately owned and manned armed ship, commissioned by a belligerent government to fight, capture, and harass enemy ships. The license issued by the government was called a *letter of marque* or privateer commission. A privateer should also not be confused with a corsair, a type of outlaw no less popular in the Mediterranean during the early modern period. Corsairs were sea raiders connected with a political authority but not properly commissioned by international standards. This distinction between state and stateless sea robbers became more evident during the

seventeenth century. As piracy was gradually eradicated from the North Atlantic in the eighteenth century, privateering was regulated by various acts and acknowledged as a legitimate and useful war tactic. Armed merchantmen traditionally carried guns to resist pirates or privateers. Sometimes the merchants overwhelmed their assailants and captured their ships; but neither the assailants nor the defenders had a legal title to a captured ship and its cargo, unless they were commissioned with a *letter of marque*. The seizure was not legal and the prize was not “condemned” (i.e., granted to the assailant) until this document was inspected by a prize court at a neutral port. Such a commission, however, did not legitimize assaults against neutral parties.

During the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48), and even more so during the Seven Years’ War (1756–63), Britain, allied with the Hapsburg monarchy and Prussia, respectively, launched privateers worldwide at an unprecedented rate in an effort to defeat France. The Levant (i.e., the Eastern Mediterranean) was frequented by the French commercial navy. Markets for prizes (captured ships and their cargos) were available in Malta, Italy, and the Venetian-held Ionian Islands. Moreover, in case of a barren cruise, that is, in the absence of war prizes, there were good chances of securing and purchasing an alternative cargo of some value to sell. Therefore the Ottoman-held Eastern Mediterranean became a popular destination for such British “cruising voyages,” which inflicted a severe blow on the French export and import trade (Eldem 1999: 13–33). The Ottoman Empire, however, was a desirable player, as a mediator or an ally in the 1740s and 1750s, respectively, for both France and Britain. Traditionally, the Great Turk was a long-lasting friend of the most Christian King of France. The French ambassador at the Sublime Porte (i.e., at the Ottoman government) was extremely influential. France dominated not only the import but also the carrying trade of the empire, being in addition Egypt’s main foreign partner (McGowan 1994: 724–32). The Turks were also receptive to British diplomatic overtures, which were intensified in the age of global politics and warfare; but British diplomatic representation in the Ottoman Empire was not particularly effective. It was still linked to and limited by the *factories*, the trading posts of the Levant Company. The once powerful Turkey Company was in decline, following the success of French fabrics over English cloths, but also due to hostile criticism back home. Yet the British ambassadors and the consuls had to protect the *factors’* commercial interests without asking much in return. After all, their families and dependents formed the British mercantile community (known as the *Nation*) at each diplomatic post. In other words, British privateers sailed into troubled waters. Could power politics be applied in those seas without disturbing trade and politics?

The adventures of eighteenth-century British privateers in those waters had started in 1702 on the recommendation that Ambassador Robert Sutton had sent to Charles Montagu, First Duke of Manchester, then secretary of state for the Southern Department. Sutton noticed in the beginning of the War for the Spanish Succession (1701–13) that the “great” French trade all around the Ottoman Empire was carried on board “light Barques.” He suggested to Whitehall that some small frigates and privateers be sent “to cruise in these Seas” with good sailors “that may not fear to pursue them [the French] near the Coasts and among the Islands of the Archipelago [the Aegean Islands].” By 1704 daring British privateers had already become a cause for Ottoman complaints because of their activities against the French around the entrance of the Gulf of Smyrna.<sup>2</sup> On this occasion, the grand vizier (prime minister) was advised to reissue an order of Porte, from the War of the Grand Alliance (1688–97) “for the neutrality and freedom of the Archipelago,” within a line stretching from the coast of Asia Minor to Negreponte (Euboea), via the islands of Samos, Ikaria, and Andros. The grand dragoman, or first interpreter, Nicholas Mavrocordatos, was duly sent to the British ambassadors to announce his master’s intention to provide security for all merchantmen in the seas near his Mediterranean ports “in general.” When he was asked about the extension of this “zone of Liberty,” he replied that he had no particular directions. Ambassador Sutton, like his successors afterward, judged that this measure would be more beneficial to the French than to the British, because the French employed numerous individual vessels and not convoys, as the British did. He also foresaw that it would be easy for the Turks to argue, on false testimonies, that the rules had been broken, and then require satisfaction from the British.<sup>3</sup>

Sutton had touched on the key issue of neutrality that must be elaborated. The British privateering experience of the eighteenth century was fashioned by a complex of interactive forces: the supply of capital and labor, the nationality of the target, and seasonal and local factors, such as geography and the economy. Local factors determined the propensity of ventures, the volume and the value of the prospective prey, and the vulnerability of the targets, in other words, the very conduct of privateering. Misconduct—that is, piracy or the allegation of piracy due to the violation of neutral rights—was not unusual, both in home waters and also overseas. Neutrality, as Ambassador Sutton had said, favored French trade worldwide but was never a real impediment to boarding. When they had only documents to protect them, neutral ships were easily overwhelmed. The outcome of a thorough search on board at gunpoint was never harmless, because the proper conduct of privateering was also related to the human factor. To avoid or to reduce diplomatic complications, states sometimes established

criteria for those who were unfit for privateering, such as petty merchants and risky adventurers, who were bound to revert to piracy against neutrals. The British Privateering Act of 1759 aimed to raise the opportunity cost for such individuals. Obtaining a commission as a privateer required the ability to mobilize in advance enough capital from investors to fully arm a ship of at least one hundred tons for a six-month period.

Nonetheless, disputed interceptions were frequent in the Mediterranean Sea both prior to and following this Act, especially in its eastern parts during the war period (1740–63). One might argue—taking a tune from *Orientalism*—that in these waters the human factor militated against “honest” privateering, if such thing existed, for the Levant Sea was a world of crooks and imposters. Neutrality was easier to claim than to prove, and prizes were easier to capture and have condemned than to examine and return. Surely the reasons were far more complicated. The scale of the French trade was a first-class stimulus for anyone holding a British commission, honest British and foreign imposters alike. Considering the volume of French trade, aggressive privateering was strategically important regardless of motivation or conduct. The geography of the Aegean Archipelago defied—and still does—a commonly accepted definition of territoriality as a prerequisite of neutrality. Moreover, French and other European commercial ventures, including the carrying trade, were hard to separate from Ottoman interests, which relied heavily on foreign carrying services. Even commanders of the Royal Navy could be tempted by such easy captures, despite repeated instructions not to disturb Ottoman subjects, in addition to the warnings of the Sublime Porte to avoid Ottoman coasts. Such disputes were referred by the Ottoman sufferers and the authorities to the British consulates, the embassy, and the High Court of the Admiralty, and could even reach the Privy Council. Some Ottomans, as we shall see, were willing to travel to London, a costly process with no guarantee that wrongly condemned goods would be restored. Others pressed for and gained restitution on the expense of the Levant Company *factors*. British diplomats were worried, and not only for financial reasons; the Turks should not be given additional excuses to side actively with the French.

This article argues that the legitimacy and overall effectiveness of British privateering in the mid-eighteenth-century Mediterranean was determined by a complicated matrix that involved conflicting private and state British interests, French diplomacy, and specific characteristics of the Ottoman state and economy. It will also be argued that while privateering generally supported British naval supremacy (and this has been widely acknowledged), in the Eastern Mediterranean privateering caused embarrassment and increased risk, rather than contributing to national

pride. The politics of Whitehall, the economic interests of London, and French intrigues with the Porte occasionally rendered the privateers a dispensable burden. This is how these men are presented in mid-eighteenth-century British diplomatic correspondence, where they secured a place only due to the seriousness of their misconduct. Though the bottom-up view is very hard to locate in the State Papers, these personal stories, presented in the following section of this article, are extremely revealing for the purposes of this study. The common features or factors in these four case studies are analyzed following the presentation of the case studies, and the contradicting views and loyalties of diplomats and privateers are reassessed in the concluding section.<sup>4</sup>

#### FOUR CASE STUDIES OF NAVAL ADVENTURES

##### *The Ruby of Robert Saunders*

Most stories of ship captures are not well known. Such were the adventures of the privateer Robert Saunders of *The Ruby*. In the summer of 1744, naval supremacy on the Mediterranean front during the War of the Austrian Succession had yet to be determined. Could privateers tip the scale? In the aftermath of the Battle of Toulon, in the summer of 1744, there were rumors, allegedly spread by British consuls in the Levant, that neither Ottoman subjects on board French ships nor French passengers on Ottoman vessels would henceforth be secure. France officially suspended traffic with Smyrna and Constantinople for the summer months but unprotected French merchant ships were everywhere. In the absence of Ambassador Everard Fawkener,<sup>5</sup> the *Reis effendi*, or foreign minister of the Porte, asked Stanhope Aspinwall, the secretary of the embassy, if these horrible rumors were the result of royal orders. Aspinwall had no sooner denied the accusation than bad news came from Smyrna. A French polacre, *St. Francis de Paula*, a three-masted sailing vessel laden with merchants and goods from the Barbary Coast bound from Tunis to Athens, had been captured by an English privateer and carried away with some of her passengers. It was later discovered that the privateer was *The Ruby* of Captain Robert Saunders, with twenty guns and almost a hundred men. This ship was a four-hundred-ton galley launched at Taylor's dock at Cuckold's Point in early March 1742. Saunders was no stranger to the Levant; in 1721, "a very honest gentleman" and fairly young, we may assume, he was expected to command a ship for the South Sea Company.<sup>6</sup> He may have done so. In any case he had been crossing the Mediterranean since at least 1728. In June 1732 he

was attacked, shot, wounded, and robbed at New Cross in London on his way from Eltham to his ship. But he was soon to make his way back to sea.<sup>7</sup>

*The Ruby* accompanied the captured polacre to the Venetian-held Zante (Zakynthos), a destination with which Saunders had long been acquainted. There he had the prize (worth some twenty thousand talers) ratified by the Venetian authorities, and then set sail for Malta and Leghorn (i.e., Livorno), the famous Tuscan port-city, the most popular prize market and refitting base for Mediterranean privateers. Some of the "Moors" on board were put on a boat off the island of Chirigo (Kythira) from where they traveled all the way to Constantinople to demand satisfaction and restitution. Other passengers were transported to the Moreas (Peloponnese), where they applied to the local pasha for assistance. The latter duly informed the French consul. As the Turkish passengers had been deprived even of their clothes, the *Reis effendi* pressed for an official reaction at the highest level. In fact three of the victims who could not wait for the official response decided, against all advice, to travel to London themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile *The Ruby* was back in business. A second capture near Rhodes was reported in early November 1744. The prize was *Postillon de Salonique*. A third French vessel, *St. Laurent*, which was unloading cargo at Zante, also fell prey to Captain Saunders, but was recaptured by a French man-of-war.<sup>9</sup> By the following spring, their cargos, including coffee and rice, had reached Leghorn. The goods were not auctioned, but the dispute had not been resolved by June 1745, to the detriment of the British embassy and to the British *Nation* in Constantinople, which was judged, unlike the sensitive French, as indifferent to Ottoman requests. A disaster was bound to follow sooner or later. In July the Levant Company, making reference to the irregular case of *The Ruby*, submitted a petition to the Lords Justices asking them to issue additional instructions for the protection of Ottoman captives and properties in British courts of justice. Then in August came news from Leghorn to Constantinople that coffee and other spoils acquired by *The Ruby* had been sold in open auction.<sup>10</sup>

After some additional months of delay, the Porte summoned the embassy in early January 1746 with a four-month notice to obtain full satisfaction; meanwhile the *factors* of the Company were asked to advance cash to the victims. Secretary Aspinwall hoped that back in London this case would be treated with due regard for the delicate political issues involved. If not, the Ottomans, unable to produce the necessary documents, would have only slight chances of success. His hopes for speedy process were in vain. In late spring, after the four-month period had elapsed, he was obliged to satisfy the Ottoman demands from the Levant Company's own cash.<sup>11</sup> The case had in fact already been judged without him



knowing it. Months before, in early February of the same year, the Lords had reported to the Privy Council that, because Captain Saunders had acted contrary to his instructions, he ought to be prosecuted. They also thought it advisable to add some further instructions for the use of men-of-war and privateers, to prevent such excesses in the future.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, almost three weeks after this official recommendation, the owners of *The Ruby* summoned the mariners and their officers to Cross Hill at Cornhill in London to distribute the due shares from the three prizes, *St. Francis de Paula*, *Le Postillon de Salonique*, and *St. Laurent*. The High Court of Admiralty had decided on December 6, 1745, that all of them were “good and lawful prize to the captors.”<sup>13</sup>

### The Diamond of *Captain Robert Robinson*

The Levant adventures of HMS *The Diamond*, a man-of-war armed with forty guns, started a little later. She is mentioned as an escort of Levant Company vessels in the summer of 1745, taking a French prize on her passage to Smyrna in the open sea between the islands of Chirigo and Chirigoto (Antikythira). As was common practice, Captain Robinson gave the command of the captured ship to his lieutenant, with orders to follow him to Smyrna. Bad weather separated the captive ship from the convoy, however, and his lieutenant sought refuge by the Island of Stanchio (Kos), where the prize, an old polacre in poor condition, was detained by the local judge (or *kadi*). The French claimed that their ship had been captured near the castle of Candia (probably referring to the island fortress of Gramvousa, just off the northwest coast of Crete), against the explicit orders of the Porte not to engage close to Ottoman ports. Thus the *Kapudan pasha* (captain pasha) was ordered to travel to Kos, check the evidence, and decide the fate of the prize. His verdict, sometime in November, favored the British, but final approval from the Porte was not forthcoming. The French were doing their very best to reverse the *Kapudan pasha's* decision. Meanwhile, the Castle of Foça (i.e., Phocaea) had fired on *The Diamond*, in an attempt to stop her from patrolling the entrance to the Gulf of Smyrna in search of fresh prey. The English were upset. Eventually Robinson went to Kos, took his lieutenant, crew, and a number of valuables from the captive ship, and departed, leaving the captured ship in place. He was obliged to escort the Company's ships back to England. This move was understood by the French as a sign of disengagement; they therefore maximized their efforts to reclaim the ship. Six months later, in June 1746, the case was still pending. It was a matter of honor rather than profit for the two nations, since the value of the ship (fifty to eighty pounds) was insignificant.<sup>14</sup>

By the summer of 1746, HMS *The Diamond* had returned to the Levant with HMS *The Lowestoft*, and they both returned to action. The British consul, George Wakeman, reported from Nicosia that the two ships, on their way from Rhodes to Cyprus, had, after a chase, captured a French bark with a cargo of wheat, biscuits, and iron worth three thousand pounds; half of this cargo was the property of the first dragoman of the French *Nation* in Nicosia. Near the port of Limassol (Lemesos) they captured a load of rice on another French ship, sailing from Damietta. Although the cargo was the property of Ottoman subjects and the vessel was sailing within Ottoman waters, she was robbed, stripped of her masts, rigging, and sails, and run aground. The famine-stricken island was badly in need of supplies, and the Cypriots hoped that these goods could be returned to them. After all, the export of Ottoman rice was prohibited by law. But the local governor, Abdullah pasha, and his officers, bribed by the British consul, decided that these foodstuffs had been seized by the British men-of-war legitimately. Robinson, whose ship was kept at anchor near Limassol, was warned by a May 7 letter from Wakeman that his deeds had caused trouble to the island that might end up costing his consulate dearly. For the time being, however, the two men-of-war were safe; the consul was not. The following day the Abdullah pasha brought to the consulate a declaration of the *kadi* of Limassol requesting the immediate return of the rice. Wakeman wrote accordingly to Captain Bowdler of *The Lowestoft* on May 8. He was desperate; unless the captain complied he would have to pay the whole value of the cargo himself. It was already too late. When Wakeman's second letter reached Limassol, the two British men had already sailed for Leghorn. A year later the case had still not been resolved. The prizes of *The Diamond* had been sold in Leghorn on Robinson's account. The Ottoman merchants were not in a position to produce the sealed documents that were necessary to prove their ownership. "Such a lawless place, Damietta," wrote the British consul Purnell from Latakia. The British embassy, however, did not submit a formal complaint, expecting that Vice-Admiral Henry Medley, commander in chief in the Mediterranean, would handle the recovery process, as the vessels involved had not been privateers. The newly arrived ambassador, James Porter, periodically raised the issue of the rice cargo, but the misconduct of *The Diamond* had long since been overshadowed by that of *The Fame*.<sup>15</sup>

### The Fame of *Fortunatus Wright*

Some privateering stories are better known than others. Most well known is the case of Fortunatus Wright, a native of Liverpool, an active and glorious privateer who perished at sea in 1757. He is fortunate enough to have a full entry in

the *Dictionary of National Biography*, written by the naval historian Professor John Knox Laughton, an account that can now be partly revised.<sup>16</sup> Wright was a mariner and businessman of some experience. For reasons that remain unclear, he is reported to have settled as a merchant at Leghorn, then an Austrian possession, in the early 1740s. According to his own report he was in Liverpool in 1745 and actively participated in the preparation of the local units sent to counter the Jacobite rising. Before the end of hostilities, in November of that year, he sailed from Liverpool to Port Mahon, where he sold a cargo worth three thousand pounds. In April 1746 he took a *letter of marque* from the Vice Admiralty Court at Mahon for his ship *The Fame* of 150 tons, with sixteen carriage guns (guns with a frame and mount supporting the barrel), sixteen swivel guns, and seventy men and boys on board. His subsequent cruise between Syria and Egypt was extremely successful. In November the *London Gazette* gave details of a battle won offshore of Cyprus. The defeated French ship had been run aground and the sailors had fled inland. In December 1746 the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported that Wright had captured sixteen French ships worth four hundred thousand pounds. This was an obvious exaggeration, since he had captured no more than four polacres of 100 to 150 tons each.<sup>17</sup> In any case, according to Wright's testimony, the French were so annoyed that they chased after him with the *Hercules*, a ship double the size, with two times the guns and the crew of *The Fame*. During an eight-hour fight Wright defeated both *Hercules* and another French ship that came to her assistance, although his crew had been reduced to fewer than twenty men. Perhaps this is what William Hutchinson had in mind when he described Wright, in his *Treatise on Naval Architecture*, as a "worthy hero" (Hutchinson 1791: 134). By the time news had reached London, *The Fame* was already out for a second cruise. Wright was too sick to go to sea, he wrote, so he appointed his lieutenant Henry Frissell, who proved no less efficient, as commander of his ship. Then trouble commenced. In December *The Fame* captured a ship transporting the baggage of Luis Reggio y Branciforte, prince of Campo-Florido, who was the departing Spanish ambassador to the French court, and sent her to Leghorn. Wright returned the baggage to the prince because he held a pass from the king of England but not the ship, which did not. Eventually, the matter was referred to the naval commander in chief at Minorca, who decided against Wright. He was charged fifteen hundred pounds for the damages sustained, a heavy fine for some cases of liquor and wine, the prince's own supply, which had been consumed by the thirsty English crew. Under pressure by Vice-Admiral Medley, he also agreed to return the bark.<sup>18</sup> But his troubles did not stop there.

In late December 1746 John Edwards, secretary to the Levant Company, asked Consul Barrington Goldsworthy at Leghorn to prevent the sale of the numerous cargoes taken by *The Fame* on the Levant seas. The Company had also applied to stop the condemnation of any prizes that included Ottoman goods on board French ships in order to protect its *factors* in Turkey from reprisals. The consul was also informed that a considerable sum of money had been taken from an officer (or servant) of the Pasha of Tripoli (Lebanon) on board the French ship, *Maria Theresa*. The Ottoman officer had a passport issued by the British consul of Tripoli, following a demand by the sultan. Wright was at Leghorn when this letter from London arrived in early 1747. He made clear to the consul that the ships in question, *The Charleroi* and *Maria Theresa*, had French passes and colors; in fact the latter had been engaged in battle for some time before being captured. They had both been legally condemned and liquidated, and the money had already been distributed; nothing could be done or undone. From his account, one gets the impression that Wright himself and not Frissell was in command of *The Fame*. Therefore these must have been earlier prizes, captured prior to November 1746.<sup>19</sup>

The British embassy in Constantinople was also alarmed. *The Fame* had already sailed off the coast of Syria with Frissell in command and had taken four more French prizes. Three of them were laden with goods belonging to Ottoman subjects. All four had been sent to Leghorn. The grand vizier had exploded at this insult. HMS *The Lynn* was sent from Smyrna to ask Frissell to restore the damage done to the Ottomans and to take any measures necessary to make him comply with the ambassador's orders. His *letter of marque*, warned Ambassador Porter, could no longer protect him.<sup>20</sup>

By October 1747 Whitehall had taken serious action. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Wright, which was communicated before the end of that year to all British consuls residing at Ottoman ports. In a letter to consul Goldsworthy, the privateer rejected anew the allegation of mischief, and assured him that the value of his prizes had been overestimated. He made no reference to the cash confiscated by his deputy and retained one of the French barks, against the advice of the consul and Horace Mann, the British minister in Florence. As it was rumored that he was still active in privateering with a Sardinian commission, Goldsworthy, acting in cooperation with the British ambassador in Vienna, Sir Thomas Robinson, suggested that Wright should be imprisoned in the castle of Leghorn.<sup>21</sup> He was in fact arrested in the afternoon of December 11 and was imprisoned "as a traitor;" but the Tuscan authorities refused to hand him over to the British consul, who had made plans to transport him directly to London. Goldsworthy asked again for the

assistance of Sir Thomas Robinson. Permission was granted by Vienna a month later, but there was no man-of-war available for transportation.

On April 19, 1748, with the War of the Austrian Succession in its final stage, the High Court of Admiralty sent a mandate to Leghorn to have Fortunatus Wright freed. It was presented to Goldsworthy by Wright's own agent Thomas Earle. The consul was reluctant to comply with it—he had received no orders—until he was convinced by Horace Mann. Wright was set free sometime before June 10, 1748.<sup>22</sup> During his last months in prison he prepared a petition against the Levant Company for all the losses he had suffered and against the Vice-Admiralty Court of Minorca for irregular procedure and the violation of his rights. Eventually his petition was referred to a Committee of the Lords of the Privy Council. The embittered privateer stated that the misfortunes he and his family had suffered were but “a poor Reward to encourage bravery.”<sup>23</sup> Most likely his case with the Levant Company remained pending. In 1750, with his case still unresolved and the Ottomans still claiming reparation, Wright wrote another angry letter to Goldsworthy. He set out his legal arguments and concluded: “They attach'd me at Law, to that Law I must appeal; if I have acted contrary to it, to it I must be responsible; for I do not apprehend I am so to any Agent of the Grand Signior's, to the Grand Signior himself, or to any other Power Seeing I am an Englishman and acted under a Commission from my Prince.”<sup>24</sup> Wright's language was surprisingly strong for the time, and it is noteworthy that he defended his actions by declaring his national identity in plain civic terms.

### Lord Blakeney of *Constantis Calamattas*

Some privateering stories are completely unknown. Such are the adventures of Constantis Calamattas (also spelled Calamatas), a Greek from the island of Patmos who settled in British-held Minorca, most likely in the 1740s. He commanded and partly owned a polacre, *La Compostana*, registered at Mahon, but his Levantine excursions can hardly be considered a success, judging from the heavy debt he had contracted by 1755. He had also been active in the illegal trafficking of fellow Greeks to Minorca. The Porte prohibited permanent emigration, but the British favored the creation of a friendly outpost, be it Greek-Orthodox or Jewish, in that predominantly Catholic island. This is why Greeks were given permission to build their church and a fishery, and to manage salt pits there.<sup>25</sup>

In June 1756, when Minorca was invaded by the French, Calamattas volunteered and fought with the British, who were then being besieged in the fortress of St. Philip. He brought with him, of his own free will, a barrel of corn powder

and numerous glass flasks with gun powder. When the fortress was surrendered, William Blakeney (later Lord Blakeney, the lieutenant-governor of Minorca) and his men, including Calamattas and some other Greeks volunteers, were transferred on board a French vessel to Gibraltar. With the mediation of their captain, Theodoros Alexianos, a leading figure of the Mahon Greek colony, the Greeks were all granted letters of reference, signed by Blakeney. A few months later some of the Greeks moved to London.

Calamattas, destitute in England, outlawed in Turkey and frequently ill, wrote a petition to the king requesting rewards appropriate to his war services. He was granted fifty pounds. With these he paid his recent debts. Then he found among his friends, patrons, and creditors some willing to support him, armed a polacre, and obtained a *letter of marque* for himself in October 1757. His ship of two hundred tons, the *Lord Blakeney*, a name apparently chosen to honor his patron, carried sixteen carriage and eighteen swivel guns. Meanwhile he once again fell seriously ill. Following five months of suffering at the parish of St. George in Hanover Square and having spent the remainder of his capital on medicine and doctors, he submitted a second petition, this time requesting compensation for the supplies he had brought to St. Philip's castle.<sup>26</sup>

Whether his petition was approved, as is more likely, or not, Calamattas was not back in the Mediterranean until 1759. The Seven Years' War was raging on the seas. He was not the first Greek privateer hoisting British colors.<sup>27</sup> The French called them *Anglignecs*, and the Greeks were all too confident with this affiliation. Some of them, like Nikolaos Yerakis from Cephalonia, Loukas Valsamakis and Stephanos Solomos from Ithaca, and Panayiotis Ayomavritis from Lefkada, operating with or without proper commission, were notorious for the damage they caused to French interests.<sup>28</sup> The last two privateers were both veterans of St. Philip's. Their mischief—especially against neutral vessels—had upset the Levant Company, which desired their speedy arrest and punishment. Calamattas's name was explicitly mentioned in the Company's letters to the embassy, which, for a number of reasons, shared the merchants' anxiety.<sup>29</sup> The intensity of privateering had increased the untoward incidents. The number of contracts between Ottoman merchants and French captains in Chania dropped from an average of twenty-five between 1754 and 1756 to sixteen in 1757 (Panzac 1996: 79–80). And the French were masterfully exploiting this situation in order to reduce the British influence at the Porte.

Sometime in late 1759 a report reached Constantinople that a noncommissioned privateer had removed two barrels of cochineal and other goods from a Danish ship bound for Smyrna.<sup>30</sup> The incident had taken place at the port of the

island Tzia (Kea). Almost a year later it became clear that the privateer involved was the *Lord Blakeney* of Calamattas, with a crew of some eighty men. The Greek had taken his prize to the island of Kos to check the identity of the cargo, since the Ottomans on board had claimed that the captured ship and the merchandise were theirs. It was unfortunate that at Kos he encountered two frigates commanded by the *Kapudan pasha* himself. Although the Greek produced his British commission, the pasha, assured by the French that Calamattas's papers were not valid, detained the privateer and sixty of his men, all Greeks and subjects of the grand seigneur, that is, the Ottoman sultan. The pasha had some of them, including Calamattas, chained on board his vice-admiral's ship, the *Patrona*, and sent to Constantinople. The rest, some twenty to twenty-five of the privateer's crew, were taken to the pasha's flagship (*Capitana*) anchored at Kos.

Calamattas produced his papers before the British diplomats, but they were suspicious. His commission looked valid, but, in the hopes of receiving their protection, the Greek captain had offered a share of his bark both to the consul in Smyrna and subsequently to Ambassador Porter. This offer was illegal and strange. Legally *Lord Blakeney* was not his property; unless of course the bonds of security he carried with him signed by London merchants were not genuine and he was a crook. Although he assured the British diplomats that there was nothing wrong with his *letter of marque*, Calamattas and his men ended up in prison. The support and an excellent reference rendered to him by Commodore Hugh Palliser and the consuls were to no avail. All that the embassy had managed to accomplish was to prevent the captives from being declared as common pirates. Since Calamattas had produced a genuine *letter of marque*, such a declaration would have constituted an offense to the British navy and been detrimental for the privateers' morale.<sup>31</sup>

Ambassador Porter would surely have proved more effective and might even have had the captives released, through pressure or indirect bribes, had it not been for active French involvement in conjunction with one further, and almost unprecedented, event. In September 1760, with most of the crew ashore for the Friday prayers, the Christian slaves on board the *Capitana* mutinied, overpowered the small remaining garrison, and took the ship by storm. Among the instigators were twenty of Calamattas's men. The ship was carried off to Malta with the taxes *Kapudan pasha* had collected during his cruise through the Archipelago. Under the circumstances, Porter was reluctant to take any firm action in favor of the Greek prisoners. Calamattas's was in any case a miserable crew without a single Englishmen. To save time, Porter asked the Levant Company to cross-check the Greek's papers. He was an Ottoman subject after all, just another "poor devil" who had risked his life. He could and should wait for a better occasion to be released.<sup>32</sup>

Calamattas's case did not surface again until August 1761, when *Capitana* was returned from Malta, escorted by a French man-of-war. In his report, Porter recalled all the events of the Greek's arrest, including his many misdeeds, concluding that he would not intervene unless he was ordered to do so. The Levant Company clarified that there was nothing wrong with Calamattas's papers, but they thought it better to leave the matter with the ministry. As a matter of fact, the ongoing shortage of foodstuffs had forced Porter, under pressure from the Porte, to order all British privateers not to touch French vessels destined for Constantinople. Transportation from Egypt and the Aegean should proceed unimpeded. This was definitely not the right moment for Calamattas to be released. After Lord Blakeney died in September 1761, there was no one left to stand up for him. Thus the Greek spent fifteen more months in the dungeons. But he was not to be broken.<sup>33</sup>

In August 1762 Calamattas sent a petition directly to Charles Wyndham Lord Egremont, secretary of state for the Southern Department who, against all expectations, expressed some interest. The newly appointed ambassador Henry Grenville prepared a memorandum for Egremont titled "Captain Calamata's Case"; but there was nothing new to say since the petition drew exclusively on Porter's correspondence. Grenville expressed some calculated sympathy for the prisoner but was sure that, as an Ottoman subject, he was not entitled to official protection. Then the embassy had an idea: "If Lord Egremont, from a Spirit of Christian Charity, should think proper to order me to employ about that Sum, towards putting an End to this poor Devil's Miserys, I think I can find the Means of effecting his Discharge from Prison; but to reclaim him from the Porte in an open, publick Manner, is a measure I woud by no Means advise, for Reasons set forth in my Letter to his Lordship."<sup>34</sup> The implication was clear. If the minister thought he deserved some kind of assistance on moral grounds, then bribery was the only way to secure his release. In January 1763 he calculated that one hundred pounds would be enough. Calamattas should pay this sum, but since he could not even make ends meet, there was an alternative.

Grenville waited in vain for a reply from Whitehall; Lord Egremont died in August 1763. Meanwhile, plague reduced the imprisoned Greeks from sixty to thirty. After four years in jail, Calamattas wrote one more letter to the new minister George Montagu-Dunk, the Earl of Halifax, who also was moved. After the exchange of some more letters between public servants and diplomats in October 1764, the ministry encouraged the redemption of the Danish cargo, still detained by the embassy. Upon its return to Calamattas, or to his friends, it could be sold and the necessary capital for bribing the Ottoman authorities could be dispatched to the ambassador.<sup>35</sup> This was far from an expression of Christian charity; in any



case it was the last time the name of Calamattas was mentioned. Those who like happy endings might find some comfort in the information that in 1821 in English-held Malta there resided a Demetrio Calamatta, *accatapano minore* (police lieutenant), and a Lorenzo Calamatta, regulator of the Clock of Vittoriosa. Their names were written with double Ts, the way Constantis had signed his *letter of marque* in London. Apparently they were his descendants, also in British service, though their duties seem to have been lighter.<sup>36</sup>

## THE MEDITERRANEAN MATRIX

### *The Privateers*

The four naval adventures narrated above reveal the complexities involved in Mediterranean privateering careers, in addition to the risks deemed acceptable in trading and seafaring. But these stories do not imply that privateers as a rule were unfit to handle such hardships; quite the opposite. Clearly, successful privateers had to be able masters and commanders, brave enough to engage in battle as often as was required to maximize their own spoils and their creditors' profits. They also had to be shrewd enough to calculate in advance whether they could profit from a misdeed. Such decisions required a thorough knowledge of the existing regulations and judicial procedures.

Of course, privateer captains were not one of a kind. Some were more experienced than others, having spent a lifetime in the Mediterranean on board merchantmen or privateers. They knew the sea routes, the hiding places, and the pitfalls. Most likely Wright and Saunders were gentlemen of some standing, surely more educated and better off than Calamattas and the other *Angligræcs*. The latter spoke more languages, however (Turkish and Greek for sure), in addition to a working knowledge of Italian (or, perhaps, of *Sabir*, the Mediterranean *lingua franca* based on Italian) that had to be mastered for professional survival in the region. Taking into consideration the paperwork that had to be completed on board, all these captains must have been literate enough to supervise their secretaries, and to read and sign the correspondence addressed to the authorities. Calamattas was able to sign in both the Greek and Latin alphabets. Even those who were not literate certainly developed a high degree of social literacy, which enabled them to exploit or evade the different bureaucratic procedures in various countries. They had all traveled widely and lived in diverse lands. They were aware of the importance of citizenship at least to the extent that this rendered them

subject to a specific set of laws. If they were locals of the Levant they must have had an advantage in constituting a part of the networks operating in the region.

But British privateers had the fuller support of the home government and better access to publicity. Their heroic deeds against the French, transmitted to London from all corners of the globe, were published, multiplied, and glorified in newspapers and magazines, not without a touch of exaggeration. Publicity surely helped them to secure capital for new ships, but it could not always save them from trouble when they were abroad. Bravery, vested with real or alleged patriotism, did not top the list of privateering virtues. Although valor and honesty were appreciated by fellow naval officers, and occasionally by the admiralty, they were not necessarily prized by merchants and diplomats. It was calculated risk that really mattered if they were to survive. An illegal prize taken by a man-of-war would surely cause some trouble to an officer of the Royal Navy, like Robert Robinson; but he was unlikely to end up in a Turkish prison like Calamattas or in a Tuscan prison like Wright.

There is sufficient evidence to support the view that both English and non-English privateers were too confident in sailing under British colors, so confident that a few became reckless, disregarding the possible consequences of their illegal captures. Such recklessness does not imply that they were either naïve or greedy, however; it constituted a rational choice, more often than not justified by events. They knew that Ottoman subjects would not be able to defeat them in English courts. If they moved fast and the captured ship was condemned and sold, it was unlikely that restitution would be forced. Sometimes they were unfortunate enough to run into an official of another state, a diplomat with a tempting supply of liquor or a pasha with a hefty purse. But in the 1740s and 1750s there were additional factors that made privateers misjudge their chances, as if their British colors had faded. To their surprise, they were treated by their countrymen as “traytors,” to quote Fortunatus Wright.

### *The Grand Seigneur, His Seas, and His Needs*

The first complicating factor was the Ottoman state. Assessing its role in limiting the privateers' freedom of action is not an easy task. The archival sources used in this article were produced by British consuls and ambassadors who were far from impartial observers. Their professional efficiency was judged by their ability to maintain a working relationship with the Porte and with local officials, with the aim of benefiting both the Crown and the Levant Company. Attacks against neutrals by both cruisers and men-of-war made this an impossible balancing act,

for the issues involved were, before anything else, of a delicate legal nature. Even the proper identification of real Ottoman cargoes was a difficult task. The Porte had ordered them to be registered as such whenever they were shipped on foreign vessels. Yet there were cases in which later investigations proved that the cargoes registered as Ottoman were actually French, thus complicating the settlement.<sup>37</sup> More often than not, reliable (and comprehensible) documents of identification were missing. Yet this was a marginal complication compared to the vague definition of territoriality, drawing mostly from the ill-defined and disputed "antient Maritime Rules and Laws."<sup>38</sup>

In 1745 (or even earlier) an imperial decree was issued by the Porte making clear that whenever there was a war between the Christian powers, their men-of-war should not come into the waters of Ottoman dominions; and in case they did, they ought not to engage each other.<sup>39</sup> This decree was also used as a model from the outset of the Seven Years' War in 1756.<sup>40</sup> But the phrasing was far from clear. "His Seas," that is, the grand seigneur's, constituted a very poor definition of territorial waters as opposed to "high Seas." The expression, "under Castle Guns," and the adjectives "good," "sufficient," "competent," and "due," were used to measure the distance from Ottoman fortresses, ports, or shores whenever an engagement had taken place. Such estimates were highly subjective, especially when different sources of information produced different accounts. The French ambassador, for example, asserted that the aforementioned capture of HMS *Diamond* had not taken place between the islands of Chirigo and Chirigoto but under the "castle of Candia," most likely implying the island fortress of Gramvousa, off the north-western coast of Crete, some twenty miles farther to the south.<sup>41</sup> Such gross disputes over facts remained pending until the Ottoman authorities decided whose testimony was the more persuasive, a process open to corruption and intrigue. The exact limits of local officials' jurisdiction in the vicinity of a port were also unclear. Was it the range of the castle guns, the "cannon-shot-rule," commonly accepted by other nations? As mentioned above, the *Diamond* was fired at from the land when she was "at some Distance" because the Ottomans thought she was searching for prey too close to the port of Smyrna (Kent 1954: 537–53).

In 1757 the Porte, perhaps encouraged by French, set a line at Kythira, apparently connecting the Peloponnese, Crete, and Egypt. Inside this boundary, captures would be forbidden and captured ships would be denied access to any port. The British were aware that such a settlement, presented as an "act of Humanity," was not in their favor, since the amount of trade they conducted with the Ottomans was far less than that of the French. They refrained from giving their approval to this initiative, which would destroy the trade in prizes (i.e., captured cargoes); but

the Porte insisted in denying access and threatened to confiscate any prize brought into Ottoman ports.<sup>42</sup>

The second ground for dispute with the Porte was the intentional or, perhaps, unintentional harm caused by British cruisers to Ottoman subjects, and to Muslims in particular. The Ottoman authorities were especially upset if the harm was done during a voyage of pilgrimage, or if it involved individual humiliation, such as the stripping of captives. To save time and trouble on one such occasion, the British consul, George Wakeman, thought it necessary to pay a ransom of forty-five hundred talers out of his own pocket to the privateer.<sup>43</sup> "A capture of Turkish pilgrims from Mecca is enough to make the whole Country revolt," wrote Ambassador Porter to London, describing the situation in Cairo and in Cyprus and asking for specific terms for safeguarding Turkish pilgrims to be included in the commissions, since privateers paid little attention to orders once they were at sea, if such orders reached them at all.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the period under examination, directives were issued from Whitehall against violent practices and in favor of restoring goods to the Ottomans, the region of Algiers included.<sup>45</sup> Violation would reduce privateers to pirates, who could expect no mercy from the Turks or support from the embassy. However, the French deliberately spread rumors that Britain had unleashed unrestricted cruisers. Rather than officially discourage the Turks from using French vessels, as the British would have wished, such rumors provoked the Porte to press for and receive new assurances from London.<sup>46</sup> Ottoman anxiety was easy to explain. They depended heavily on foreign trade, on the French more than anyone else's, and had no incentive to discourage such imports, especially fabric and coffee.<sup>47</sup>

In fact, it was more than fashion and coffee the Turks cared for. The commissioner of customs, Ishak aga, put it bluntly to the British ambassador in 1745: privateering acts against the French had reduced the revenue from customs to the detriment of the public interest. His own revenue has been reduced substantially, because, in addition to curtailed legal transactions, the flow of French bribes had dropped as well.<sup>48</sup> The same was argued in 1757: anywhere the Ottoman commissioner gained a shilling from the British he procured a pound from the French.<sup>49</sup>

In any case, because of British privateering, Ottoman merchants became more hesitant in their use of French vessels. If the British really cared for the Turks, they could have halted their navy on both the aforementioned occasions, in the 1740s and 1750s. They chose not to do so, not in order to defy Ottoman regulations, as they explained to the Porte, but to protect their own merchant navy and provide a proportionate response to the French, including the seizure of French goods on neutral ships. The British King, they said, could not do otherwise.<sup>50</sup> The bottom

line was that the Porte would have to rely on British assurances rather than on British firm action against seizures, as long as the French trade was so brisk and challenging for British privateers.

The harm that British privateers caused to Ottoman interests was not just a matter of lost profits, bribes, and revenues. The most serious concern of the Ottoman Empire was the steady provision of the urban centers. Food crises developed all too often in the empire and escalated into serious social protests.<sup>51</sup> The fact that many—perhaps most—of the irregular captures that troubled the Porte concerned cargoes of cereals and rice should not be attributed only to the nature of the French carrying trade. Geography and history made seaborne transportation essential (see Greene 2010: 122–37). This was not a seasonal phenomenon; it was brisk throughout the year, therefore tempting for privateers. But the disruption of the food trade caused by British privateers was not a simple matter of trade statistics; political stability could be affected. The funds belonging to the Pasha of Tripoli seized from the *Maria Theresa* were intended for the purchase of corn, Lebanon being threatened with famine. Cyprus was in want of food when *The Diamond* and HMS *The Lowestoft* captured loads of wheat and rice intended as provisions for the island. Ambassador Porter explained in one of his letters to Consul Goldsworthy that the reclaimed French barks were of unimportant value. It was the cargo that mattered, for “The Turks live by this Trade, and keep their Country from Want, and Famine.”<sup>52</sup> In 1758 and 1761 the scarcity of wheat and rice caused serious turmoil in the capital (Constantinople) and made the Porte extremely sensitive to naval incidents that might interrupt the traffic with Egypt and the Aegean Islands. The ambassador gave the necessary instructions to all captains, but he could hardly restrain the undisciplined and illegitimate *Angligrec*, named Canales, cruising somewhere off Cyprus, from hampering the provisioning of the capital and causing complaints from merchants in Cairo and Damietta. The embarrassment Canales caused to the British made them reluctant to press for poor Calamattas’s release.<sup>53</sup>

### *The French Intrigues*

The French factor, in particular French diplomacy, made things even more complicated for the privateers. From the British point of view, the French could hardly claim to be respecting Ottoman regulations. If the French judged vessels representing British interests as weak and vulnerable, they did not hesitate to attack them, thus showing little regard for free trade or Ottoman welfare. Despite their own misconduct, however, the standard handling of disputed cases by French

diplomats throughout the ports of the empire was to present the British as having acted against the Orders of the Sublime Porte.<sup>54</sup> This was the case with all of the captures that occurred as part of the four case studies described above. Some other cases were imaginary, meant simply to increase the pressure on the British and force them into the embarrassing position of having to apologize. The French, it was maintained in British reports, were very effective in this policy because of the Ottoman officials' corruption, "with most of whom Gold is the only Argument, and the French give it profusely to get the better of us."<sup>55</sup> They spared "no Expence upon such Occasions, and Gold will always turn the Scale in their favour." The British *Nation* in Constantinople could not match the French in these unfair practices. In time they found a theoretical way to console themselves for being inferior to the French in this matter: "however strong this Partiality may seem, we have at least the Satisfaction to know, that it is not shewn them Gratis, but costs them dear to have their Vanity flattered by these Instances of Superior Favour to them; and if they do carry their Cause too often that at least they are obliged to buy it."<sup>56</sup> Such bitter thoughts were not always sufficient satisfaction for the British. This is why the Consul Wakeman bribed Abdullah pasha of Nicosia in advance, to prevent the French instigations.

Ottoman subjects were aware of French effectiveness in this tricky game. This is why they were willing to assist French merchants by "lending" to them their names. A Muslim name or seal on the cargo would facilitate reclaiming the merchandise in case the ship was captured by the British. By doing so the Turks disregarded their own sovereign's instructions, but they secured an easy profit in return. The risk of forgery taken by the French was considered acceptable in wartime, but forgery could not protect their ships from being captured. Such captures resulted in a vicious circle of an ever increasing number of forged or justifiable Ottoman complaints directed to British diplomats.<sup>57</sup> If the latter could not reveal the forgery or any other trick used by the French and their Turkish associates, they were apt to lay additional blame on their own privateers for their hastiness and recklessness. In the protracted absence of Ambassador Everard Fawkener from Constantinople, his secretary Aspinwall felt desperate, having been obliged to stand alone against all the continuous French intrigues and false insinuations without any instructions from London.<sup>58</sup>

French influence was more than a matter of mutually beneficial trade interests, customary bribery, and intrigues. No matter how disgusting they seemed to the British, all these practices had shaped a strong diplomatic bond between France and the Ottoman Empire that went back to the sixteenth century. This was lucidly described by Stanhope Aspinwall in 1745, shortly after the Ottoman initiative

to mediate in the War of Austrian Succession between the Christian powers. In his judgment this move was related to the advantages derived from the extensive French trade with the empire.<sup>59</sup> France looked positively on Ottoman mediation. In view of the mutual interests outlined above, there was no reason for the French to turn the Turks down. They accepted the offer in principle, thus retaining their friendly status.<sup>60</sup> Ambassador Porter feared that Britain might do the French a favor by blowing up the mediation and taking all the blame. The day of Porter's official reception as an ambassador, his French colleague reminded the vizier that the British had not thus far responded officially to the Ottoman peace initiative. Apparently, he concluded, London was treating the Porte with contempt. British unwillingness to support the restoration of Ottoman goods captured by cruisers and their protracted policy of no reply pointed to the same direction: the British king, they claimed, was neglecting the appeals and diplomatic overtures of the sultan.<sup>61</sup> As it did not require stretching the facts, the dissemination of such views was not particularly difficult.

### *Diplomacy Fit for the British Nation*

It was ironic that during the Seven Years' War (1756–63) Britain set the opposite diplomatic task but confronted the very same difficulties. This time the British desired and worked hard to approach the Porte for reasons that will be explained in detail in the following paragraphs. The obvious duty of the British naval forces in the Mediterranean was to curtail the French Levant supply lines and to eliminate French cruisers that were harassing their own Levant trade. In the very early stages of the war, the Royal Navy treated the Ottomans by the book, "with great Politeness, Humanity and Prudence," while the French appeared unable to instigate complaints.<sup>62</sup> The Rule of 1756, however, made clear that any neutrals assisting the trade of the enemies of Britain could be considered and treated as belligerents. The Rule referred specifically to the Atlantic and East Indian colonial trade, but the need and temptation to strike the French commerce hard in the Mediterranean grew as well. Inevitably the increased naval action interfered with Britain's diplomatic approach to the Porte; this interference will be described in some detail to demonstrate the delicate position of the embassy and explain its tough reaction to privateering.

From the outset of the war, Ambassador Porter was instructed to secure the friendship of the Porte, arguing that France, being in alliance with Austria and Russia, had abandoned the Porte, while the British king had issued very strong orders to both men-of-war and privateers not to molest Ottoman interests.<sup>63</sup>

This desire for friendship escalated in early 1759 when the grand vizier appeared willing to enter into a triple alliance with Britain and Prussia, following an initiative that had been pending for some years. Porter did his best not to commit his king to a remote continental war against Austria and/or Russia, but the vizier was not convinced. He wanted a secure relation with London if Turkey was to participate actively in this war. "No Arguments can beat him out of this Idea," wrote Porter.<sup>64</sup> London encouraged Porter to proceed speedily with the talks. Having "a perfect knowledge of Ottoman manners and characters," he was even licensed to use a considerable sum of money, if necessary, but not to deliver it until the Ottoman army was in motion against the Austrians. Initially he was advised not to engage officially. He should simply work in favor of Prussian interests, in other words to help them put the Austrians and/or the Russians in a two-fronted war. When the government in London realized that British military involvement was a *sine qua non* for any alliance with the Ottomans, Porter was authorized to flirt with the idea of a defensive alliance, without promises of territorial expansion, and to work closely with Karl Adolf von Rexin, the emissary of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia.<sup>65</sup> Yet this was not an easy task, not only because Rexin was not suitable for this mission, but also due to the sudden change in the fortunes of war. In 1759–60, as the Prussians were constantly losing ground to the Austrians and Russians, the risk of military assistance grew greater for the Ottomans.

Cooperation between Rexin and Porter was also deficient: new scenarios were constantly emerging, and the flow of rumors was steadier than the flow of concrete information. It was hard to make appointments with Ottoman statesmen and the capital required for diplomatic maneuvering was enormous. The grand vizier himself warned Rexin bluntly that the Prussians "must not think the Turks are so simple, as to be taken in, and bring Ills on Themselves for a little Money." The Prussian got the message for it is said he spent one million talers in the Ottoman capital.<sup>66</sup> Porter himself admitted confusion since Ottoman views were difficult to penetrate.<sup>67</sup> In general he was not as optimistic as Rexin, but he was proved the better judge of Ottoman tactics. The expected alliance was reduced to a treaty of friendship and commerce, agreed between Prussia and the Ottoman Empire in spring 1761, which could hardly affect the fortunes of war in Britain's favor. Later efforts to achieve something more substantial were in vain; while London was considering other options, developments in Russia in 1762 completely derailed the plan for an alliance, since the new Prussophile tsar of Russia, Peter III, recalled his armies, thus eliminating the importance of Ottoman involvement.<sup>68</sup>

Throughout these long years (1756–61) Porter was very afraid that any setback in the process of mediating between the Ottomans and the Prussians might impact



negatively upon the British, who would thus have expended all the influence they once possessed in Constantinople. The *Anglignecs*, the shameful adventure of the *Capitana*, and the constant threat of famine did not make his mediation any easier. Such interventions were both a distraction and embarrassing. Supporting the privateers beyond the unofficial line of Chirigo was a luxury he could no longer afford, even if and when he desired to do so. Though the privateers did not know this in advance, they soon discovered that, if they misbehaved, they would face Ottoman wrath largely on their own.

Even if he had not been assigned with the mediation, there were additional and indeed strong reasons why Porter would not commit himself to the protection of troublesome privateers. Like his predecessors and his successors, he had to serve and protect the everyday interests of the Levant Company and its *factors* in the sultan's domains. These were the very people he lived with in Constantinople, his own *Nation*. This was not an easy task considering the constant pressure exercised on the *factors* to reimburse captured cargo of Ottoman interest on board French and neutral vessels. In mid-1746 Aspinwall had to compensate the victims of *The Ruby* from the Company's cash, to prevent any consequences. His earlier representations of the board members to the Lord Justices and to the Duke of Newcastle, to intervene speedily with the attorney general and to have Robert Saunders prosecuted and his victims compensated, and even his warnings to the Privy Council that the consequences would greatly affect the interests of the British *Nation* at the Porte, had all been in vain.<sup>69</sup> Almost a year later Porter sadly observed that British trade had been drastically reduced, while the Company *factories* had been obliged to reimburse the Ottomans for captures. Whenever Muslim protesters reached the capital city, reclaiming their seized properties, the economic burden of compensation was automatically transferred to the local *factors*, which was very onerous. They had to borrow at 10 percent interest in order to raise the necessary capital. In addition, to make up for the disgrace they had suffered following such incidents, they had to raise significantly the value of any presents to government officials and to the sultan. Their debt in 1748, by the end of the Austrian War, was no less than twelve thousand pounds.<sup>70</sup>

In this context, the captures by *The Fame* were bound to alarm the board of the Company, which invested its utmost energy and succeeded in making an example out of Wright, regardless of his glorious contribution to the war effort. It was as a result of similar early captures in the Archipelago by the Royal Navy in late 1755 that the board petitioned the king and achieved the issuing of instructions, additional to those of 1747, "that the Commanders of His Majesty's Ships of War, do not upon any Pretence Take out of any Port belonging to the Ottoman

Empire, any French Vessels; or molest, detain, or imprison the Persons of any of the Subjects of the Ottoman Empire, or seize or detain any French Ships or Vessels which they shall meet with in the Levant Seas, bound from One Port to another in those Seas, or to, or from any Ports in Egypt, having the Effects of Turks on Board.”<sup>71</sup> Clearly these instructions reflected the most frequent causes of Ottoman complaint. They constituted a good start, but as was the case in the previous war in the 1740s, the Company did not rest on its laurels. The board continuously monitored privateering in the Mediterranean, checking commissions and encouraging the arrest of troublesome privateers.<sup>72</sup> Care was taken to avoid hasty condemnations of disputed goods, to speed up legal procedures in British courts, to press for fresh and strict instructions, and to compensate victims in the periphery of the empire before they had the opportunity to share their sufferings with the embittered Porte. A long series of alleged or real privateering misconduct with effects of varying cost for the Company *factories* culminated in a contest fought both at home and in the Levant, in consulates, ministries, and courts. *Factors* wanted privateers held on a short leash; but was this demand really in Britain’s favor? Private and national interests were not always aligned, or rather, the national interest of Britain was interpreted through the prism of the private, and this was case for both privateers and *factors*.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS: PRIVATEERING BETWEEN THE COMPANY AND THE NATION

The language used by the British consuls and the ambassadors to describe the financial miseries suffered by the Levant *factors* because of disobedient privateers is robust. The payments required from them were “violent Demands,” a “national Evil,” and a “great Expense to the *Nation*.” If not paid, the Turks could always confiscate goods on board the ships of the Smyrna convoy or even resort to crude violence and devastate their mercantile community, the *Nation*. Such expressions of the threat to the *Nation* left no doubt where blame should be placed. Yet the adventure of eighteenth-century privateering in the Levant had started on the recommendations of an ambassador, as was described in the introduction. The debate about Ottoman neutrality also started in the very early years of the eighteenth century, and it was clear right from the beginning that, given the nature of the Levant trade, any kind of “zones of liberty” favored the French no less than the Turks. This was an additional risk for future privateers. What followed in the 1740s and 1750s was a replay of 1702 with certain variations. This article broadly

argues that the conduct of British mid-eighteenth-century privateering against the French in the waters of the sultan cannot be analyzed and explained except within a complex set of parameters involving various aspects of Anglo-Ottoman relations. Royal Navy captains and Levantine mariners, daring men, bold but not necessarily simple or naïve, found it convenient to associate their private interests with those of Britain and fought the French around the globe. Some were, or were considered, patriots, but all overestimated their contribution to the war effort and the influence of their British colors. Thus, I have argued, they found themselves trapped in the labyrinth of the delicate Anglo-Ottoman relationship, a labyrinth they were unaware of, haunted by Levantine intrigues and unspoken truths that must be spelled out.

British privateering was playing an increasingly important role in undermining French trade worldwide. Privateers took that for granted and were encouraged to do so. But the French trade was proving too multifaceted to be defeated by privateers alone. This was the case especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, where the Ottoman Empire was the major commercial partner and a potentially desirable ally for both the French and the British. Privateers could grasp only the first part of the logic of the situation, thus justifying their double role as warriors in the national service and tradesmen of the prizes they won with honor. Their views and rights, it seems, were shared not only by newspaper editors and readers but also by navy captains and officials, even by British courts of justice. This is why judges needed “encouragement” or “advice” in considering aspects “other” than the legal condemnation of prizes. For all of them the neutral rights of the Turks were not a priority; the outcome of the wars against France and the civil rights of Englishmen—to recall the outburst of Fortunatus Wright—were.

British consuls and ambassadors, on the other hand, were afraid of riots caused by hunger, incidents that occurred repeatedly in Turkey and could become extremely violent. Some of them, like James Porter and Anthony Hayes, spent almost a lifetime in the Levant and made a family there (Laidlaw 2010: 182, 189). It is hard to distinguish any appreciation for Ottoman politics and morals, let alone for Ottoman concerns to define territorial waters, in their correspondence; not even a word of praise can be found for Ottoman might, which had often been acknowledged in previous centuries. It is true that not much was left of it. Yet the Ottoman Empire still mattered in terms of global strategy, a fact that privateers, especially Greek-Orthodox locals, like the Mahones or the Ionians, found difficult fully to grasp. The diplomats were better apprised of the situation, but it is difficult to determine whether it was their better knowledge of strategy or an impartial concern for their king’s lukewarm Oriental diplomacy that made them so rough

with privateers of their own nation in the Levant seas. Naturally they disliked apologizing to the Turks. But would Rexin, the Prussian envoy, have had any hopes for an offensive alliance with the Ottoman Empire, or would the French have had less influence in the Ottoman court, if it had not been for a number of illegal captures perpetrated by British privateers? Did all these unfortunate incidents deserve so much detail in diplomatic correspondence? Did diplomats actually believe that privateers could and should be impeccable? Most certainly not. In fact they appreciated the importance of prize sales for the local trade in wartime no less than the need of cruisers to restrain French navigation.

What British diplomats knew well and privateers or Navy captains did not was the precarious state of the Levant Company trade, whose increasing decay was not related to such extra taxation for compensation or bribe, widely known as *avantias*.<sup>73</sup> It was a fact that the Levant Company's treasury could no longer take any accidental blows. *Avantias*, excessive gifts, and turbulent uprisings during the lengthy wars of the time accelerated its decay and had the potential to prove lethal. From their Levantine posts, diplomats were experiencing a true war of attrition. Privateers and the Royal Navy might bring the French traders to their knees and eventually win the war. Their immediate concern, however, was whether their *Nation*, the people with whom they spent their lives with abroad, would still be standing after the war to reap the fruits of victory, or whether it would fall as collateral damage prior to the termination of hostilities or soon afterward. In line with this embassy view, preserving the integrity of Ottoman trade and also transport interests took on additional importance. Any potential sources of harm to *factors* should be eliminated in advance or promptly mitigated. It is reasonable to assume that in order to extract timely, firm assistance from the ministry and the admiralty, diplomats had to dramatize the threat and demonize the perpetrators. In principle, and providing the British authorities had been convinced, the government would be then willing to issue orders to soothe the sultan and benefit the Levant Company. Wright, Calamattas, and other seamen, perhaps unaware of, or even indifferent to such delicate politics, were easily targeted by consuls who viewed them as a source of unbearable embarrassment. But the overall record of diplomatic professional efforts indicates that, in general, the threat against their *Nation* in Turkey was not perceived as a threat for the nation as a whole back in Britain. In fact a few privateers enjoyed significant popularity. Heroes have always been in short supply.

## NOTES

This paper has benefited from comments and amendments suggested by Professor Dimitris Livianos, Dr. Yannis Karras, the editor, Susan O. Shapiro, and two anonymous reviewers.

1. See <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/privateer> and <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/privateer>.
2. SP 97/21, Sutton to Lord Manchester, Constantinople, May 30, 1702, O.S., fol. 98r–v.
3. SP 97/21, Sutton to Harley, Constantinople, November 8, 1704, O.S., fols. 182r–183r.
4. This section is based on Starkley (1990); Lydon (1970); and Pares (1938).
5. Fawkener, upon his return to England, became secretary to the Duke of Cumberland and accompanied the duke on his campaign in the Scottish Highlands to suppress the 1745 Rebellion.
6. *London Journal*, February 25, 1721.
7. For his voyages to Gallipoli, Venice, Leghorn, and Zante, see *Daily Journal*, July 17, 1728; October 6, 1732; February 9 and August 5, 1736; *General Evening Post*, January 6, 1728, and January 15, 1743. For the attack against him in London, see *Daily Journal*, June 6, 1732. For the launch of *The Ruby*, see *Daily Post*, March 15, 1742.
8. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, August 15, 1744, fols. 107r–108v; October 13, 1744, fols. 124v–125v. Attached are the letters of Samuel Hayward, Zante, July 21 and 31, 1744, fol. 129r–131v.
9. For this incident, see also *General Advertiser*, December 5, 1744.
10. SP 36/66, “The Humble Petition of the Governor and Company of Merchants of England Trading to the Levant Seas,” fol. 73r–v.
11. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, November 9, 1744, fol. 132r–v; December 6, 1744, fol. 163r–v; May 27, 1745, fol. 222v; July 11, 1745, fol. 241v; August 7, 1745, fol. 251v; February 9, 1746, fol. 302r–v; June 24, 1746, fol. 320r–v.
12. PC 1.6.2, G. Paul, D. Ryder, W. Murray to the Right Honourable the Lords of a Committee of His Majesty’s Most Honourable Privy Council, February 4, 1746, fols. 2.1–2.4.
13. *London Gazette*, January 17, 1746.
14. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, August 7, 1745, fols. 252r–253r; August 30, 1745, fols. 274v–275r; September 24, 1745, fol. 279r–v; December 7, 1745, fols. 293r–294r; June 24, 1746, fol. 321r–v.
15. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, June 24, 1746, fols. 322r–323v; September 4, 1746, fols. 344r–354r, including attachments: Wakeman to Aspinwall, Cyprus, May 3 and 21, 1746; Wakeman to Robinson, Nicosia, May 7, 1746; Wakeman to Bowdler, Nicosia, May 8, 1746; Purnell to Aspinwall, Latakia, July 30, 1746. SP 97/33, Porter to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, February 21, 1747, fol. 26r; March 18, 1747, fols. 44v, 46v, 60r–61v; Porter to Goldsworthy, Constantinople, April 2, 1747, fol. 100r.
16. See [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Wright,\\_Fortunatus\\_\(DNB00\)](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Wright,_Fortunatus_(DNB00)). His death was confirmed by several letters from Leghorn despite earlier reports that he had survived a storm: *London Evening Post*, January 12, 1758. For early references to his deeds, see *The British Chronologist* (1874: 3.227); and Raymond (ca. 1790: 495). The classic reference to his life is Williams (1897/2010: 32–78).
17. See note 23 (PC 1.6.14, fol. 3r).
18. SP 98/55, Goldsworthy to the Duke of Newcastle, Leghorn, January 23, 1747, fols. 25r–27v.
19. SP 98/55, Edwards to Goldsworthy, London, December 26, 1746, fols. 38r–40r; Goldsworthy to Barker, Governor to the Turkey Company, Leghorn, February 20, 1747, fols. 36r–37r.
20. SP 97/33, Porter to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, March 18, 1746, fols. 44v–46v, 51r; Porter to Robert Man, Commander of HMS *The Lynn*, at Smyrna, Constantinople, March 23, 1747, fols. 65r–66r. Captain Man replied that he would seek *The Fame* but was not authorized

to oblige Frissell to restore the “effects” (Man to Porter, Smyrna, March 31, 1747, fol. 88r); Purnell to Porter, Latakia, March 24, 1747, fols. 102r–103v.

21. SP 97/33, the Duke of Newcastle to Porter, London, October 20, 1747, fol. 243r; Porter to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, December 26, 1747, fols. 255r–256v; January 30, 1748, fol. 282v.

22. SP 98/55, Goldsworthy to the Duke of Newcastle, Leghorn, December 11 and 18, 1757; February 5, 1758, fols. 50r–v, 52r–v, 58r; the same to Robinson, December 18, 1757, fols. 54r–55r; the same to Duke of Bedford, June 10, 1748, fol. 68r. Wright later wrote that he had been imprisoned on December 1. Had this been a difference of eleven—and not ten—days, this might have been attributed to the different calendar, since both were in use at that time.

23. PC 1.6.14, “Petition of Fortunatus Wright Sole Owner and Commander of the Fame Privateer against the Turkey Company and the Judge of the Vice Admiralty Court in Minorca”; “Order Referring to a Committee the Petition of Fortunatus etc.,” June 30, 1748. The “petition,” which has the form of a chronological account of Wright’s adventures, has been used extensively as a source throughout the previous paragraphs in order to fill gaps in the monthly correspondence.

24. SP 98/55, Wright to Goldsworthy, Leghorn, June 4, 1749, fols. 130r–131r. The letter has also been published by Williams (1897/2010: 48).

25. According to their own report (December 9, 1743), the Greek families of Minorca were identified as “Catholick Christians of the Greek Church”: CO 174/2, fol. 154r. For the Greek colony in general and for some testimonies on Calamattas in particular, see Svoronos (1956: 2.326, 347); Hernandez (1925: 340); Desmond (1990: 82, 152); Marshall (1932: 101–6); Lucas-Torres (2011: 491–94, doc. no. 69).

26. Desmond (1990: 172); see the “List of the Greeks which were Volunteers at Saint Philips Castle in Minorca during the Siege” with twenty-one names (T1/393, fol. 158r). For Calamattas’s petition to the Privy Council, see also Marshall (1932: 106–7). All the other evidence is drawn from T1/368, fols. 77r–78r; T1/379/47–49, fols. 73r–75r; T1/382, fol. 114r; T1/393, fol. 155r; HCA 26/8, fol. 90r (October 21, 1757).

27. SP 97/39, Porter to Fox, Constantinople, April 2, 1756, s.f.

28. Svoronos (1956: 336; 1996: 158–61); Krantonelli (1998: 42–44, 173–74); Mertziros (1947: 379n2–380). SP 97/41, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, May 17, 1760, fol. 71r–v.

29. SP 105/119, the Governor and Company to Porter, London, March 13, 1760, fol. 49.

30. Cochineal is a highly prized red dyestuff that is made from an insect. It was imported from Latin America and used throughout the Ottoman Empire for the dyeing of carpets.

31. SP 97/41, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, September 2, 1760, fols. 104v–105r; October 16, 1760, fols. 117r–118v. See also SP 97/42, “Captain Calamata’s Case,” attached to Grenville to the Earl of Egremont, Pera, January 31, 1763, fol. 8r. SP 97/42, “The Humble Petition of Constantine Calamata, Now Prisoner at Constantinople in Turkey to the Right Honourable the Earl of Halifax, One of His Majesty’s Principal Secretaries of State,” fol. 129r.

32. SP 97/41, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, October 16, 1760, fols. 117v–118r; November 3, 1760, fol. 122r; December 3, 1760, fols. 128v–129r and December 7, 1760, fol. 133r; February 5, 1761, fol. 146r. SP 105/119, the Governor and Company to Porter, London, January 16, 1761, fol. 70.

33. SP 97/41, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, August 17, 1761, fols. 206v–207r; September 17, 1761, fol. 214v–215r; SP 105/119, the Governor and Company to Porter, London, June 16, 1761, fol. 76.

34. SP 97/42, Grenville to Earl of Egremont, Pera, January 31, 1763, fols. 6v–7r; Grenville to Wood, Pera, January 31, 1763, fols. 10r–11v.

35. SP 97/42, “Captain Calamata’s Case,” fols. 6v–7r; and the “The Humble Petition of Constantine Calamata” fols. 129r–129v; Ministry of State to Grenville, St. James’s, October 23, 1764, fol. 127r, private.

36. CO 158/31, “Fixed Establishment of All the Departments of Government in Malta. From the 1st January 1821 until Further Orders.”

37. SP 97/33, "Extract from Mr. Porter's Letter to His Grace the Duke of Newcastle Dated Constantinople, March 18th 1746/7," fol. 63r-v.

38. SP 97/32, "Memorial of Isak Aga, First Commissioner of the Customs at Constantinople," fol. 258r.

39. See the aforementioned "Memorial of Isak Aga" attached to SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, August 7, 1745, fol. 257r; cf. June 24, 1746, fol. 321r-v, where a project of French inspiration is mentioned. The aim was to convince the Ottomans to deny access to port to British cruisers and men-of-war.

40. SP 97/39, Porter to Fox, Constantinople, September 14, 1756, s.f.

41. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, August 30, 1745, fols. 274v-275r.

42. SP 97/39, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, March 16, 1757, s.f.; June 1, 1757, s.f.; June 16, 1757, s.f.; SP 97/40, May 3, 1758, s.f.

43. SP 97/33, Wakeman to Porter, Cyprus, March 30, 1747, fol. 112r.

44. SP 97/33, Porter to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, May 18, 1747, fols. 128v-129r.

45. The orders given in January 1756 to the men-of-war and in June 1756 to privateers made explicit reference to the similar orders issued in March 1747: SP 97/39, "At the Court at St. James's the 3rd Day of January 1756" and "Copy of an Order of Council Dated 1st June 1756," s.f.

46. SP 97/33, Porter to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, March 18, 1747, fol. 50r. During the Seven Years' War Ottoman subjects were prohibited from employing French convoys, to the detriment of French trade: SP 97/39, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, December 23, 1757, s.f.

47. "The Turks are used to see whole Fleets of their [French] Merchant Vessels in their Ports, which makes them appear more considerable than other Nations; and indeed the Turks can neither be clothed (at the Price, and in the Manner, they wish) nor have Coffee to drink, without them; for They bring vast Quantities of that, and Sugar, from their American Settlements"; SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, June 24, 1746, fols. 320r-321v.

48. See the "Memorial of Isak Aga," fol. 258r. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, July 11, 1745, fols. 240v-241r.

49. SP 97/39, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, March 3, 1757, s.f. Ishak aga retained his post until the fall of 1757.

50. See the draft letter prepared for the Sultan attached to SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, August 7, 1745, fol. 265r.

51. See, for example, Olson (1977: 193). For the case of Salonica, see Gounaris (2008: 41-65).

52. SP 97/33, Porter to Goldsworthy, Constantinople, April 2, 1747, fol. 100v.

53. SP 97/40, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, May 3, 1758, s.f.; SP 97/41, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, September 17, 1761, fol. 215r.

54. See the draft letter prepared for the Sultan attached to SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, August 7, 1745, fols. 265v, 267v-269v.

55. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, June 24, 1746, fol. 322r-323r.

56. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, July 11, 1745, fol. 240v. SP 97/39, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, March 3, 1757, s.f.

57. SP 97/33, Porter to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, February 21, 1747, fol. 42r.

58. SP 36/66, "Extract of a Letter to the Levant Company from Mr Stanhope Aspinwall, Secretary to Sir Everard Fawkener at Constantinople, Dated the 22nd May 1745," fol. 67v.

59. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, July 11, 1745, fol. 242r-v.

60. SP 97/32, Aspinwall to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, December 7, 1745, fol. 291r; June 24, 1746, fol. 321r.

61. SP 97/33, Porter to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, March 18, 1747, fols. 44r.

62. SP 97/39, Porter to Fox, Constantinople, April 2, 1756, s.f.

63. SP 97/39, Fox to Porter, London, July 26, 1756, s.f. In the same letter was announced the fall of St Philip's castle; Porter to Fox, Constantinople, September 14 and December 16, 1756, s.f.

64. SP 97/40, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, April 3 and 8, 1759, s.f.
65. SP 97/40, Pitt to Porter (most secret), London, May 25 and June 11, 1759, s.f.
66. SP 97/41, Porter to Pitt, Constantinople, February 8, 1760, fol. 14r; February 9, 1760, fol. 35r–v.
67. SP 97/41, “Copy of Mr. Porter’s Letter to Mr. Mitchell at Berlin, Dated the Fourteenth of February 1760,” fol. 47v.
68. See Scott (1977: 153–75) and Fraser (2000: 459–60).
69. SP 36/65, “The Representation of the Governor and Company of Merchants of England, Trading to the Levant Seas” to the Duke of Newcastle, London, February 4, 1745, fols. 58r, 97r; SP 36/66, “Pro Memoria for Mr. Stone from the Levant Company,” London, June 5, 1745, fol. 96r–v; PC 1/6/2, London, February 4, 1746, fols. 1–4.
70. SP 97/33, Porter to the Duke of Newcastle, Constantinople, February 21, 1746/7, fols. 26r–27v; Wood (1964: 148).
71. SP 97/39, Sharpe to the Lords of the Admiralty, Whitehall, February 5, 1756, s.f.
72. See, for example, SP 105/119, the Governor and Company to Porter, London, March 13, 1760, fol. 49.
73. See the detailed memo submitted by the factors to the Earl of Halifax (August 24, 1765), attached to SP 97/42, Grenville to Conway, Constantinople, October 1, 1765, fols. 286r–293v; and for an overall view, see Laidlaw (2010: 24–28).

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