

THE FEARLESS AND SELF-RELIANT SERVANT.
THE LIFE AND CAREER OF SIR ALFRED BILIOTTI (1833-1915),
AN ITALIAN LEVANTINE IN BRITISH SERVICE

by DAVID BARCHARD

“No more fearless or self-reliant servant of Britain ever lived than this son of the Levant, who has no drop of British blood in his veins,” the archaeologist David George Hogarth wrote of Sir Alfred Biliotti, one of the most singular figures in 19th century British diplomatic history¹.

In his day, Biliotti enjoyed eminence not usually attained by consular officials. Lord Salisbury advanced him in official social rank to equality with the ambassador he served by making him a knight. He achieved recognition of a different sort from both King George I of Greece, and Sultan Abdülhamit II of Turkey. Both monarchs disliked Biliotti and tried to obstruct his career. In Britain, Biliotti was hailed by some for his gallantry in relieving beleaguered Cretan Muslims, while others, notably Canon Malcolm McColl, the political philhellene and close associate of William Gladstone, tried to undermine him.

Biliotti's name was quickly forgotten after his retirement in 1903 and when he died in 1915, the consul was more or less a forgotten figure. Now, by a fluke of history which he could never have imagined, in the age of the Internet Biliotti's name is once more familiar as scholars in the Balkans, Turkey, and Greece turn to his consular reports for accounts of nineteenth century conditions in their subject areas which are often hard to match elsewhere. His consular reports are notable for their insight and their grasp of fields as different as politics, law, demography, anthropology, and farming, as well of course of diplomacy.

A Google search will dredge up work by the young Biliotti on the archaeology of Rhodes; by the middle aged Biliotti on the peoples and ethnology of the Black Sea; and by the elderly Biliotti on the maelstrom of ethnic and political violence in Crete and Macedonia at the end of the 19th century.

Until recently, Biliotti's name was best-known because of his secondary career in early adulthood as an archaeologist and as the excavator of a good many objects now in the British Museum. His reports on sites as far apart as Satala in Eastern Turkey²

¹ D. G. Hogarth, *Accidents of an Antiquary's Life*, London 1910, 29.

² For discussions of Biliotti's work at Satala see T. B. Mitford, "Biliotti's Excavations at Satala", *Anatolian Studies* 23-24, 1974, 221-44; and C. Lightfoot, "Survey Work at Satala: A Roman Legionary Fortress in North-East Turkey", in R. Matthews (ed.) *Ancient Anatolia: Fifty Years' Work by the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara*, London n.d. [1999], 273-84, esp. 279. I am grateful to Dr. Eric Ivison of City University New York for information on this point and for this reference. The interpretation of the remains as representing a basilica had been made by Alfred Biliotti, British Vice-Consul in Trebizond, who spent nine days at Satala in August and September 1874. However, his report went unnoticed until it was published one hundred years later (esp. 233-35), Biliotti's interpretation failed to convince the editor (see the rejection in n. 13 on p. 235).

and Rhodes remain standard scholarly reading to this day, being until recently the only works on them generally accessible to scholars. Interest in his consular political and social reporting has grown steadily stronger since the 1990s. Biliotti's reporting from Trabzon in the 1870s and 1880s has recently been used by Michael Meeker in his magisterial study of the eastern Black Sea, *A Nation of Empire*, and is cited by a growing number of Turkish scholars writing on the same area. Meeker observes "He was perhaps the most open-minded of all the British and French Consuls ... personally inclined to cite facts and incidents rather than offer generalizations ... They include an impressive body of ethnographic details"³.

Towards a biographical account

How did the son of a minor local employee in a backwater posting attain international eminence? There are a few parallels to Biliotti's career in the history of late nineteenth century British diplomacy. Biliotti's apparent disqualifications for positions beyond those normally held by locally employed consular officials were glaring. Throughout his life he had difficulty in writing correct English. Junior members of the British Embassy in Istanbul sometimes mocked him behind his back by underlining grammatical mistakes in his despatches⁴ and there are some indications that his high profile was resented there. As Hogarth indicated, few British officials of modern times have been less British than Biliotti who spoke French at home with a wife who understood not a word of English. More puzzlingly still, although Biliotti achieved distinction as an analytical writer in both diplomacy and scholarship, he seems to have had no formal education.

Till now no biography of Biliotti seems ever to have been written. There is no entry on him in the Dictionary of National Biography and, though he left a wealth of diplomatic documents behind, they seldom reveal details of his personal life. Had he been British-born, Biliotti would almost certainly have written his autobiography as his two successors as British consul-general on Crete did. The Levantine-born and locally recruited Biliotti probably felt that he would not merit attention from metropolitan British audience — and as we shall see, he may well have been made uncomfortable by the attention that he had received. This preliminary biographical account therefore contains some substantial gaps, particularly in details of Sir Alfred's personal and family life, which later researchers may perhaps some day fill.

Sir Alfred's family predecessors

Sir Alfred Biliotti's British career contrasts curiously with the quintessentially Italian background of his family which possessed a pedigree stretching back a thousand years and a coat of arms sporting a fox as its emblem. He was apparently the only member of the family to obtain British nationality. In the twentieth century Sir Alfred's son and grandchildren would live as Italians in Italy. In 19th century

³ M. E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*, London 2002, 262-263 and 267. However, Meeker also sees Biliotti's consular reports as "curiously skewed".

⁴ For example, FO 195/1939, no. 159 November 12 1896, p. 588.

Rhodes, the family's first language was Italian. Alfred Biliotti's second was French and his third Greek — English was his fourth language and Turkish his fifth.

Charles Biliotti, Alfred's father, was born in Livorno, a centre of the Levant trade, in June 1800⁵ and moved to Rhodes at some later point in his life. Though the existing family trees among his descendants in Rhodes all begin with Charles, he certainly had other male relatives in the islands during his adult years which suggests an earlier connection. Nevertheless, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars broke the chain of merchant connections between the Ottoman lands and the West which had existed since the end of the Middle Ages and new arrivals took their place at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Perhaps Charles Biliotti's arrival in Crete was analogous to the wave of Anglo-French families such as the Whittalls and Girauds who arrived in Izmir and Istanbul towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars, restoring the earlier trade links between the Ottoman Empire and western European markets.

By the late 1820s, Charles was living in Rhodes, working as a merchant and consular agent, and in the early 1830's he married Honorine Fleurat, the daughter of George Fleurat, French Vice-Consul in Rhodes until his death in 1837. The future British Consul Alfred would thus have family links with the French consular service through both his mother and his wife. Honorine Fleurat had been born in Istanbul and Charles Newton records her recollections of how Rhodes appeared when she saw the town for the first time in 1827 at the age of thirteen or fourteen⁶.

Alfred was born on July 14 1833, the eldest of seven children. By then Charles Biliotti was a local merchant in Rhodes, having also worked for the previous four years as a translator to the British Consulate on the island. At this date such work — and the more formal positions of Consular Agent and Vice-Consul, and even Consul — were unsalaried part-time activities carried out alongside commercial activity, much to the suspicion of many senior officials. Charles Biliotti would live to see the British consular service gradually being transformed into a regular salaried body, though he would narrowly miss qualifying for a pension when the British government introduced them⁷.

Rhodes itself was part of the Ottoman Empire, the capital of what was called in English "the Turkish Archipelago" and grandiosely '*Cezâyir-i Bahr-i Sefid*' [Islands of the White Sea] in Ottoman Turkish. The *Vilayet* or province did not consist simply of what today we call the Aegean islands, but also extended to Kastellorizo and Cyprus. Nevertheless the *Vilayet* of Rhodes was a backwater throughout the nineteenth century, commercially and politically much less important than the *Vilayet* of Crete. During Alfred Biliotti's early years — the middle decades of the 19th century — as in most other Ottoman provinces, the consolidation of Ottoman rule as a result of the *Tanzimat* reforms had not yet happened in the archipelago. Ottoman

⁵ I am indebted to Yvonne and Victor Mas of Rhodes and to Mrs Mary Biliotti Campbell of Pistoia for these details about the Sir Alfred's family.

⁶ C. Newton, *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant*, London 1865 (repr. Hildesheim 1989), 152 and 355 n. 66.

⁷ For details of Charles Biliotti's career with the Foreign Office and pension application, see FO 78/3018 Consular Records for Rhodes 1878-79.

control was weak, but so, unlike Crete, was pressure from Hellenic nationalism. Local piracy was the most serious problem faced by British officials.

Rhodes teemed with fragments of the civilisations which had preceded Ottoman rule. In the 1840s and 1850s, the town probably looked very much as it did a few decades later when Lady Layard visited Rhodes with her husband, Sir Austen Layard, then British Ambassador in Istanbul on a sea journey to Jaffa on 14 September 1879. Enid Layard writes:

“We went down the famous street where the houses of the Knights are. It was most wonderfully picturesque. The carvings & designs on some of them were wonderfully curious and picturesque. At the end of this street is a splendid building the old hospice. It is used as a barrack ... We sat in the colonels’ room a while to rest & take coffee & then went to see a mosque which was the English church of the knights. Then we went to a shop full of Rhodes plates & bought some Greek silver coins & then on thro’ the bazaars. At every turn we saw fine bits & remains. At one mosque we saw a fine renaissance carved marble door way”⁸.

Around the time of his son’s birth Charles Biliotti’s work for the British ceased and, though he continued to act as a consular agent for Spain and his native Tuscany, he seems to have been mainly a local merchant working in Rhodes and the small town of Makry (now Fethiye) on the Anatolian mainland.

None of this was in any way exceptional and Alfred Biliotti might well simply have remained for all his days as a Levantine Italian merchant in this obscure corner of the empire but for two completely unforeseeable events that were to link his family and his personal destiny with Britain.

The Jones murder: Makry 1845

The first event came in November 1845 when Alfred was twelve years old. Two British travellers, Sir Lawrence Jones, a baronet from Cranmer Hall in Norfolk, and his companion, Mr Twopeny, arrived in Makry and seem to have stayed the night with the Biliottis before venturing out to explore the area around it.

Quite what led Sir Lawrence to undertake what proved to be a fatally dangerous journey is not clear. At this date the Ottoman *Sancak* of Mentesche, of which Makry was the main port, was an under-populated and backward district where western travellers, including merchants, were seldom seen and violence was endemic. Fifteen years later Charles Biliotti described the role of brigandage there in stark terms, referring in a report to “the brigands who infest certain parts of the province and who, emboldened by impunity, dare to present themselves at Makry in broad day light, armed, with the object of ransacking the traders whose operations are continually frustrated by their boldness”⁹.

On Friday 7 November 1845, the day after their arrival in the town, Sir Lawrence and his party set out on an expedition in to the countryside. Around midday, in a small valley called Kızılbel, they were stalked by *zeibecs* or brigands and Sir Lawrence, was murdered for his money, dying an exemplary British Victorian death.

⁸ Diaries of Lady Layard, 14 September 1879, available on the internet at <http://fleetwood.baylor.edu/layard/>. The Isis Press of Istanbul is preparing a printed edition for publication.

⁹ FO 198/11 *Report on Mentesche by Mr Charles Biliotti Her Majesty’s Vice Consul at Makry*.

Surrounded by the brigands, he insisted on sitting down and having a picnic lunch, remarking that it was much more agreeable to fight on a full stomach. Shortly afterwards the brigands attacked and the baronet was killed and robbed. Mr Twopeny was merely wounded and survived to write an account of the incident¹⁰.

The death of a British baronet outraged the British Government in London, but the local Turkish authorities and the British consulate in Izmir made no progress for many months in finding the culprits and bringing them to justice.

Indeed but for the resolution and courage of Charles Biliotti, the *zeibecs*, who were locally very powerful, might have escaped punishment entirely which was what they themselves apparently expected. When Istanbul asked that measures be taken to apprehend them, the authorities in Makry were initially unwilling to act, perhaps hoping that the trouble would blow over. London sent a series of rebukes to its Consul in İzmir. The Pasha of Aydin was instructed to pursue the murderers, but it was not until Charles Biliotti, who had been close to the affair at all its main points, worked with the Kaymakam [area governor or district officer] of Makry to pursue and arrest the killers. The latter were eventually arrested and sent to Istanbul on 23 April 1846, though only after the kaymakam himself had been killed. The arrest was a heroic achievement of which Charles remained very proud to the end of his days. The Jones family of Cranmer Hall were duly grateful. Sir Laurence's brother and heir, Sir Willoughby Jones presented Charles Biliotti with a silver jug and cup which, seventy years later were named by his son in his will as his foremost possessions¹¹.

This however was by no means the end of the story as far as the Biliotti family were concerned. Relatives of the men arrested swiftly murdered Ali Pasha, the Kaymakam of Makry. Charles Biliotti was forced to flee Makry and abandon his business there for several years. Eventually, in March 1848, Charles was able to return to his business in Makry — but he did so as British Vice-Consul and thus a heavily protected figure.

So began a close association between the Biliottis, father and son, and Britain which would last 55 years.

The British Consulate at Rhodes operated a network of vice-consuls and agents on other islands, stretching from Mytilene in the north to Kastellorizo and Cyprus in the east. Various members of Biliotti clan were destined to play a considerable part in its commercial and diplomatic life down to the 1920's. In the early 1850s Alfred's uncle, Fortunato Biliotti, had been the British consular agent on Kastellorizo since 1831 and the subject of at least one major financial scandal when he refused to return monies deposited with him¹². Charles did conspicuously better in the service and rose to be Vice-Consul and the third most senior figure in the Rhodes consulate. By 1852, the time of Newton's arrival, he was back in Rhodes as Vice-Consul after a posting in Nikaria.

¹⁰ FO 195/241 From Smyrna 1844-46. See also the account in W. Allen, *The Dead Sea, A New Route to India*, London 1855, 86-90.

¹¹ FO 195 241 From Smyrna 1844 -46, FO 847/55, 1915, estate of Sir Alfred Biliotti.

¹² FO 195/446 From Rhodes 1854-55, 317.

Alfred Biliotti's education

During the preceding decade, his eldest son, the young Alfred, had somehow obtained the equivalent of a high school education and was able to work professionally for the Rhodes Consulate. How had he done so? None of the localities that figure in Charles Biliotti's career would have given him much chance of educating his son at a modern school in the 1840's.

As Catholics, the Biliottis would have been obliged to send their son to a Catholic school, but at this date there were few high schools of any description in the island towns where Charles worked. By the end of the 19th century, social change and educational expansion would have populated the area with schools, but in the 1840's for Christians and Muslims alike the process was only beginning.

If Alfred did attend a school, then the most likely possibilities are one or other of two schools opened in 1841 by the Christian Brothers in Izmir (Smyrna) and Ayvalık. Ayvalık is very close to Mytilene. The possibility of at least some time spent in education in Izmir is suggested by the close friendship and business partnership which existed throughout Biliotti's adult life with the Giraud family of Izmir, an Anglo-French trading family who then as now, were one of the city's leading business families and acted as his bankers and closest friends throughout his adult life. Izmir, with its Catholic archbishop and five parishes, was the nearest thing to a metropolis for Catholics in the late Ottoman Aegean and a town which, though he never worked there as consul, Biliotti visited regularly on a number of occasions in later life¹³.

Most probably Alfred never attended a high school and obtained any formal education through a tutor. He must have been instructed mainly in French rather than English, since his command of the latter language was never quite perfect. However the fact that he could act as a translator from Greek into English for the consulate suggests that he was taught some English, no doubt with an eye to future work in the consulate. By 1853, Biliotti was indeed making the beginnings of a consular career in his father's footsteps and his name appears as the author of occasional certified translations from Greek in the despatch book of the Rhodes consulate, activities which neither his father Charles, nor the senior vice consul, E. Blunt undertook¹⁴.

University education

Having probably missed a high school education, Biliotti had even less chance of going to university. In view of his later attainments, the question is worth examining in some detail. Biliotti may well have dreamt of a university education, but it would have been far beyond the means of a local consular official and it would have set him on a particular trajectory which would probably not have been British. Given his family's Italian and Catholic background, Biliotti would likely have opted for a French or Italian university. That would have been an odd choice for the son of a now well-established British local consular official, but an insuperable

¹³ C. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, Cambridge 1983, 252.

¹⁴ FO 195/370, 2 February 1852. From Rhodes 1851-53, Biliotti also seems to have worked with his father in Makry from the age of 16.

obstacle prevented him from attending the two ancient universities in England, even if he had possessed the resources and the inclination to attend them.

Under British law, education at Oxford or Cambridge was impossible for a practicing Catholic before 1872 and even when the secular authorities lifted their ban, the Pope maintained his for two more decades until Pope Leo XIII lifted it in 1896. Since university education was unusual, this deprivation would have been a familiar frustration, if indeed it was irksome at all, but in Biliotti's case it would be resolved in a unique way. A second chance event in the history of the family knocked him out and his career out of the usual orbit of consular local employees. At exactly the age at which he might have gone to university if he had lived elsewhere, the British world of literature and learning reached out to Rhodes and scooped him up.

Biliotti and Charles Newton

In the spring of 1852 when Biliotti was 18, Charles Newton, an archaeologist working for the British Museum, arrived in Mytilene as Vice-Consul in with a special remit to conduct archaeological investigations. The instructions to Rhodes made it quite clear that Mr Newton was not to be treated as a normal member of the service. He was be allowed to travel as he wished and any regular vice-consular duties came second to his archaeological work¹⁵. A year later Newton had become Consul in Rhodes and though he returned to England at the start of 1854 because of the death of his father, he returned to the Aegean after six months to continue with the hunt for antiquities.

Newton's field work in the Aegean continued over the next fourteen years and the monuments of his labours can be viewed by posterity in the British Museum which would look very different today if he had never visited Rhodes. Newton's mission was essentially one of extraction and removal rather than archaeological research in today's sense, and as the number of sites he was probing rolled out, he had to find deputies and associates who could preside over them in his place. Most of these were English: Alfred Biliotti was the exception. By the time Newton's archaeological activities in the near East were over, Alfred Biliotti was in his early thirties, capable of directing a major archaeological excavation himself — and engaged in direct correspondence with the prime minister of England and the British Museum.

Newton's presence in the archipelago meant that the backwater temporarily became an intellectual centre of sorts. In June 1853, for example, George Finlay, the historian and veteran of the Greek War of Independence, paid a visit to the Newton and the two men travelled together to Chios, accompanied by "Mr Alfred Biliotti" who would then have been just short of his twentieth birthday¹⁶.

Biliotti's life story in these crucial early years offers us a set of contradictions which will perhaps be resolved by future research. Newton thought sufficiently highly of Biliotti to groom him as an archaeologist and to quote him in his two best known books. Yet in Newton's narrative of his work in the Aegean, the young Biliotti

¹⁵ FO 195/370, Rhodes 1851, 52, 52, 225. On Sir Charles Newton, cf. B. Cook, "Sir Charles Newton, KCB (1816-1894)", in I. Jenkins, G. Waywell (eds.), *Sculptors and Sculpture of Caria and the Dodecanese*, London 1997, 10-21.

¹⁶ FO 195/370, June 1853, Rhodes 1851.

is essentially a bystander. Neither Charles nor Alfred Biliotti rates much attention in Newton's private letters. The English Vice-Consul Blunt gets mentioned much more often than the Levantine father and son. These non-British figures were perhaps of less social interest than the grander English figures with whom Newton was in contact. Nevertheless Newton cites the young Alfred as a 'credible person' witnessing the ability of sponge divers to descend thirty fathoms¹⁷.

Charles Newton was a voluminous letter-writer and from his letters home, we can learn his opinions of Rhodes and the Ottoman Empire. Biliotti would have heard from Newton, as he no doubt heard from many others, about the Empire's approaching downfall and dissolution. In August 1853, just after the trip with Finlay to Chios, Newton wrote to his father: "The Turkish Empire is by the assent of all the most competent authorities on its last legs and I do not feel at all sure that it will last two years longer or that we may not all be sent home in the event of a general war. In fact everything here is in a transitory state. Nothing can be worse than the prospects of Turkey. Before another six months are over, we expect to see another disorganisation of the Empire"¹⁸. Harbingers of the form this 'disorganisation' might take were regular violent local inter-communal tensions between Orthodox Greeks and Muslims mentioned by Newton and his colleagues in consular despatches from Rhodes the 1850s.

When Newton left the Aegean, Biliotti had neither a university degree nor a complete knowledge of English. Both deficiencies could have been remedied fairly easily if Newton had arranged to take him to Britain. Biliotti's Catholicism cannot have been the whole story. Biliotti could have been sent to London University, where Catholics were admitted, and he would then have been only a stone's throw away from Newton and the British Museum, the epicentre of the archaeological activities of both Newton and Biliotti. The obstacle may have come from the Biliotti family: perhaps the limited income of a Vice-Consul was the difficulty or they were unwilling to violate Catholic rules and send their son to a godless university. Nonetheless it is striking that around the same time, Hormuzd Rassam, an Assyrian living near Nineveh, was talent-spotted and trained by Henry Layard, went on to Oxford and eventually settled in England. Unlike Biliotti, Rassam explicitly rejected Roman Catholicism. More important still, Henry Layard treated Rassam as a close friend and did his best to defend and advance his interests over many years, something Newton never did in the case of the Biliottis¹⁹.

Biliotti's contacts with Newton were nevertheless sufficient to enable a locally appointed ethnic Italian consular official with no formal higher education to become one of the most prominent British consular officials of the late nineteenth century.

Under Newton's direction, Biliotti rapidly became a competent surveyor and field archaeologist. These skills remained with him throughout his life. In 1896, he was capable of drawing a quick sketch of the ground plan of Ephesus (then generally

¹⁷ Newton, *Travels*, *supra* n. 6, 359 n. 131.

¹⁸ British Library ADD 71705 Charles Newton's letters to his father 1852-53, August 24th 1853.

¹⁹ For details of Hormuzd Rassam's career see the *Dictionary of National Biography* and G. Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, London 1962. The Rassams are an Iraqi Ottoman exact parallel to the Biliottis. Rassam's older brother Christian served as the first British Vice-Consul in Mosul in the 1840s.

little known but one of the sites investigated by Newton though) from memory to send to Sir Gerard Noel²⁰. Yet as already noted, Newton's archaeology was mainly concerned with finding statues and similar exhibit-worthy objects for removal to the United Kingdom. The imputation of being a treasure hunter clung to Newton's pupil Biliotti. Many years later, French visitors to Crete would joke a little unkindly that Sir Alfred had been knighted for his services to the British Museum²¹.

Archaeology however was always supplementary to Biliotti's consular work. In Newton's account, Biliotti always seems to be closely associated with the Rhodes consulate and his activities there. A memorable example is Newton's description of how, the 23-years old Biliotti led rescue operations when the church of St. John in Rhodes was destroyed by an explosion in late 1856, toiling through the night by torchlight, digging out survivors from the rubble, romantically saving a young Turkish girl and restoring her to her fiancé. The resolution of Campbell, the British Consul, and Biliotti is contrasted with the 'helplessness and apathy' of Turkish officials²². It was an early display of the energetic humanitarian concern for which Biliotti was distinguished in four decades later in Crete.

Biliotti's progress as an archaeologist after he became capable of directing an excavation on his own is relatively easy to chart. Between 1852 and 1864 he collaborated with Auguste Salzmänn, a French photographer and traveller, nine years older than himself in work at the acropolis of ancient Kamiros on Rhodes²³. Over 300 tombs were said to have been open during the dig and many valuable vases obtained for the Museum.

In 1865, he resumed British excavations on behalf of the British Museum at Halicarnassus in an attempt to see whether the work of Charles Newton, suspended seven years had left further architectural monuments undiscovered. But Newton had already stripped Bodrum of its best surviving antiquities and work was quickly abandoned.

Biliotti however continued to be the guardian of British archaeological interests in Bodrum for some years afterwards. A period of extended leave in Izmir in the late autumn of 1871 was interrupted when the British Museum was informed by the Embassy in Istanbul that the administration of the new Grand Vizier Mahmut Nedim Pasha was considering 'dismantling' the castle at Bodrum, possibly along with others on the Mediterranean coast, and had put out a feeler to the British about selling the marble *spolia* built into the castle's walls (the remains of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus)²⁴.

Some of Biliotti's early archaeological work remains of permanent importance. In 1868 he began to excavate the necropolis of Ialysos (Moschou Vounara) in Rhodes

²⁰ Noel Papers, Royal Naval Archives, Greenwich, Box 2B.

²¹ V. Bérard, *Les Affaires de Crète*, Paris 1900, 92-3.

²² Newton, *Travels*, *supra* n. 6, 74-5.

²³ See A. Salzmänn, *Nécropole de Kamiros*, Paris 1875; G. Jacopi, "Esplorazione archeologica di Camiro - I. Scavi nelle necropoli camiresi, 1929-1930", *Clara Rhodos* 4, 1931; Idem, "Esplorazione archeologica di Camiro - II. a. Necropoli. b. Acropoli", *Clara Rhodos* 6/7, 1933; A.W. Johnston, "Rhodian readings", *BSA* 70, 1975, 145-67; see also <http://www.swan.ac.uk/classics/staff/dg/fikellura/c1.htm> (David Gill, 2000).

²⁴ FO 195/941 From Rhodes 1868 to 1871, 24 November 1871.

and uncovered fine painted pottery of a kind which was not familiar to archaeologists. They were bought by John Ruskin and presented to the British Museum, but Victorian classicists did not appreciate that these were products of an early date (something which might have been inferred from Biliotti's field reports if the stratification had been examined closely) and supposed them to be oriental imports of an unknown kind and took little interest in them. After Schliemann's excavations at Mycenae, they were subsequently recognized as Mycenaean but, if Biliotti's report had received closer attention, Classicists might have recognized the existence of a pre-Classical civilisation in the Aegean several decades earlier. Biliotti's Ialysos excavations produced the first substantial group of Greek Bronze Age objects which entered the British Museum²⁵.

Biliotti would appear to have been diffident about his work as an archaeologist. He published relatively little on the cities he excavated. When the excavations at Kameiros were published in 1875, though Salzman had by then been dead for three years, they appeared under the Frenchman's name without Biliotti's²⁶. His diffidence, perhaps arising from his slightly imperfect English, meant that he achieved only limited professional recognition among specialists and was more or less unknown to a wider public.

An incident in Crete immediately after the Three Year Insurrectionary War there of 1866-1869 supplies us with a glimpse into the way the young Biliotti carried out his duties for the Museum. On 6 April 1869, the British Consul in Canea was informed that Biliotti, then a Vice-Consul in Rhodes, would be sent on behalf of the British Museum to the southern coastal town of Ierapetra to inspect and if possible purchase two large statues which had been discovered there. The source of this information was evidently not Dickson himself and he added rather pointedly that Ottoman Government permission would be needed to export the statue. Biliotti duly made what was probably his first visit to Crete, but times had changed. The sense of obligation arising from the Crimean War had faded and the Ottoman government now had archaeologists of its own building up a national museum. When the necessary application was made to the Ottoman Government in Istanbul, it replied regretfully that the statues had already been acquired for the Imperial Ottoman Museum and that it was therefore unable to oblige²⁷. The loss to the British Museum was considerable: one of the statues, now known as the Hierapytna Hadrian, is of importance for art historians²⁸.

²⁵ Cf. A. Furtwängler, G. Loeschke, *Mykenische Vasen, vorhellenische Tongefässe aus dem Gebiet des Mittelmeeres*, Berlin 1886; J. L. Myres, "The Cretan Labyrinth: A Retrospect of Aegean Research (The Huxley Memorial Lecture for 1933)", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 63, 1933, 272; M. Benzi, *Rodi e la civiltà micenea* (IG XCIV), Roma 1992, 1; J. L. Fitton, *The Discovery of the Greek Bronze Age*, London 1995, 31-32.

²⁶ *Supra* n. 23. Accounts of Biliotti's archaeological work in the early 1860's can be found in FO 78/1830.

²⁷ FO 195/936 From Crete 1869, 1870, 1871; 6 April 1869 and 28 April 1859.

²⁸ This statue and its inscription are listed under no. 585 in G. Mendel, *Catalogue des sculptures, grecques, romaines et byzantines of the Ottoman imperial Museum*, Istanbul 1914. The entry begins "Hierapytna (Crete); signalée des 1865 par Pervanoglou (in *Bollettino dell'Istituto* 1865, 132); envoyée au musée impériale vers la fin de 1870, par Costaki pacha Adossides, muouteessaryf de Lasithi". Details of the second statue are contained in vol. III of the catalogue, entry no. 1105. I am grateful to Professor Stephen Mitchell for this reference.

Biliotti's research and excavations were carried out on behalf of the British Museum, but they were driven by the tastes and interests of the Classical education which Whig grandees in the British Cabinet had received. As a result, though Biliotti was only a young consular local employee in a minor backwater, archaeology brought him into direct correspondence with the highest echelons of the government.

They also gave him a rare opportunity to travel to northern Europe. In May 1864, we find Biliotti still Vice-Consul of Rhodes, writing directly to Earl Russell, then Foreign Minister, on archaeological matters. Towards the end of that year, Biliotti received what seems to have been his only spell of formal higher education when he spent three months in Wiesbaden, studying art history and archaeology²⁹. This investment by the British Museum in Biliotti indicates that his archaeological career was at this time outstripping his importance as a consular official, for his reports from Rhodes and the Sporades during these years, are taken up with shipping, tobacco and agriculture, and minor trading matters. They make tedious reading and give no indication of the talents he would display in future decades as a reporter and analyst of political and social conflicts.

As the 1860's advanced, Biliotti's work as an archaeologist gradually took second place to routine consular duties. By his middle thirties, he must have realised that his real vocation was the consular service. Despite his status as a local employee, his career showed signs of advancement. In 1867 he served as Vice-Consul in Mytilene and Chios, the second most important posting of the Rhodes consul. Though his father had held it before him, by this date Mytilene and Chios was a job normally carried out by an Englishman from London.

In 1873, when Biliotti was forty, he made a professional breakthrough which took him definitively out of the ranks of local employees. The Foreign Office posted him to Trabzon on the eastern Black Sea Coast. It was an imaginative appointment. During the 1860's the British Consul at Trabzon had been one of most intellectually powerful figures in the Victorian Consular service, the writer and former Jesuit, William Gifford Palgrave. Palgrave had held the rank of Consul but Biliotti remained, only a Vice-Consul until 1879 and was paid less than his British-born predecessors³⁰.

Biliotti's promotion was possible because he had been a British subject for two years. On 23 October 1871, the Home Office issued his naturalisation papers³¹. No record seems to exist for any other member of the family becoming a British subject, but during the same months other Levantine vice-consuls — notably Lysimachos Kalokairinos in Candia — was also going through the naturalisation process³². Alfred's prospects of promotion may have been linked to becoming a British citizen, for his father never acquired British nationality.

But if Alfred was British and of unquestioned loyalty as far as his profession went, no corresponding transition followed in his family or personal life. In due

²⁹ FO 78/1830. Consular correspondence, Rhodes 1864.

³⁰ *Infra* n. 42.

³¹ HO 45/929 3/7577. Home Office Naturalization Papers for Alfred Biliotti.

³² HO 45/9289/5408. Home Office Naturalization Papers for Lysimachos Kalokairinos.

course, Biliotti would marry a Frenchwoman; give his son a French/Italian rather than a British name; and retreat back into his origins on Rhodes in his final years after his retirement. In the absence of any first hand account, only speculative explanations are possible. As already suggested, the mostly likely of these is that Biliotti's professional self-confidence was not matched by personal self-assurance. Had he lived in England, as Rassam Hormuzd did, or married an English wife, his life might have turned out very differently.

Fifteen Years in Trabzon and Anatolia

The move from a Mediterranean family home to a rainy distant posting on a northern sea cannot have been particularly congenial³³. It brought a permanent setback for Biliotti's archaeological career. On the Black Sea and in eastern Anatolia, well preserved Classical archaeological sites were few and far between.

The main one on which Biliotti worked during his years in Trabzon was Satala or Sadak, a Roman frontier fort and small town. Satala had been founded by Vespasian on a site which went back to the early Bronze Age but was abandoned after the Persian conquest of 610 AD. In August and September 1874 Biliotti surveyed the site with the professionalism he had brought to his work in Rhodes and the Aegean sites. This small frontier settlement must have seemed to offer meagre pickings by comparison with them. Even so, Biliotti discovered a large head of Apollo, now in the British Museum, and also identified a large basilica. This identification was rejected by contemporary scholars in London, who believed it to be an aqueduct, but was eventually confirmed as correct by a different generation of British archaeologists a hundred years later³⁴.

It was during his Trabzon years that Biliotti established his reputation as an outstanding observer and analyst of the regions in which he served as consul.

The hallmarks of Biliotti's consular career — a combination of vigorous intellectual and physical energy — are already apparent in his years in Trabzon. His work on the eastern Black Sea coast and the internal provinces of Anatolia is of permanent value. Before analyzing a problem in a despatch, Biliotti would research it with remarkable thoroughness, travelling and investigating conditions on the spot whenever he could. In this respect at least, Biliotti belonged squarely to the British tradition, following in the steps of energetic nineteenth traveller-consuls such as Longworth and Blunt³⁵. He strove to be impartial, though, especially when reporting violence or crime, a note of moral indignation often creeps into his language. In conflicts between Christians and Muslims, perhaps inevitably, he was never an entirely impartial observer since his main informants were almost always local Greek Christians. Michael Meeker, argues that during his Trabzon years Biliotti

³³ For Biliotti's career in Trabzon, see M. Meeker, *Greeks who are Muslims*, in D. Shankland (ed.), *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia*, Istanbul 2004, II, 317-21.

³⁴ For Biliotti's work at Satala, see the articles of Mitford and Lightfoot cited in n. 2 *supra*.

³⁵ It is hard to assess the degree to which the consuls of the other Powers in Trabzon travelled, but it is very clear that in Crete Biliotti attached much more importance to travelling and investigating than the Consuls of the other powers who sometimes attempted through their governments to prevent his expeditions. See for example FO 195/1933, July 9 1896, Constantinople to Crete, p. 353.

developed an increasingly harsh and unfriendly view of the Ottoman Muslim population³⁶.

An important part of any Late Victorian British Consul's job in the Ottoman lands was the protection of Christians, that is to say looking out for and investigating atrocities and wrongdoing by Muslims against local Christians. Under international law as it had evolved after 1856, there was no corresponding requirement to investigate allegations of violence against Muslims. Biliotti nevertheless did so and attempted to strike a balance in his reports. In Trabzon however the Muslims were in an overwhelming majority. Tendencies to partiality were exacerbated by the fact that, apart from their *kavasses* (consular servants), their local staff tended to be Christian and Greek nationalist and after about 1860, it was on information supplied by them, that all British Consuls in Crete tended to rely when analyzing events in Crete. For example in Crete, the Consulate depended for four decades on the reporting of its Candia Vice-Consul, Lysimachos Kalokairinos, who was both an ardent Greek nationalist and a rapacious and hated moneylender who used mortgage debt as an instrument to expropriate the Mussulman Beys³⁷.

Had he ever been asked what his mission was, Biliotti would probably have explained it in humanitarian terms as an attempt by Britain to manage the inevitable disintegration and disappearance of Ottoman rule in a way which caused the least international disorder and the minimum of human deaths and suffering. He would certainly have included the Ottoman Muslims within this remit. For they too were potential victims in a fragile historical situation in which the downfall of the Ottoman Empire often seemed not simply inevitable, but close at hand. As Consul Biliotti no doubt occasionally thought back to the 1850s and to remarks he must have heard from men like Charles Newton, he must have been well aware of what "disorganisation of the Empire" could easily mean in practice.

Biliotti was to spend thirteen years in Trabzon in all. It was a rainy remote town, far away from his parents and family and despite his work at Satala, his career as an archaeologist had come more or less to a halt. Furthermore though he had been paid the compliment of replacing an outstandingly gifted predecessor, William Gifford Palgrave, Biliotti's salary was £ 200 *per annum* less than Palgrave's had been and he only had the rank of Vice-Consul.

Career prospects

By the late 1870's Biliotti was in his thirties, self-confident, but professionally frustrated. He also had reason to hope that his talents might be recognized by promotion. Sir Austen Henry Layard, who knew Biliotti from his archaeological work, was ambassador in Istanbul, while the Foreign Secretary was Lord Salisbury with whom Biliotti seems to have developed a surprising rapport. The months before the Congress of Berlin in July 1878 saw Biliotti reporting to Layard about the fears of local Muslims, their trust in Britain (even when they had few logical grounds for it), and the issue of Batoum's inhabitants³⁸. In Layard, one of the driving forces

³⁶ Meeker, *Greeks*, *supra* n. 33, 319-20.

³⁷ R. H. Bacon, *A Naval Scrapbook*, London 1925, 223 n. 1.

³⁸ British Library ADD 39020, 103, Biliotti to Layard, 15 May 1878 and 4 June 1878.

behind the great archaeological project of the previous quarter century, Biliotti sensed an ally and some of the references in their letters suggest that he undertook discreet contacts with Ottoman officers on Layard's behalf.

Towards the end of the same year, Layard was to be a strong ally when the Foreign Secretary proposed a career move to Biliotti which filled the consul with intense horror. In November 1878, Salisbury raised the possibility of transferring Biliotti from Trabzon to Diyarbakir, one of the consulates of eastern Turkey with which Trabzon was grouped. A native British consular official would probably have taken the move stoically. To Biliotti, a shift to a hot Muslim Mesopotamian city, far from the sea and outside the Classical Greek world, filled him with alarm and he treated the suggestion as an indication that his masters in the Foreign Office were not satisfied with his work. He told the ambassador that "nothing in my conduct to call on me a mark of dissatisfaction, [so] I must attribute the painful impression under which I labour now to the absence of official information, which I trust your Excellency will kindly furnish me with in due time. I send no copy of this report to the Marquess of Salisbury, leaving Your Excellency to deal with the case as you may think best. It only remains to me to beg you to accept in anticipation my best thanks for whatever you may do on my behalf"³⁹.

Not all ambassadors would have received such an appeal from a relatively obscure consular official very well, but Layard evidently did what was necessary. The threat of a transfer to Mesopotamia receded and Biliotti's career discussions continued to centre on the Greek-speaking centres in the Ottoman lands.

At the beginning of June 1879 Biliotti was planning his first leave for three years which was to be a trip across Europe culminating in a visit to London. Along the way he would take the baths in Karlsbad and Elbe for what he claimed was a chronic bronchial condition brought on by the Trabzon climate. But as May ended, there came news from Rhodes that Charles Biliotti had suffered a short illness and died, at the age of 78, without receiving the pension for which he had applied earlier the same spring⁴⁰. Biliotti saw this as the moment to try and put his professional life in order. As he prepared to leave Trabzon for Rhodes, Biliotti wrote a dispatch to Salisbury discussing his own future and that of the Trebizond consular post. The self-confidence with which the Levantine Vice-Consul writes to Salisbury in the summer of 1879 is surprising. He addressed Salisbury on the subject of himself and his future in the sort of tones in which rising young company executives intimate to their bosses the overwhelming enlightened self-interest of awarding a pay rise. His dislike of the distant rainy northern post, so remote from his family and the Mediterranean world, comes through strongly. He began by drawing attention to his record, signalling clearly that as well as the usual consular responsibilities he also had archaeological duties to the British Museum.

"I have been in the service thirty years, upwards of 22 of which as Vice-Consul. I have while performing my consular duties been intrusted [*sic*] by the British

³⁹ British Library ADD 39023,126, Biliotti to Layard, 18 November 1878.

⁴⁰ For Biliotti's correspondence in 1879, see FO 78/3015 Consulates Diyarbekir (Kurdistan) Trebizond etc 1879. For the circumstances of Charles Biliotti's death, see FO 78 3018 Consular reports from various centres including Crete and Rhodes, esp. p. 399.

Museum to superintend excavations in research of antiquities and I may safely state that my discoveries have added an important and valuable collection to the objects of art in that public institution," he had written⁴¹.

"There is the separate question of the Post of Trebizond which I couple in no way with the hopes I may entertain for myself." he wrote a little disingenuously, for by pointing out the importance of Trebizond where "commercially our interests here are as important as those of all the other nations put together," he was of course implicitly pushing for his own promotion to full Consul.

"Indeed so far as I am personally concerned, promotion to a post in the Mediterranean, such as Crete where I could undertake again archaeological researches, is owing also to the climate of the Black Sea not agreeing with my constitution, my most ardent hope."

In the end Biliotti would receive exactly what he was asking for, even Crete, though it would be seven years before he was transferred to Canea. During the summer and autumn of 1879, Biliotti continued to press his suit with Salisbury from a variety of addresses across Europe. It is unlikely that he would have done so without Layard's support.

On September 19 he wrote asking for more leave. On October 8 he wrote again to Salisbury letting the Secretary of State know that he "was hoping for good tidings" and would be calling in on the Foreign Office while in London in the hope of collecting them. Perhaps he was being kept informed by a third party, for good tidings were indeed on the way. On 27 October, the Secretary of State wrote to inform Biliotti that he was being made a full Consul in Trabzon. So Biliotti returned to his distant posting on the eastern Black Sea coast with his desire for promotion satisfied⁴².

In terms of money in the bank however, the tidings were not particularly good at all. The British Empire was run on a shoe string and the Victorian consular service perhaps especially so. The appointment of Biliotti in Trabzon represented a substantial economy for the British government over what it would have had to pay a native-born Englishman. The documents suggest that Biliotti was always well aware of this unflattering fact. Three years later, on 23 October 1882, Biliotti renewed his request for better remuneration and revealed that his 1881 salary at Trabzon was £240 below the amount paid in 1872 to his predecessor who had got £600 plus £200. In 1881 Biliotti earned only £400 at Trabzon, plus £160 in other expenses. He had a tiny and low-ranking staff consisting of Hekimian Gomidas, an Armenian clerk, and Doulcet Numa, a French agent at Samsun⁴³.

One secret which consuls of the Great Powers evidently had no compunction about revealing to each other was their salaries and emoluments. Biliotti supported his case for a pay rise with details of the total remuneration and expenses of his colleagues. All of them, even the Italian, were strikingly better rewarded. The total of £ 560 paid by the British at Trabzon compared with £ 1100 for his Austro-Hungarian colleague; £ 1250 for the French consul; £ 824 for the Italian consul;

⁴¹ FO 78 3015 Consulates Diyarbekir (Kurdistan) Trebizond etc, Biliotti to Salisbury, 3 June 1879.

⁴² *Ibid.* 27 October 1879.

⁴³ FO 78/3420 Anatolian Consular records 1882.

and a whopping grand total of £ 2700 paid to the Russian consul and his staff. The implication was clearly that Biliotti received less than a native Englishman in the post would have done. The figure are the more striking in that a substantial reorganisation and upgrading of the British consular system in Anatolia had been taking place during the previous few years.

Biliotti's post was indeed enhanced in 1882 — but perhaps not in the way he had envisaged. His consular area was expanded to include Sivas, a large inland *vilayet* with its capital, 500 km away from Trabzon. The vilayet of Sivas contained a substantial Armenian population. Tensions between Ottoman Muslims and Christians and between nationalist and loyalist Armenians were acute. As a Levantine, Biliotti seems to have encountered rather more obstruction from the Ottoman authorities than a native Englishman would have done. His right under the Capitulations to hear court cases involving British subjects was challenged for a while by the Ottoman authorities by withholding the necessary *berat* or license for Biliotti in Sivas. A full legal opinion and substantial political pressure were necessary to uphold his right to carry out consular duties⁴⁴.

As for the ordinary Turks among whom he worked, Biliotti saw them as the uncomplaining victims of forces they did not understand. In October 1880, Biliotti wrote of the Anatolian Turkish masses: "I may say in a word that dissatisfaction [among the Turkish Muslims] prevails to the highest degree. The only wonder is that populations should have so long submitted, without making their voices heard, to the state of things that I have described in the reports which I have had the honour to address to your Lordship from time to time, during my recent journey.

"It is strange that the same Mussulmans who so manly [*sic*], proudly, and fearlessly face the enemy [*sic*] of their country, and death, should endure with abasement and pusillanimity the treatment to which they are subjected when they resume private life.

"This contrast can only be ascribed to their innate reverence for the authority of the Sultan and the unbounden [*sic*] faith which, until lately, they placed in his person, though they had long ages ago lost all confidence in the class ruling in his name"⁴⁵.

Consul in Crete

After thirteen years in Trabzon, in the summer of 1885, Biliotti was transferred to Canea, the capital of Crete, a much more challenging posting than Trabzon and the one on which his reputation largely rests. Four years after his arrival in Crete, Biliotti, by now in the second half of his fifties, married. Though she could not speak English, his wife Marguerite, enabled him to entertain at the house at Halepa on a generous scale which impressed visitors from London⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ FO 881/5463 Memorandum on the Right of Consul Biliotti to exercise jurisdiction over British subjects in Sivas.

⁴⁵ FO 78/3137 Consular reports from Trabzon, 25 October 1880.

⁴⁶ The date of the marriage is known only from Biliotti's entry in *Who was Who*. His wife, Marguerite, was a close relative of the Consul of France, Paul Blanc. For an account of entertainments and hospitality at the Biliotti household, see R. A. H. Bickford-Smith, *Cretan Sketches*, London 1898, 88-89.

The seeds of future violence were obvious enough in Crete. An embittered Muslim minority sensed that its days on the island were numbered and seems to have feared eventual expulsion. Conflict between the two populations might trigger war elsewhere in the Balkans and a scramble to grab Ottoman territory.

Though Crete was part of the Ottoman Empire, it was largely autonomous during the 1880's with a Lilliputian parliamentary system under a Christian Ottoman governor-general appointed by the Sultan. Sir Henry Layard had effectively established this arrangement in 1878, revising an earlier 'Organic Law' introduced by the reforming Ottoman Grand Vizier A'ali Pasha in 1868⁴⁷. Until its breakdown in the spring and summer of 1889, this was widely regarded as a satisfactory arrangement though Christian Cretans, who were now growing in wealth, education, prestige, and as a proportion of the population, mostly remained committed to long-term union with Greece. The United Kingdom exercised a quiet hegemony over the island even though it did not wish (contrary to the openly-expressed hopes of some of its inhabitants, both Muslim and Christian) to absorb it into the British Empire. Britain's main, though usually unspoken, aim was probably a strategic one — to prevent Suda Bay falling into the wrong hands, particularly Russian or French ones⁴⁸.

Biliotti's first act on arriving in Canea was to ask the Foreign Office to advance him £80 for the cost of a tent to enable him to travel through the island. His second was to return to Rhodes for several months to visit his mother — and possibly to engage in archaeological work — leaving Thomas Sandwith, his predecessor temporarily in charge⁴⁹.

Biliotti was British Consul (from 1897 Consul-General) in Canea for fourteen years. His duties as consul were often tedious, including many routine chores and such matters as the regulation of disputes between Britons and British-protected persons. The Maltese colony on the island was "congenitally litigious" and produced several hundred cases a year for the Consul to try according to Esmé Howard, who was consul general in Canea six years after Biliotti left. Howard claims Sir Alfred managed to kill this habit by introducing a deposit for both sides before he would try a case but this may perhaps only have been consular folklore⁵⁰. Maltese Cretans, other than Vice-Consul Ittar, figure hardly at all in Biliotti's despatches.

During this period, the most obvious duties of the British Consul in Crete were often more those of a 'proconsul'— that is to say an informal representative of the British empire, trying to broker arrangements which would produce stability on the island. For most of Biliotti's years on the island, Britain was committed to keeping the island inside the Ottoman Empire, a position that remained unchanged until February 1897.

⁴⁷ This account is taken from a longer description of Crete during the 'Pact of Halepa' Regime which I am currently writing. See also A. Yule, *A Little Light on Cretan Insurrection*, London 1879, Chapters 16 and 17 for an account of the island at the time of the establishment of the Halepa regime, and L. Makrakis, *Eleftherios Venizelos 1864-1910*, Athens 2001 (in Greek).

⁴⁸ H. Turot, *Insurrection Crétoise et La Guerre Gréco-turque*, Paris 1897, 73: "J'entendais parler de la baie de la Sude qui est, de l'avis de tous, la clef de la question crétoise".

⁴⁹ FO 78/37/3779 Consuls 1885, 1 April.

⁵⁰ E. Howard, *Theatre of Life*, XXXX, p. 25.

Though Biliotti's social connections with the Christian Greeks were much closer than his contacts with the island's Muslims⁵¹, and, though he could foresee that Ottoman rule would eventually end, Biliotti was not a Hellenist and did not work for the union of the island with Greece. On the contrary, in the 1880s when he was approached by Muslim Cretans who wanted the island to become a British protectorate, he showed some sympathy for the idea — until London firmly indicated that it had no interest⁵².

Biliotti's consular work in Crete

Biliotti's analytical work as consul in Crete can be grouped into several distinct areas:

- Monitoring political developments in the island and more particularly of acts of violence, particularly those of Muslims against Christians, though Biliotti routinely tried to produce reports which balanced claims of violence committed by both sides. There was no corresponding obligation to monitor attacks by Christians on Muslims since the latter had no significance in international law, but one of the striking features of Biliotti's reporting is that he routinely did so, giving a "six of one and half a dozen of the other" impression of the causes of the inter-communal conflict, contrasting equal numbers of instances of violent incidents by Christians and Muslims. His reporting was probably among of the main reasons why Lord Salisbury and other observers in London were well aware of the existence of violence by Christian Cretans.

Biliotti's approach however ignored the different sizes of the two populations and the vulnerability of the Muslim population to violence. Biliotti however did not, unlike his brother-in-law the French consul Paul Blanc, play or down or ignore serious cases of violence against Muslims. While it is difficult to quantify such judgements, this reader at least has the impression that Biliotti was also more impartial on the question of sectarian violence in Crete than his predecessor, Thomas Sandwith.

- Assessing the underlying causes of the administrative and financial problems of the island and its periodic slides into disorder and violence. Biliotti wrote clearly about matters such as the reorganisation of the Cretan budget, and the application of the Cretan Government's three sources of tax revenue (salt, alcohol, and tobacco); reform of the legal system, and the courts and judiciary.

- Prescribing appropriate courses for British policy to take. It is difficult to state with exactness how far Biliotti went beyond what was usual for a consul in designing British policy on Crete, but it is clear that by the time Salisbury returned to office in 1895, Biliotti was regarded with sufficient respect in London to have his views imposed by the Prime Minister upon the Embassy in Constantinople. Occasionally the Embassy riposted. In August 1889 for example, the young Charles Hardinge (a Fellow of All Souls) wrote a comprehensive report from Constantinople on the

⁵¹ Makrakis, *Eleferios Venizelos*, *supra* n. 47, 175 for details of social contacts between the Greek Community and the consuls in Chalepa in the 1880s.

⁵² FO 78/4220 Biliotti to Constantinople, August 3 and 5 1880; Turkey no. 2, 1889, 87, Biliotti to Salisbury, 5 August 1889.

Cretan economy which reads very much like an unsuccessful attempt to outdo Biliotti in the eyes of London⁵³.

But the consul also had private views about the longer term which only occasionally became public. One of these was that the Muslim Cretans were doomed to depart the island eventually and that this was probably the most humane solution to its conflicts⁵⁴.

Some slight hopes in his early years on the island that the Cretan parliamentary regime of the 1880's might lead to a political order which transcended the Christian/Muslim division rapidly were only temporary.

Four years after Biliotti's arrival on the island, the Lilliputian democracy of Pact of Chalepa broke down and for the first time in his life, Biliotti became a participant in a major political and military conflict. In the spring of 1889, feuding between Cretan Christians in the two parties in the Cretan Assembly got out of hand and spiralled into an insurrection which neither side had originally intended and which disgusted the international community and brought down the constitutional parliamentary regime on the island. It is noteworthy that at this time, the supporters of the Liberals, the more pro-Ottoman, of the two Cretan parties included a 27-year old lawyer called Eleftherios Venizelos, who according to some reports was a protégé of Consul Biliotti⁵⁵.

International disapproval of the 1889 insurrection meant that the Ottoman Government enjoyed a relatively free hand to restore control on the island. In July that year, around 20,000 Ottoman troops were landed in the island and were permitted — despite Christian protests — to move into the hinterland of the island and be billeted in villages. This led to a stream of protests of alleged atrocities and acts of oppression which Biliotti and his fellow consuls investigated but mostly found unsubstantiated. Biliotti respected the Ottoman commanders of 1889, Çapanzade Ahmet Şakir Pasha and Cevat Pasha⁵⁶.

It was assumed by the Great Powers that the Ottoman Government would swiftly restore the parliamentary regime, known as the 'Pact of Halepa', according to which there was a set of clear constitutional arrangements by which both the Ottoman Government and the population of the island had to abide. The Sultan Abdülhamit II however believed that the time had come to try and reintegrate Crete directly into the empire and the island was governed, first with strictness and later with harshness, in defiance of the Halepa Pact arrangements until 1895. The Greek Christians of the island responded with a policy of total non-cooperation with the Ottoman authorities, thus sealing the ultimate fate of Ottoman rule on the island.

Nearly a decade before it actually took place, Biliotti foresaw with clarity the chain reaction ahead. Muslims would come to blows with Christians in the towns. This would lead to attacks on the minority Muslim population in the hinterland. At

⁵³ Turkey no. 2, 1889 (continued), *Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Crete*, Sir W. White to Salisbury, 14 September, apparently written in response to a report by Biliotti on the same subject, *ibid.* 29 August.

⁵⁴ See Turkey no. 2, 1889, *supra* n. 52, Biliotti to Salisbury, 23 January 1888. Also n. 80 below.

⁵⁵ Makrakis, *Eleftherios Venizelos*, *supra* n. 47, 264 following Joannes Mourellos.

⁵⁶ This account is drawn from the *Blue Books* for the period from 1889 to 1891.

least once every decade since the 1840's, the rural Muslims of Crete had been driven by their Christian neighbours to seek shelter in the towns and live for months or years under siege while their homes and olive groves were burnt and destroyed by the Christians. This would eventually lead to their expulsion from the island⁵⁷.

In the late 1880's and early 1890's however, Biliotti tended to believe in the criminality of the lower class Muslims who by then had declined from a ruling caste into a marginalised and impoverished community. In December 1889, Robert Reinsch, a visiting German naturalist, was murdered while exploring the beach near Canea. Biliotti instantly assumed, no doubt on information from his subordinates, that it was the work of a Muslim secret society. He compared it to a similar murder of an Englishman out walking at Candia by Muslims a decade earlier. However when the subgovernor of Candia, Colonel Hasan Bey tracked down the murderers, Biliotti went to some lengths to record his achievement⁵⁸.

By contrast Biliotti attitude towards Cretan Greeks sometimes proved overly trusting: leaving Biliotti looking naive. Antony Yannaris, later an academic at St. Andrews and eventually a Cretan Minister of Education, worked as a young man in the Canea consulate as confidential clerk. Biliotti must have known that Yannaris was a nephew of Hadjimichalis, the pro-Russian Greek nationalist Cretan leader living in exile in Athens, and yet he was dismayed when Yannaris abandoned neutrality to support the nationalist cause. When Yannaris returned during the 1896 uprising, Biliotti went out of his way to draw Yannaris's dubious connections to the attention of his superiors in London⁵⁹.

The case of Manoussos Koundouros, a young Cretan Christian lawyer who headed a group called the *Epitropi* which took to the mountains in September 1895 was still more embarrassing. The Ottoman authorities knew from their own secret dealings with the British consul that Koundouros was a protégé of Biliotti and assumed that the revolt must be the work of the British consul. A few years before, Biliotti had secretly persuaded the Ottoman governor to pay the costs of Koundouros's education in Athens, arguing that this was a good investment for Ottoman rule in Crete. The Governor was convinced by this argument because (as Biliotti later explained) Manoussos's father was already being retained as an Ottoman agent. Koundouros's decision to become an insurrectionary took Biliotti completely by surprise, causing him severe personal embarrassment. The elder Koundouros, by contrast, seems to have been not the slightest affected by his exposure in the British Government Blue Book as a Turkish spy and one must therefore assume that he was a double agent of whose status his countrymen were well aware⁶⁰.

In the early stages of the final insurrection, Biliotti tried vainly to build bridges between the ailing Ottoman Cretan administration and those Cretan Greeks with personal influence who might still be prepared to work with it. One such was Christos

⁵⁷ *Supra* n. 47.

⁵⁸ See Turkey no. 2, 1889, *supra* n. 52, 17 December 1889. The detection of the murderers and Biliotti's commendation of Colonel Hasan Bey for accomplishing it, are to be found in FO 195/1803 From Canea, 6 February 1893.

⁵⁹ FO 78/4736 Biliotti to Salisbury, 31 March 1896 and also Biliotti to Curry FO 195/1983, 7 September 1897.

⁶⁰ FO 195 1890 Biliotti to Curry, September 27 and 28, 1895.

Veloudakis, a member of a distinguished Cretan Christian family whom Biliotti briefly hoped in the spring of 1896 might head a revived Cretan gendarmerie.

Suspicion between the two communities flared into large scale violence in Canea on Sunday 24 May 1896 on the Muslim Feast of Sacrifices (Kurban Bayramı) when Muslims streamed into Canea from the countryside, partly for the festival but also partly because they feared they were about to be attacked. In this hyper-charged atmosphere it took only a single spark to produce a fatal explosion. A few random insults led to a brawl at the gates of the town and the deaths of the *Kavasses* of Russia and Greece and several senior Muslims. With them died Ottoman Crete.

By evening of the 24th, the Christians and Muslims of Canea were firing at each other from behind barricades. Fearful of a general massacre, Biliotti sent a telegram to London which read “FIGHTING IN THE STREETS BEGINS THIS MOMENT WITH INTENSITY. SHIP OF WAR MOST URGENTLY REQUIRED”⁶¹.

For the next three years, Crete was the centre of a major international crisis and peace was maintained by the warships of the four Great Powers. Britain, France, Russia and Italy: Austria-Hungary and Germany refused to participate. The “quiet hegemony” of the British was replaced by “concerted action” by the Powers and the Consular Corps in Canea acted as a commission, liaising with the naval and military officers of the Powers.

The 1896 crisis took place with the Conservatives and Lord Salisbury once more back in power. Salisbury had worked with Biliotti in the 1889 crisis and, as we have seen, had known him since the 1870s, but reading their exchanges after 1896, one gets the impression that the prime minister had an unusual degree of respect for the opinions of his consul in Canea. In his archaeological career, Biliotti had often suffered from a lack of appreciation for the quality of his work and ideas among those he corresponded with in London. In diplomacy, he was more fortunate: Salisbury was clearly well aware of the sharpness of Biliotti’s intelligence and his despatches played an important part in driving the direction of British policy during the final crisis of Ottoman Crete. Salisbury had no qualms about instructing his diplomats in Istanbul to follow Biliotti’s prescriptions. The Embassy in Istanbul cannot have enjoyed being ordered to follow the recommendations of its Consul in Canea. On a number of occasions it was obliged to do so.

In September 1896, Salisbury made a public demonstration of his esteem for Biliotti by giving him a knighthood. Biliotti was not expecting the honour. In a letter replying to congratulations from Sir Gerard Noel, (an admiral who was an old acquaintance of Biliotti and two years later would be British Commander in Crete), he described it as “an honour which was far from dreaming and which overwhelmed me with happiness”⁶².

At this point, Biliotti’s greatest achievements in the consular service still lay in the future. Salisbury’s precise intentions in knighting Biliotti are lost to us. Perhaps it was a reward for some specific service which has not been recorded, though

⁶¹ Crete 1896 195/1939 [no day given] May 1896 — presumably Sunday May 26.

⁶² Noel Papers, Royal Naval Archives, Greenwich, Box 2B, Biliotti to Noel, October 1896.

there is no indication of this. Perhaps Salisbury wanted to signal to the diplomatic and military community, including the British Embassy in Istanbul, that they were to deal with Biliotti on terms of deference not usually given to Levantine local employees. There may also have been some competition for seniority between the consuls in Canea: Paul Blanc was also upgraded around this time, becoming Consul-General of France at the start of October 1896. The effect of knighting Biliotti was that he became the social equal of the admirals and soldiers with whom he had to deal during the crisis-ridden years ahead⁶³.

Just how necessary this was, even despite the KCMG, would be seen in later months in Biliotti's poor relations with the first of the two British admirals in Crete, Sir Robert Harris, and later still in his dealings with the British Embassy in Istanbul in the autumn of 1898.

Biliotti and the Admirals 1897-1898

A truce had been negotiated in Crete at a meeting in Istanbul on August 26 1896 and during the next six months, a new regime on the island, still under Ottoman rule, but with key institutions supported by the Great Powers, who would handle matters such as finance and the gendarmerie, was supposedly being created. In reality neither the Christian insurgents nor the Sultan Abdülhamit were interested in such a deal and the arrangements for establishing one were still incomplete in January 1897 as the olive harvest, a particularly good one that year, drew to an end, freeing the villagers of Crete to return to warfare. The point seems to have been well understood in Greece: a secret visit to the island in mid-January by Athos Romanos, the secretary of the *Ethniki Etairia*, or National Society, the nationalist military organisation which was the spearhead of Greek irredentism, took place in late January 1897⁶⁴. A few weeks later a Greek naval force landed on the island, but the international community regarded the attempt to take over the island as premature and dangerous to peace in Europe. The Powers denounced the Greek landings, ordered the Greek troops out of the island, though it took them until May to achieve this, and stepped up their own naval intervention in the island, introducing a blockade of Crete on March 17 and rule of the coastal regions by a Committee of Admirals — an early example of a temporary collective peacekeeping international administration for peace-keeping.

The British Admiral, Sir Robert Harris, arrived in Crete in February 1897 amid mounting violence with the breakdown of law and order in the island. Harris was, on the evidence of his despatches and autobiography, a bluff and genial man who had a way of seeing through to the simple issues at the heart of complex problems. In his memoirs, he goes out of his way to try and dispel reports that he and Biliotti were on bad terms or saw the Cretan problem differently⁶⁵. Nevertheless it is clear

⁶³ Biliotti's brief and uninformative entry in *Who's Who* dates from after he received the knighthood. His failure to supply even such basic personal details as his mother's name suggests reticence if not outright awkwardness.

⁶⁴ FO 195/1957, Egerton to Salisbury, 26 January.

⁶⁵ Sir Robert Harris, *From Naval Cadet to Admiral*, London 1913, 238. Harris also praises Biliotti's role during the relief of Candanos, 229-323.

that where Harris was able to do so, Biliotti was left out of the 'communications loop' and that he was sometimes stung into drawing attention to this in his own dispatches. By contrast, Harris's successor, the cooler and less engaging Sir Gerard Noel, arrived in the island already on good terms with the Consul and in Biliotti's letters to Noel there is a palpable note of personal friendship going well beyond official dealings.

There was no such warmth with Robert Harris. Biliotti was a magisterial analyst when he felt he was being listened to. But when he felt excluded, he quickly betrayed the underlying sensitivity and touchiness of a social outsider. In a despatch in December 1897, the consul poured out his frustrations about the lack of communications from Admiral Harris to his superiors in Istanbul. The Ambassador, Sir Philip Currie, wrote on the back of the despatch "I thought Admiral Harris was absent. Biliotti is hurt"⁶⁶.

Harris's coolness towards Biliotti in the first months of the Admirals' rule of the island arose from his swift recognition that locally recruited Greek staff, as well as the Greek stringer for the Times, were distorting British public perceptions of the Cretan crisis. This led Harris to the mistaken assumption that Biliotti's mind worked along the same lines as those of his subordinates. Harris was impartial where Greeks and Turks were concerned. He had no instinctive automatic sympathy for Greek nationalism and quickly concluded from what he saw in the consular offices in Canea and Candia that the 'Levantine Greeks' in British service (in fact Biliotti's deputies, Lysimachos Kalokairinos, Trefilli, John Cassimati, were not to be trusted. He wrote: "One of the greatest difficulties which I have had to contend with is the lying and intriguing telegrams sent by the British Vice-Consuls at the Ports of Rethymo and Candia. This may be accounted for by the fact that they are Levantine Greeks. It appears to be undesirable that the government should have to rely upon information received from such biased and unscrupulous sources"⁶⁷.

Soon after his arrival, Harris therefore banned the vice-consuls from using secret ciphers and seems to have been barely on speaking terms with Biliotti. When he received important intelligence, he reported directly to the Embassy in Constantinople or London, cutting out the consulate in Canea. It was a pointed gesture, for the consuls of the other powers seem to have been aware of what information their respective Admirals were passing to each of them — Biliotti no doubt particularly so because of his close family relationship with the Consul of France.

However Harris and Biliotti arrived at similar conclusions on one of the main humanitarian issues of the Cretan crisis, the large-scale massacres of Muslims by Christians at the eastern end of the island. The Greek troops who landed on Crete under Colonel Timoleon Vassos in January 1897 seem to have triggered these events by distributing weapons to Christian villagers, instructing them to exterminate their

⁶⁶ FO 195/1983 Biliotti to Curry, 658, 30 December 1897, with Curry's comment pencilled on the back.

⁶⁷ ADM116/89 Feb/March 1897. Harris to Hopkins 24 February. Harris's comments are heavily blue pencilled by the Admiralty, Harris to Hopkins 24 February.

Muslim neighbours⁶⁸. In the second week of February, around 1000⁶⁹ people in the east of the island were murdered in cold blood while up to 4,000 others were sent as refugees to Candia. Though investigations were ordered, the perpetrators had little difficulty in organising a cover-up. This task was made easier by the British Vice-Consul in Candia, Lysimachos Kalokairinos, who seems to have helped ensure that no Muslims were included in the investigation party⁷⁰. This then reported that it could find no trace of a massacre.

The survivors, who had been rescued and taken to Candia, were informed by Kalokairinos that their allegations had been disproved. The French, who were placed in charge of that part of the island in the International Administration, declined to take any further action. Both Biliotti and Harris however quickly came to the conclusion that the murders had indeed taken place⁷¹. Before that happened however, Biliotti's career reached what was probably its climax in an expedition to the remote and dangerous south of the island to rescue another community of beleaguered Cretan Muslims from being slaughtered by their Christian neighbours.

Candanos

Cretan Muslims were in a minority everywhere across the island, but on its northern side they always had access to refuge in the large towns. This was not true of the isolated Muslim communities of south western Crete who could only be reached from Canea by sea. The general tenor of the 1897 uprising, and the events in Sitia province which had already taken place, suggested that there was a real possibility that these Muslim communities would simply be eliminated by the insurgents.

At the beginning of March 1897, word reached the admirals that the siege of around 3000 Muslim civilians and a small garrison had reached a point where it was likely that they would soon be overrun and massacred. It was exactly a month since the massacres in Sitia on the eastern side of the island and the Great Powers were evidently spurred by their awareness of this. The admirals decided that a joint Franco-British expedition would sail to the south of the island, march inland, and

⁶⁸ C. T. Currelly, *I Brought the Ages Home*, Toronto 1956, 60-62; J. A. MacGillivray, *Minotaur: Sir Arthur Evans and the Archaeology of the Minoan Myth*, New York 2000, 161-62. Striking corroboration of this account is provided in N. Papadakis, *Sitia: Fatherland of Myson and Kornaros*, Sitia 1983, 26, and K. Chatzifoteinos, *Nisafi pia* ("Mercy at last!") Athens 2004, 76, citing a Greek folk poem on the necessity of the massacres at Etia. For a French account, H. de La Martinière, *La Marine française en Crète*, Paris 1911, 19, n. 1.

⁶⁹ Biliotti put the number at 851. FO 195/1981 no. 219, Biliotti to Currie, 31 July 1897, p. 448. Biliotti's and Chermiside's lists, the only detailed contemporary data, do not include villages mentioned by Currelly and other observers, presumably Biliotti, because the investigators did not travel to them and were no survivors from them in Candia in 1898. The case of the Karahassanaki family of Dafni and Tourtoulis, whose sole surviving member Cevdet, a credible witness, recalled eight or nine murdered brothers and sisters, is also indicative. Only three Karahassanaki children, one of them unnamed, aged between 5 and 19, are listed among the victims in the petition produced for General Chermiside in December 1898. Biliotti's total is therefore probably understates the situation.

⁷⁰ FO 195/1983, Biliotti to Currie, March 1897, *passim*, esp. 283, March 10, and 315, March 15 1897.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

try to evacuate the Muslims. Prospects of doing this were complicated by the uncompromising hostility of the Cretan Christians in the mountains who had considerable superiority of fire power.

It was decided to invite the foreign consuls to go with the expedition, but they were given only two hours notice. Only Biliotti would agree to go.

The expedition which followed might come from a Victorian boys' adventure tale. "Like all the rest, Biliotti was given at dead of night two hours' warning of the sailing of the ships. His colleagues went sleepily to the telegraph office and blocked the wires with demands for instructions from ambassadors, who were snug abed in Pera; but Biliotti, asking no man's leave, stepped into his consular boat, and had the conduct of all negotiations at Candanos," David Hogarth recalled⁷².

It was not until 4 pm the next afternoon that the ships arrived on the southern coast and Biliotti was despatched to negotiate safe passage with the Cretan Christian chiefs. They were initially hostile because of military action by the forces of the Powers against the mainland Greek forces on the island. Biliotti won them over by telling them that the Powers had reached a decision on Crete and that it was to be given autonomy with the de facto ending of Ottoman rule. This mollified the insurrectionaries and he and the expeditionary force were then able to march for six hours inland to the beleaguered Muslims of Candanos.

The following day the Muslim settlements of south-western Crete were evacuated from Candanos, Selinos, and Spaniakos. The operation took place under the barrels of the insurgents' guns and with some firing. Captain Grenfell, commander of *HMS Rodney*, gave orders to return fire with fire. There were casualties on both sides. Wounded Muslims had to be left behind, including some women and girls, while according to Grenfell casualties on the Christian side amounted to "4 killed and 10 wounded though we generally fired over their heads, but it was brought on entirely by their own aggression, and I fancy they will receive little sympathy from their own people"⁷³.

When the expedition sailed back to Canea on the 10th of March, it brought a total of 2047 Cretan Muslim civilians and 594 Ottoman soldiers who had been saved from certain extermination. No Europeans had been injured. Despite the loss of the wounded Muslims, the expedition had been an unqualified success.

"The *beys* say that it is impossible for them to express their gratitude to the Powers for their humanity," reported the *Times* on Thursday 11 March 1897. Biliotti's skills as a negotiator — and his reputation with the Christians — had averted a disaster.

"Candanos was the last fortress in the interior of the island remaining in the possession of Turkish troops, If the garrison had been massacred the sympathy in Europe felt towards the insurgents would have disappeared. Their cause would have been fatally prejudiced," wrote the *Times*. There was little satisfaction however in Greece, which demanded that the Muslim refugees should be transported to Greece for a decision about their future.

⁷² Hogarth, *Accidents*, *supra* n. 1, 29. See also Bickford-Smith, *Cretan Sketches*, *supra* n. 46, 184-205.

⁷³ Greenwich NMA XX 62896: letters about Candanos rescue by Captain J. H. Rainier of the 'Rodney'.

Even in London there was considerable excitement at the relief of Candanos among those who were following events in Crete. On 11th March, a day after the expedition returned to Canea, one of the few public meetings which supported the Muslim side in the conflict was held in London. At a meeting of the Moslem Patriotic League at the Oriental Academy in Bloomsbury Square, an Indian Muslim, Moulvie Rafiuddin Ahmad passed a motion congratulating Biliotti on Candanos and warning that unless the powers intervened to help them, the Muslims of Crete would soon be exterminated by Greece⁷⁴.

Investigating massacres

By coincidence, on the very day the Candanos refugees arrived in the north of the island, the British newspapers published a report by the Royal Navy claiming to have disproved the reality of the massacres at Sitia a month earlier⁷⁵. By then both Biliotti and Admiral Harris knew very well that these claims were untrue: Biliotti because he had been in the east of the island negotiating the exchange of wounded Moslems for wounded Christians.

Harris wrote caustically: "The report of the British Officer who accompanied this force should be read with the statement of the Mussulman notables of Candia. There is no great difficulty in reconciling them. The massacre of the Mussulmans took place some time before the International Effort was made to relieve them and when that force passed thro' the countryside, there were very few Moslems found, the survivors being probably those who were protected by their relatives. All traces of the massacre had clearly ceased to be in evidence"⁷⁶.

Despite their personal differences, Biliotti and Harris shared a common dismay at the February 1897 massacres of Muslims by Christians in eastern Crete. Each felt very strongly that the perpetrators should be held to account. Both saw it as a lapse from Christian standards and it is likely that British officials in Crete commented among themselves on this lapse. But whereas Harris wrote caustically about Christian failings in his memoirs⁷⁷, Biliotti's despatches on the Sitia murders suggest profound embarrassment and puzzlement and a desire to cling for comfort to reports of 'good Christians' who had saved Muslims from being murdered.

Writing on 17 March 1897, a month after the killings, when the story was still coming out, he commented to Sir Philip Currie that "It is most satisfactory to find by the confession of the Mussulmans themselves that everywhere several Christians have done all they could and succeeded in many instances to protect them."

Though he investigated the killings as thoroughly as he would have investigated comparable murders of Christians, and indeed supplied London with information on which it chose not to act, Biliotti nevertheless spent more space commenting on the few righteous Christians — and, in surviving reports at least, does not attempt to identify the guilty, though the materials for doing so were evidently available among the Sitia survivors in Candia.

⁷⁴ *Times*, Saturday 13 March 1897.

⁷⁵ *Times*, Wednesday 10 March 1897.

⁷⁶ ADM116/89 Feb/March 1897, Harris to Admiral Hopkins, 15 March 1897.

⁷⁷ Harris, *From Naval Cadet*, supra n. 65, 236-37.

“The excesses committed by the Christians of Sitia are the more incomprehensible that the inhabitants of the eastern districts of the island have always been considered with reason the most moderate Cretans. But they seem to have been taken with a sort of frenzy which can only be explained by the terror of being killed if they did not kill their enemies. However there were exceptions, for had it not been for the interposition of Christians from other communes of Sitia, the number of victims would have been much greater. They did so I will not say at the risk of their lives, but on declaring that they would be killed before allowing the Mussulmans whom they had taken under their protection to be molested. It is a pleasant duty for me to give the names of Capitan Michael Alexakis and his brother Nicola who together with other Chiefs of the same villages I regret not to know, and 200 or 300 followers,” he wrote in July, reviewing further evidence about the murder of around 850 Muslims⁷⁸.

As we shall see, he later made a vain effort to take measures against those responsible. His response was thus very different from that of the archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, who came into direct contact with the aftermath of the massacres and recorded it, but never called for any kind of legal sanctions, apparently arguing that the massacre of Muslims by Christians had at least forestalled the Muslims from killing Christians.

Ironically, around the same time Biliotti had also to counter what he saw as the machinations against him of the main Greek government agent in Crete Nicholas Gennadis, now ‘Royal Commissioner’ rather than Consul-General⁷⁹. Gennadis had been a foe of Biliotti since before the conflict and from April 1897 argued that there could be no settlement in Crete, including a return of the beleaguered Muslim population all of whom were now refugees in the towns, unless Ottoman troops were withdrawn. Presumably it was because of Gennadis’s dispatches from Canea that King George of Greece and the Greek government came, rightly or wrongly, to regard Biliotti as one of the obstacles standing in the way of Hellenism in Crete. When Malcolm MacColl, the organiser of the Hellenic lobby in Britain and a clergyman on intimate terms with Gladstone and reasonably good ones with Lord Salisbury, visited the King in Athens in 1897, he was given a message about Biliotti’s shortcomings which he duly relayed home in letters to both Gladstone and the Prime Minister⁸⁰.

“His Majesty accuses our Consul in Crete of being largely responsible for the present state of things. He had material interests in Turkey and is more Turkish than the Turks. I believe the King is right have had heard similar reports of Biliotti from other sources and I had provisionally arrived at the same opinion of him from a study of his own dispatches during the last two years. Is it not a pity to employ these miserable Levantines in Greek important ports?” MacColl wrote to Gladstone on 6 April 1897.

⁷⁸ FO 195/1983 Crete 1897, Consular Reports to Embassy, Biliotti to Curry.

⁷⁹ FO 95/1983 Biliotti to Curry, 23 August 1897.

⁸⁰ MacColl to Gladstone, 6 April 1897, in M. MacColl, *Memoirs and Correspondence*, ed. by the Right Hon. George W. E. Russell, London 1914. MacColl also sent a virtually identical comment giving King George’s views on Biliotti to Lord Salisbury.

Biliotti was not a rich man and the mention of his 'material interests in Turkey' is presumably simply a reference to the fact that the Giraud family of Smyrna acted as his bankers and held his savings, something which would not imply any political sympathies, pro-Ottoman or otherwise. Almost certainly it had been discovered by Gennadis and passed on to Athens. There is no indication either in his correspondence or his will that Biliotti possessed any property in Turkey other than his house in Halepa outside Canea.

The Greek monarchy enjoyed singular advantages in delivering such messages. MacColl was far from being its only or even its most important line of communication. Another channel ran through the close relatives of the Greek Royal family in Britain, for the Princess of Wales was the sister of King George. An instance of how her influence could be deployed is to be found in the diaries of Lady Layard. Two years later, on 2 June 1899, Lady Layard, the widow of Sir Austen Henry Layard, was received for tea the Princess of Wales. The conversation turned to Crete. By then the Princess's nephew, Prince George of Greece, had been installed as governor. "She told me that she knew that our Consul there Biliotti was very Turkish & helped to keep up the anti-Greek feeling," Lady Layard wrote in her diary that day. Greek pressure against Biliotti seems to have been continuous from April 1897 onwards. Eighteen months later, as we shall see, it would take the form of a public meeting in London and reports in the *Times*.

Autonomy and the international administration on Crete

From 13 March 1897 until December the following year, Crete was under a naval embargo by the Great Powers which, at least in theory, prevented both Turks and Greeks landing troops on the island. The Admirals of the Four Great Powers assumed effective international control, and the Ottoman administration's writ ran only in the fortified towns among the Muslim population and the garrison. Inside the Venetian walls, the 80,000 to 100,000 Cretan Muslims, just under a third of the island's population, lived in a state of siege from their Christian Greek neighbours on small rations of flour and water. In the hinterland there was something approaching anarchy, though the insurgents gradually began to develop the beginnings of their own system.

With effective Ottoman rule in Crete at an end, the Powers quickly devised a new political formula for the island, modelled on arrangements introduced elsewhere in the Balkans: autonomy under Ottoman suzerainty, thus forestalling the outright transfer of the island to Greece while paying lip service to the idea of continued Ottoman rule. The formula first appears in British documents on 24 February 1897 when it was suggested by Biliotti in a despatch from Canea.

He wrote: "If no definite decision is come to the situation may end in unheard-of massacres on both sides, as it is growing hourly from bad to worse.

"One of my colleagues informs me that there is a proposal to set up some kind of autonomous organization in Crete. Neither party would be left any ground for complaint by such a solution of the Cretan question if the island were merely tributary to the Porte, and if the Prince or Governor were neither a Turk nor a Greek, and European by birth and education"⁸¹.

⁸¹ *Affairs of Turkey*, Parliamentary Papers, London, 1897, no. 10, 92.

This idea seems to have surfaced during discussions between the members of the consular corps in Canea. Within a few days, all the Powers were agreed upon it. It meant that Crete would be detached from the Ottoman Empire and become autonomous under a governor-general appointed by the Powers, who would not be an Ottoman citizen. This solution was not acceptable to the Muslims, not least since the Greeks indicated that they would not lift the siege of the towns until Ottoman forces had left the island. The Cretan Muslims regarded the troops as their sole effective source of protection. It was also for the time being at least unacceptable to the Greeks who were determined to have immediate union.

Relations with the Press

In the late nineteenth century, the Cretan crisis was regularly in the headlines. One of the hazards for a British Consul in Crete was managing visiting journalists. In February and March 1897, there was an influx of correspondents covering the terminal crisis of Ottoman Crete. According to Bickford-Smith, fourteen correspondents arrived on a single Austrian-Lloyd steamer one day in February 1897⁸². Despite the cultivated atmosphere of avuncular joviality, Biliotti (like many, another British official since) disliked the journalists he came in contact with, though he kept his feelings well hidden and entertained the more important ones lavishly. He cultivated the impression that he had a special regard for J. D. Bourchier, the *Times* correspondent, and seems to have given him special briefings to which other correspondents did not have access. According to tales current at the time, the less favoured correspondents would crouch in the lane outside the Biliotti's home in Chalepa, listening as Bourchier and Biliotti, both of whom suffered from deafness, bawled out questions and answers to each other⁸³.

However Biliotti probably did not relish the periodic appearances his name made in the papers. Sometimes he regarded these as malicious leaks by his Greek colleague Gennadis. At others, as for example, when in the autumn of 1898 the *Times* revealed his private opinion that the Muslim minority had no future in Crete and should emigrate⁸⁴, they were no doubt indiscretions. But Biliotti's sensitivity made him see things differently.

Early in 1999 he poured out his feelings in a letter to Admiral Sir Gerard Noel. Noel was outwardly a less sympathetic figure than his predecessor Sir Robert Harris, a chilly and ambitious professional office seeker who, to judge from his wife's surviving letters to him in the Greenwich Archives, may well have had essentially "orientalist" attitudes towards Turks and Ottomans. Yet Biliotti and Noel had been personal friends since 1894 and their friendship persisted after Noel's departure from Crete at the end of 1898.

"What is very strange in all Cretan affairs is that Englishmen take part against us: Brailsford, Evans, Rosenbusch, Bourchier. Even Commander Fraser it would seem who it is reported to me from Candia said 'there must certainly be something

⁸² Bickford-Smith, *Cretan Sketches*, *supra* n. 46, 179-81.

⁸³ Lady Grogan, *The Life of J. D. Bourchier*, London, 1926, 72.

⁸⁴ *Times*, Thursday September 8 1898. The article (which praises Biliotti while damning Chermiside) was written by the socialist writer, H. N. Brailsford.

wrong in Candia'. Would you believe that [...] himself appears to be blaming Chermiside and myself ... what for I do not know. All this is very sickening and I assure you more disgusting than any Cretan politicians' intrigue" Biliotti wrote⁸⁵.

Yet he concealed these feelings with sufficient professionalism to be portrayed affectionately by Bickford-Smith and Hogarth and, despite the hostility of the Greek establishment and MacColl in London, he escaped the frequent public attacks made on Sir Herbert Chermiside. Nonetheless, tensions with philhellene British journalists would resurface when Biliotti encountered them again in Salonica during his term as consul-general there.

Biliotti and the Candia uprising

The diplomatic and political deadlock in Crete continued throughout the first eight months of 1898. By then the Powers knew the outcome that they were aiming for: an autonomous Crete with Prince George of Greece as its governor. But they could make no progress towards as long as they were unable to persuade the Ottoman government to remove its troops from the island. They were equally unable to get the Christians to allow the island's Muslims to leave the safety of the fortified towns and return to their farms and villages. And until the Muslim refugees left the towns, there could also be no return by the Christian Greek minority of the towns which had mostly departed to Athens at the start of the emergency.

Biliotti monitored the chopping and burning of the olive groves, explaining to London the underlying logic behind the different forms it could take. Usually the trees were chopped in a fashion which enabled them to grow back after a season or two. In other words, the Christians anticipated a settlement in which the Muslim owners would eventually return. But in 1897-98 Biliotti was alarmed to find that in some areas a more radical technique of burning out the stump and killing the tree was being applied which suggested that no return of the Muslims was envisaged by the insurgent leadership⁸⁶.

In the early summer of 1898 the Powers resolved to wait no longer and break the deadlock on this island⁸⁷. Ever since the early spring of the previous year, the governments of Britain, France, Italy, and Russia were all agreed that Ottoman rule in Crete should be ended and that, as the Christian insurgents demanded, the Ottoman military presence in the island must end. In the summer of 1898 they went a step further and began to establish an indigenous Greek administration for the island. The Admirals began by holding contacts with the insurrectionary Christian Assembly at Plakoures in the Akrotiri peninsula east of Canea. This produced a power-sharing deal between the Admirals' Administration and the Christian insurgents cutting out the need to reach further deals between the two communities or between the Cretan Christians and the Ottoman Government.

"They [Britain, France, Italy, and Russia] have consequently decided on the formation of an executive committee, to be nominated by the Cretan Assembly, to

⁸⁵ Noel Papers, Royal Naval Archives, Greenwich, Biliotti to Noel, 29 January 1899.

⁸⁶ FO 195/1893 Biliotti to Currie, 20 November 1898, report on population of Crete. The destruction of olive groves owned by Muslims is discussed on 607-08.

⁸⁷ FO 195/2004 Salisbury to Currie, 8 June 1898.

which would be entrusted the mission of administering those parts of the island now obeying the Cretan Assembly, while the Admirals would exercise their authority in those regions occupied by the European troops. The nature of this committee will be temporary. It will be in permanent touch with the Admirals and will be immediately revocable by them in the event of its exceeding its mandate," the Admirals announced⁸⁸.

After a meeting between Admirals and insurgents in July 1898, the offer was accepted by the Christian leaders, headed by the President of the Assembly, Ioannis Sfakianakis. The Christians were formally offered "a scheme for a temporary government system drawn up by the Consuls at the request of the Admirals." This would create an executive committee. The Christians continued to haggle over details for the following few weeks, but effectively a new political system had been created in Crete, under the nose of the Turks. Sultan Abdülhamit failed to raise the objections which the Western Powers had expected, presumably because he had his eye off the situation in Crete and his officials did not alert him to the significance of what was happening⁸⁹.

The next step was to find income for the new administration. The only source of public revenue was the Ottoman tithe or dime, still under the control of Turkish officials, which consisted of several local taxes and customs dues. The Admirals resolved that they should be transferred to the new administration, a step which in essence meant sacking the Muslim officials and giving their jobs to Cretan Christians appointed by the insurrectionaries. Though it was an obviously provocative move, there was no difficulty in making this transfer in Canea, Rethymo and Sitia. Candia, as Biliotti noted, with its 52,000 Muslim refugees, was a different matter.

"It should be borne in mind that what is an easy task in Canea becomes a very dangerous one in Candia, owing to the far superior number of Moslems, their heavier sufferings and distress, and especially the animosity of the Sitia Moslems who are in Candia, in consequence of the massacre of their relatives"⁹⁰.

Though Britain had generally led the way in the Concert of Europe's policies on Crete, this was not the case between July and early September 1898. The surviving documents in the British archives contain obvious gaps, but it seems clear that it was the other Powers which insisted that the Ottoman tax revenues at Candia — the 'Dime' — be taken out of Turkish hands and placed in Christian ones. Leaving political and legal implications of this action to one side, it would mean depriving the few Muslims among the 52,000 refugees in Candia who had paid employment of their jobs. It was certain to create a strong reaction amongst a large group of refugees who were still armed and had only a small force of British soldiers among them. Furthermore the British official presence was smaller than it should have been for the task required of it.

The commander of the British troops in Candia, General Sir Herbert Chermeside, worked well with Biliotti whom he would already have known from the latter's

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ FO 195/20231898: see particularly Biliotti to Currie, 28 July and 30-31 July.

⁹⁰ FO 78/4934, Biliotti to Salisbury, September 30 1898 repeating FO 195/2023, Biliotti to Constantinople, early September 1898.

time in Trabzon in the late 1870s and was adept at maintaining good relations with the town's Muslims and their leadership. But during the summer of 1898 Chermiside was not on the island. He had gone on leave at the beginning of June. His replacement, Colonel Rowland Mainwaring, was a well intentioned man who seems to have completely missed what was afoot in the policies of the British and other governments involved in the Cretan crisis. Shocked by the sufferings of the Muslim refugees in Candia, Mainwaring lectured the Cretan Christian chiefs naively on the need to allow the Muslims to return to their homes. This produced no effect. Then on 2 August, Mainwaring wrote to the Admirals calling for them to take measures to raise the siege of the Cretan Muslims and allow them to return to their lands⁹¹. He was immediately plucked from the island, leaving, the very next day and without any farewells or explanations.

Mainwaring's replacement was Colonel Francis Reid, a man who, as events would show, was wholly unfitted for a command at a critical moment. The departure of Mainwaring was wholly unexpected and took Biliotti completely by surprise. Two weeks later, he wrote to the Foreign Office: "I have just heard of this change from a private letter from Colonel Mainwaring to Sir H. Chermiside. Neither the War Office nor Colonel Reid has informed us of the change. Enquiry has been made at the War Office"⁹².

Their precarious military position in Candia meant that the British would bear the brunt if there was any armed opposition to the take-over of the Dime by the Powers and the Christians. On 3rd September however at a meeting of the Admirals, the Admirals of France, Italy, and Russia insisted that the take-over of the Candia Dime should go ahead. The takeover was only nominal since the office was already effectively in British hands, but, as it amounted to dismissal of the two Muslim clerks paid by the British and their replacement by an insurrectionary, Mr Alexiou⁹³, it was highly provocative in a town of hungry refugees. As with the army, there was a gap in the British Naval command. Admiral Noel was away, and his place at the meeting was taken by Captain Harry Hughes-Hallett, who disliked the Muslims. Hughes-Hallett failed to stand up to the admirals by using his veto⁹⁴.

The mystery in all this, which cannot easily be solved in the absence of Cabinet Papers on the subject, is what London thought of the situation and how aware it was of the risks to British soldiers.

No doubt it was impatience with the stalemate in Crete, which had now continued for a year and half, which led the British to cave in to Christian insistence. It is nonetheless surprising that there was apparently little discussion in London of the risks involved and that Biliotti's apprehensions were not listened to⁹⁵. A partial

⁹¹ FO 195/2023 Crete Consular Reports, 2 August 1898.

⁹² FO 78/4934 From Crete, Biliotti to Salisbury, late August 1898. Unfortunately Mainwaring's letter to Chermiside does not survive in the Chermiside papers.

⁹³ FO 195/2023, Statement by Colonel Reid, 7 September 1898; FO 78/4934, Biliotti to Salisbury, 30 September 1898.

⁹⁴ R. J. Pritchard, *International Humanitarian Intervention and Establishment of an International Jurisdiction over Crimes against Humanity: The National & International Military Trials on Crete in 1898*, New York 2003, 1-88, n. 30.

⁹⁵ Pritchard, *The National and International Military Trials*, *supra* n. 94; see also FO 195/2004 Balfour to de Bunsen, 20 August 1898.

explanation could be that after the departure of Sir Philip Currie as ambassador in July 1998, Biliotti had few friends in the Embassy to which he reported. Whatever the explanation, the British Embassy in Constantinople seems to have set little store on the views of its Consul-General in Canea during these crucial months. Perhaps the Embassy should take responsibility for overlooking Biliotti's warnings⁹⁶.

Une chasse contre l'Anglais

Alarm bells were starting to ring among the Muslims of Crete as they realized that their already dire situation of living under siege was about to be replaced by an even worse one, but almost no attention was paid to them by the western powers. On 18 August, Biliotti reported to London about the fears of the Cretan Mussulmans at the new administration then being set up and their alarm at the idea that its writ would be extended to the towns. In a separate dispatch to the Embassy in Istanbul, he again drew attention to the flaw in the arrangements which the Admirals and the Powers had created by excluding the besieged Cretan Muslims from a share in the government of the island.

"At the same time the Executive Committee disregard the principle that if these regulations are to have a permanent character the Muslim minority must also take part in framing out the regulations which are decided upon exclusively by the Christian Executive Committee," he wrote⁹⁷.

The sources for the weeks preceding the explosion are singularly poor and it is hard to judge, from the surviving British sources at least, why the Great Powers allowed themselves to travel down a course in Crete which was very likely to provoke an explosion among the Muslims.

The Cretan Mussulmans were not the only ones to be afraid. The same day, 18 August, Biliotti received a letter which Colonel Reid in Candia had written to him two days earlier. It contained a very thinly concealed appeal for help in a request to assist him in sorting out disputes between chiefs over who should sell grapes and who should sell raisins. The Consul's characteristic response was to get on a boat and pay an immediate visit to Reid.

On 3 September, Biliotti paid a visit to Candia, trying to patch a deal which would prevent an explosion among the Muslims of Candia, where Muslim clerks — earning £3 a month, a pittance by any Victorian standard, but the only salaries then received by Cretan Muslims — were due to be dismissed. The Consul was caught between forces who would not compromise. The Admirals of Russia and Italy were determined to push through the transfer of power and revenues to the Cretan Christians and to allow no delay. They can hardly have been unaware of the consequences this was likely to provoke.

"The fact is owing to the far superior numbers of Mussulmans, their heavier sufferings, and distress, the animosity of the Sitia Mussulmans now in Candia consequent on the massacre of their relatives, that which is an easy task in Canea

⁹⁶ Sir Nicholas O'Connor, Currie's successor, was occasionally openly hostile to Biliotti on later occasions. See n. 100, 107, and 109 *infra*.

⁹⁷ FO 195/2023 Biliotti to Currie, 18 August 1898.

and Rethymo becomes very dangerous in Candia,” Biliotti wrote in a dispatch which appears to have been drafted in the first day or two of September but sent only on the day he uprising actually happened⁹⁸.

British officials on Crete, who were having to keep the peace among 52,000 Muslims, including several thousand massacre survivors, felt a palpable resentment against the treatment they were receiving from the Continental European powers. Biliotti mentions jokes being made about ‘une chasse contre l’Anglais’. He added: “This is only the continuance of what has taken place ever since the international occupation of Crete.” Privately the British had always felt themselves odd man out among the occupying powers on a number of occasions in the previous year and a half⁹⁹.

‘Une chasse contre l’Anglais’ is how it turned out¹⁰⁰. British forces in Candia consisted of only 128 men, under an inexperienced and evidently frightened commander. Biliotti talked to Colonel Reid and to Edhem Pasha, the Ottoman kaymakam in Candia, trying to broker a deal whereby a Christian clerk could be put in and paid for at £6 a month, leaving the income of the Muslim clerks untouched even though they would lose their jobs. Edhem Pasha, who had less easy relations with the British than some of his Ottoman colleagues, refused to obey at first and special orders had to be relayed to him from Canea.

Biliotti finally wrote out a memorandum, explaining details of what had to be done to Colonel Reid. He told him to explain away the dismissal of the Turkish officials by saying that accounts are now to be kept in a European language. “This would reduce the impression of religious intolerance,” he added¹⁰¹.

Having attempted to defuse the situation, the consul sailed back to Suda Bay the same day. He arrived in the evening. His attempts to prevent the coming explosion had been observed by the Admirals but were not welcomed by them. “... On arrival [at Suda] I met on the landing quay the Russian and Italian Admirals who disapprove of our proceedings in Candia,” he later reported to London. Driving home from Canea to Halepa, he encountered Hughes-Hallett “who appeared to be in great anxiety in consequence of strong observations made to him by the Foreign Admirals”¹⁰².

Biliotti had tried to avert the explosion but failed. For the next few months, as the climax of the 77 year-long struggle to end Ottoman rule on the island arrived, he was reduced to the role of a bystander.

⁹⁸ FO 195/2023 Biliotti to Salisbury, 6 September 1898.

⁹⁹ For Biliotti’s earlier alarm at fraternizing between French, Russian, and Italian troops and the Christian Cretan, see FO 195/1983 Confidential no. 21, Biliotti to Currie, 20 July 1897.

¹⁰⁰ The following account is drawn from FO 78 4934 From Crete Aug – Dec 1898, FO 784923 (Constantinople to London) and FO 195/2023 (Consular Reports from Crete 1898).

¹⁰¹ FO 195/2023, p. 461 and following. This statement of evidence by Biliotti, delivered in October 1898, gives the best connected account of the events which led up to September 6th.

¹⁰² FO 195/2023, Biliotti to Currie, p. 461, 18 and 19 October. See also *Times*, 24 Saturday 1898: “The Admirals were advised by our authorities that we could not employ force to take over the dime offices, but they insisted and our representatives had to obey.”

Biliotti and the September 6 1898 Muslim uprising

Around 2 pm in the afternoon of Tuesday 6 September, the luckless Colonel Reid and his staff officer went to the Customs House outside the harbour gate of Candia to try and take it over. A force of twenty British soldiers was posted at the gate. Colonel Reid demanded the keys of the building from a Turkish official but he fled. While the keys were being produced, a crowd of Candia Muslims started to come down the city's main street to the harbour gate. Then a second crowd began to approach from the harbour. The soldiers drew their bayonets, noticing at the same time that rifles were pointing out of the windows of houses nearby.

Blows were exchanged and firing started, though according to a statement made to the press by Biliotti two days later, only after a British soldier had been stabbed¹⁰³. Several hours of fighting then engulfed Candia, as Ottoman troops stood aside. By the time they intervened and calm returned to the town, 18 British soldiers, between 300 and 500 Christians, most of Candia's Cretan Christian inhabitants, had been killed. So too was the British Vice-Consul Lysimachos Kalokairinos and his family, who had been burnt alive in their home¹⁰⁴, and the father of the head of the Eastern Telegraph Office in Candia. A total of 41 Muslims, including 29 Turkish irregulars, and four Turkish soldiers, were dead. The Candia massacre, as it became known, gave the Great Powers the lever they had sought to fast-forward the end of Ottoman rule in Crete. Military trials and executions of the ring-leaders of the uprising tightened the grip of the Powers over the Muslim population. On 22 September all Muslims were ordered to hand over their arms. In the first two weeks of November, Ottoman troops and the last governor were forced to depart. Prince George of Greece was then named High Commissioner of a newly autonomous Crete. He arrived just before the western Christmas.

Biliotti isolated

Biliotti spent most of the following three months after the September 6 revolt in Candia, several of them most uncomfortably aboard HMS Camperdown. The weather during the late autumn and early winter of 1898 was unusually stormy in Crete, which must have made it particularly disagreeable though this is not mentioned in his despatches. His real complaint seems to have been that, taken away from the international consular corps and his office Canea, his influence over events was greatly reduced¹⁰⁵.

On November 5, as Turkish rule on the island was ending, Biliotti complained to his superiors "I am deeply grieved that my services here within the last two months have been so unnoticed that Her Majesty's Government is not even aware of my presence in Candia." The complaint seems to have gone unequally unheeded.

¹⁰³ This account is taken from *Times* from September 7 to September 10, and from Biliotti's and Reid's accounts of the uprising in FO 195/2023, *Consular Reports from Canea to Constantinople*, 1898.

¹⁰⁴ Sir Reginald Bacon, *A Naval Scrapbook*, London 1925, 223 says that Kalokairinos's reputation as a money-lender was a factor in the violence. "No small part of the reason of the massacre was due to this fact. Our Foreign Office at that time was most careless as regards the appointments of Vice-Consuls." Kalokairinos had been British representative in Candia for four decades.

¹⁰⁵ The other consuls remained in Canea.

Two days later the Embassy in Constantinople decided, it said on advice from London, that Biliotti should remain in Candia for the rest of the British provisional occupation¹⁰⁶.

If one regards Biliotti's sojourn in Candia during most of this time as deliberate sidelining, then it is tempting to link this to pressures against him in London, pressures which ultimately emanated from Athens. On Wednesday 5 October, the *Times* reported a meeting held by the anti-Ottoman lobby group, the Grosvenor House Committee, which was chaired by Canon MacColl, and at which a paper on British Consuls in Turkey was read out by one Edward Atkin, an otherwise unknown figure. Even if one did not know of MacColl's conversation with the King of Greece the previous year, it would be obvious that the unnamed target was Biliotti and, assuming that Biliotti read the British press, the attacks must have stung.

Atkins told his listeners that "what was needed was a purification of the Consular staff by eliminating the easy-going Levantine and replacing him by British military or naval officers with the necessary linguistic qualifications ... the extra cost of installing a better class of consular official was surely worthy of the money." The meeting resolved that it "desires to call attention of the mischievous effects of the system of employing in the British Consular service men who are connected, either directly, or through relatives, with local commercial enterprise, and who are in consequence unable to act and speak with firmness in dealing with affairs vitally affecting British interests"¹⁰⁷.

Though a relatively junior member of the consular service spoke at the meeting about aid to Armenians, an indication that both the Foreign Office and its Ambassador in Turkey, Nicholas O'Connor, were well aware of the meeting, no one stepped forward to defend 'the easy-going Levantines' in British service. However Biliotti's instincts over many years to work hard at good PR probably came to his rescue. His advocates were more numerous in the UK than his detractors. The best books on Crete published in Britain during the previous year — *Accidents of an Antiquary's Life* by David Hogarth and *Cretan Sketches* by the strongly philhellene Roandeu Bickford-Smith — had lavished praise on Biliotti and his consular and diplomatic work for Britain¹⁰⁸. Biliotti's good relations with Admiral Noel were probably another strong point in his favour.

Nevertheless, though Biliotti had foreseen and attempted to forestall, the explosion of September 6th, the despatches of the new British ambassador in Istanbul, Sir Nicholas O'Connor, give the distinct impression that in the days following the Candia uprising, HM Consul Canea was distinctly out of favour in the Embassy to which he reported. O'Connor's despatches relay information to London about conditions Crete given to him by the French chargé d'affaires, and obtained from Paul Blanc's reports out of Canea. Biliotti, addressed by his job title rather than his name¹⁰⁹, was ordered to comment on them and ascertain their truth. Blanc had

¹⁰⁶ 1898 FO 195/2023, 5 November 1898, Biliotti to Currie; FO 78/4923, 7 November, Currie to Salisbury.

¹⁰⁷ *Times*, Wednesday 5 October 1898.

¹⁰⁸ D. J. Hogarth, *The Wandering Scholar*, Oxford 1925; Bickford-Smith, *Cretan Sketches*, *supra* n. 46, 87-89 and 194-205.

¹⁰⁹ FO 78/4923 O'Connor to Biliotti, 9 September 1898.

suggested that Muslims also posed a danger in Rethymo where they were much less numerous and the takeover of the dime and eviction of Muslim clerks had gone ahead without difficulty.

The warning, which proved entirely false, reflected the French Consul-General's attitude towards the Ottomans. Blanc was an advocate of the French policy of an unwavering hard line towards the Muslims. Biliotti had always suggested a softer and more inclusive policy, and — as he himself admitted — he had not expected the Candia Muslims to attack the British. In a despatch to Lord Salisbury at the end of the month, he conceded his failure to predict the events of 6th September, but argued that this provided confirmation of the mistake made in taking over the dime.

“Where I was greatly mistaken was when I asserted that no Moslem would lift a finger against British troops. The attack is the more strange to understand in that after the occurrence I begged Dr Ittar to inquire publicly whether the Moslems had any reason to complain of any British officer or man, and they all replied in the negative with loud protestations. Therefore, taking all circumstances into due consideration I am induced to believe, and I have the firm conviction that had it not been for the dismissal of the two Mussulman clerks, and even perhaps if their withdrawal had not been made compulsory within a short period, nothing would have occurred”¹¹⁰.

Biliotti's later reporting picked up rumours of Muslim conspiracies and the possibilities of further violence. On 18 October, Sir Nicholas O'Connor reported approvingly to Lord Salisbury that a telegram from Biliotti had “seriously frightened the Sultan” when read out to him by the Ottoman Foreign Minister, Tewfik Pasha¹¹¹.

After the departure of the Ottomans

By the middle of November, the Ottoman official presence in Crete no longer existed. Soldiers and officials from the mainland were gone, though the Ottoman flag continued to fly. The departure of Ottoman forces meant that the island's Christians were now called upon to allow their Muslim fellow-countrymen to return to their villages. As a necessary preliminary, the Christians too now had to hand over their arms. At the end of November in and early December Biliotti once more rode among the villages of central Crete in Temenos and Malevizi districts. He and Chermiside were now concerned with the issue of encouraging Muslims to return to their homes. Security was only the first of several obstacles. A second difficulty was that wood and other construction materials needed to rebuild village houses were not indigenous to Crete. Despite some discussion, the Powers were not willing to advance the funds necessary to purchase them. A third obstacle was that, as it became clear that the British and international administration in Crete was only transitional, tens of thousands of Cretan Muslims prepared to flee to Turkey. Within

¹¹⁰ FO 78/4934, Biliotti to Salisbury, 30 September 1898. In a forthcoming study of the end of Ottoman Crete, I hope to discuss new evidence that has recently come to light suggesting that the uprising was indeed the work of a conspiracy among the Muslims of Candia.

¹¹¹ FO 78/4923, O'Connor to Salisbury, 18 October 1898.

a year of the end of Ottoman rule, the proportion of Muslims in the Cretan population had plunged from around a quarter to one ninth. Their departure was discouraged, partly because it was an acute embarrassment for the International Administration but also because it was a blow to the island's economy. Though Biliotti had always believed that the exodus of the Muslims was inevitable, he and General Chermiside now found themselves working unsuccessfully to prevent one.

A question of conscience

At this point the unresolved issue of the massacres in Sitia province in February 1897 re-emerged. Sitia was in the French zone but Admiral Poittier, now the *doyen* of the Admirals ruling Crete, and his officials had refused to take the matter up¹¹². Around 800 survivors of the massacres had been transported from the east of the island to Candia in the spring of 1897. Only a lucky few, such as Cevdet Karahassanaki, had been able to go to the mainland to begin a new life in Turkey¹¹³. The others remained under British protection in Candia, regarded by some British officials as justifiably angry victims of an outrage (Chermiside's view) or trouble-makers (the view of Captain Hughes-Hallett, the second most senior British naval officer in Crete).

No action had been taken to bring the perpetrators of the massacres to justice, apparently because the French refused to do so. The Sitia survivors in Candia, who would be a small minority in a remote area after any 'repatriation', were mostly extremely unwilling to go. On 19 November, Admiral Poittier, the French Admiral in the International Administration, wrote to Noel saying that "we are now ready to receive Muslim refugees in the province of Sitia." A day earlier, Paul Blanc had sent a despatch to Paris saying that Christians would no longer hold onto Muslim property and that the Cretan Executive Committee exhorted Christians henceforth to treat Muslims as their brothers¹¹⁴. A group of 40 refugees, all men, was sent from Candia on behalf of the refugees to see what conditions were now like in the east of the island. They returned with dispiriting opinions of what they had seen.

"Most Moslems who visited Sitia brought discouraging news reported to French captain. The fact is that all mosques in Sitia are turned into churches as they were in old times and one is now so treated in the village of ..." Biliotti later reported¹¹⁵.

¹¹² I have been unable to find any archival correspondence between the British and French authorities on this matter. However the correspondence of Admiral Noel makes it clear that he was in direct contact with the French on this matter and sympathised personally with the French desire to take no further action against the culprits.

¹¹³ Cevdet Karahassanaki told his family in later years in Turkey that he and the refugee orphans rescued with him had been taken out of the island on a British vessel and there is corroborative evidence to support this though it appears this action was semi-official. There seems to be no surviving British account of how the bulk of the Sitia survivors were moved to Candia or why — one of several *lacunae* on these topics in British documents.

¹¹⁴ Noel Papers, NOE 10, Poittier to Noel, 19 November 1898. *Livre Jaune: French Foreign Ministry, Affaires d'Orient, Evacuation de la Crète Par les Troupes Ottomanes*, October-November 1898, 46, Blanc to Delcassé, 18 November 1898.

¹¹⁵ FO 195/2023, Biliotti to O'Conor no. 136.

The French, Italian, and Russian Admirals, supported by Noel, insisted that the refugees should return unconditionally. Chermside and Biliotti however both insisted that those responsible for the massacres should face some sort of process for their crimes. On December the 1st 1898, Admiral Noel arrived at Sitia in person to investigate the problem for himself. Commandant Chevalier, head of the French forces there, convinced him that there was no point in further investigations or further trials. "L'heure était à l'apaisement," the official history of the French navy in Crete reports¹¹⁶. Noel was said by the French to be deeply impressed by the tranquillity he found in Sitia. It was of course a province where Greeks had been almost totally in control since before the arrival of the European troops and where the proportion of Muslims in the population had always been very low. None of that boded well for the surviving refugees in Candia.

Biliotti and Chermside, public officials who knew and abided by the rules of their profession, were not willing to be silenced immediately. They clearly felt themselves to be confronted by a moral issue which they could not drop. There were almost certainly other aspects to it. Biliotti and Chermside also appear to have made a fuss over the holding of Muslim children in Selinos and Sitia by Cretan Christians, presumably with a view to assimilating and Christianising them. The Council of Admirals was aware of this issue but refused to take action. Biliotti and Chermside tried unsuccessfully to get this position reversed. It is hard to know exactly what happened since all references to it seem to have been removed from the Foreign Office Crete records, but Biliotti writes in a despatch from Salonica a year later that "that there are at least ten young Mussulman boys and girls, who have been kept in Selinos and Sitia by the Christians against the will of their parents and co-religionists and whose release General Chermside and myself found it impossible under different pretexts to obtain"¹¹⁷.

Final attempts to raise the Sitia massacre issue

Despite Noel's refusal, Chermside continued to press a little longer for measures against those guilty of the Sitia massacres. Late nineteenth century Cretans, Muslim as well as Christian, were used to petitioning the Great Powers for help. In the first few days of December, a detailed petition, listing the victims of the killings, witnesses to the killings, and the alleged murderers, was drawn up in Candia about the questions of resettlement of the Sitia refugees and their claim to justice. The petition was well-prepared and written in French so it is unlikely to have been prepared without the sympathetic guidance of a Western European, the most probable suspect being Chermside himself. Chermside kept Biliotti aware of the petition and it was discussed by the two at a meeting in Candia 5 December after the Consul-General's return from the countryside. However Biliotti had already passed information about the petition on to Sir Nicholas O'Connor in Istanbul and was already under instructions to refuse it when it was presented to him.

¹¹⁶ De la Martinière, *La Marine Française*, *supra* n. 68, 170, FO 78/4969, 6 December 1898, Chermside to Noel; Confidential Print Correspondence Affecting the Affairs of Crete October-December 1898 no. 7250, Biliotti *Memorandum* to Salisbury, 16 and 17 December 1898.

¹¹⁷ FO 78/5005, 115, Biliotti to Salisbury, November 10 1899. See also the following note.

Nevertheless on 6 December Chermside wrote to Noel forwarding “lists of the reputed victims of the massacres in that district, which also give the names of the persons accused ... I gather from you in conversation that this point [the date of the killings] is immaterial and that the Council of Admirals are not prepared to entertain this question, as occurred with that of the Moslem children still detained as captives, put forward by me in 1897. In view of the definite accusations by which this eloquent appeal is supported, it is, however, my duty to transmit it.”

He added, perhaps sardonically, “We can, of course, at any time put pressure on these unfortunate people by stopping their relief of ration here and only issuing it in their own province”¹¹⁸. There matters seem to have stopped. Chermside was a serving officer on active service, writing to his commander. He could do no more. However his intervention means that to this day a list exists of victims, witnesses, and alleged murders for the February 1897 massacres.

Biliotti as a civilian consular official was rather differently placed and he continued to press the issue until the eve of the arrival of Prince George, sending a very strongly-worded memorandum on the matter to Lord Salisbury on 16 December and copying it to Sir Nicholas O’Conor in Istanbul the next day¹¹⁹. The Memorandum was addressed to Chermside and sent with a covering note to London.

“It is consequently more than ever the duty of the occupying powers to do all that is possible to ameliorate the position of these unhappy and long-suffering Mussulmans, and to take such measures as will ensure their being compensated, at any rate in some degree, for their pecuniary losses. The Christians should be dispossessed of the properties of the people whom they have either murdered or driven away,” he wrote. Perhaps Biliotti believed that Salisbury would act when Noel and officials in Crete were unable to do so. If so he was wrong. The despatch went to Salisbury. It was marked “received for perusal” with the large ‘S’ in red ink which the Prime Minister placed on documents he read personally.

Evidently Salisbury endorsed Noel’s decision to avoid confrontation with the French. In terms of practical policy considerations, and the letter of international law as it then stood, his decision was probably inevitable. But it exposes a glaring moral inconsistency in western policy towards Turks and Muslims in the 19th century which, to judge from their actions during the previous three weeks, Biliotti and Chermside found unacceptable. Any violence or injustice committed against Christians in the late Ottoman Empire was an international incident, which Salisbury personally pursued as energetically as he was able to. Even though the end of Ottoman rule had been provoked by the Candia uprising of September sixth which had killed a smaller number of people and been caused by obvious provocation, the murder of 850 Muslims by Christians could be passed over without condemnation or retribution.

Five days later Prince George of Greece arrived and the International Administration of Crete began to come to an end. The argument over the Sitia

¹¹⁸ FO 78/4969, Chermside to Noel, 6 December 1898.

¹¹⁹ FO 78/4934 from Biliotti to Salisbury, 241, 16 December 1898.

refugees had evidently caused many tempers to be lost and Biliotti's memorandum must have done so most of all. On 23 December 1898, Admiral Noel wrote to his French counterpart, Poittier, to make peace: "My dear Admiral," he began, "I fear you are rather hurt at our action in the case of the Lassithi [*sic*] refugees at Candia." After explaining that the reason why the British had acted as they did was "to endeavour to get these destitute Moslems something to live upon", Sir Gerard then deftly took responsibility for the whole affair and offered an olive branch. "I would explain that the memo forwarded by Sir Alfred Biliotti was written at my instigation and I feel entirely responsible for it, including inaccuracies if there are any. I much regret it."

Poittier wrote back the next day, making it clear that he had taken exception to "Sir Biliotti's" Memorandum but graciously accepting Noel's apology. The matter of the Sitia refugees was over. Biliotti must have been given slight satisfaction when Salisbury at least allowed a section of the Sitia memorandum, with some excisions, to appear in the next Blue Book on Crete¹²⁰.

Canea as Prince George arrives

The closing days of 1898 were a time of exhilaration for Cretan Christians, but in the British consulate-general in Canea, the mood was rather different. Because Biliotti was not in Candia, his secretary there, a Mr Wilkinson, wrote to him describing what was going on in the Cretan capital to the Consul-General. A surviving fragment of one of Wilkinson's letters to Biliotti indicates that the British staff in the consulate did not regard themselves as witnessing a triumph of their own making: "December 11, vociferations of upwards of 1000 Christians can be heard ... feasting the great achievement! On their arrival in town they soon crowded in the cafes where they still are, drinking and singing warlike songs, where the conspicuous words are, of course, 'the defeat of the Turk'. The authorities, far from doing anything to stop all that, are having patrols of international troops escorting the Christians for fear of any attack on them. ... I have also been told that French soldiers joined the Christians in last night's revelling"¹²¹.

Comments of this kind should not be taken as indications of political sympathy by Biliotti and his staff for the Turkish cause, or indeed as opposition to Greek nationalism. More likely the inmates of the Consulate at Chalepa simply disapproved of the excesses they saw, and particularly the partisan behaviour of the French, which for the Consul-General must have been to some extent a family problem.

On the 27th Prince George met Biliotti for the first time and explained to him his plans to hold quick elections and convene the Cretan Assembly for as short a time as possible. At the end of December Noel and the other admirals departed. Prince George, though technically the High Commissioner ruling an autonomous island on behalf of the Great Powers, was now Crete's sole ruler.

¹²⁰ Noel Papers, Noel to Poittier, 23 December 1898, and Poittier to Noel, 24 December 1898.

¹²¹ Confidential Print *Correspondence Affecting the Affairs of Crete October-December 1898*, no. 7250, 273-4, 11 December 1898, Wilkinson to Biliotti.

Biliotti and Prince George

Though Crete was now for most purposes an independent state with its own external relations, the change in its status reduced rather than enhanced Biliotti's personal position. For two decades Britain had been the pre-eminent outside power on the island and even when Biliotti was not doyen of the consular corps, he had been its outstanding figure.

In January 1898 however, he found himself a marginal and apparently unpopular figure in Candia.

Despite the Sitia controversy, Biliotti had remained on warm personal terms with Gerard Noel and his letters to the Admiral in the weeks after he left the island describe his situation there with a frankness which is not to be found in any despatch. In a letter on 29 January, Biliotti confessed that he did not know whether he would have made Consul-General without the Candia troubles and was thinking of leaving the island and might prefer somewhere else on a lower salary.

"As you well know, Crete is not a very pleasant post for a consul who wants to do his duty conscientiously and according to what I have already seen promises to be much worse now for the British consul and British officers. If things continue to go as they do, I shall have to ask for my removal"¹²².

Chermside's position was even more exposed. The Admirals in one of their final meetings had apparently favoured his removal. Biliotti took the opposite view, since he and Chermside were still hoping to resettle the Cretan Muslims successfully. But he knew this would be unpopular on the island. "His [Chermside's] prolonged stay here is sure to give rise to comments on the parts of the foreign consuls and officers. But Sir Herbert's presence here is still expedient," he wrote to London on 1 January¹²³. It was fairly inevitable that the Greeks and the British would quickly fall out with each other, for it was not hard to find Cretans, Christians as well as Muslims, who hoped that the British administration in the island would continue for as long as possible. The British administration in the countryside south of Candia seems to have been genuinely popular, with the British self-consciously introducing improvements such as a postal service and being rewarded with votes of thanks from local communities.

Biliotti explained the reasons why the British army rule went down well with Cretan Christians in a dispatch to Nicholas O'Connor on 29 December 1898. He wrote: "The preference given by the Christians to British officers over their coreligionists was due to the fear of jealousies between them which in spite of all precautions cannot fail to spring up for obtaining government posts.

"I may add that the province of Candia [is] being better administered than any other in Crete, its inhabitants, Christians and Muslims, openly express the hope that British officers will continue to be kept in their present offices all over the Province for some time to come"¹²⁴. Such praise was no recommendation to the new High Commissioner in Candia.

¹²² Biliotti to Noel, 29 January 1899, Noel Papers NOE 10 (Series II).

¹²³ Biliotti to Constantinople, FO 195/2058, 1 January 1899.

¹²⁴ Biliotti to Constantinople, FO 195/2023, 29 December 1898.

The Rift with Prince George

Biliotti's instincts were absolutely right. As 1899 got under way, relations between him and Prince George became strained very quickly. The Powers had originally envisaged that the High Commissioner would preside over an administration with a largely international character. There had been talk of Numa Droz, a Swiss elder statesman who would have been the first choice of many Cretans for High Commission, would serve as the Prince's Chief Adviser. But the appointment of Prince George inevitably meant that the new administration would have a strongly Athenian character. This was confirmed in the final days of 1898, when the former Greek Consul general in Salonika, Andreas Papadiamantopoulos, arrived to serve as the Prince's political secretary.

Within less than a month of arriving on the island, the Prince had clearly made his mind up to remove both Biliotti and Sir Herbert Chermiside and cut short the administrative reforms and resettlement of the Muslim population in which the two were engaged¹²⁵. The move was not simply aimed against the British. Next in line after Biliotti and Chermiside was the French Consul-General Paul Blanc even though his reports had generally been much friendlier to the Greek cause. The decision to force them out not have been a personal initiative by Prince George, but the result of advice from his counselor.

Because of British objections, Crete was not to be formally united with the Kingdom of Greece until 1912, despite several proclamations of union by the Cretan Christians themselves, but the Prince's decision to clear out Biliotti, Blanc, and Chermiside was clearly intended to give a strongly 'Athenian' stamp to the new Cretan administration, which it would not have had if they had remained and he had had to do his work in the shadow of these senior figures.

Three weeks after arriving in Canea, Prince George showed his hand. At a meeting with the High Commissioner on January 13, Biliotti was first warned not to offer hospitality in his house to a leading Muslim Bey. As a British official, Biliotti was deeply indignant at this instruction. The Prince then turned to the question of Sir Herbert Chermiside's behaviour.

"He then expressed himself with great bitterness against Sir Herbert Chermiside, the whole of whose proceedings he blamed. I finally told the Prince that I was very grieved to see that he so easily lent an ear to the Cretan political gossip so soon after his arrival," Biliotti wrote¹²⁶.

On 23 January there was a second clash. Prince George summoned Biliotti to a long interview. Its contents were so unfriendly that Biliotti took long and careful notes on it¹²⁷. The High Commissioner began by rebuking Biliotti again for the meeting he had had with the Cretan Bey, one Hassan Skilianaki, his principal contact among the Muslims of Candia. Biliotti had merely offered the Bey coffee in his house, but this had now become a potentially suspect contact. Biliotti was caught

¹²⁵ For an account of these disputes from an observer somewhat sympathetic to Prince George, see a letter written by J. D. Bouchier to his foreign editor, Moberley Bell, in London, *Times Archives* on 25 February 1899.

¹²⁶ Biliotti to Constantinople FO 195/2058, 14 and 15 January 1899.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41, 24 January 1899.

off balance by this unexpected accusation. His first instinct was to assume that there had been some mistake in language which suggests that he may have been unaware of the strength of the campaign against him in Athens.

"I am more than convinced that Prince George in speaking to me as he has done has been actuated by the best of intentions towards me and by the feeling of straightforwardness which he expressed to me," he wrote to London, then added:

"But as Her Majesty's Representative how can I submit to the indignity of not being at liberty to offer in my house or office either to a Cretan Christian or Moslem a cup of coffee without the High Commissioner stepping in and giving warnings to both my guest and myself at the suggestion of some lowbred Cretan politician, as must have been the case in the present instance?"

Then, the Prince, having first told Biliotti that he greatly admired British officers and if he had the choice, he would use only them to run Crete, launched into a fierce, detailed, and apparently inaccurate, attack on General Chermside.

Biliotti took down the details. The Prince accused Chermside of keeping him in the dark by not sending reports; of failing to hoist the new Cretan flag. He concluded "That all Christians complained of General Chermside and that even some Moslems were not satisfied."

The consul-general pointed out that as 10,000 Muslims had signed a petition to Queen Victoria praising the general, this stretched credibility. And, as his last throw, he tried the 'man to man' approach on the prince, which he had used successfully in difficult times with Ottoman officials such as Cevat Pasha.

"I finally told the High Commissioner that I would take the liberty to speak to him not as a British Consul to a Prince, but as a gentleman to another and that I was quite distressed that in so short a time they had succeeded in getting him to lend an ear to Cretan political intrigues and in inducing him in error. I further told him that if he wanted to know the truth, it was that the town and the province of Candia were better administered than any other province in Crete.

"I cannot understand how the High Commissioner is made to believe such erroneous reports which he does not hesitate to repeat with conviction as being true. This does not bode well for the future and for his sake some means should be found to put him in the right path."

This was a flawless political forecast. Prince George had embarked on the first stages of an autocratic style of government which would eventually alienate the population of the island, provoke a general uprising, and lead to his ignominious departure from Crete in 1906, a debacle which was the successful first round for Eleftherios Venizelos and his followers in a contest with the Greek monarchy which would dominate Greek politics for decades. What it implied in the short term was that both Biliotti and Chermside would have to be withdrawn from the island within months.

News of Biliotti's departure from Crete was announced in the *Times* on 4th April. He was to be transferred to Salonica, a larger and even more dangerous centre of political tension than Crete. The decision was taken at the beginning of March, when Robert Windham Graves, was already on his way to take up the post¹²⁸. But it

¹²⁸ R. W. Graves, *Storm Centres of the Near East. Personal memories, 1879-1929*, London 1933, 170.

was not exactly a promotion, even if it looked outwardly like one. The salary at Salonica was £ 200 *per annum* lower than the salary of Canea, so the transfer was not in itself particularly welcome news for Biliotti who always seems to have felt, and not without justification, that he was less well rewarded for his work than his British colleagues.

The transfer did not make Biliotti's enemies abandon their campaign. The flavour of Greek Royal family's feeling against the consul-general can be gathered from an entry not long afterwards in the diaries being kept by Lady Layard in London. Lady Layard noted after a meeting with the Princess of Wales who had visited Crete a few weeks earlier at the end of April, that "She told me that she knew that our Consul there Biliotti was very Turkish & helped to keep up the anti-Greek feeling — that he had told her he was going to leave Crete, being tired of it — when she knew that he had been removed by our Govt"¹²⁹. Princess Alexandra's informant was almost certainly Prince George, her favorite nephew.

There were also other reasons. Though Biliotti had the confidence of the Foreign Office in London and the Services, as we have seen, the regard shown for him by Admiral Gerard Noel and General Chermside was not universally shared among British officials. In 1899 he came under fire from Sir Edward Law and the Ottoman Public Debt authorities. Law and his colleagues were determined to defend possible revenues from Crete even after it was no longer part of the Ottoman Empire in a meaningful sense. Law fiercely attacked both Biliotti and Paul Blanc, alleging that they were encouraging the Cretan Christians to wriggle out of their obligations to the Ottoman Public Debt and at the same time, trying to undermine the position of Prince George, the High Commissioner.

"As regards the present question in Crete, what strikes our Council as outrageous is that, although the Powers, through their Admirals, confirmed the status quo, the Consuls have taken to themselves to encourage the Cretans to annul this decision", wrote Sir Edward Law in September 1899, suggesting that misunderstandings over Cretan commitments to payments to the Debt were "part of a Blanc-Biliotti intrigue to embroil the Prince with his subjects", Law wrote¹³⁰.

There is nothing in Biliotti's own despatches, in which a good deal of attention is devoted to Cretan public finances, to support this interpretation and his general attitude to the Christians on Crete was never one of a committed supporter. Sir Edward's hostility, and his tendency to lump Biliotti together with his French brother in law, possibly reflects the way the Consul-General was discussed in the British Embassy in Istanbul, though it may also be the product of exposure to gossip about Biliotti in Athens¹³¹.

Biliotti left the island almost fourteen years to the day from his arrival in 1885. The British naval officers on Crete thought it only fitting to arrange for Sir Alfred to

¹²⁹ Lady Layard's journal, 2 June 1899, *supra* n. 8.

¹³⁰ FO 78/5005, 240, Law to Sanderson from Homburg v. d. H. 8 September 1899.

¹³¹ Law was married to a Greek and came to the Ottoman Public Debt Administration after serving in Athens in 1897 as the British Commissioner on the International Financial Commission administering Greek debt after the Greek-Turkish War that year.

leave the island in style on a Royal Navy Warship¹³². It was however not the end of Biliotti's links with the island, for he did not sell his home there and revisited it at least once before his retirement. Two days earlier, Biliotti had welcomed his successor, Robert Windham Graves, to the island.

Consul General in Salonica July 1899-June 1903

In Salonica, Biliotti was confronted by a larger and vastly more complex situation than the struggle in Crete between Hellenic Christians and Ottoman Muslims. The city was the epicenter of disturbances between several rival Christian nationalisms, as well as between Turks and Muslims. Behind them lay several international tensions: the triangular contest between Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, and the rivalry of Austria and Russia.

The Muslims indeed were in decline and the essential battle was between Greeks and Bulgarians for the future of Salonica. A pattern of tensions, threats, atrocities and reprisals, very similar to those of Crete, dominated the consular agenda, all of them assiduously reported by foreign correspondents who had covered the Crete crisis.

His appointment did not please the Ottoman authorities who tried, ineffectually, to resist it. As in Crete, Biliotti seems to have leant heavily on Greek intelligence agents. Graves, who eventually also succeeded him in Salonica, tells us in his memoirs that on arrival in that city, he found the intelligence operations of the Consulate-General dominated by Greek agents rather than Slav ones and that they appeared to push a Greek nationalist interpretation of events¹³³. This sounds like a possible repetition of Biliotti's mistakes with Yannaris and Manoussos Koundouros, or indeed of Sir Robert Harris's unfavourable view of the British consular presence in Crete in the spring of 1897, and Graves would not have put such an arcane detail permanently into the public domain by mentioning it in his memoirs if he had not considered it significant.

In 1901, Lord Salisbury retired. Soon after there was a change of government in Britain and the Liberals came to power. Biliotti himself was now nearing the Foreign Office's mandatory retirement age of seventy. The surviving diplomatic correspondence from his time in Salonica suggests that respect in London for his professional skills was waning and he was now regarded less as an accomplished analyst and administrator than as an elderly and excitable veteran nearing the end of his career.

In the spring of 1903, the pro-Greek journalist E. J. Dillon, relying apparently on an unreliable sources, claimed that Turks had been responsible for 3000 deaths in clashes in Salonica.

¹³² Noel Papers Royal Naval Archives, Greenwich, Box 2B, 17 June 1899, George Neville to Admiral Gerard Noel.

¹³³ Graves, *Storm Centres*, *supra* n. 129, 197: "Of the intelligence agents Biliotti had passed on to me, I had certain doubts, for though they were supposed to be acting quite independently of each other, I found very soon that there was a striking resemblance in the manner as well as the matter of their reports, which showed a decided bias in favour of the Greek as opposed to the Bulgarian claims in Macedonia". But Biliotti's own despatches tended in the opposite direction if anything.

Biliotti was away on leave in Crete when the story broke, but on investigation he ascertained that the real number of dead was more like 50. Apparently unworried that he might be accused of being called pro-Turkish, he wrote several impassioned dispatches to London. These accused Dillon, a longstanding and eloquent opponent of the Turks, of diverting attention from issues that needed to be confronted. "In a word there never anywhere has been a reign of terror such as exists in Macedonia at this moment, and no outburst of Turkish ferocity has ever caused so much misery over such a large and thickly populated are ... The fact is that the Turkish atrocities, what ever they were, are a thing of the past, while the anarchy caused by the bands is a thing of the present and future and in my opinion it is on the latter and not the former that public attention should be directed and concentrated. What measures are going to be taken for the suppression of the bands? It is becoming daily more certain that Turkey cannot cope with them effectually, because her hands are tied by the ever present fear of the atrocities outcry. There is, in my opinion, only one remedy for the present state of affairs, that that is martial law, which would enable the authorities to deal in a summary manner with anyone found in the possession of arms, ammuniton, or dynamite"¹³⁴.

Dismayed by this suggestion and probably also by Biliotti's uncharacteristically undiplomatic comments on the individuals¹³⁵ who had reported the alleged killings, Sir Nicholas O'Connor, the British ambassador in Constantinople, asked Lord Lansdowne to take care to ensure that these remarks were not included any forthcoming Blue Book. Lansdowne agreed, writing "They appear to have been written by Sir A. Biliotti when he was in a state of considerable excitement" The Foreign Secretary nevertheless added "but he makes out a strong case against the accuracy of the stories related by Nestor and accepted by Dr. Dillon"¹³⁶.

O'Connor's forebodings that Biliotti's judgements on violence in the area around Salonica would prove politically controversial were correct. They remain so to this day. A hundred years later, some of them are to be found on the Internet, still being cited in controversies between Greeks and Slavs over the area. But though Biliotti was vehement, he appears also to have been factually correct.

On 14 July 1903, Biliotti reached the age of seventy and consequently retired. The weeks immediately after his retirement found him again staying in Izmir. From that city, he wrote to Graves, "expressing his regret that he had not found time before his retirement to recognize the services of Mr Vice Consul Shipley who had worked under him for the last four years as Consular Assistant and asking me if possible to repair this omission for him"¹³⁷.

¹³⁴ FO 78/5282, Biliotti to Lansdowne, 29 April 1903.

¹³⁵ On Madame Bakhmetieff, one of the main sources for the massacre allegations against the Turks, the Consul-General wrote: "A woman is rarely to be entirely trusted. In dealing with hard facts, there is no room for sentiment, personal or national ... and Mrs Bakhmetieff has the additional disadvantage that she is an American by birth, a Russian by nationality, a convert to the Orthodox faith by religion, and by nature an ambitious lady, who wishes to make a name for herself in Russia and Bulgaria", FO 78/5282 Salonica, 28 April 1903.

¹³⁶ FO 78/5282, April 29 1903, Biliotti to Lansdowne with comments by Lansdowne.

¹³⁷ FO 78/5282, Graves to Lansdowne, 31 July 1903.

The typewritten testimonial casts some unexpected light on Biliotti's personal circumstances during the final months of his consular career as he neared his seventieth birthday. He told Shipley of "my heartfelt gratitude for the delicate attention which you paid me in sparing my eyes by doing yourself without even waiting for me to ask you all the working incumbing (*sic*) on me, and I must confess that without such help on your part, I would have found myself in the impossibility of carrying out my duties with the regularity with which they have been performed, at least during the last three or four months."

Mr Shipley is thanked for taking over from the Consul at times "when the condition of my eyes made me helpless" and his wife for work on dictation and copying of despatches.

Whatever problems Biliotti had with his eyes, they may only have set in shortly before his retirement, for despatches written in his handwriting in January 1903 suggest that his vision was adequate for writing correspondence at the start of the year.

Final Years

With his retirement Biliotti dropped from view in England, and effectively reverted to his Italian-Levantine family origins, spending his final eleven and a half years in Rhodes with his wife, Marguerite, and their son Emile, though they retained their house in Canea which was managed for them by Cassimati, Biliotti's former Vice-Consul there. The connection with Izmir also persisted. Sir Robert Graves records seeing his predecessor with his brother in law Paul Blanc on a visit to Izmir. Unlike his father who had died too early to receive a pension, Biliotti was in receipt of £ 40 a month at the time of his death.

By coincidence, the year of Biliotti's retirement (1903) was also the year when Britain ceased to keep a regular vice-consular office in Rhodes — a symptom perhaps of the general downscaling of British representation in the Ottoman lands following shifts in British foreign policy after 1900.

So there was no British consular official on the island in May 1912 when Rhodes was wrested from the Ottoman Empire, after a sudden raid by Italy. Along with the rest of the Dodecanese, Rhodes would remain Italian until after the Second World War despite popular demonstrations in favour of union with Greece. For most of the Biliotti family who were Italian nationals, it must have been an agreeable alteration in their circumstances and one is tempted to wonder whether or not they had a hand in helping bring the change about. For Sir Alfred, although Britain and Italy were to be allies in the coming war, it perhaps seemed slightly paradoxical to be living his last years as a naturalised Englishman on Italian soil.

Biliotti died on 1 February 1915. He left a relatively modest estate of £1107, all of which, other than certain objects, went to his wife. But because it was wartime, the execution of his will was fraught with difficulties. Biliotti had named his nephew, Alfred Biliotti, and Charles Giraud, his old friend from Izmir who had also acted as his banker, as his executors. Alfred Biliotti Jr was an Italian national and could not be executor to his uncle's will, while Charles Giraud was still living in Izmir and so could not be contacted because it was enemy territory. A hearing in the British Court in Cairo was necessary before probate could be granted.

The war inflicted a further blow on the Biliotti family. In the spring of 1915,

soon after the Consul's death, his former home in Crete was requisitioned by the Greek army and returned to the family after the war in a damaged condition. Marguerite Biliotti petitioned the Greek government for payment for the damage. She was paid a token amount, but lost her right to full compensation by accepting it. Lady Biliotti then applied for assistance to the British Embassy in Athens in her struggle for fair treatment, but despite four applications from the British Government, the Greeks refused to make further restitution. In the summer of 1922, an official in the British Embassy wrote with some disgust: "It will therefore be seen that this claim on the part of the widow of one who, in his day was a notable benefactor of the Christian population of Crete, and whose name is still held by them in affectionate remembrance, has now dragged on for nearly seven years, in spite of repeated requests by His Majesty's representative for a settlement." Earlier the same official had written to the Greeks arguing that: "There might at least be some grounds for supposing that that the widow of so distinguished a consular officer and also Philhellene as the late Sir Alfred Biliotti would be paid on the nail anything she asked within reason." It is a little surprising that all memory of the way Biliotti had been regarded by the Greek Royal Family and Greek nationalists in Athens had faded so completely¹³⁸.

Sir Alfred had left one child, a son, Emile, still evidently unmarried at the time his father's will had been drafted – and for whom he displays more affection than confidence. But, according to the family records, Emile married, had four children, and moved to Italy which is where the descendants of the Consul live today¹³⁹. The move to Italy happened before World War Two¹⁴⁰.

When his branch of the family left Rhodes, Sir Alfred, the most distinguished of the Biliottis, was forgotten and when relatives of the family on the island today are asked about him, they invariably confuse him with his nephew, Alfredo, the mayor of Rhodes. The connection with Italy survived and persisted; the link with Britain, even though it had brought great personal eminence and a title, vanished with Sir Alfred.

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¹³⁸ FO 286/818, Lady Biliotti's claim against Greek Government, May-September 1922.

¹³⁹ Biliotti family record held by the Mas family in Rhodes.

¹⁴⁰ Emile died in the late 1930's and Sir Alfred's descendants have almost no knowledge of him.