

K. E. FLEMING

The Muslim Bonaparte

*Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali
Pasha's Greece*



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THE MUSLIM BONAPARTE

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DIPLOMACY AND ORIENTALISM
IN ALI PASHA'S GREECE

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For My Parents

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Unless noted otherwise, all translations are my own.

THE MUSLIM BONAPARTE

ONE

INTRODUCTION

I FIRST LEARNED of Ali Pasha when I was a teenager, while on a now-distant family holiday to Greece. In the course of our mapless meanderings, I went to Ioannina, in Epiros, and saw the remnants of the city as it was in Ali's day, with its defensive walls and semipreserved old quarter. Many sites seemed to be under reconstruction, but they were being worked on at such a desultory pace that it was difficult to determine whether buildings were in the process of being demolished or revived. At a local mosque we found a lone workman sitting amid great heaps of rubble in the unlit gloom, tapping aimlessly with his hammer at what appeared to be a wall. A shovel stood propped against a pile of rubbish. When we expressed our surprise that he had all alone taken on so vast a task—one that clearly called for teams of workmen, engineers, architects, and specialist consultants—he shrugged his shoulders and said by way of explanation, "Tzami einai" (It's a mosque). Nationalist concerns, as often happens in Greece, were an obstacle to the preservation of what, even in its dilapidated state, was clearly an important artefact of the country's history. The fact that this building was associated with Islam and Turkishness condemned it to the status of a trash heap.

I have come to learn that one of the arenas in which this contemporary nationalist antipathy for the Turkish past is most pronounced is that of Ali Pasha of Ioannina. To this day he is viewed in Greece as a paradigm of Turkish cruelty and rapacity, the quintessence of barbarism, an Antichrist. Over the years that I have been at work on this book I have experienced many obstacles, most of which have their roots in such attitudes. Materials written in Ottoman are at best heaped together unread, unclassified, and unmanageable; at worst they are left to rot away. In many quarters my expressed interest in Ali was met with amazement, curiosity, and disgust.

Such attitudes are widespread indeed. In the autumn of 1996, at an academic conference, I presented what I thought was a thoroughly benign, if not boring, paper on the economy of the Aegean islands in the late eighteenth century. It was the paper's unspectacular contention that the economy of the Aegean in this period saw some improvements, which I linked to an array of causes, ranging from the 1774 Treaty of Kutchuk Kainardji to the policies of various mainland Ottoman governors, among them Ali Pasha. After the conference I was accosted by an apoplectic man who said

to me sarcastically: “Po, po, ton agapas poli! Ti, na ton agiaseis theleis?” (My, my, you love him a lot! What do you want, to canonize him?). As a historian, one scarcely knows where to begin by way of an answer to such a question. It is in the nature of the nationalist mind-set to be binary; if I was not defending Ali, then surely I was on the Greek side. Otherwise, I was clearly a Turkish apologist. If Ali was not to be made into a saint, then he should be demonized instead. It is not such a stretch of the imagination to see in such attitudes shadows of the tragic circumstances of so-called religious nationalism just beyond Greece’s northern borders.¹

This Manichaean vision finds its academic replication in a similar bifurcation, witnessed in the body of scholarship pertaining to the Balkans under Ottoman rule. In one camp stand those who argue that the nationalist tensions of the Balkans were created by the so-called millet system of the Ottoman state, under which subject populations were bureaucratically subdivided according to religious affiliation. In the other are those who argue in the Ottomans’ favor, claiming that such tensions were preexisting and were kept effectively suppressed by the mechanisms of empire. According to the second viewpoint, the appearance and recurrence of such tensions in contemporary times can be linked directly to the absence of any unifying, all-embracing power.

In his introduction to a recent collection about this debate, L. Carl Brown rightly recognizes its polemical dimensions; he uses a metaphor of litigation in his reference to the two camps: “the prosecution (Ottoman legacy lying somewhere between the negative and the noisome) and the defense (continuing importance of certain Ottoman ideas and institutions).”²

Even the most cursory consideration of the problem thus construed is enough to show that both perspectives are laden with several troubling implications in terms of historiography and nationalism alike. The first implies, among other things, that the Ottomans are somehow to blame for the current crises; in the absence of any modern-day Ottomans wandering around, the Bosnians (among others) have constituted the handiest target for retribution.

The second position, which in contemporary scholarship has tended to enjoy greater popularity than the first, is just as easily given to national-

¹ I say “so-called” because the contemporary trend to attribute current conflict in the Balkans solely to religious causes is a dangerous one. Although religion is certainly mobilized as a useful *symbol* in national conflicts, it is often simply a smoke screen for the totalitarian impulses of specific individuals and groups. The current preoccupation with religious nationalism, moreover, creates the illusion of religious differences as being inevitably, hopelessly long-standing, entrenched, and irrational and helps any would-be interloper more easily shrug off any sense of responsibility for the ensuing horrors (Danforth 1995; van der Veer 1994; Denitch 1992; Denitch 1994; Bringa 1995).

² Brown 1996, 6.

ist abuses. Cemal Kafadar writes: "Most current historiography . . . tends to operate on the basis of a 'lid model' whereby at least some empires (the oriental ones?) are conceived as lids closing upon a set of ingredients (peoples) that are kept under but intact until the lid is toppled and those peoples, unchanged (unspoilt, as nationalists would like to see it), simply reenter the grand flow of history as what they once were. They may have experienced changes in terms of numbers and material realities but not in essence."³

It seems that nationalist rhetoric usually favors some combination of these two views. On one hand, the Ottomans (and, by extension, Islam) are blameworthy for having subjugated Christian and Jewish populations and rigidly hierarchized society according to religion. On the other hand, nationalists favor a model that assumes a fairly high level of societal compartmentalization, as such models allow for the illusion that religious and cultural syncretism is a nonexistent feature of their national histories.

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It is certainly not this book's aim to serve as an apology for Ali Pasha. It is its aim, however, to focus attention on an individual who played a significant role in Ottoman, Balkan, and modern Greek history and who was a critical point of contact between western Europe and the Ottoman East in the latter half of the eighteenth and the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Greece in particular and the Balkans in general served not just as a geographic bridge but also as an economic and cultural one between western Europe and the Ottoman Empire. When the West spoke of the Orient, in many instances it based its vision not on the Far or Middle East but on the Balkans—a territory that was technically European. Ali's prominent role in the cultivation of the European romanticist, philhellene, and Orientalist sensibilities of the eighteenth century has long been overlooked.

So too has the part Ali Pasha played in the early stages of the Greek War of Independence, which broke out in Ali's lands just months before his death. The fact that both this insurrection and the failed uprising of 1770 had their geographic origins in territories under his sway is no coincidence.⁴ Greek nationalists may be made uncomfortable by the notion that the success of the Greek revolutionaries depended in no small part on Ali's presence, but to fail to recognize this is to miss a significant dimension of the historical and cultural climate that gave birth to the mod-

³ Kafadar 1995, 21.

⁴ For the international and cultural context of the 1770 insurrection, see Constantine (1984, 168–85).

ern Greek nation-state.⁵ There can be no doubt that Ali's declaration of independence from the Porte (the Ottoman government) provided an opportune occasion for the Greeks, too, to try their hand at freedom.⁶ The ensuing Ottoman battle against Ali created an opportunity for Greek revolutionary rhetoric to be put into action. Indeed, one contemporary observer asserted: "It cannot be doubted that the declaration of the Porte against Ali was the immediate cause of the Greek insurrection."⁷

Ali's own conflict with the Porte tied up huge numbers of Ottoman imperial troops even while his infamy in the West encouraged European philhellenes to enlist in the battle against the Ottomans, a battle that, Ali's own attempt at secession notwithstanding, was widely perceived as a battle of Greeks against Ali. Thus both diplomatic and cultural history are necessary routes of inquiry for the study of this period in general and Ali Pasha of Ioannina specifically.

I hope that this book will make some small headway into an often-neglected period of Greek history and an often-ignored geographic terrain. It is a hybrid—part diplomatic history, part cultural history, part theoretical excursus—and I hope that in the attempt to cover such an array of approaches I have not fallen between a number of stools. Ideally, I intend to demonstrate that cultural and diplomatic history are not mutually exclusive; neither are Middle Eastern and European studies. Geographically bound categories of study are particularly frustrating to the Balkanist, and I can think of no focus of inquiry more amply poised to prove the relevance of the Balkans to both the East and the West than Ali Pasha of Ioannina. In any event, the fact that such nationalist discourses find their parallels—unwitting or not—in the pages of scholarship is worth the historian's attention.

Diplomatic and Cultural History

The turn of the eighteenth century marked perhaps the pinnacle of western European fascination with the Islamic East, as well as the birth of a widespread western European philhellene sentiment,⁸ a sentiment that persists to this day⁹ and that had a powerful impact on Greece.¹⁰ These

⁵ For an analysis of the historical and cultural climate of the revolution's early stages in the contexts of Wallachia and Moldavia, see Otetea (1966, 379–94).

⁶ Skiotis 1976.

⁷ Leake 1826, 38.

⁸ Malakis 1925; Eisner 1991; Augustinos 1994; Silvestro 1959; Spencer 1954; Woodhouse 1969; Tsigakou 1981.

⁹ Gourgouris 1996; Woodhouse 1992; Marchand 1996.

¹⁰ Stoneman 1984, 1–15; Campbell and Sherrard 1968, 385; Augustinos 1994, 288.

two features of the early nineteenth century's intellectual-cultural landscape conspired to make Ali Pasha a focus of particular and concentrated interest.

Ali Pasha was the Ottoman-appointed governor of Ioannina, in Greek Epiros, from 1787 until his dismissal by the Ottoman Porte in 1820. From Ioannina, Ali ruled over a territory that when combined with the neighboring *paşaliks* (gubernatorial districts) of his sons covered almost the entirety of what today is mainland Greece. Only Athens and the surrounding portions of Attica were not under his control. Ali was thus the most immediate eastern neighbor of western Europe. This proximity had tremendous implications, both political and cultural, for the relationship between western Europe and the Orient, of which Ali's Greece was, in the eyes of western Europe, decidedly a part.

From a diplomatic standpoint, this proximity brought Ali in direct communication with the governmental representatives of various western European countries. Britain and France in particular established close diplomatic relations with him, and he in turn was eager to forge alliances with them, even when (or perhaps precisely because) those alliances were in direct contravention of the official diplomatic stance of the Ottoman state. Both Britain and France had consuls resident in Ioannina, both were eager to have Ali's approbation, and both clearly understood the pasha to be a major factor in the geopolitics of the day.

France was Epiros's closest neighbor, for the 1779 Treaty of Campo Formio gave to the French control of the Ionian Islands, and Napoleon's 1805 victory over the Austrian forces at the Battle of Austerlitz resulted in the French possession of Dalmatia. Britain, Russia, Venice, and Austria also came into close contact with Ali's territories, and the nature and content of the diplomatic negotiations between these powers and Ali effectively demonstrate that at the turn of the century he was regarded, as he wished to be, as a *de facto* sovereign political entity.¹¹ These negotiations make clear, too, that western Europe was discomfited by Ali's economic and military strength, and recognized him as a potentially formidable foe.

Whereas much of the Ottoman historiography of the last several decades casts the regional Ottoman governors of the Balkans as representatives of Ottoman weakness, "decline," and supposed ignorance of Western statecraft, Western diplomatic materials from the turn of the

¹¹ A Greek revolutionary tract of 1809 cited Ali's virtual independence from the Porte as clear evidence of Ottoman decline: "The Ottoman state finds itself today in its death throes, and can be compared to a human body, gripped by apoplexy. . . . Such is the tyranny of the Ottomans today, that in regions other than the capital it is not recognised to exist. . . . Take as . . . example, the tyrant of Ioannina [Ali], who, although he does not manifest it, all know well enough that he is not afraid, and that he never obeys the command of his Sultan" (Clogg 1976, 115).

eighteenth century suggest a more nuanced perspective. Such regional governors as Ali in Ioannina and Mehmet Ali in Egypt certainly represented a threat to Ottoman absolutism, but they hardly gave Europe an impression of vulnerability or weakness. In the case of Ali, for instance, France and Britain felt, if anything, a sense of threat, and clearly they perceived that he had the upper hand in diplomatic dealings for the better part of a quarter century. The more general backdrop of Ottoman decline should not overshadow the not insubstantial strength of a number of the empire's regional governors. Such governors were not merely symptoms of Ottoman weakness; in and of themselves they represented a new and fearful power in the path of Western designs on Ottoman territory.

Culturally, the implications of Ali's proximity to the West were twofold. First, this proximity meant that Ali became the most accessible and popular figure for fashioning the Orientalist¹² genre of literature then wildly popular in western Europe.¹³ Second, the fact that Ali was in control specifically of Greece, a place to which the West also laid some sort of claim, meant that he played host to a huge number of Western travelers interested not in him but in the supposed vestiges of Greek antiquity contained within his lands.

The French and particularly the British fascination with the ostensible founts of Western civilization had, of course, a long and revered history; so much so, in fact, that travel to Italy was a virtually institutionalized feature of the education of gentlemen of a certain class. This phenomenon has been well documented.¹⁴ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, scions of the upper classes were expected to travel to France, Switzerland, and, especially, Italy, then considered the apogee of proximate otherness and the site of the roots of European civilization. By the end of the seventeenth century, this circuit had become so standard that it was given its own name; "the Grand Tour" had become a requisite chapter in an Englishman's education.¹⁵ The eighteenth century saw unprecedented numbers of travelers, most with tutors in tow, set off for Italy and the surrounding lands.

By the century's end, however, Greece came to supplant Italy as the most popular destination of the gentleman-traveler. The reasons for this are complex and numerous, but one is obvious: the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815) brought a necessary and abrupt halt

¹² Throughout this book I use the term *Orientalism* in its Saidian sense (Said 1979).

¹³ Hugo 1829; Morier 1951; Davenport 1823; Davenport 1837; Byron 1901; Jókai 1897; Christowe 1941; Farwell 1981; Behdad 1994; Eisner 1991; Sharafuddin 1994.

¹⁴ Augustinos 1994; Constantine 1984; Eisner 1991; Malakis 1925; Tregaskis 1979; Tsiakou 1981.

¹⁵ This expression is found for the first time in R. Lassels's *Voyage of Italy*, published in London in 1670. It was rapidly adopted into common parlance (Tregaskis 1979).

to all travel in France and Italy.¹⁶ English travelers were forced to venture beyond these familiar routes,¹⁷ and Greece presented itself as the most logical educational alternative. In addition, the increasing sense of Ottoman decline, fostered during the eighteenth century by such popular writers as Dimitrie Cantemir (whose “insider” account of the Ottoman administration was widely read in Europe), made curious travelers eager to visit.¹⁸

Other, more subtle factors, too, contributed to the rise in popularity of travel to Greece. In *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal*, David Constantine has effectively demonstrated that even before the Napoleonic Wars, Greece was gaining in popularity over Italy as an educational travel destination.¹⁹ Piracy in the Mediterranean was on the decline, and the establishment of Ottoman supremacy throughout the Greek islands following the 1669 Siege of Candia contributed to the overall safety of the region. Moreover, the strengthening of French and British mercantile relations with the Ottoman Porte facilitated travel in the area.

Cultural concerns, too, contributed to this gradual shift in the Western traveler’s itinerary. By the eighteenth century some were beginning to feel that Italy was a bit too much “done,” not exotic enough or far enough off the beaten track to provide the traveler with the desired sense of adventure and apprehension of Otherness. Moreover, there was increased interest in the classical civilization of Greece and the developing sense that Italy was but a poor imitation of the real thing. As Flaubert wrote after his first visit to Greece, “The Parthenon spoiled Roman art for me: it seems lumpish and trivial in comparison. Greece is so beautiful.”²⁰

Such comments arguably constitute one version of Orientalism. Flaubert’s stance is authoritative, his dismissal of Roman art striking in its completeness, and his embrace of the Hellenic aesthetic paternalistic in its simplicity. But whereas so-called Orientalist discourse has most frequently had as its backdrop colonialism and Western imperialism, such mechanisms of Western political control are absent in the preponderance of the lands of the Ottoman Empire. They are completely lacking in the instance of the southern Balkans. Rather, in the territories with which this book is concerned the backdrop for discourse is travel—specifically, travel to “classical” Greece.

¹⁶ Eisner 1991. On the demise of the Grand Tour and the Napoleonic Wars, see chapter 4 of Eisner’s work, which is particularly relevant. See also Tregaskis 1979.

¹⁷ There were, of course, early British and French travelers to Greece, but they became numerous only after the start of the Napoleonic Wars made travel in Italy untenable. For an excellent overview of early French travelers to Greece (1550–1750), see Augustinos (1994).

¹⁸ Dakin 1955, 6. Cantemir (1673–1723) was Peter the Great’s publicist, and his account of Ottoman decline was widely translated and read in Europe (Cantemir 1734–35).

¹⁹ Constantine 1984.

²⁰ Flaubert 1979, 1:137.