

Copy

No 35

Jerusalem
2 Dec 1847

My Lord

I have to report that in the Church at Bethlehem most innocent disturbances have frequently arisen of late, even personal fighting of the Greek and Latin monks and clergy.

Some months ago an altercation arose about the removal of a curtain for a few inches, which divided the altar from the Greek sanctuary. This matter was carried before the Pasha and Kadi who decided in favour of the Greeks.

A new Superior of the Latins for Palestine and Syria having recently arrived he almost immediately ordered the demolition of certain erections which the Greeks had commenced about the church at Bethlehem, which the Latins declare to be encroachments upon an ancient burial ground: this disturbed the town afresh, and the Pasha was called on to

St. Palmaria
8 Oct.

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The Consul Prime

No 18

S. Buckman

Recd

to decide.

Since then an altercation has taken place between the monks and clergy of the two leading Communities (the Armenians who also have property in the Convent and Church, always siding with the Greeks) the origin of which is difficult if not impossible to arrive at: during which they fell to blows with large staves and bars of wood, and a Bishop of the Greeks was much hurt.

The laity of Bethlehem rushing in, either to assist or separate the combatants, were expelled from the scene as having nothing to do in the affair, and the doors were closed.

On the conclusion of this disgraceful scene, it was discovered that the silver plate in the Crypt which was believed to mark the spot of our Saviour's nativity had disappeared, having been wrenched by violence out of the pavement.

The Greeks accuse the Latins of having stolen it: and the Latins not only recriminate, but charge their clerical adversaries with having got up the quarrel in order to effect the theft during

its continuance, and to insert a new plate with a Greek inscription and Russian armorial ensigns in its place.

The silver plate was of the form of a star and is mentioned in Books of Travels as bearing the inscription *Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est.*

The question of the theft was brought before the Pasha, who of course considered it as one about abstracting a certain value of silver, and found it difficult to decide which party was culpable.

But then came the Consul of France to interfere in the matter, in quality of Protector of Christianity in the East, or some such title, and demanded that previous to deciding as to the wronging or wronged party, the Latins should be allowed to replace the star with the same inscription either in silver or some less tempting metal.

A difference of opinion has in consequence arisen between the Excellency and the Consul of France: the former either by mistake or ignorance refusing to acknowledge the title: but whether he declined to accept the pretension, or whether he denied the fact of the French being Protectors of

Christianity, so long as by far the most numerous and influential Christians in the Turkish Empire, in various Sects, respect such Protection: It is not easy to ascertain by those not actual parties in the controversy — but the dispute was conducted in high language on each side, and is now referred to superior adjudication.

As to the stealing of the silver plate, who is one for a moment imagines it to have been done for the sake of the metal, because far more portable articles of silver, such as lamps and chains are always found in immediate proximity to that spot: it must have been done in that spirit of rivalry which is always urging one or other of the two parties to encroach upon the property of the other.

This species of property both in Bethlehem and Jerusalem consists of inches of marble if one may so speak without levity, minutely chronicled and jealously watched.

The place in the Crypt of Bethlehem believed to be that of the manger is confessed to be property of the Latins: while the place whence the inscription has been stolen, about two yards distant, is the floor of a small niche. Half way up this niche is a shelf or slab of marble made into an altar of the Greeks. This is confessed to be Greek

shelf or slab of marble made into an altar of the Greeks: this is confessed to be Greek property. Between this slab and the inscribed floor are several silver lamps always lighted: these are equally divided in number as Latin, Greek and Armenian property. It may have been therefore that formerly the whole of the niche was common property of all Christendom: but that by one step after another the two leading Sects had taken, one the floor of it, and the other a midway station. But the distribution has been for a long time before the memory of the present generation as I have had the honor to describe it above: and any attempt made to disturb claims of so long prescription by secret theft or open violence must be regarded as scandalous if not criminal.

The Latins do not seem to have been the aggressors: for I cannot conceive why they should wish to disturb the question of appropriation: whether their claim to the spot be disputable or be beyond reach of doubt: in the former case they would have been satisfied with actual possession of a Latin inscription there:

unlike indeed they might have calculated
upon having a public claim made into a
strong one by means of the very demand
which the Council of France is now making
- viz. to have it publicly explained in
Latin without examining any other
Question

Meanwhile I am glad that no
Subjects of Her Majesty have any share
in these transactions. And it is well
to remember that the principles of
Christianity are of more importance than
the possession of even the most consecrated
localities.

I have the honor

to be

Yours

J. F. Davis

Inference /
in Jerusalem
No 18

1847

Copy

No 36

My Lord

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Jerusalem
3 Dec 1847

I have the honor to report that
a new Bishop for Alexandria was
consecrated on Sunday last by the
Greek Patriarch in Jerusalem.

After consecration in the Church of
the Holy Sepulchre, he walked in
procession to the Convent, a considerable
distance, with large burning tapers and
incense before him, aspersions of rose
water &c.

The Moslem population looked on
with great anger, and were heard to
express loudly their discontent.

As this is said to be done in
violation of Capitulations made by the city
when conquered by the Turks, it seems
worth while to notice it, and it may be
productive

Robt Palmerston
S. C. B.