DISSENSION IN THE IONIAN ISLANDS: COLONEL CHARLES JAMES NAPIER AND THE COMMISSIONERS (1819-1833)

The question of dissension between Colonel Charles James Napier and the Lords High Commissioners of the Ionian Islands, Sir Thomas Maitland and Sir Frederick Adam, originates with and partly concerns the Greek Revolution (1821-1828). From 1819, there are signs of Napier’s philhellenic sentiments and Sir Thomas’s anti-philhellenism. This conflict is more fully exploited when Sir Frederick succeeds Sir Thomas as Lord High Commissioner in 1824. The conflict arising over the Greek Revolution is, however, only one aspect of several in the dissension that extended beyond 1828.

While serving as Inspecting Field-Officer of the Ionian Militia (1819-1822), Colonel Napier made four visits to the Court of Ali Pasha of Jannina. Ali Pasha, an Albanian satrap, was plotting a rebellion against Sultan Mahmud II, and requested Napier’s military advice and assistance. Napier encouraged the intriguing pasha, and suggested an advance of £1,000,000 to recruit Greek Kleptes and form an ordnance corps. In fact, Napier viewed the pasha’s scheme as an opportunity to expel every Ottoman Turk from Greece. English help in this plot, reasoned Napier, was mandatory, or else the Greeks might look to Russia for military assistance.

Colonel Napier would receive minor opposition from Sir Thomas on the matter of Napier’s philhellenism. Sir Thomas, like many others, regarded


Philhellenes as misguided romantics who were «fresh from college, and full of classic imaginings». The image of Greeks as virtuous patriots was, to Sir Thomas, utter hyperbole. Likewise, the Ionian Greeks thought even less of Sir Thomas. Even his first biographer, Walter Frewen Lord, described Sir Thomas as «dirty and coarse, rude in manner and violent in temper». «No one more uncongenial to the Ionians», wrote Lord, «could have been found».

Along with this unpleasantness, Sir Thomas had grown increasingly unpopular with his subordinates. The cession of Parga (1817-1819), a mainland dependency of the Septinsular Republic, had only resulted in the alienation of the Ionian Greeks and the complaints of the military. Sir Thomas himself expressed the opinion that the cession of Parga was unfortunate, though a necessary quid pro quo agreement: for the accession of Parga, the Porte would recognise de facto British suzerainty over the Septinsular Republic. Ali Pasha appeared as the main culprit in the accession when he objected to the method of transfer by the Resident, Lieutenant-Colonel C. P. de Bosset. Sir Thomas dismissed de Bosset, and the Resident at Zante, Sir Frederick Adam, completed the evacuation of Parga. De Bosset sued Sir Thomas for compensation and was awarded £100 damages (King's Bench: 15 July 1821). Despite the obvious guilt of Ali Pasha in this affair, Sir Thomas did not escape unscathed from the Parga dilemma.

Napier's appointment as Resident at Cephalonia (12 March 1822) would come at a rather unfortunate time. Sir Thomas's opinion of the Greek Revolution (6 March 1821) had further soured. The Lord High Commissioner complained of attacks upon Ionian shipping, massacres of Turkish prisoners, and the temporary arrest of the Vice-Consul for Patras. In fact, complained Sir Thomas, the mainland Greek insurrectionists acted «in the most Lawless and piratical manner». In response to the hostilities on the mainland, Sir Thomas disarmed the population on Corfu, Paxo and Ithaca.

In 1823, Lord Byron visited Cephalonia, and although he did not initially form a favourable impression of Napier, Byron did recognise Napier as an able soldier. In a letter to the London Greek Committee, Byron said of Napier that «a better or a braver man is not easily found». «He is», wrote Byron, «our man to lead a regular force, or to organise a national one for the Greeks. Ask the army! ask anyone!» By January 1824, Byron had persuaded Colonel Napier to sail for London for an interview with the Greek Committee.

When Napier arrived in London, he encountered official opposition. Under the statutes of the Foreign Enlistment Act, no British subject could join the forces of a foreign state, and Lords Canning (Foreign Minister) and Bathurst (Colonial Minister) could not be persuaded to waive the statute for Napier. To justify his position, Napier wrote to Lord Bathurst, stating: «if... your lordship's colleagues doubt my conduct, or wish for my place...»

4. W. Napier, Life, I, pp. 335-338. Byron also advised Napier to restrain any signs of crusading, because the Colonel's «ardour appeared to mislead his judgment». Quoted in George Finlay, A History of Greece, ed. by H.F. Trozer, 7 vols, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1877, VI, p. 325. Byron spent four months on Cephalonia, while Sir Frederick officiated for Sir Thomas. Sir Frederick pressed Napier for information on Byron: «Let me know what Lord Byron's instructions are —and what he is about». Adam to Napier, Corfu, 11 September 1823, PRO/CO 136/1309. Napier did not respond and Sir Frederick sent another despatch: «You don't tell me a word of Lord Byron or what his intentions are». Adam to Napier, Corfu, 12 October 1823, PRO/CO 136/1309. Again, Napier did not respond.
5. Napier had written: «Neutrality does not bother me». Quoted in W. Napier, Life, I, pp. 374-375. The Rt. Hon. Robert Peel stated that «it was perfectly fair that his majesty should have the power of preventing the enlistment of British officers in the service of foreign states...» Great Britain, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 2nd ser., Vol. XIII (1825), 1475.
to give a better man... let them use their acknowledged power to employ men they think best calculated for the King's service". In 1824, Napier faced a dilemma: resign his commission and citizenship in order to fight for Greece, or refrain from such activity. By 1825, however, the course was determined: the bondholders of the Greek Committee, despite Byron's recommendation, refused Napier's services. Napier was naturally disappointed, but he went on to write a new tract: "Greece in 1824" (London, James Ridgway, 1824).

Colonel Napier received little opposition from Sir Thomas, since the Lord High Commissioner was often too concerned with the administration of Malta and the reforming of the Septinsular Republic's archaic institutions. W. F. Lord comments that Sir Thomas was not uneasy with Napier's interest in the Greek Revolution, and that Napier "was at liberty to ruin himself for the Greeks, if he chose".

Despite Sir Thomas's casual attitude, the outward signs of Colonel Napier's dissent became conspicuous to a contemporary observer. Early in 1823, Julius van Millingen (Lord Byron's physician) remarked that of all the British administrators in the Ionian Islands, only Colonel Napier refused to participate in the "rancour and animosity" shown to the Greeks. Van Millingen, however, failed to mention that Sir Thomas had proclaimed the neutrality of the Ionian Islands soon after the initiation of the Greek Revolution. According to Sir Thomas, all Residents were not to receive any Greek corsairs, nor to engage in the insurrection. This was Sir Thomas' method to assure the Ottoman Turks that the British in the Ionian Isles would not

4. Lord, Maitland, passim. Napier, a nephew of Charles James Fox, had been appointed as Resident as a conciliatory measure with regard to Capodistria. Cf. Dakin, Philhellenes, pp. 46-48; and Woodhouse, Capodistria, p. 145.
involve themselves in the mainland hostilities\(^1\).

Colonel Napier's real nemesis proved to be Sir Frederick Adam. As Maitland's successor\(^2\), Sir Frederick (1824-1832) inherited the problems of Ionian administration; not a very attractive post. Meanwhile, the Greek insurgents were gaining success and infringements upon Ionian neutrality were frequent.

Sir Frederick had a long and distinguished career as a soldier; however, like his predecessor, Sir Frederick had experienced a legal dispute in the past. This incident occurred during the Napoleonic Wars, when Thomas Moore (a merchant) claimed personal and commercial loss against Sir Frederick in Alicante, Spain. Moore won the suit on the point of personal assault, but lost on the matter of commercial compensation\(^3\).

Also like his predecessor, Sir Frederick possessed no philhellenic sentiments. According to Sir Frederick's biographer, all British colonial administrators, diplomats and military officers in the Near East preferred the Ottomans and despised the Greeks. «The spirit of Philhellenism», wrote Alfred von Reumont, «has been only shared by independent noblemen, poets, and men addicted to classical studies»\(^4\). Sir Frederick was aware of these anti-Hellenic currents and could not change matters, even if he had such inclinations. In a speech to the Ionian Assembly, Sir Frederick condemned the mainland Greeks for perpetrating violations of Ionian neutrality (also British neutrality) and obstructing the commerce of the Seven Isles. Sir Frederick


2. Napier may have felt discouraged when Sir Frederick was appointed Lord High Commissioner. (Perhaps Napier coveted the post himself!) With his discouragement, Napier foreshadowed his eventual recall. In an account of his civil works projects on Cephalonia, Napier wrote that his purpose in writing was to describe and enlighten, so that «should any circumstance remove unexpectedly from the government of Cephalonia, my successors may pursue the same course . . .» Charles James Napier, *Memoir on the Roads of Cephalonia*, London, James Ridgway, 1825, p. iii. Colonel Napier went on to write that Sir Frederick showed «great activity, united with a thorough knowledge of the resources and wants of all the islands . . .» *Ibid.*, p. 47.


criticised the Ionian legislators for their cautious manner concerning such incidents and threatened all Greeks with the intervention of the Royal Navy¹.

Despite his threats, however, Sir Frederick tried to halt the mainland hostilities. During the siege of Missolonghi (April 1826), Sir Frederick attempted to mediate a truce between the Ottoman and Greek forces, but Ibrahim Pasha refused to accept Sir Frederick's offer and the Greeks followed suit². One month later, Sir Frederick held a conversation with John Capodistria. In response to Capodistria's enquires about Ionian neutrality and the frequent Ottoman violations, Sir Frederick stated: «I am bound by strict neutrality». Capodistria retorted: «What about Nelson at Copenhagen?³. Such experiences produced disillusionment, and Sir Frederick did not forget these incidents⁴.

Ionian neutrality, first declared by Sir Thomas, was reasserted by Sir Frederick. The Treaty of London (6 July 1827) defined British, French and Russian policy towards the Greek Revolution by imposing a truce —with force, if necessary— upon the Greeks and Ottomans⁵. Intransigence and ambiguous instructions on the part of both the three powers and the Porte resulted in the naval battle at Navarino (20 October 1827), thus placing Ionian neutrality in an embarrassing light⁶. In a dispatch to Napier, Sir Frederick reaffirmed Ionian neutrality and ordered Napier to deny clearance to all Ionian ships that intended to embark for Ottoman ports in the Morea⁷.

Ionian neutrality was a major concern of Sir Frederick; however, this

1. Adam to Ionian Assembly, Corfu, March 1825, PRO/CO 136/28; Adam to Horton, Corfu, 15 April 1824, PRO/CO 136/26; and Adam to Strangford, Corfu, 5 August 1822, PRO/CO 136/20.


4. Sir Frederick later refused Capodistria's request to visit his family on Corfu (February 1828). Cf. Woodhouse, Capodistria, pp. 334, 342.


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concern only generated more responsibility for the Island Residents. Within the Greek Provisional government were some former Cephaloniotes, and Sir Frederick requested Napier to procure information on these heterocktons. Furthermore, Napier was instructed to secure these facts (there were nine questions) (without any publicity or direct application)\(^1\). Napier had experience in clandestine missions; however, by 1829—with the conclusion of the Greek Revolution—Napier was more concerned with road construction, rather than obtaining information about former Cephaloniotes.

Once again, Colonel Napier's dissent and his military ability was noticeable to a contemporary observer. In January, 1828, the American philhellene, Colonel Jonathan Peckham Miller, docked at Cephalonia and was quarantined by Napier. After the normal twenty-five days isolation, Miller met Napier (February 21) and later remarked that Napier «appeared to be a man of good sense and much discernment ...»\(^2\). Eleven days later, Miller read Napier's *War in Greece* and *Greece in 1824*, thus stating that «it is to be regretted that a man like Col. Napier should not have sufficient encouragement ... to ... assume the chief command in Greece, which has heretofore been held by ignorant Palikars or conceited coxcombs ever since the commencement of the revolution»\(^3\). Perhaps Napier's dissent was now transformed, as interpreted by Colonel Miller, into frustration.

With the passing of Napier's dissent on the Greek Revolution, the disension between Sir Frederick and Colonel Napier occurred over the domestic administration of Cephalonia\(^4\). Colonel Napier was entrusted with road construction on Cephalonia, and apart from the natural obstacles, the main difficulty was forcing the Cephaloniotes to assist in the construction. Napier instituted the dreaded *corvée* thus remarking that no one, except paupers,

4. In 1827, Sir Frederick ordered Napier to reduce the expenditure concerning Cephalonian administration. In the last paragraph of the despatch, Sir Frederick wrote: «I expect on your part not only the fullest participation in my views, but that you will understand I expect your information will be given on the principle of the most entire and unreserved candour, and that your Statement will be upon honour one between Man and Man, never thinking of providing for the individual ...» Adam to Napier, Corfu, 11 December 1827, PRO/CO 136/1273.
were exempt: «nobles, priests, peasants, all work or pay according to their means»¹. According to Napier, the price of labour and food was so extraordinary, that the corvée was equally distributed among all classes of Cephalonian society. Napier estimated that if the corvée were rigorously enforced, the road construction would only require four years labour; however, he lamented, this was not always so, and no less than eight years would likely be required².

Eventually, Sir Frederick’s disapproval of Napier’s methods reached Cephalonia. Napier’s use of the corvée, which affected all Cephaloniotes, angered the nobility and they complained to Sir Frederick about Napier’s methods. A memo to Napier was despatched, directing the Resident to ease his expectations and to delay the rate of road construction³. To Napier, such instructions were repugnant: why should he postpone progress to appease an indulgent population —especially that of the Cephaloniote nobility? Colonel Napier, after all, was chosen for his firmness in dealing with arrogant and intriguing opportunists; the Ionian nobility was infamous for its duplicity⁴. Sir Frederick instructed Napier to ease the corvée system and proceed with road construction on a «modest scale»⁵.

Sir Frederick felt that Napier’s methods, especially the corvée, alienated all classes of Cephaloniote society. «There is nothing more galling to the peasantry», wrote Sir Frederick, «than the forced labour . . . not only because it is of itself the most irksome of all obligations but also from the impossibility of the pressure falling in fair proportion upon the several Classes . . .». The Lord High Commissioner continued with: «There is nothing more vexatious to the Landholders than the Road Contribution because they are obliged to declare to the municipality their Incomes, and because they consider contributions as a land Tax . . . and lastly because it is a direct one»⁶. Napier’s system, where all either worked or paid rates, was not —according to Sir Frederick— bureaucratically expedient; too many complaints from the Cephaloniotes had been received at Corfu, thus reflecting upon Sir Frederick’s administration. Sir Frederick suggested moderation in road construction, and a relaxation of the corvée amendments⁷. Moderation and relaxation, however, were not inherent characteristics for Colonel Charles James Napier.

2. Ibid.
3. Rudsdell to Napier, Corfu, 28 December 1829, PRO/CO 136/1275.
5. Rudsdell to Napier, Corfu, 28 December 1829, PRO/CO 136/1275.
6. Adam to Napier, Corfu, 28 December 1829, PRO/CO 136/1275.
To increase the dissension, Napier was finally ordered to gather statistics and to report on the expenditure of administering Cephalonia\(^1\). As illustrated in his earlier tracts and memoirs, Napier was very thorough in gathering statistics; however, in 1829, Napier was rather slow in executing Sir Frederick’s orders. A dispatch was sent to Napier, reminding him of earlier orders and stating that the “public Service has been much impeded in consequence of the delay in their transmission”\(^2\). Napier, concerned with personal problems and the conclusion of the Revolution, gave little thought to any delays and prepared to embark for England\(^3\).

Since his wife was considerably ill, Napier accompanied her on a ship for England (February 1830). Napier’s first stop was Corfu where Sir Frederick told the Colonel: «Good bye, Napier. Stay as long as you please, but remember that the longer you stay the worse for us»\(^4\). With Napier’s absence, however, Sir Frederick underwent a radical change of sentiment. Road construction on Cephalonia was ordered to halt, and four months later, — after a religious disturbance — Sir Frederick seized Napier’s public papers and filed seventy charges with the Colonial Office against Napier\(^5\).

Sir Frederick only pressed charges and recalled Napier when the Resident was in England\(^6\). The Lord High Commissioner reduced the number of charges to nineteen which were, at the time, kept secret\(^7\). Colonel Napier had no cognizance of the charges, and instead, wrote to Sir Frederick — upon the Lord High Commissioner’s arrival in London — asking him to clarify matters, especially those which occurred on Cephalonia. Sir Frederick’s response was quick, but not conciliatory. Lieutenant Rudsdell, Sir Frederick’s secretary, replied that the Lord High Commissioner did not feel obligated to account for his conduct on Cephalonia: what occurred there was Sir Frederick’s concern\(^8\). Napier next wrote to Lord Goderich, Secretary of State for War and Colonies (1830-1833), where Napier expressed his displeasure at Sir Frederick’s actions.

1. Circular no. 137, 21 September 1829 and Circular no. 141, 9 January 1830, both in PRO/CO 136/1275.
2. Rudsdell to Napier, Corfu, 8 February 1830, PRO/CO 136/1275.
3. Napier’s civil works projects were continued by others: Cf. Report of W. Worsley, in PRO/CO 136/1275.
5. Ibid. Cf. Bruce, Napier, p. 108.
6. Rudsdell to Napier, Corfu, 20 December 1830, PRO/CO 136/1276.
"I am," wrote Napier, "an old colonel in the service. I filled one of the highest offices in the Ionian Islands for many years; an office which I... had been ordered to assume by Sir Thomas Maitland." Napier then stated that his recall was punishment "unjustly inflicted, not only in my absence and without being heard in my own defence, but without my having the most distant idea of what I was accused, by whom I was accused, or that I was accused at all!" Napier concluded by demanding to be reinstated to his former post at Cephalonia. In the meantime, Sir Frederick was received by King William IV and this prompted Napier to address further letters to Lord Goderich (9 and 11 December 1831), both of which failed to generate any interest.

Napier's next resort was to publish his grievances, which he did in the study: *The Colonies: Treating of their Value Generally — Of the Ionian Islands in Particular* (London, Thomas and William Boone, 1833). Without actually knowing the specific charges brought against him, Napier surmised the offences. Among other charges, specific offences included: insubordination, sedition, arbitrary conduct and administration, disrupting morale, incompetence, aiding clandestine agents, and abusing the Orthodox clergy. Napier's justification to these charges were all punctilious: insubordination was frustration at having no chance to explain his actions; sedition was only a verbal disapproval of King William's accession; arbitrary conduct was the only effective method of administration in Cephalonia; disruptive morale was already inherent in the Cephaloniotes; the charge of incompetence was a falsehood; there were no clandestine agents —all were administrative personnel; and the Orthodox clergy were within the limits of the corvée— they paid rather than worked. Napier's rebuttal to Sir Frederick's charges were the expected answers; however, both the charges and answers (in fact, recriminations) were far from precise. That Napier was guilty of insubordination is quite correct, but the verity of the other charges and Napier's justification are far more difficult to ascertain.

Apart from the charges, Colonel Napier placed some emphasis on a speech that Sir Frederick delivered on Cephalonia. According to Napier, this speech included some of Sir Frederick's charges, as well as some criticisms that Sir Frederick used against Napier. In his book: *The Colonies...*, Napier conveniently excluded a copy of this speech —if such a speech exist-

ed!— and substituted a second speech which Sir Frederick delivered to the Cephaloniotes in the autumn of 1830. In this particular speech, Sir Frederick only alluded to Colonel Napier in the concluding paragraph:

«I have the highest esteem and affection for Colonel Napier, and have the honour of being a friend of his; and perhaps my feelings of friendship have induced me to think too favourably of some of his measures, but I certainly feel, and every one must see, that if the good which he has rendered to Cephalonia was put in the balance against the evils, the good would indefinitely, most indefinitely, over-balance them»1.

As indicated above, there was very little in Sir Frederick’s speech that was either harmful or derogatory to Colonel Napier. According to Napier, Sir Frederick delivered an earlier speech on Cephalonia, but this speech is not extant, while the second speech is rather unharmful. It appears also that Sir Frederick pressed his formal charges against Napier when both men were in England, and perhaps the damaging speech which Sir Frederick is alleged to have delivered really took place in London. In spite of the speculation, Colonel Napier made very little effort to relate the events in a concise manner. Napier could only write that «Multiplied mediocrity had beaten individual genius»2.

The question of fault in the dissension between Colonel Napier and the Lords High Commissioners has been related by biographers and historians; however, their pronouncements cannot be fully related here3. It should be noted that Colonel Napier himself considered Sir Thomas as an able soldier

2. Quoted in Butler, Napier, p. 74. The years 1828 to 1832 were a burden for Sir Frederick and he soon resigned after Capodistria’s assassination. Cf. von Reumont, Adam, pp. 41-44; and John A. Petropoulos, Politics and Statecraft in the Kingdom, of Greece, 1833-1843, Princeton, University Press, 1968, pp. 107-150.
and a strong administrator\textsuperscript{1}, whereas Napier labelled Sir Frederick as an imitator and a mediocre administrator\textsuperscript{2}. In the survey of pronouncements, Viscount Kirkwall has suggested that Colonel Napier was ill-suited for a post that demanded submission to authority;\textsuperscript{3} however, such reasoning is merely sympathetic.

Instead, the conclusions reached by Professor Dakin and William St. Clair are, though cynical, far more observant. Although both scholars have overlooked the dissension, they have interpreted Napier's moves as a deliberate attempt to ingratiate himself with the Greek insurgents. As a soldier and a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, Napier was accustomed to sanguinary commands, and he viewed the Revolution as a chance to gain both glory and destiny\textsuperscript{4}. Napier's plans were, however, too calculated and selfish: his persistent efforts to obtain a command failed where many philhellenes with lesser abilities and romantic inspirations succeeded. In his disillusionment, Napier neglected his civil responsibilities and interpreted his superiors' orders with rancour and fears of a threat to his Residency on Cephalonia\textsuperscript{5}.

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Napier wrote that Sir Thomas «was a rock; a rock on which you might be saved, or dashed to pieces; but always a rock». Napier, \textit{Colonies}, p. ix.
\item[2.] Napier speculated that Sir Frederick, had he possessed any wit, would have suited the ladies of the Court of King Charles III. Napier, \textit{ibid.}, pp. 70-77.
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