CHAPTER 2

Long-Distance Empathy and Denominational Competition

While Kaiserswerth had established a station in Jerusalem to symbolically occupy the “Holy Land,” its move to Beirut in 1860 followed a seemingly different rationale: that of humanitarian intervention. In the last days of May in 1860 – four years after Sultan Abdulmecid I. had proclaimed the second major reform edict, violence broke out almost simultaneously in different parts of Mount Lebanon. Intercommunitarian relations had deteriorated long before on account of the complex interplay between Western interventionism, Egyptian and Ottoman reforms, and local aspirations for autonomy. In the spring and summer of 1860, peasants rose against feudal lords, Druzes and Christians of the various sects alike. Violence developed into massacres with thousands of predominantly Christian victims. Soon after these scenes had ended, tumult broke out in Damascus in the beginning of July, where many Lebanese Christians had fled. Within a few days, thousands were killed. Again, streams of refugees made their way to the Syrian coast, above all to Beirut. In what would be the first modern large-scale Western intervention on behalf of Ottoman Christians, French troops, European diplomats, and a host of

1 Although the events of 1860 form an important lieu de mémoire in the national history of Syria and Lebanon, few monographs examine them in depth. Samir Khalaf, a social scientist, interprets the events as an expression of “uncivil violence.” Id.: Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon. A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 85–102. According to historian Caesar E. Farah, they resulted from European politics of interventionism as much as from the destruction of the Lebanese feudal system through Ottoman politics. Id.: The Politics of Interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830–1861 (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 2000), 554–602. Leila Tarazi Fawaz considers the conflict a response to growing socio-economic inequities in Syrian society rather than as a religious conflict (Id. (1994)). According to Ussama Makdisi, the sectarian tensions underlying the conflict were unleashed by the coincidence of Ottoman reforms on behalf of non-Muslims, Western colonialist and missionary aspirations, and a local quest for autonomy. They were therefore not the expression of age-old enmities, but a fundamentally modern phenomenon (Id. (2000)).


Christian organizations, Kaiserswerth among them, made their way to this burgeoning port-city in the aftermath of the events. How did an initiative aimed at temporary help turn into a long-term initiative? How did the representation of events in Prussia, the interests of “men on the spot,” the ambivalent relations between Kaiserswerth and Catholicism, and missionary rivalries more generally impinge on this decision, and to which effect?

“Means to Reconstruct Their Cabins”: The Campaign on Behalf the Syrian Christians in 1860 Prussia

In most European countries, the Syrian massacres dominated the media for weeks. Although Prussia did not form an exception, events were certainly felt to be more remote than in either France or Britain, both nations, and particularly France, having closer relations with the Levant. While Prussia had established a Consulate in Beirut since 1842, it confined itself to a politics of strict neutrality in the region. Syria, therefore, was still a distant place in 1860 from a Prussian perspective. When first news about the massacres reached the Prussian capital, Freiherr von Schleinitz, the Prussian Secretary of State, was on holidays in Oostende and did not care too much about the matter. In the Prussian press, the events received a rather belated coverage. Even a major paper like the *Neue Preußische Zeitung* had no permanent correspondent in the region. Other than in France or Britain, it was not the Syrian events that dominated the headlines of

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4 Due to the little attention Western humanitarian interventionism in the Ottoman Empire has received so far, the Armenian massacres of 1895/96 are generally interpreted as the first series of events to have triggered this kind of concerted action. See, for instance, Nazan Maksudyan: “Being Saved to Serve: Armenian Orphans of 1894–1896 and Interested Relief in Missionary Orphanages,” in: *Turcica* 42 (2010), 47–89.


6 Instructions to the first Prussian consul were unambiguous in this respect: GStA PK III. HA II Nr. 752. Heinrich von Bülow to Louis von Wildenbruch, Berlin, 30.06.1842.

7 Ibid. III. HA I Nr. 7574. Alexander von Schleinitz to Albrecht von Bernstorff, Oostende, 25.08.1860.

8 For reasons of economy, the coverage on Syria was examined systematically for two periodicals only, the *Neue Preußische Zeitung* (henceforth: *NPZ*) and the *Neue Evangelische Kirchenzeitung* (henceforth: *NEK*), the papers Kaiserswerth communicated with most frequently. On the *NPZ*, the most important conservative newspaper in Prussia, see Dagmar Bussiek: *Mit Gott für König und Vaterland! Die Neue Preußische Zeitung (Kreuzzeitung) 1848–1892* (Münster: LIT, 2002),