The Burning of Smyrna: H. C. Jaquith’s Report to Admiral Bristol

Ilias Chrissochoidis

As royalist families in Athens were vying for court favors and government appointments on the return of King Constantine (December 1920),¹ hundreds of American citizens were struggling to relieve the persecuted Greeks of Anatolia. These were high-minded Christians of superb education (graduates of theological or medical schools) and moral integrity, which renders their testimonies of the Asia Minor catastrophe especially credible.

Exceptional among them was Harold Clarence Jaquith (ca. 1889–1943), director of the Near East Relief (NER) in Constantinople.² A native of New Hampshire, he was educated at Trinity College and Columbia University and received a Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary. He served as pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in New York City (1912) before undertaking humanitarian work overseas through NER. A trip to the Middle East, in 1919, opened the door for a string of administrative positions. Following a representation before the League of Nations in Geneva for the recognition of an Armenian state,³ he moved to Constantinople as regional representative of NER. His superb executive skills and deep knowledge of the area⁴ led to his promotion, in April 1921, as Managing Director of NER in Constantinople, putting him in charge of

¹ Arnold J. Toynbee reported to his wife, on 6/19 January 1921, that “The respective dismissals and reinstatements of officers and officials of either party since 1917 are the things that really interest people in Athens – far more than the financial situation or the Anatolian War.”: Ilias Chrissochoidis, “Arnold Toynbee before his Kemalist conversion: Unpublished correspondence from early 1921,” The Journal of Modern Hellenism (forthcoming).
³ “There has long been a peculiar bond of sympathy between the American people and these Armenian victims of Turkish cruelty and ruthless European imperialism.” H. C. Jaquith, “Armenian Reds Curbed by American Philanthropy,” The Current History Magazine (1925), 715–720: 720.
⁴ On December 11, 1920, for example, he was assigned a delicate mission to Batum’s NER station: https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/46780.
180,000 orphans and refugees. His herculean effort to rescue and alleviate refugees from Smyrna, in September 1922, drew international attention, and his pleas for help were widely reported in the American press.

In 1923, Jaquith was assigned the supervision of the settlement of hundred thousand Muslims from Greece to Turkey, for which he received top civil honors by both Greece and Turkey. Two years later he married Mary Harin (1898–1985), a Russian emigree in Constantinople who worked at NER and would later become one of the first simultaneous translators at the United Nations. In 1927, he was promoted as Associate General Secretary of NER and oversaw its transformation into the Near East Foundation. Moving back to New York in 1929, he continued his association with the foundation until 1933. The last years of his life were spent in academic executive positions in America. Prior to his death, in April 1943, he also got involved with the Greek War Relief Association (GWRA) as chairman of its campaign in New England.

The withdrawal of Greek troops from Smyrna (August 24/September 6) ahead of its capture by Turkish Nationalist forces set an alarm to foreign agencies in Anatolia for the evacuation of their citizens and the protection of its Christian population. Jaquith landed in the city on Saturday September 9 (August 27, OS), 1922, and sailed with an American destroyer on the 16th. He thus witnessed the tragic week from the arrival of the Turkish army until the end of the great fire. Returning to Constantinople, he produced a written deposition in answer to specific questions by Admiral Bristol, the U.S. High Commissioner in Turkey. His document was available to and quoted by Edward Hale Bierstadt in The Great Betrayal (1924), but has never been reproduced in public. A copy of it was found by this author at the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford University in January 2014, and is reproduced below in semi-diplomatic transcription. Although not included in the report, Bristol’s original questions can be reconstructed by the numbered answers as follows:

1(a) the conduct of Nationalist forces towards Smyrna’s population prior to the fire

---

6 See https://www.neareast.org/who-we-are/
8 Trinity College, Alumni News (March 1941), 13.
1(b) the conduct of regular troops after the fire broke out
1(c) “the action of the regular forces during the period of evacuation of the refugees.”
2(a) the attitude of civilian Turks after the arrival of Nationalist forces
2(b) “the attitude of the civilian population during the fire”
2(c) “the conduct of the Turkish civilian population and irregulars or Chettas since the fire”
3(a) the attitude of the “local non-Moslem population”
3(b) the attitude of the “Christian population” during the fire
3(c) “the conduct of the Greek and Armenian civilian population” after the fire
4 origins of the fire
5 “an estimate of the number of deaths in Smyrna during the first week of the Turkish Occupation”

Jaquith’s report of October 11, 1922, based on his personal diary, is one of the first non-governmental testimonies about the destruction of the historical metropolis of Hellenism. It confirms Smyrna’s burning as a premeditated crime to eradicate the city’s Christian element, and reinforces the credibility of other published American accounts on this event.11 Its documentary strength derives from the assumption that his answers will be “considered confidential.” In addition, Jaquith’s refusal to comment on events he did not personally witness in Smyrna does confirm the integrity of his account. If anything, it should justify the terminological shift from neutral descriptions (“Great Fire”) to ones that better reflect reality: the arson of Smyrna was a crime against humanity, and an strategic assault against Christianity in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Jaquith, H. C.
Letter to Admiral Mark L. Bristol,October 11, 1922,concerning events in Smyrna, September 9–16, 1922.[page]

October 11, 1922

Admiral Mark L. Bristol, U.S.A.,United States High Commissioner,

---

Mark Lambert Bristol (1868–1939). U.S. naval officer and the highest U.S. representative in Turkey, whose views and reports shaped American policy in Anatolia. Praised as a solid military officer, he was also severely criticized for his pro-Turkish stance. A short anthology of excerpts on his actions appears in Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 141–44. On September 10, Bristol had transmitted to Washington, D.C. a cable from Smyrna, co-signed by Jaquith, about a possible city-wide starvation due to ceased foodstuff imports: Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 44–45. Jaquith’s warning was shortly appeared in the New York Times: 13 September 1921, 3.
American Embassy, Constantinople.

Dear Mr. Bristol: —

I assume that the answers desired to the questions in your letter of September the 30th will be considered confidential. The answers are culled from my diary kept from the time of my arrival in Smyrna on the morning of September the 9th [August 27, OS] on the U.S. Destroyers [sic] Lawrence, to the time of my departure from Smyrna on the afternoon of September the 16th [3rd, OS], on the Destroyer Litchfield.

1. (a) The First Nationalist forces to enter Smyrna were the cavalry, well mounted, well disciplined. They made their appearance just before noon, Saturday September the 9th. During the entire afternoon Additional [sic] companies of cavalry troops arrived, and passed along the quay. Murcella Pasha stated that approximately 2,000 cavalrymen were in the city of Smyrna, arriving in Smyrna on Saturday afternoon. Large contingents [sic] of additional troops arrived on Sunday.

By Sunday noon there were ample military forces to adequately police all quarters of the city, but previous to the fire there was absolutely no effort made on the part of the Commander of the regular forces, Nurredin [sic] Pasha or the Commandant of the city, Kassim Pasha, to maintain regular patrols at regular places, or to police the city. Details of soldiers were sent upon special request and insistance [sic] of the American Naval Officer to the International College at Paradise, and to one or two other places where American interests were vital. Even the forces sent to Paradise did not prevent the looting of the community House connected with the college, or the personal assault on Dr. MacLacklin [MacLachlan] the President. After these two events additional forces were sent to the College. Even along the quay no regular patrols were

---

13 “CONSTANTINOPLE, Sept. 9 (By The Associated Press). […] H. C. Jacquith [sic], director of the Near East Relief, and Major Charles Clafin Davis, of Boston, Commissioner for the American Red Cross, left to-day for Smyrna aboard the U. S. S. destroyer Lawrence on a mission of relief to 200,000 terrified Greeks and Armenians, who fled from the interior to Smyrna[,] Director[,] Lawrence took considerable emergency supplies, including bread, flour, canned milk and meats.” New York Tribune, 10 September 1922, 1.

14 Nureddin Ibrahim Pasha (1873–1932). Turkish military officer. Held responsible for the massacre of Pontian Greeks in 1921, he also delivered Smyrna's Greek Archbishop Chrysostomos to the city's Muslim mob, thereby sanctioning his tragic murder.

15 For a photo album of the College, see http://www.levantineheritage.com/college.htm.

16 The Reverend Dr. Alexander MacLachlan (1858–1940). American missionary in Turkey and founder of Smyrna's International College. “In 1922, during the Smyrna disaster, he was severely wounded by brigands and spent a year in Greece recovering”: The New York Times, 9 September 1940, 15. Contemporary reports of the attacks he suffered by Turkish soldiers are reprinted in Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 48–49, 58, 105.
maintained, but the continual passing of troops had a tendency toward maintaining of order, and a resemblance of protection.

[handwritten red marking on left page margin] Wherever looting was seen, the regular troops were present and participating. [handwritten] Regular army wagons were being used to facilitate the movement of loot when too heavy for personal transportation. When leaving the konak after a conference, three days later the Regular Army had occupied Smyrna, we passed a large automobile filled with Turkish officers and loot, standing in front of the government buildings. Officers, as well as men [sic], shared in this phase of the Turkish Occupation. When [2] Nourredin [sic] Pasha was reminded of some of these phases of the Occupation, he answered: “But the Troops were promised.”

Before the fire the entire bazaar area was a complete wreck. At least four-fifths of all the Armenian Quarter had been opened and looted, and a large number of houses in the Greek Quarter. [handwritten red marking on left page margin] On the third day, five troops of regular soldiers visited the Refugee Camp adjacent to the Tobacco warehouse at the Point, and robbed all of the refugees, some thousands in number[,] of all their available money. Repeated efforts were made, formally and informally, requests were presented to Nourredin [sic] Pasha for places of safety for the refugees under the protection of Turkish regular soldiers; but the refugee camps were never established. [handwritten]

The main street from the Consulate to the Bostanjik Station passes through the Armenian Quarter. On the second day of the Occupation not less than thirty-five bodies were counted lying along this street. Practically all of the deaths apparently had occurred from rifle bullets.

The road from Smyrna to Paradise was also lined with bodies, apparently most of them victims of the first day on which the Turkish troops entered Smyrna. It is quite impossible to give anything that resembles a full report on the conduct of the regular troops, as no investigation was made relative to what occurred within the houses in the Armenian Quarter or in the less frequented streets.

The other principal occupation of the Turkish regular[s] seemed to be the gathering of all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, and marching them in large groups regularly towards the government prison.

1. (b) When the fire started[,] I was in the Smyrna Theatre, helping with the evacuation of the American citizens. Until the morning, I was on the Destroyer and it was

17 “H. C. Jacquith [sic], managing director of the Near East Relief, reported he and Major Claflin Davis of the American Red Cross had found congestion in Smyrna and the roads leading from the city even before the fire.” New York Times, 16 September 1922, 2.
quite impossible to observe the conduct of the Turkish regulars or irregulars during this period. It was reported that Turkish Troops were at either end of the quay, preventing the movement of refugees during the process of the fire. This may be true, although the actual presence of Turkish troops was quite unnecessary as the frightened people were held immovable by fear.

During the second and third days of the fire, there were no patrols established, no effort to maintain order, and no visible efforts to extinguish the fire. On the third day regular guards were stationed at intervals along the quay to prevent the passage of persons on or off the quay, without proper permits from the Commandant of the Port. The looting ceased during the fire, because practically all that remained, outside of the Turkish Quarter, was burned.

Mr. Jacobs and Mr. Fisher in their reports will give you full details relative to the action of regular troops towards American citizens both in looting and shooting.

1. (c) I have not been in Smyrna since the 16th, or what might be called the day after the fire. Consequently, I am in no position to make a statement relative to the action of the regular forces during the period of evacuation of the refugees.

2. (a) On the morning on which the Turkish Troops entered, several bands of local citizens or neighboring Turks passed along the street, parallel to the Quay, in the direction of the Turkish Quarter. These groups had a variety of fire arms, sticks and knives. Some apparently were without weapons. All were hilarious and their attitude threatening. No individual cases of violence were personally observed. During the succeeding days, local citizens fraternized with the soldiers, and men not in army uniforms were seen practically in all parts of the town where looting was in progress, sharing the spoils with the men in uniform. Some of the civilian population made more noise on the streets, than was made by the soldiers. Frequently small street fights occurred, many of them apparently as a result of personal spite on individuals, or as a result of the attempt of some particular individual to escape from arrest, or being robbed, or shot. It was difficult to discriminate between the soldiers and civilians many

---

18 Jake Jacobs, Y.M.C.A. director in Smyrna, who had been working “day and night since the beginning of the holocaust for the relief of the victims”. On September 10, 1921, while he was helping refugees at the quay, he was personally attacked, robbed, and shot at by Turkish soldiers (Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 115, 42).

19 Edward M. Fisher, worker at Smyrna’s Y.M.C.A.

20 “E. M. Fisher and E. O. Jacob[sic], directors of the Y.M.C.A. were held up and robbed by Turkish soldiers, and when attempting to escape were fired upon. The shots, however, went wild, and they reached a place of safety.” New York Times, 18 September 1922, 1; repr. Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 83.
times, although the soldiers in many places made every effort to monopolize the rewards of victory in the form of loot.

2. (b) During the fire much robbing of the refugees took place, there was little change in the attitude of the civilian population during the fire, from that which was rampant preceding the fire.

2. (c) As I have not been in Smyrna since the 16th, I cannot make a statement relative to the conduct of the Turkish civilian population and irregulars or Chettas since the fire.

3. (a) The local non-Moslem population was classified into two groups, the refugees who had come from the hinter-land and were seeking refuge or possible transportation, and the regular inhabitants of Smyrna. Only one incident occurred during the first day of the Turkish Occupation which was brought to my attention. A civilian, said to be an Armenian, threw a bomb at a Turkish officer riding at the head of a Company of Cavalry.

After the regular troops began to arrive there seemed to be a feeling of confidence or perhaps hope. The Chettas had not arrived, and there was an ample force of Regular Troops to maintain order. It was the hope and expectation of the major portion of the Non-Moslem population that the Occupation would be orderly, and in the main creditable to the Turkish Commander and Army. The arrival of the Turkish Troops was greeted by large throngs of all people on the quay, and resembled more a parade, rather than a victorious entrance to a conquered city.

As the Nationals of the Great Powers were being removed, [4] and the areas of looting and shooting spread, the people left their homes and sought refuge during the day along the quay, and at night in houses, squares and other protected places close by the quay, in order to secure at least the moral support, or what they considered to be the moral support of the American[,] British, French and Italian Navies in the Harbor. The local population was increasingly permeated with fear.

3. (b) During the fire the entire Christian population was at the mercy of the flames, and under most terrifying fear of the Turkish Troops and population. They were obsessed with but one idea, and that was escape. There were individual cases of heroism, and there were individual cases of extreme selfishness. During the day of the fire few men were apparently taken from their families, or from the crowd. There seemed to be a temporary cessation of activities on the part of the officials in the weeding out of men from eighteen to forty-five.

The first real effort at evacuation occurred on the first night of the fire, when possibly 20,000 people were placed on the steamers in the harbor, and transported to places of safety. The three following days [were] of unfulfilled hope and expectancy on
the part of the thousand [sic] of refugees remaining on the quay, eagerly looking for ships to take them out of Smyrna to some place of security.

3. (c) As I have not returned to Smyrna since the day after the fire, I cannot make a statement as to the conduct of the Greek and Armenian civilian population at that time.

4. The fire started in the Armenian Quarter from several places simultaneously. It was reported by the men assigned from the ship to act as guards at the Intercollegiate Institute that no effort was made to put out the fire, and that at least on one occasion Turkish Troops interfered with those who did make an effort in this direction.21

On every afternoon on which the fire started, a reporter of Chicago Tribune interviewed Moustafa Kemal Pasha, and during the course of the interview, after commenting upon the orderliness with which the troops had entered the city, suggested that it was reported that certain unfortunate incidents had happened within the houses, in the Armenian Quarter. Moustafa Kemal Pasha replied that the reporter could visit and enter any of the houses and that permission would be given him by the Commandant of City, Kassim Pasha.

Sitting on the stern of the Destroyer, twenty-five feet off the quay in the early evening, the smell of kerosene was distinctly noticeable. One of the members of the Relief Committee reported that he had placed his hands in what seemed to be suspicious liquid in front of the Consulate a short time previous to this period, and had remarked that the liquid was kerosene.22

[handwritten red marking on left page margin] During the first night of the fire, from the ship could be seen people who apparently moved along the quay, and with kerosene ignited the bundles of belongings of the refugees. These fires were clearly visible some distance ahead of the main fire. [/handwritten]

During the first two days of the fire, there was no visible attempt to extinguish the flames. On the second night of the fire anchored not far from the quay, Mr. Barnes23

21 This sentence was reproduced in Bierstadt, The Great Betrayal, 35–36.
22 This paragraph is reproduced in Bierstadt, The Great Betrayal, 36. On September 19, 1922, Fisher reported to the Associated Press: “The Turks had deliberately poured kerosene on the buildings. I saw a stream of kerosene running through the street on which the American consulate was located.” New York Times, 20 September 1922, 3. See also Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 62, 88. A. J. Hepburn reported to Admiral Bristol, on September 25: “The only direct evidence bearing upon this subject which came to my notice at the time was the statement of Vice Consul Barnes that he saw Turkish soldiers pouring kerosene in the street in front of the Consulate.” Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 153.
23 Maynard M. Barnes (1898–1970). U.S. Vice Consul in Smyrna. “Mr. Barnes entered the Consular Service as a clerk in the consulate at Patras, Greece, on August 26, 1919. Later he passed his examination and on May 25, 1921 was appointed Vice Consul of Career of Class 3. On October 18,
and myself sat on the deck of the Destroyer, and watched an individual silhouetted against the Custom House wall, because of flames which were repeatedly started, but which apparently failed to ignite the building. The position that this person occupied was within fifty feet of the quay, along which Turkish soldiers were passing constantly, and in full view of any one from the quay. After a period of perhaps twenty minutes the last fire or blaze which the person started apparently was sufficient to ignite the building, and within a few moments the entire structure was in flames. It would seem inconceivable that any person not in sympathy with the authorities could have remained in that vulnerable position for a period of twenty minutes, during which time he was constantly illuminating himself by the fire which he was attempting to start.

5. It is quite impossible to give an estimate of the number of deaths in Smyrna during the first week of the Turkish Occupation for the following reasons: The number of people actually seen dead on the main thorough-fare through the Armenian Quarter, or on the road from Smyrna to Paradise, or on the road from the Point Station to the Standard Oil Installation Plant, which are the most conspicuous places, would naturally be at the very minimum, and no criterion for judging the number of persons who met their death previous to the fire. 1st: Because these places were comparatively open, and the officials less willing to have evidence remain. The numbers of people who were killed in their homes or in back-streets or in shops, or during the process of looting, it is impossible to estimate. 2nd: Groups of men were continually being gathered from all parts of Smyrna and led under guard in the direction of the government prison. These were in addition to the Greek prisoners who came into the City of Smyrna with portions of the Turkish Army. It was impossible to obtain any report as to the disposition and final treatment of these thousands of civilian prisoners.

1921 he was assigned to the consulate general at Smyrna and on May 26, 1922, promoted because of efficient service from the office of Vice Consul of Class 3 to that of Class 2. Under the recommendation of the Secretary of State the President subsequent directed the promotion of Mr. Barnes from the grade of Vice Consul of Class 2 to that of Class 1 and transmitted his nomination to the Senate for a further promotion to the grade of Consul of Class 7, as a mark of appreciation of the character of Mr. Barnes’ services and as an incentive to his colleagues to put forth their best efforts in behalf of the loyal and effective protection of Americans and American interests abroad.” Levant Trade Review 11/5 (May 1923), 255–306: 272. Barnes was publicly praised for his courageous attitude toward the city’s refugees. “All other Americans in Smyrna were immediately placed on board, save Vice Consul Barnes and three Americans business men whose interests demanded they remain with the American relief workers.” New York Times, 15 September 1922, 1; repr. Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 67. “An extremely young man, he displayed courage, judgement and sagacity far beyond his years. He was a tremendous help to everybody.” New York Times, 18 September 1922, 1; Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 79.

24 “Vice Consul Barnes watched a Turkish officer leisurely fire the custom house and the passport bureau, while at least fifty Turkish soldiers stood by.” New York Times, 18 September 1922, 1; Hatzidimitriou, Smyrna, 81. This part of Jaquith’s report was cited in Bierstadt, The Great Betrayal, 34.
Immediately after the fire the road to Paradise was literally filled with women and children, together with older men, being led off under guard towards the Interior. The final destination, direction or disposition of these people has never been reported, although in a letter from Sivas dated the latter part of September a few deportees from the Smyrna region were passing through the City eastward.

In separate communications I have called the attention of the High Commissioner to the splendid co-operation and sympathetic services of the Naval Unites in Smyrna, with special mention of Captain Hepburn, Captain Rhodes and his Staff, Captain Knause and his Staff, together with the splendid assistance of the crews of the Litchfield, and in Simpson.

A separate letter was addressed to the High Commissioner relative to the courageous conduct of Chief Torpedo Mate Crocker of the Litchfield at the time Dr. MacLachlin was personally attacked by Turkish troops just outside the compound at the International College at Paradise.

I have further recorded the vote of appreciation on the part of the Executive Committee of the Near East Relief for the co-operation and assistance in the relief activities undertaken by the local committee in Smyrna, in conjunction with the Emergency Relief Committee from Constantinople, for the alleviation of the suffering caused by the defeat of the Greek Army, the Occupation by the Turkish Troops, and the fire.

If the State Department desires any fuller information on any point, referred to in the foregoing statement, I will be pleased to furnish it.

---

25 A few days later Jaquith reported in a cablegram: “At intervals Turkish soldiers are driving groups from the quay through the ruined city to unknown destinations in the interior. Many must die on the roadside before they go far.” *New York Times*, 22 September 1922, 2; repr. Hatzidimitriou, *Smyrna*, 94. Also reported in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 September 1922, 1.


27 “American sailors of the destroyer Litchfield snatched 450 orphaned boys from the fire and carried them safely to Constantinople. The jack tars slept on the iron decks or under torpedo tubes while the youngsters occupied their bunks. In all the acts of gallantry by the Americans at Smyrna there was none more inspiring than this. / While the orphans were being loaded on the Litchfield, H. C. Jacquith [sic], director of Near East Relief, who came here recently from Constantinople, diverted the attention of the Turkish guards, giving them cigarettes and talking to them in their native tongue.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 September 1922, 2.
