

Prelude to a Stronger Involvement in the Middle East: French Attacks on Beirut in the Years 1403 and 1520

ALBRECHT FUESS

ABSTRACT *The aim of this article is to explain the evolution of French Levant policy from crusade to diplomacy. Traditionally French policy towards the Levant was dominated by the hope of the Most Christian Kings to re-conquer the Holy Land from the “infidels” until the early sixteenth century. In the course of the sixteenth century this changed and a new approach of treating Muslim powers in the same way as Christian neighbours emerged. The reason why the latter concept became predominant shall be explained by showing the examples of two French attacks on Beirut in the years 1403 and 1520. Although both were initially undertaken in the spirit of the crusades, France reversed its policy in the aftermath of the 1520 failure and sought co-operation with a Muslim state. Severely threatened on several borders by Habsburg Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, France henceforth looked to the Ottomans as allies and gave up on further crusading projects. This reconsideration of its foreign policy aims culminated in the French–Ottoman treaty of 1536.*

Keywords: *Ottoman empire–politics; Mamlūks; France–politics; Beirut–Lebanon; Genoa–Italy; Naval policy; Boucicaut, Jean II Le Meingre, Marshal of France; Francis I, King of France; Post-Crusade history*

Introduction

The Franks became blind, deaf and careless, after they had been surprised. Then they were cut to pieces like meat on a chopping block. Some of them fled and others surrendered or plunged into the water out of despair and drowned like the people of the pharaohs.¹

These are the words of the author of a contemporary Arab *qaṣīda* on the 1520 slaughter of the French invaders of Beirut. The French campaign in the year 1520 was indeed a total disaster whereas the previous military expedition in 1403 had at least succeeded in sacking Beirut. However, both attacks failed to achieve long term consequences and the ambitious plan of recapturing parts of the Holy Land for Christianity in the name of the French King had to be abandoned.

It is the aim of the present article to analyse how the expedition of 1403 stood in the tradition of the old-fashioned French Levant policy, and how a turnaround of this policy occurred in the aftermath and the political circumstances of the 1520 attack. This article will place the actual attacks in their respective geopolitical context and explain differences as well as similarities. Furthermore it will show how the failed last crusader style attack of 1520 helped to encourage a new more diplomatic approach towards the Levant. This was quite a remarkable evolution if one considers the intense and enduring French crusading tradition.

After all, one has to keep in mind that it was in Central France where Pope Urban II (1088–1099) inaugurated the crusader movement with his famous speech ending with the exclamation “deus lo volt” (God wills it).² French knights like Godfrey de Bouillon, who was to become Advocate of the Holy Sepulchre after the conquest of the Holy City and whose family subsequently ruled over the kingdom of Jerusalem, had played a leading role in the founding of the crusader states. Three French kings, Louis VII (1137–1180) in 1148–1149, Philip II Augustus (1180–1223) in 1191 and Louis IX (Saint Louis) (1226–1270) in 1248–1254 travelled personally to the Levant during the times of the crusades, showing the great interest of the French crown in the “liberation” of the Holy Land from the hand of Muslim “infidels”.³ Although all of these French royal expeditions failed to achieve a long lasting success, the French influence was substantial in the formation of the crusader states right from the start in terms of internal structures like law courts, administrative institutions, etc.⁴

The term “Franci” (men from Northern France) was therefore used in the Christian West as well as in the Muslim East as general expression for “crusaders”.⁵

About 1300 writers began to assert that God has given France His special blessing and approval. As visible signs of His favour he had sent the Holy Ampulla, the lily and the oriflamme. The kingdom of France was equated with that of Israel; its people were described as the Second Chosen People. They were the descendants of King David who would one day return to Palestine.⁶

Given this religiously motivated crusade tradition it is no wonder that in the fourteenth century a pro-crusade propaganda was still very much alive in France, though somehow silenced by the outbreak and the ongoing of the so-called “Hundred Years War” (1337–1453) between England and France. Much of the French energy was tied by this struggle, although there were also calmer periods of truces in this long war, during which the Levant came back into the mind of the French military caste. Therefore French noblemen were very pleased when the Italian coastal town of Genoa offered allegiance to the French King Charles VII (1380–1422) in 1396. A French dominated union followed which lasted thirteen years.⁷ Suddenly France had a tool under its control which was missing during previous time periods, but which was absolutely necessary in order to operate in the Eastern Mediterranean: a powerful fleet, i.e. the Genoese fleet, and the French Marshal Boucicaut, who became governor of Genoa in March 1401, had apparently always dreamt to liberate the Holy Land.

This joint French–Genoese expedition was the first larger scale French military operation against the Syro-Palestinian coast since the days of King Louis IX in the mid-thirteenth century. Fortunately, Arab authors as well as French writers have left records describing this expedition. The accounts of the local Arab historian

Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā (d. after 840/1436)⁸ are reinforced by a biography of Marshal Boucicaut, written by an anonymous admirer under the title: “*Le livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut, mareschal de France et gouverneur de Jennes*”.⁹ Composed by a staunch supporter of Boucicaut and therefore presenting the events in a very positive way, the *livre des fais* has to be handled carefully if one has to rely on it as only source for a particular fact.¹⁰

The French failure of 1403 did not bring about a major adjustment in French attitude towards the Levant. Throughout the fifteenth century the Levant was still regarded as a possible target for a French crusader attack. The French paradigm change towards the Levant came in the aftermath of the French assault on Beirut in 1520. Although it was only a small adventure, it played an important role in shaping the future French policy towards the Syro-Palestinian coast. Moreover, it remained for centuries, until the ill-fated campaign of Napoleon at the end of the eighteenth century, the last French military operation against the Syro-Palestinian coast. The French expedition of 1520 is even better recorded in original sources than its predecessor hundred years before. In this case three different types of sources exist. We have Arabic contemporary historical sources,¹¹ the more literary approach of a *qaṣīda*¹² and the account of a Venetian merchant who described the attack as eyewitness from his ship in the Beirut harbour.¹³ What is missing in the case of the 1520 assault is a French source, but what makes both attacks worth looking at is the fact that they have been largely ignored so far by secondary literature. Only the works of Delaville le Roulx for the expedition of 1403 and the article of de la Roncière for the attack of 1520 come to mind, both of them more than hundred years old and not using the Arabic sources.¹⁴

But let us go back to the beginning of the fifteenth century and meet Jean II le Meingre, dit Boucicaut, “Mareschal de France”, a Christian crusader who would certainly have rejected any idea of a French–Ottoman alliance.

France’s “Last Knight”: Marshal Boucicaut, Governor of Genoa, 1401–1409

The French nobleman Boucicaut considered himself a staunch defender of Christianity against Muslim might. In his deeds he aspired to live up to medieval ideals of knighthood that appealed to overcome petty state rivalries for the common Christian good. Born in Tours in 1366 as Jean II le Meingre, he became known as “Boucicaut”. His Father, Jean I le Meingre, had already served as Marshal of France, a top military position in the country fighting the English.¹⁵ Some time after the death of his father in 1368 young Boucicaut was admitted into the entourage of the dauphin, the future King Charles VI, who would be called “The Mad” later, because beginning in 1392 he suffered from longer periods of insanity, which were interrupted by only brief times of relative clarity.

Already as a twelve-year old page Boucicaut experienced his first military expedition, which was undertaken against the king of Navarra in 1378.¹⁶ In 1384 he took advantage of a truce of eight months between France and England to join the Teutonic knights against the troops of a pagan prince of Lithuania, who was pictured a “Saracen” by Boucicaut and his fellows. Apparently he was so committed to fighting “infidels” there that he returned one year later to repeat the venture.¹⁷

Back in France, he followed a military career and after some years in the field he decided to conduct a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1388. During his visit there Boucicaud did not encounter any difficulties and he was on the verge of leaving Palestine again, when he heard that a French nobleman of royal descent, Philippe d'Artois, comte d'Eu, had been imprisoned by the Mamlūk authorities in Damascus. Boucicaud decided to join the comte d'Eu there in January 1389. As the comte was a cousin of the French king, Boucicaud voluntarily shared the imprisonment of the comte in order to be at his service. They were transferred to Cairo, where they remained in prison for four months.¹⁸ After their liberation they went to the monastery of St. Catherine in the Sinai and to Jerusalem. Thereafter they decided to depart via the harbour of Beirut. But once again the Mamlūks seized them and delayed their travel for another month before they were allowed to leave for France.¹⁹ It is not clear how freely Boucicaud could wander through Beirut during this time, but it is quite likely that he gained a profound impression of the topography of the town he would attack with his fleet some fourteen years later. Interestingly Boucicaud, the comte d'Eu and two other knights wrote a long poem during their time in the Orient, its main theme being the praise of the fidelity of real knighthood.²⁰ The whole episode of his pilgrimage indicates that Boucicaud was still a child of the medieval court culture. He may have developed personal plans to re-conquer the Holy Land and to liberate it from the Muslim "infidels" already at that stage of his life. But first he went to fight the "Saracens" in Prussia again in 1390. When he came back he was appointed to become one of two Marshals of France despite his young age of twenty five. One reason for receiving this honour was that his father had once been Marshal himself.²¹

At the beginning of the year 1396 a cry for help from King Sigismund (King of Hungary (1387–1437)/King of Germany (1410–1437)) calling for a new crusade, reached France. Hungary was threatened by the incursions of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezit I Yilderim, "the lightning" (1389–1402). As there was a four year truce between the English and the French, which had started in 1394, the French decided to participate in the Anti-Ottoman coalition. The European troops then set out to help the Hungarians, but the Ottomans were a powerful enemy and they crushed the Christian coalition at the battle of Nicopolis in September 1396.²² Marshal Boucicaud found himself once again a prisoner in the hands of Muslims. After months of negotiations in which Boucicaud played allegedly a considerable role, the French prisoners were liberated after paying the requested ransom.²³

Back in France, Boucicaud resumed his office as "Maréchal de France". But soon thereafter, he left again for the Orient in order to help the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II (1391–1425) in his struggle against the Ottomans, who were paralysing Constantinople with an effective blockade. With four ships and two galleys French soldiers departed from Aigues-Mortes in Southern France in June 1399.²⁴

This fleet which was reinforced by ships from Venice and Rhodes on the way succeeded to break the blockade of Constantinople by raiding Ottoman coastal towns and fortresses near the endangered Byzantine capital and therefore the inhabitants of Constantinople were able to receive necessary supplies.²⁵

Boucicaud realised that the force of the Ottomans would not be broken by this limited action, therefore he apparently convinced Emperor Manuel II to go to France in order to raise further assistance. Manuel II was even prepared to abdicate in favour of the French King Charles VI, if the necessary help would be granted to Constantinople.²⁶ In the summer of 1400 Manuel was received by the French

King, who promised to send the Emperor 1200 soldiers under the command of Marshal Boucicaut. Sadly for Manuel, Charles did not keep his word, as his mental illness worsened considerably. The same happened with the promised assistance from King Henri IV of England (1399–1413), where Manuel had stayed from December 1400 to February 1401. Finally, Manuel left for Constantinople in November 1402 without having obtained any help.²⁷ What is important in this context is to show how the expeditions of Boucicaut in the Orient and Prussia were part of a larger crusader style approach in contemporary France which was prevalent among French nobles. In 1400 Boucicaut even founded the order of “l’escu vert à la dame blanche” (The green crown of the white lady). The order which consisted at first of thirteen knights were supposed to defend the virtue and the belongings of women who stayed alone and unprotected in their castles, while their husbands or fathers were absent or killed on the battlefield.²⁸

The French–Genoese Attack of 1403

It was not before long and Boucicaut was off to the Orient again. In 1396 Genoa proposed an alliance to the French King Charles VI. The King accepted this offer, apparently against better knowledge.²⁹ Genoa was weakened by the long war with Venice that was ended by the peace treaty of Turin in 1381. As a result, Genoa lost its commercial vitality and military strength and came under the increasing influence of the kingdom of France. Finally the city opted for outright French rule and Boucicaut was then appointed governor of the city in 1401.³⁰ In Genoa he was hailed as a knight capable of restoring the city’s former glory as a foremost Levantine trading power. The Genoese were aware of his successful campaign to save Constantinople from the Ottomans. Certainly they expected from French rule to support their strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean where they had come under considerable pressure. In 1373 Genoa had captured the important trading port of Famagusta that was the hub of most European trade with the Levant. But in subsequent years, the Frankish kings of Cyprus refused to accept this loss and tried repeatedly to regain Famagusta. When King Janus (1398–1432), who had spent some years in Genoa as a royal hostage, ascended to the throne, he started military operations to regain Famagusta. Early in 1402 he commanded an army of 6000 soldiers and some hired Catalan vessels. He vowed to lift the siege of Famagusta only when his beard would turn white. In response to the threat, Marshal Boucicaut dispatched reinforcements to Famagusta which relieved the city and forced the termination of the siege.³¹

A year later Janus resumed his attack on Famagusta. Boucicaut decided to equip a larger fleet and to go to Cyprus himself. All in all there were eighteen ships, among them 9 galleys, six hundred horses and 700 foot soldiers. He proclaimed to fight the Cypriot King, but probably he also already planned to attack the Mamlūk Empire. He was encouraged by the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II, who had passed Genoa in January 1403 on his way back to Constantinople.³² The time seemed ripe for Boucicaut to pursue old French crusader dreams as he expected the defence arrangements of the Mamlūks to have been weakened by the devastating campaign of Timur (d. 1405), the Tamerlane of Western sources and powerful warrior from Central Asia, in Syria in 1401. It is not clear whether the expedition of Boucicaut had been ordered by the French king given the unstable mental state of Charles VI.

One might assume that it was at least sanctioned by the king's council. Considering the important rank of Boucicaut within the French kingdom he himself might have been the initiator of the campaign. But there is no sign, that he regarded the naval expedition as his private undertaking. The *livre des fais* makes quite clear that Boucicaut went to rescue Famagusta because it was a town that belonged to the king of France.³³ Boucicaut set sail to the Levant as official representative of the French kingdom even if the actual king was not aware of what was really going on.

The massive build-up of this fleet raised suspicious feelings among the Venetians. They assumed that the Genoese–French fleet had the intention to attack Venetian colonies and property in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, Carlo Zeno, the Venetian General of the Adria was ordered to gather a Venetian fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean to survey the movements of the Genoese.³⁴ Boucicaut apparently was in Rhodes in June, where the Grand Master of the knights of St. John proposed to negotiate a peace treaty between Cyprus and Genoa. King Janus gave in, impressed by the scale of the Genoese expedition.³⁵ The peace treaty of Nikosia, concluded on 7 July 1403, forced the Cypriot king to accept Genoese rule over Famagusta.³⁶ As far as Genoa was concerned, it could have ended here. Famagusta was secured and Genoa had shown its standings in the Eastern Mediterranean. Intoxicated by success Boucicaut took the opportunity to pursuing his long-term crusader project in the name of the Most Christian King, the King of France.

As first target he chose Alexandria, which, according to his belief, was the key entry point for a conquest of the Mamlūk Empire as it protected the vital Nile valley. Thus emulating the failed plans of St-Louis in 1249/50 and of the Cypriot King Peter I (1359–1369) in 1365 Boucicaut tried to reach Alexandria by sea, but his fleet could not overcome strong winds blowing from the opposite direction. Against the recommendations of his Genoese counsellors, Boucicaut decided to attack the Syro-Palestinian coast and to capture Alexandria by moving southwards along the coast.³⁷

Meanwhile the Venetians under Carlo Zeno (d. 1418) were warning the Muslim coastal towns, apparently under the official order of the Serenissima home government. Boucicaut was surprised to find the coastal towns prepared for defence. He discovered the explanation, when he captured a Venetian ship near Beirut, whose captain confessed to have the order to warn the Mamlūks.³⁸ Boucicaut was very upset about this Venetian directive: “De ceste tres grant mauvaisté. Laquelle jamais ne cuidast, fu moult esmerveillié le mareschal”.³⁹ He believed himself to be fighting for the whole of Christianity and there he was, in his eyes, betrayed by the Venetians who pursued mainly their narrow economic interests to prevent the Genoese from expanding their influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and to maintain the good Mamlūk-Venetians trading relationship. There existed a great difference between the “crusader-spirit” of Boucicaut and the trade-inspired policy of the Italian seafaring nations like Venice, who had had long lasting and continuous experiences at the Syro-Palestinian coast. The last French involvement at the coast had been under King Louis IX more than hundred years ago, before the kings of France were distracted in the fourteenth century by inner strifes, the Black Death and the outbreak of the “Hundred Years War” with England. Some historians argue that the glorious “siècle de St-Louis” had been succeeded by the “siècle de malheurs” in the fourteenth century.⁴⁰ Now, at the

beginning of the fifteenth century it had stabilised to a certain extent and that is why France had the capacities to get involved again in Syro-Palestinian affairs.

Despite the betrayal of Christian solidarity by the Venetians, Boucicaut started his attacks on the coast by landing his troops near Tripoli. Boucicaut disembarked his soldiers and started a battle, which he later claimed to have been victorious. The French–Genoese army then succeeded in occupying *al-mīnā'*, the harbour of Tripoli, but did not enter the actual town of Tripoli further inland because the Mamlūks had meanwhile reorganised in the fields between *al-Mīnā'* and Tripoli. Faced with the appearance of a determined opposition the Christian soldiers returned to their ships and headed towards the next target.⁴¹ In contrast to this account, the Venetian merchant Piloti and Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā speak about a Genoese defeat brought about by a fierce will of the Muslim defenders to deny the French–Genoese troops access to Tripoli.⁴² Boucicaut's next raid, probably to regain lost confidence, was the coastal town of Batrūn in the south of Tripoli. Batrūn was a small town without any walls. It was looted, burned and all Muslim inhabitants were killed.⁴³

Boucicaut then took his fleet to Beirut. It is surprising that Beirut was targeted after Tripoli, since Beirut seems a more logical starting point for a campaign towards Alexandria. Moreover Boucicaut had personal knowledge of the town in which Mamlūk authorities had forced him to stay for a month some fourteen years earlier.⁴⁴ Beirut was also more vulnerable because it was located at the sea and not three miles inland as the better fortified Tripoli. The harbours on the Syro-Palestinian coast were not fortified at the time of Boucicaut's attack, as all towns of the coast had been destroyed by the Mamlūk authorities and their fortifications razed after the expulsion of the last Christian knights after 1291 out of fear the crusaders might return and use the harbours as bridge heads for new intrusions. The Mamlūks resorted to this kind of policy because they had no powerful navy to prevent the better equipped European fleets to land soldiers on their shores. So instead of building a powerful navy themselves, the Mamlūks maintained this "scorched shore" policy for the rest of their reign.⁴⁵

Especially during the fourteenth century unprotected Beirut was therefore a constant target of Christian pirates from nearby Cyprus, Genoa and then later from Catalonia, as they had nothing to fear from Mamlūk ships. Leading trading nation was the republic of Venice who was on good terms with the Mamlūks and therefore every year a Venetian state convoy visited Beirut.⁴⁶ The Venetians did not want to threaten their special relations with the authorities of Beirut and therefore they had warned them about the impending attack. According to Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā the French–Genoese fleet arrived in front of Beirut on the 20 of Muḥarram 806/9 August 1403:

When the people of Beirut noticed the coming of the fleet, they evacuated women and children and the city was almost completely abandoned.⁴⁷ Neither the local governor (*mutawallī*) nor Muslim troops remained except the troops of the Emirs of the Gharb.⁴⁸ These soldiers feared the many horses on the ships. The Franks landed at a place known as *al-Ṣanbaṭiyya* to the west of the city to destroy and burn our houses. Then they did the same thing with the market, which is near to the harbour. Finally the Muslims rallied. The courageous among them fought with the Franks in the streets, killed some and three Muslims died. At this point the governor

Yusūf al-Turkmānī l-Kisrawānī returned. The Franks withdrew to their ships after the afternoon prayer (*al-‘aṣr*). The Muslims pursued their traces during night. The Franks then sailed on to Sidon (. . .). Among the things the Genoese had looted in Beirut were large quantities of spices of the Venetians worth around 10,000 *dīnār*. The Venetians then wanted them back from the Genoese and more than that. The Mamlūk governor of Damascus then ordered the governor of Beirut, to decapitate the dead Franks. (. . .) The heads were first brought to Damascus and then to Egypt.⁴⁹

The *Livre des fais* does not talk about the stealing of Venetian spice.⁵⁰ Apparently the author did not want to smear the image of Boucicaut as a noble knight. The Marshal, disappointed by the Venetian treason of the Christian cause, may have condoned the looting of the Venetian spice depository as an act of revenge.

After the sacking of Beirut, Boucicaut attacked Sidon. Meanwhile the governor of Damascus, Shaykh,⁵¹ responded to the attacks and went first to Tripoli, then to Beirut and finally to Sidon where he encountered the enemy. A heavy battle took place during which the governor's horse was wounded. Apparently Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā was himself present with the governor of Damascus. At the end, the troops of Boucicaut had to retreat to the ancient fortress in the harbour of Sidon. Shaykh counted on a second attack of the Franks on the next day and therefore he tried to hide his defence efforts from the Genoese with large doors and curtains. But the Franks disappeared in the direction of Beirut, where they replenished water supplies at the Nahr al-Kalb. The Muslims who chased them came too late to catch them there, the French and Genoese had already gone by the time their pursuers arrived.⁵² Boucicaut finally turned to Latakia but abandoned plans for a raid when he realised the number of defendants was too large. This was the end of his tour around the Syro-Palestinian coast.⁵³

During his expedition in Syria Boucicaut had also sent some ships to Alexandria, claims the Venetian merchant Piloti, which were spreading fear among the local population. Therefore the Sultan ordered to send a rich spice merchant to the captains of the ships to buy off a possible Genoese attack. As the Mamlūks had no military ships of their own this was obviously the only defence scheme the Mamlūk sultan could come up with. When the merchant reached Alexandria, the ships had already left, presumably because the crews had been decimated by the plague.⁵⁴

As shown, the expedition of Marshal Boucicaut failed to re-conquer the Holy Land. We do not know if Boucicaut really intended to recapture the entire Palestine with this particular expedition. His haphazard opportunistic approach suggests that he rather aimed at establishing a Christian stronghold at the Syro-Palestinian coast, which could have been supplied by the Genoese from Famagusta and then used as basis for further operations in Syria.

The Impact of the 1403 Attack on Trade

Instead of weakening the Muslims the raids enhanced the rivalry of the two greatest trading nations in Italy. Towards the end of the Syro-Palestinian campaign, Boucicaut was chased by angry Venetians who wanted their goods back which had been stolen in Beirut, but he denied that his ships were carrying Venetian

spices, explaining that they found the Venetian spice depositories empty. Instead of complaining, he insisted, that Venice should have been more careful as the Serrenissima had known of his plans in advance. Still as a sign of good faith, he offered to compensate goods of individual merchants.⁵⁵

But the Venetians failed to be persuaded by his arguments and insisted that the looting of Venetian goods violated the treaty of Turin of 1381. Venetians ships engaged the fleet of Boucicaut in battle on 7 October 1403 near Modon. While Boucicaut managed to escape, his French–Genoese fleet suffered a defeat and considerable losses.⁵⁶ Back in Genoa, he was criticized for the disaster he had brought on the city. His record was indeed poor. Without cause, he had reopened the fight with the Venetians, damaged trade relations with the Mamlūks, ruined the Genoese fleet and caused many Genoese to be prisoners of the Venetians due to the battle of Modon. Genoa had to pay indemnity to the Venetians in order to settle the dispute. A first agreement was signed in 1406⁵⁷ and after a resumption of tensions a new treaty was signed in Florence in the year 1408.⁵⁸

Boucicaut and the French occupation started to become costly for the Genoese merchants, as Boucicaut continued to develop plans for new operations. Despite the failure of 1403 Boucicaut still hoped for a large French–Genoese crusade against Alexandria. When Raymond de Lescure, a representative of his former enemy, the king of Cyprus, came to Genoa in 1407, Boucicaut presented plans concerning Alexandria. Raymond de Lescure encouraged him and ensured him the assistance of Cyprus in this respect.⁵⁹ Boucicaut sent emissaries to King Janus with his propositions. According to these plans the troops of the Cypriot King and Boucicaut should join in Rhodes and then go to Alexandria in order to attack the city. The expedition needed several thousand men and a fleet. Half of the costs were expected from the Cypriot king as soon as possible.⁶⁰ The Cypriot King turned out to be not so fond of the plan. There existed the problem of financing and Janus did not like the idea to leave his kingdom alone for too long because of possible inner unrest and Muslim incursions. Therefore he finally declined the offer to the great disappointment of Boucicaut.⁶¹

Meanwhile the Genoese grew tired of Marshal Boucicaut's military ambitions. While Boucicaut was campaigning again in Italy in August and September of 1409 a popular revolt broke out in Genoa and the French lost control of the city.⁶² Marshal Boucicaut returned to France at a time when it needed all its soldiers. The English were expected to soon resume fighting. The English King Henry V (1413–1422) routed the French at Azincourt in 1415. Many French nobles were imprisoned, among them Jean II le Meingre, called Boucicaut, who died in 1421 at the age of 56 in English captivity, because he was not able to pay the ransom having lost most of his wealth during the insurrection of Genoa in 1409.⁶³ With him died one of the last proponents of the French crusader ideals. He had not only talked about the crusades and made plans like many of his contemporaries but put them into action by fighting the Slavs in Prussia, by participating in the crusade at Nicopolis, the expedition against the Ottomans to help Constantinople and his campaign at the Syro-Palestinian coast in 1403. Even after this failure he was still interested to bring together a Christian coalition to attack Alexandria. As a very "active" crusader, he was a product of his time, upbringing and special French environment believing in knighthood and the liberation of the Holy Land.

Therefore the attack on Beirut can be considered an old-style crusader attack, attempting to reclaim the Holy Land for the Christian kings of France.

France and the Levant in the Fifteenth Century

After the defeat of France at Azincourt in 1415 the future of France looked bleak. The king was insane and the nobles squabbled among themselves while the English king was capturing one French town after the other. Only after the arrival of a new King of France, Charles VII (1422–1461), the country recovered its former unity and strength. By 1453 the French had won the Hundred Years War and the English could only hold on to Calais as their last town in France.⁶⁴

When Charles VII King of France had secured his leadership in France, he thought about the possibility of a new crusade in the East and ordered Jean Germain, the bishop of Chalons, to write a book about the merits of Christianity in comparison to the errors of Islam. In 1452 Jean Germain gave the king his work: “Débat du Crestien et du Sarrazin ou de traité de la fausseté de la loy Sarrazins”.⁶⁵

No action followed then or after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Latin Christianity was shocked but preoccupied with fighting itself. Anyhow, the idea of a large-scale crusade undertaken by a combination of different rulers still found believers, especially among Oriental Christians. Louis de Rochechouart Bishop of Saintes met Maronites in Jerusalem who in 1461 were still desperately waiting for the next Christian crusade.⁶⁶

While the notion of the crusade was kept alive in France, it became more and more an unrealistic venture in practice. A slow shift towards a more practical, i.e. diplomatic and economic approach towards the Middle East emerged in France following the example of the Italian trading ports of Venice and Genoa. During the later half of the fifteenth century French commercial contacts resumed with the Mamlūk ports. The famous French Orient merchant, Jacques Coeur, accumulated considerable wealth until his imprisonment for allegedly selling weapons to the Mamlūk sultan.⁶⁷ French merchant ships also visited the Levant, i.e. Beirut and Alexandria, annually to trade spice. To circumvent the Italian traders the French King Louis XI (1461–1483) declared that spices had to be imported only via French harbours. The commercial relations between France and the Levant increased with state encouragement and protection.⁶⁸

In 1511 the French even tried to take advantage of diplomatic problems between Mamlūks and Venetians. Louis XII (1498–1515) ordered the French envoy Peretz to convince the Mamlūk sultan that the French would be much more reliable than the Venetians and should be therefore granted the same status as the Venetians.⁶⁹ This démarche was rejected by the Sultan. Although the Venetians kept their special position at the Mamlūk court this time, this episode marked a more *realpolitik*-like approach of France towards the Levant, which had slowly emerged during the fifteenth century. It is no contradiction to this development that the young French King Francis I (1515–1547) dreamt to liberate the Holy Land from Muslim “infidels” at the beginning of his reign and therefore initiated naval expeditions towards the Levant at the beginning of his reign. Later on, he too would shift to a more realistic policy. Both concepts

were present in France in the fifteenth century towards the Levant. The hope to re-conquer the Holy Land from the “infidels” and the way of dealing with the Muslim powers exactly in the same way as one would do with neighbouring Christian states.

The Outer Frame of the Attack on Beirut in 1520

Massive changes had happened in the Middle East at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In 1514 the Ottomans stopped the expanding Şafavids from Iran. Only three years later the Ottomans wiped out the Mamlūk empire, which had existed for more than 250 years. The Ottomans then became the new masters of Syria and Egypt. However, their grasp over the new territories was challenged by uprisings of remnants of the old Mamlūk elite, so that the region was still in turmoil in 1520.⁷⁰

Christianity became alarmed at the amazing successes of the Ottoman armies. Already in 1515, when they concluded a Concordat at Bologna, Pope Leo X (1513–1521) gave Francis I a superb reliquary. It was shaped like a cross and contained a piece of the “real cross”. The gift intended to remind the French King of his duty to lead a crusade.⁷¹ The rulers of Christianity were furthermore asked to enter into action by a worried Pope Leo X in 1516 after the Ottomans had crushed the Mamlūks in Syria.⁷² In response Francis assured him that he would provide arms and men in order to fight “the enemies of the Christian religion, who were polluted by ‘Muhammadan’ wickedness” (“*christiane religionis hostes et mahumetica pravitate pollutos*”).⁷³

In 1517, during the congress of Cambrai Francis I proposed the idea of a joined Franco-German crusade against the Ottoman Empire, the common threat to Christianity, to the German Emperor Maximilian. Francis I suggested to the German Emperor that the Ottoman Empire be divided between them and that their plan would be hidden from the Pope. But this secret agreement did not really lead to an actual operation.⁷⁴

After news had spread in Europe that the Ottoman Sultan Selīm I (918–927/1512–1520) conquered Egypt in January of 1517, Pope Leo X got really worried and thought the Ottomans could menace Italy from Alexandria. He sent letters calling for a new crusade to all European kings. The Emperor Maximilian was the first to react and to devise an attack scheme whereby Maximilian would take on the North African coast with the king of Portugal and then march towards Egypt and one year later it should be followed by a joined attack by the French and English kings on Istanbul.⁷⁵

Needless to say that Maximilian’s master plan did not materialise either, although the Pope had declared five years of peace for Europe in March 1518 and called for a Holy War against the Ottomans. Also France, Spain and England declared their wills in 1518 to join their forces against the Muslim foe and to liberate the Holy Land from the Turks and on 6 December 1518 Francis I publicly declared in Paris his urgent wish and his determination to re-conquer the Holy Land for Christianity.⁷⁶

The spirit of a possible crusade existed in Europe in 1517–1518 and was widely propagated in France. “In 1518, for example, Jean Thenaud dedicated the second

volume of his *Triumphes de Vertuz* to ‘Francis, the very great and very good, king of France, future Emperor and destroyer of the Turkish empire, invincible’.⁷⁷

Only, the crusader spirit seemed much more rhetorical than actually leading to a real effort. And it was definitely far away from the powerful movement which had made the first crusade such a stunning military success over 400 years earlier. Nevertheless, it is amazing that a crusade against the Ottomans was still not considered an outdated concept at a time when European Christianity was on the verge of seeing a bitter internal struggle from the challenge of the Protestant reformation to the Catholic hegemony.

The French Naval Expedition into the Eastern Mediterranean

Although he had trouble convincing his fellow European kings, Francis I wanted to keep his word. In 1518 he entrusted a flotilla to Christoph le Mignon, called Chanoy, destined to sail to the Eastern Mediterranean in order to protect the knights of St. John of Rhodes against a possible Ottoman attack. Chanoy was further given the instruction to find out about Turkish plans, to attack the Turks and to cause as much damage as possible.⁷⁸ During the next year this fleet operated rather successfully in naval encounters against the Ottomans. Certainly we can see in these small operations a plan to find out more about the local settings in the Eastern Mediterranean in order to prepare for a larger crusader operation, which Francis had promised publicly to the Pope and his subjects.

Nevertheless, these skirmishes were soon to be overshadowed by the death of the German Emperor Maximilian I on 12 January 1519. It was followed by the great financial struggle between the French King Francis I and the Spanish King Charles I (Spanish King 1516–1556/German Emperor 1519–1556) about the succession of Charles’ grandfather, the late Emperor Maximilian I. To that end they competed to bribe the powerful electors in Germany. Apparently Charles paid more and became the German Emperor Charles V. The France of Francis I was now encircled by the Habsburgian German-Spanish “Emperor-King” Charles. A tense situation which led to numerous wars between the two rulers over the domination of Middle Europe.⁷⁹

During the election process, Francis I still claimed to have a large crusading project as top priority on his agenda. He wrote to the Pope that he would defend him and Christianity against the Ottoman Turks once he was elected emperor.⁸⁰ He wrote similar letters to the electors using the Turkish issue as a banner in his electoral campaign.⁸¹

Moreover, a fleet of twenty galleys and 4,000 fighting men indeed purged the Thyrennic sea from Muslim pirates. Even after his electoral defeat, Francis engaged in military actions against the Ottomans. When Francis I learned about rumours of an imminent danger for the knights of St. John, he reordered Chanoy to protect Rhodes in 1520 and to attack coastal towns of the Ottoman Empire if the opportunity arose.⁸² Even if Francis had not deliberately told Chanoy to attack Beirut, his orders would have been used to justify attacks on the Ottomans and certainly to find out more about the possibilities of a large scale expedition. Francis had not given up on his plans for a crusade so far. Chanoy had only just arrived in the waters near Rhodes, when he thought that he was presented with a golden opportunity for an assault on the Syro-Palestinian coast. On 22 September 1520

the Ottoman Sultan Selīm I died. Maybe that was why Chanoy headed towards the Ottoman coast with a large fleet, in order to take advantage of the unrest which might follow the death of this powerful sovereign.⁸³ But it is unclear whether he had already learned of Sultan Selīm's death before leaving Rhodes as news did not travel that fast in these days. Nevertheless, Beirut was the destination and the fleet arrived there early on October 9th. The order of St. John did not participate in this operation, as they probably feared Ottoman revenge.⁸⁴

Beirut appeared to be the most lucrative target for the French expeditionary force given the fifteenth century revival of the spice and cotton trade from Beirut to Europe. The fortifications of Beirut had been repaired at the beginning of the sixteenth century and thus the city seemed more useful now as a starting point for further attacks inland.⁸⁵ Despite this improvement of its defence system, Beirut did not yet have a complete wall. An Italian traveller remarked that Beirut possessed walls only towards the west and the seaside.⁸⁶

The region had coped rather well with the transition of Mamlūk to Ottoman rule. The insecurity prior to the downfall of the Mamlūks had halted the merchant activity for some time,⁸⁷ but when the Ottomans had successfully conquered Syria, the Venetians were back at the Syro-Palestinian coast and tried to return to business-as-usual. This was sometimes a risky undertaking as Ottomans and Venetians had quarrelled over the naval supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean and Venice had been forced to give up territories on the Peleponnesus.⁸⁸ But despite these battles, the Venetians continued their ties with the local Arab authorities in Beirut harbour while being on guard against the Ottoman fleet.

Northern Syria had been the main battleground of Ottomans and Mamlūks. The coast was barely touched by the war. To ensure continuity, the Ottomans had installed a former high-ranking Mamlūk named Jān Birdī l-Ghāzālī as governor of Damascus. There was insecurity in the air after the Ottoman take-over, but certainly no Beirutis suspected a large-scale European attack on their town from the sea, although small raids on the coast by Frankish Pirates especially from the knights of Rhodes were a common nuisance for the inhabitants of the Syro-Palestinian coast. Things were going their usual way on the day of the French surprise attack on Beirut as the locals were preparing to trade with the newly arrived Venetian fleet.

The 1520 Attack: The Italian Eyewitness Account

At dawn on 9 October the patron of one of the galleys of the annual Venetian state convoy, Zuan Nadal, noticed the arrival of a fleet of fifteen vessels on the coast before Beirut. "We were very surprised", he wrote later in a letter to Venice, "and we did not know, why we knew nothing about such a large fleet".⁸⁹ The captain of the state convoy, Antonio Marzello, dispatched a boat to inquire who they were. The crew of the ship returned quickly stating that these were Ottoman Turks, without having contacted someone of the suspected Turkish fleet. As a result of this impression, the Venetian sailors and merchants were getting ready for defence in spite of their inferiority in the number of ships. The Venetians also sent an envoy to the city informing them about the approaching "Turkish" fleet.

Meanwhile an envoy from the suspected Turkish fleet came on board saying that this fleet came from the Most Christian French king to attack Beirut. The

Venetians should stay out, if they would like to come out of this unharmed and their goods untouched. As soon as the Venetians heard this, they sent the messenger back, warning the people of Beirut that the fleet was French and intended to pillage Beirut and the defenders of the town should be well prepared.⁹⁰

Just as in 1403, the Venetians warned the people of Beirut of a pending French invasion. Venice and France had been locked in open warfare until the French victory at Agnadello in 1509, and thus there was no love lost between them. In addition to this, France and the Serenissima had recently become rivals in a competition to become the most favoured trading partner of the Mamlūks, due to the diplomatic successes of the French envoy Peretz.⁹¹ Therefore the relations between Venetians and French had been strained before the attack on Beirut. Another reason can be found in the young French king's refusal to listen to the "advice" of the Venetians, who had tried to talk him out of attacking the Ottomans.⁹²

On 9 October the commander of the French fleet, Chanoy, ordered the bombardment of Beirut. Only the so called sea tower, standing on an island in Beirut harbour, fired back, but its canon balls all dropped short into the water.⁹³ In the meantime Chanoy let 700 soldiers land on the shore near Beirut. When the French approached Beirut they came into an ambush of the soldiers of a Druze Emir, called "capo di Drusi" by Zuan Nadal, who happened to have come down the hill to greet the arrival of the Venetian state convoy as was the normal custom. The French were taken completely by surprise by the forces hiding behind a hill. Stones were rolled on the French from the slopes and many dived into the sea just to be drowned in the water "like dogs" because of their heavy armours, as the Venetian eyewitness recalls. In one hour and a half 484 men had perished, their leader Chanoy among them. The rest managed to escape back to the ships. The heads of 303 dead were chopped off and paraded on the top of lances and then fixed on the parapet of the harbour. At eleven o'clock at night the French fleet disappeared in outmost silence, as if they wanted to forget their defeat.⁹⁴ The inhabitants of Beirut celebrated their victory for several days parading the heads of the Christians through the town "while shouting out loud towards the sky". As the life and property of Venetians in Beirut were in danger during the next two days the Emir of the Druze encouraged the Venetians to go on board of their ships until the agitated mood of the people would calm down.

The 1520 Attack: The Arabic Narrative

News of the heroic defence of Beirut soon spread to Damascus where the author Ibn Ṭūlūn heard about it. The men spreading the news, brought factual evidence of victory. Ibn Ṭūlūn wrote:

At the beginning of the month (Dhū l-Qa'da 926/October 1520) 5 carloads of heads came to Damascus, which belonged to the dead Franks on the shore of Beirut. The heads were distributed to the quarters of Damascus, where they stayed so long that the dogs ate up most of them. It is said that only 5 Muslims but 586 Franks had died.⁹⁵

The carrying of dead heads to Damascus from the shore was a common practice throughout the Mamlūk era. By doing so, one could convince the inhabitants of the

capital of the Syrian part of the Mamlūk Empire how efficient the defence system at the coast was, when in fact it was anything but that. Nevertheless in this case the Beirutis had really achieved a great victory. Its impact was so tremendous that news about it even reached Cairo, where the historian Ibn Iyās tells a slightly different version of the story, exaggerating a little bit.

They (the Franks) (...) managed to control the city of Beirut for three days. But then the governor of Damascus Jān Birdī l-Ghāzālī became aware of the situation. (...) His men went to Beirut and fought a huge battle with the Franks. An uncountable number of Franks died, 300 were imprisoned. Some say that even three sons of Frankish kings were caught. (...) Al-Ghazālī won, after the Franks stayed three days in Beirut. But then they were expelled with the help of God the Almighty.⁹⁶

Needless to say that there were no king's sons involved in the attack, nor had the French stayed three days in town and the governor was only seen near Beirut as everything was over. But this passage shows that this victory in Beirut was talked about throughout the Ottoman Empire. News of backwater areas like Beirut rarely captured nation-wide attention in normal times. And the fact that rumours added three sons of Frankish kings to the aggressors shows that there were still fears among the Muslims that Europeans might reunite in a large crusader campaign.

The 1520 Attack: The *qaṣīda* Evidence

Another indicator of Muslim fear of crusaders and Christianity is a panegyric *qaṣīda* about the Muslim victory over the Franks. It was transmitted in a text by Ibn Ṭūlūn in the following way: One day Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm came from Beirut and asked Ibn Ṭūlūn to explain him the *qaṣīda*, which was written by Ibrāhīm al-Ṣaydāwī on the Muslim victory. Then Ibn Ṭūlūn sat down and wrote this unique manuscript. He first wrote down a word of the *qaṣīda* in red and then an explanation about the word's etymology. Therefore the *qaṣīda* can be reconstructed by putting all the red words together.⁹⁷ The *qaṣīda* shows the deep impact the assault on Beirut had on the local inhabitants and how they felt blessed by God. The French are even referred to at one point as the *ṣāhib al-fīl* (The Masters of the Elephants) as the Ethiopians were called, who raided Arabia in pre-Islamic times. The *qaṣīda* shows a fight between good and evil. It is part of the anti-Christian polemic discourse and in the tradition of anti-crusader literature. After a longer appraisal of God Ibrāhīm al-Ṣaydāwī states:

In the year 926, on the 27 of Shawwāl rumours spread that the enemy had come to Beirut. They were Christian mercenaries, who change their religion as they like. They came on 14 boats, put on their armoury with perfidy. They threw the fire of idolatry through their canons. Then they went on land. They were evil and cunning. The Franks banged their drums and hissed their flags and shouted the war cries from their countries. They arranged themselves in line as if they were heroes, but they got dust, which purged the lies from their faces. Then they took their lances and armours. But a trap was made, and it became worse

for them and their heads were chopped off. (...) They had blocked Beirut like the *ṣāhib al-fīl* had blocked Mecca and the Muslims were disturbed when they saw this. (...) But the Muslims threw themselves in their blood. (...) And the Franks became blind, deaf and careless, after being taken by surprise. Then they were cut to pieces like meat on a chopping block. Some of them fled and others surrendered or threw themselves into the water out of despair where they drowned like the people of the pharaohs.⁹⁸

France in the Aftermath of the 1520 Defeat

Going back to the day immediately after the French attack, one can notice how the Venetians tried to continue their business in Beirut that year and overcome the hostility of the local inhabitants towards anything Christian. Giving 700 ducats to the Druze Emir certainly did help a lot in this respect. The Venetian merchants then delayed their departure until 13 October in order to bring their transactions to an end.⁹⁹

On 14 October the governor of Damascus Jān Birdī l-Ghāzālī was in Beirut to inspect the damages on the fortifications of the harbour done by the French canons.¹⁰⁰ Only then did the news reach him that Sultan Selīm had died. He hastened back to Damascus, put his old Mamlūk dress on and announced an uprising, which led to his own downfall and death in February 1521.¹⁰¹ Then the new Sultan Sülaymān I (1520–1566) tightened the Ottoman grip over Syria by replacing the old Mamlūk structures by Ottoman ones. This meant a stabilisation of the political situation in Syria, which had always been the hotbed of unrest and resurrection in Mamlūk times. Beirut benefited from this stable situation. Living conditions improved under the Ottomans as seen in the fact that the population rose by almost 25 percent between the years of the Ottoman conquest in 1523 and 1530.¹⁰² This is also related to an effective naval strategy that was able to defend Beirut on sea, whereas the Mamlūks had never been capable of doing so. Henceforth a crusade became much harder for anyone who was willing to risk it.

The French failure in Beirut in 1520 represented a blatant military disaster with heavy human losses, but was not the only reason why crusading became less important to Francis I. He had to concentrate more and more on the danger of encirclement of France by united Spain and Germany. Moreover, pope Leo X, the heart of European crusading propaganda, died in December 1521. His successor Pope Adrian (1522–1523) had been Charles V's old tutor. Therefore Francis was quite reluctant to promise him a new crusade, and he wanted that his territorial demands were fulfilled before committing himself to further military action, as his prior engagements had been costly, but had not managed to achieve positive results for the King. "‘We are ready’, Francis told the pope, ‘to make a peace or truce and to come with great power against the Turk, provided Milan which is our patrimony is returned to us’".¹⁰³

Despite Francis' I disappointment with the events in Europe he still tried to relieve the threatened knights in Rhodes, but he did not or could not organise a similar naval expedition as in 1520. Therefore the knights of St. John in Rhodes surrendered in December of 1522 to the Ottomans as French reinforcements arrived too late. The last Grand Master, the French Philippe de Villiers de

l'Isle-Adam (1521–1534), retreated with his troops to Crete and then Malta.¹⁰⁴ The last stronghold of France in the Eastern Mediterranean to facilitate naval operations or even a crusade was gone. On the other hand, the loss of Rhodes took away a potential source of conflict between the Ottomans and France, as the French had come to consider themselves the main protector of the knights. After the fall of the island this obstacle on the way to better relations with the Ottomans had thus disappeared. Besides, King Francis I was more and more preoccupied with his wars against Emperor Charles V. Francis' worst moment was when he turned into a prisoner for over one year after the battle of Pavia in Italy in 1525.¹⁰⁵ Humiliated by Charles he looked out for new allies. It was his mother Louise of Savoy who contacted the Ottoman Sultan Süleymān I, while Francis was still in prison, via the envoy Jean Frangipani. The Sultan replied very friendly and sympathetic to this request in an initial letter at the beginning of 1526.¹⁰⁶ Although we ignore the content of Louise's original letter to the Sultan, and we only know that Jean Frangipani was instructed by the Sultan to relay his answer to Louise orally, we can assume that the contents of this correspondence dealt with a shared view about their mutual opponent, the Emperor Charles V. Numerous envoys between the two rulers followed in the next decade, and in 1536 a French–Ottoman trade and friendship treaty, the so-called capitulation,¹⁰⁷ was signed. The French Jean de la Foret was installed as first French ambassador in Istanbul.¹⁰⁸ While Francis I had publicly declared to be a crusader in 1518, now the Most Christian King was an ally of the infidel Ottoman Sultan. Nevertheless, one should not overestimate the practical effects of such an alliance, as alliances could be broken.

For example the Ottoman sultan would have not been pleased to find out about a treaty Francis I concluded with the English king Henry VIII (1509–1547) in 1532; the aim of the French–English alliance was to levy an army of 80.000 men in order to fight the Turks.¹⁰⁹

Although this army never materialised, let alone fought, it shows how fragile alliances were at the time and how careful one has to be in evaluating their real strength. On the other hand the planned Anglo-French alliance is an indication that there was still a predominant discourse in Europe that Christians had the religious duty to fight the infidel Ottomans in a crusade. Therefore the French king had to be careful in keeping his Ottoman contacts a secret in the beginning and consequently he agreed to the demand of the pope in 1527 – a time when he had already sent an envoy to the Ottoman sultan – that French subjects should pay an ecclesiastical tax for the struggle against the Ottomans.¹¹⁰

Even if this tax was paid in France, it seems that Francis had effectively given up on the pursuit of the project of a military crusade by 1527. On one hand the French naval activities in the Eastern Mediterranean which culminated in the crashing defeat and the loss of many human lives in Beirut in 1520 had shown him how strong the military might of the Ottomans and therefore how unrealistic the prospect of re-conquering the Holy Land was. On the other hand, the Catholic German Emperor was much more of an immediate threat to him than the infidel Ottoman sultan, therefore Francis I allied himself with Süleymān I.

In doing so Francis had definitely crossed the boundaries. He had united with the greatest foe of Christianity, the Muslim Ottoman Sultan who was steadily advancing on the Balkans. In secret talks France and the Ottoman Empire had even agreed in 1536 to attack the German Empire simultaneously so that Charles V would have to split his forces.¹¹¹ The mutual treaty and the permanent ambassador

in Istanbul gave French subjects and merchants a favoured status in the Ottoman Empire. The French were now welcome in the Ottoman Empire and did not have to fear the fate of their compatriots on the shore of Beirut 16 years earlier.

In 1543 both parties even jointly attacked the coastal town of Nice, then under the rule of Emmanuel-Philibert, the duke of Savoy. The city itself was conquered in September 1543 and pillaged by the French and the Ottomans, but the fortress was able to withstand the attack. Francis then decided to keep the Ottoman fleet in France in the harbour of Toulon to have it available at any time. However, problems with the practicability of this Muslim–Christian alliance arose. Because the Christian inhabitants should not mingle with the unbelievers, the city of Toulon was evacuated and the Ottoman sailors lived in a ghost town. Finally they sailed away after Francis I cancelled the expedition and paid the Ottoman fleet a considerable sum as farewell money.¹¹² It seems therefore that the co-operation was more difficult to implement in practice than initially imagined.

Conclusions

This paper evaluated the historical impact of two French attacks on Beirut on changes in the diplomatic approaches of the French towards the world of Islam. The first attack on Beirut in 1403 had still been undertaken in the spirit of the crusades to capture a stronghold in order to re-conquer the Holy Land. Already, Christianity then had been far from united against the Muslim powers as documented in the betrayal of the French Marshal Boucicaut by the Venetians. Boucicaut's almost naïve approach reflected ideals of medieval knighthood in the service of the Most Christian French king. When not defending his country against English invaders he volunteered to fight the Slavs alongside the Teutonic Knights in Prussia, participated in the Christian defeat of Nicopolis in 1396, successfully relieved Constantinople and led a campaign against Syria to see his fleet destroyed by the Venetians. The real enemy to him, however, continued to be Muslim powers and as late as 1407, he still plotted to attack Alexandria with the help of his former opponent the King of Cyprus. It is most ironic that this self-proclaimed knight for Christendom suffered most from fellow Christians and finally died impoverished in English confinement. Until the end Boucicaut clinged to his beliefs that his true mission was the protection of Christianity from the “infidels”.

More than hundred years later King Francis I took a more *realpolitik* approach, but only after some painful experiences. He changed his attitude towards the Muslim Levant partly due to the failed attack on Beirut in 1520. Eventually, he allied himself with the Muslim Ottomans against a co-Christian ruler, because the suffocating containment of Habsburg Spain and Habsburg Germany was much more felt in France. As a response towards the Franco-Ottoman alliance, Emperor Charles V agreed to a request from the Iranian Şafavids to join the fight against the Ottomans in 1530.¹¹³ Therefore two mixed Muslim–Christian alliances emerged facing each other, although the Habsburgian-Şafavid alliance never materialised, because of the long distance separating the two and the fact that envoys had to cross hostile Ottoman territory. Nevertheless, there was a great policy shift towards the Islamic powers in a little bit more than a decade. When Pope Leo X called for a large-scale crusade to liberate the Holy Land in 1517–18, the French king Francis and the German Emperor Maximilian were keen on embarking on such a project.

Some ten years later France and Germany were searching for allies in the Muslim world to fight each other. This development is not as surprising as it appears at first sight, considering that the idea of crusade had lost its practical attraction for European rulers long time prior to the sixteenth century. Therefore the pro-crusade statements of rulers became more and more rhetorical, something one has to say to please the audience. Francis I somehow tried with this ill-fated expedition to Beirut to see what was still possible. The outcome did certainly not convince him to keep on pursuing such a project. In this respect the well documented French attack on Beirut in 1520 could be seen as a last attempt of a Christian king to live up to medieval ideals. *Realpolitik* took its toll, especially after Francis' imprisonment in the battle of Pavia hammered home to Francis that the larger and more immediate threat was at his border. If his kingdom wanted to survive this struggle against the Emperor he needed allies regardless of their religion. The attack in 1520 ended the French crusader era and was the prelude for a stronger diplomatic involvement of the French in the Levant. France was well on its way to become a nation state. The capitulations with the Ottoman Empire enabled France to rise to an exalted position of trade and influence in the Syro-Palestinian area over the next centuries and take over direct control once its good friend the Ottoman empire weakened in the nineteenth century.

NOTES

1. Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 1546), *Tārīkh Bayrūt wa akhdh al firandj lahā* (Leiden: University Library), Ms. Or. 2506, 7v 12v.
2. Hans Eberhard Mayer, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989, seventh edition), p. 14.
3. Mayer, 96 98, 133, 227 237.
4. Mayer, 138 171.
5. *Ifranj* or *Firanj* is the Arabic term for Franks. This name, which probably reached the Muslims via the Byzantines, was originally used for the inhabitants of the empire of Charlemagne, and later extended to crusaders and Europeans in general, see: Bernard Lewis, "Ifrandj", in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, volumes I XI (Leiden: Brill, 1960 2000; second edition), III: 1044a; see for the meaning of the term *Franci* in the West: Ernst Schneidmüller, "Die Entstehung Frankreichs (9. Jahrhundert 1270)", in *Geschichte Frankreichs*, ed. Ernst Hinrichs (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002; second edition), p. 36.
6. Robert Jean Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 88.
7. Jean Favier, *Histoire de France*, Tome 2: *Le temps des principautés* (Paris: Fayard, 1984), p. 343.
8. Šāliḥ ibn Yaḥyā b. Buḥtur (d. after 1436), *Tārīkh Bayrūt. Akhbār al salaf min dhurriyyat Buḥtur ibn 'Alī amīr al Gharb bi Bayrūt*, ed. Francis Hours, S.J. and Kamal Salibi (Beirut: Dar El Mashreq, 1969).
9. *Le livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut, mareschal de France et gouverneurs de Jennes*, ed. Denis Lalande [textres littéraires français] (Paris Geneva: Droz, 1985); Denis Lalande, *Jean II le Meingre, dit Boucicaud (1366 1421). Étude d'une biographie héroïque* (Geneva: Droz, 1988), p. 1.
10. For a thorough scientific analysis of the *Livre des fais*, see: *Livre des fais* (introduction by Denis Lalande), XI LXXV.
11. Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 953/1546), *Mufākahat al khillān fī ḥawādīth al zamān*, ed. Mohamed Mostafa, (Cairo: Wizārat al Thaqafa wa l Irshād al Qawmī, 1964), II: 122; Ibn Iyās (d. 931/1524), *Badā'i' al zuhūr fī waqā'i' al duhūr*, ed. Mohamed Mostafa (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1961), V: 359 360.
12. Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Tārīkh Bayrūt*, 7v 12v.
13. Marino Sanuto (d. 1533), *I diarii*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin et al. (Venice, 1879 1902), XXIX: 433 436.
14. J. Delaville le Roulx, *La France en Orient au XIV^e siècle. Expéditions du Maréchal Boucicaud*, volumes

- I II (Paris: Librairies des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1886); Ch.de la Roncière, "François Ier et la défense de Rhodes", *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes. Revue d'érudition*, 62 (1901): 223 240.
15. Lalande, 5.
 16. Lalande, 10.
 17. Lalande, 17 18.
 18. *Livre des fais*, 61 63; Delaville le Roulx, 165.
 19. *Livre des fais*, 64; Delaville le Roulx, 165.
 20. Lalande, 28; *Les Cent Ballades, poème du XIV^e siècle*, ed. G. Raynaud (Paris: SATF, 1905).
 21. *Livre des fais*, 78 82; Lalande, 37 39.
 22. *Livre des fais*, 102 113; Lalande, 57 65; Josef Matuz, *Das Osmanische Reich. Grundlinien seiner Geschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994; third edition), p. 43.
 23. *Livre des fais*, 121 128; Lalande, 67 74.
 24. *Livre des fais*, 133; Lalande, 82 84.
 25. *Livre des fais*, 142 147; Lalande, 87 91.
 26. *Livre des fais*, 150; Lalande, 91.
 27. *Livre des fais*, 154 156; Lalande, 95 96.
 28. *Livre des fais*, 160 164; Lalande, 93 94.
 29. Delaville le Roulx, 403.
 30. *Livre des fais*, 188 189; Lalande, 93 94; Delaville le Roulx, 405.
 31. Lalande, 102 103; Delaville le Roulx, 408 411.
 32. Lalande, 105.
 33. *Livre des fais*, 206 208.
 34. Lalande, 105.
 35. Lalande, 105; Albrecht Fuess, *Verbranntes Ufer. Auswirkungen mamlukischer Seepolitik auf Beirut und die syro palästinensische Küste (1250 1517)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 210.
 36. *Livre des fais*, 230; Delaville le Roulx, 431 432; Fuess, 210.
 37. *Livre des fais*, 232 233; Lalande, 111; Delaville le Roulx, 436 437; for the expedition of Peter I: Fuess, 24 29.
 38. *Livre des fais*, 233 234, 244 245; Lalande, 112.
 39. *Livre des fais*, 245.
 40. Heribert Müller, "Frankreich im Spätmittelalter: Vom Königsstaat zur Königsnation (1270 1498)", in *Geschichte Frankreichs*, 65.
 41. *Livre des fais*, 234 243; Lalande, 112.
 42. Emmanuel Piloti (d. after 1438), *L'Égypte au commencement du quinzième siècle d'après le traité d'Emmanuel Piloti de Crète*, ed. P. H. Dopp (Cairo: Université Fouad I, 1950), p. 90; Šāliḥ b. Yaḥyā, 32.
 43. *Livre des fais*, 244; Lalande, 114.
 44. *Livre des fais*, 64; Lalande, 29; Delaville le Roulx, 165.
 45. For the naval policy of the Mamluks, see: Albrecht Fuess, "Rotting ships and razed harbours: The naval policy of the Mamluks", *Mamluk Studies Review*, 5 (2001): 45 71.
 46. On the role of Venice and the Syro Palestinian coast see Fuess, *Verbranntes Ufer*, 386 405.
 47. A clear indication that the Venetians had warned the inhabitants of Beirut beforehand.
 48. The author Šāliḥ b. Yaḥyā, himself belonged to this family of the Emirs of the Gharb.
 49. Šāliḥ b. Yaḥyā, 32 34.
 50. Lalande, 115.
 51. Later to become the Mamlūk Sultan al Mu'ayyad Shaykh (815 825/1412 1421).
 52. Šāliḥ b. Yaḥyā, p. 33.
 53. *Livre des fais*, 251 252; Delaville le Roulx, 444.
 54. Piloti 90.
 55. *Livre des fais*, 255 58; Lalande, 117.
 56. *Livre des fais*, 260 267; Lalande, 119 121; Delaville le Roulx, 453 457.
 57. Delaville le Roulx, 490.
 58. Delaville le Roulx, 498.
 59. *Livre des fais*, 346; Lalande, 141.
 60. *Livre des fais*, 347 359; Lalande, 141.
 61. *Livre des fais*, 360 363; Lalande, 142.
 62. *Livre des fais*, 382 386; Lalande, 153 162.

63. Lalande, 170 173.
64. Wolfgang Schmale, *Geschichte Frankreichs* (Stuttgart: UTB, 2000), p. 82.
65. Jean Germain, "Le discours du Voyage d'Oultremer au très victorieux Roi Charles VII prononcé en 1452, par Jean Germain, C. Schefer, évêque de Chalon", *Revue de l'Orient Latin*, 3 (1895), (Introduction of the editor), 310 312.
66. Kamal Salibi, "The Maronites of Lebanon under Frankish and Mamluk Rule (1099 1516)", *Arabica*, 4 (1957), 297.
67. Eliyahu Ashtor, *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 346 349.
68. Ashtor, 492.
69. Aḥmad Darrāj, *al Mamālīk wa l firanj* (Cairo: Dār al Fikr al 'Arabī, 1961), pp. 149 150.
70. David Ayalon, "The end of the Mamluk sultanate. Why did the Ottomans spare the Mamluks of Egypt and wipe out the Mamluks of Syria?", *Studia Islamica*, 65 (1987): 134 139; Albrecht Fuess, "Dreikampf um die Macht zwischen Osmanen, Mamluken und Safawiden. Warum blieben die Mamluken auf der Strecke?", in *Die Mamluken. Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur. Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Anja Pistor Hatam (Hamburg: EB Verlag, 2003), pp. 239 250
71. Knecht, 103.
72. "Lettre de Léon X à François Ier (17th of October 1516)", in *Negociations de la France dans le Levant*, ed. E. Charrière [Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France] (Paris 1848; reprint New York: Burt Franklin, around 1965), pp. 13 15.
73. "Lettre de François Ier à Léon X (fifteenth of November 1516)", in *Negociations de la France dans le Levant*, 18.
74. "Traité d'alliance entre François Ier, Maximilien, Empereur, et Charles, Roi d'Espagne, par lequel ces trois princes prennent l'engagement de se secourir mutuellement et d'armer en commun contre les Turcs (10th of July 1517)", in *Ordonnances des Rois de France. Règne de François Ier* [ed. Académie des sciences morales et politique, vol. 2 (1517 1520)] (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1916), pp. 7 18; Georg Wagner, "Der letzte Türkenkreuzzugsplan Kaiser Maximilian I. aus dem Jahre 1517", *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 77 (1969): 321.
75. "Lettre de Léon X à François Ier (2nd of July 1517)", in *Negociations de la France dans le Levant*, 24 27; "Consultation de l'empereur Maximilien Ier (1518)", in *Negociations de la France dans le Levant*, 49 62; Wagner, 322 323.
76. "Bulle de Léon X ordonnant la trêve de cinq ans", in *Negociations de la France dans le Levant*, 63 68; Wagner, 348.
77. Knecht, 104.
78. "'Sçavoir et entendre des affaires du Turc, luy faire la guerre et tout l'ennuy et dommage' possible", Nouvelles acquisitions françaises, 6658, fol. 3, Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, here cited after: Ch. de la Roncière, "François Ier et la défense de Rhodes", *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes. Revue d'érudition*, 62 (1901): 227; see also: Nicolas Vatin, *L'ordre de Saint Jean de Jérusalem. L'empire ottoman et la Méditerranée orientale entre les deux sièges de Rhodes* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), p. 325.
79. Gerd Treffer, *Franz I. von Frankreich (1494 1547). Herrscher und Mäzen* (Regensburg: Pustet 1993), p. 105.
80. "François Ier s'engage à défendre le pape Léon X contre les Turcs, et fixe le chiffre des troupes qu'il mettra à sa disposition (11th of February 1519)", in *Ordonnances des Rois de France. Règne de François Ier*, 401 404.
81. "Lettre conférant aux électeurs de Trèves et de Brandebourg la qualité de plénipotentiaires à l'effet de promettre la reconnaissance des privilèges de l'Empire, dans le cas où François Ier serait élu Roi des Romains (12th of May 1519)", in *Ordonnances des Rois de France. Règne de François Ier*, 463.
82. Fonds français, 5500, fol. 304, Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, here cited after: de la Roncière, "François Ier et la défense de Rhodes", 232.
83. de la Roncière, 233.
84. Vatin, 326.
85. Fuess, *Verbranntes Ufer*, 311.
86. Ludovico di Varthema, *The Itinerari of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna from 1502 to 1508*, transl. John Winter Jones (London: Hakluyk Society, 1928), p. 7.
87. F. Hours, "Le rôle de Beyrouth dans le commerce officiel de Venise durant les dernières années du régime mamluk (1500 1517)", in *Sociétés et compagnies du commerce en Orient et dans l'océan Indien*,

Actes du huitième colloque international d'histoire maritime, Beirut 5 10 Sept. 1966, ed. Michel Mollat (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1977), pp. 435 438.

88. Matuz, 76.
89. Sanuto, 433.
90. Sanuto, 434.
91. Fuess, *Verbranntes Ufer*, 263.
92. de la Roncière, 233.
93. Sanuto, 435.
94. Sanuto, 436.
95. Ibn Ṭūlūn, 122.
96. Ibn Iyās, 359 360.
97. Unfortunately the manuscript of Ibn Ṭūlūn is not complete therefore not the whole *qaṣīda* can be reconstructed.
98. Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Tārīkh Bayrūt* 7v 12v.; Fuess, *Verbranntes Ufer*, 273.
99. Sanuto 436.
100. Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahat al khillān*, 122.
101. Ayalon, 139; Matuz, 116.
102. Muhammad Adnan Bakhit, "The Christian population of the province of Damascus in the sixteenth century", in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 2: *The Arabic Speaking Lands*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), p. 39.
103. F. Mignet, *La rivalité de François Ier et de Charles Quint*, (Paris, 1875) volume I, here cited after: Knecht, 182.
104. De la Roncière, 240.
105. Treffer, 169, 185.
106. Anne Berthier, "Un document retrouvé: La première lettre de Soliman au Roi François Ier (1526)", *Turcica*, 27 (1995): 263 264.
107. The term "capitulation" derives from Latin *capitula*, i.e. article and as the treaty between the French and the Ottomans were composed of several of these articles it was called capitulation; see for the text of the capitulation: "Premier traité officiel de la France avec la Porte", in *Negociations de la France dans le Levant*, 283 294.
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113. Barbara von Palombini, *Bündniswerben abendländischer Mächte um Persien 1453 1600* [Freiburger Islamstudien 1] (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1968), pp. 66 67.