

*New Jersey's Barbary Diplomat (Part 2 of 2)***By Lawrence S. Freund****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v9i1.307>**

In 1816, Charles Davenport Coxe, anxious to leave his New Jersey home and return to his diplomatic career, sought a consular appointment to France with the support of his former superior in North Africa, Tobias Lear, who praised Coxe's arduous service in Tunis at a time when the United States had no warships in the Mediterranean to protect its commerce. However, Coxe's application was not successful nor was his later bid to return to the Marine Corps as its commandant. Finally, in 1824, Coxe's efforts were rewarded with an appointment as consul at Tunis. The following year, he was transferred to another North African capital, Tripoli, where he became awkwardly entangled in the local fallout of big-power rivalries and Tripolitan politics. Coxe died in Tripoli in 1830, his legacy one of involvement in two of his country's most challenging and distant outposts as it began to emerge on the world stage.

In 1816, the longtime American consul and commercial entrepreneur in Bordeaux, William Lee, decided to depart his post. Lee, an admirer of the then deposed French Emperor Napoleon, had faced what he called "a very unpleasant time" in the French city in September 1815, as he explained to the secretary of the American legation in Paris, Henry Jackson. "An attempt was made to excite the mob to pull down the eagle placed over my door," Lee wrote, "but the people had more respect for the Government of the United States than their leaders."¹ Jackson would later write to Secretary of State James Monroe that Lee had "managed somehow to render himself highly unpopular at Bourdeaux (sic) both with the people and the authorities—and however innocently as an American he may have done this or however free his conduct may be from

¹ Mary Lee Man, ed., *A Yankee Jeffersonian: Selections from the Diary and Letters of William Lee of Massachusetts* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), 172.

censure, yet such is the irritation against him that it is become highly politic if not absolutely necessary to remove him. Indeed the happiness of his family ought to lead him to desire it.”² But even before Jackson wrote to Monroe, Lee had already decided enough was enough, and, writing to President Madison on February 16, 1816, he explained: “I feel my position so very irksome, that I have a great desire to return home.” In that same letter to the president, Lee suggested that his replacement in Bordeaux should be Daniel Strobel, “a native American, well known and respected in this city” and the current American consul in Nantes.³ Lee sailed for home with his family on June 16, 1816,⁴ and Strobel was immediately put in charge of consular affairs in Bordeaux, “the duties devolving on [Lee’s] successor, Mr. Strobel, a gentleman long well known here,” wrote an American in Bordeaux in September.⁵ News of William Lee’s resignation crossed the Atlantic quickly and Tench Coxe, the prominent cousin and brother-in-law of Charles D. Coxe, was among those receiving it. Taking pen in hand at his home in Philadelphia, Tench Coxe wrote to President Madison on behalf of his 25-year-old son, attorney Alexander Sidney Coxe, submitting the son’s name for the Bordeaux post (“He is well acquainted with the French language, and quite at ease in writing and speaking it. His principles are intelligently and decidedly constitutional”).⁶ At that same time, Charles D. Coxe initiated his own bid for the post in Bordeaux, a city known for its wine but also for its potentially profitable trading and shipping activity. He contacted for support his former diplomatic supervisor in North Africa, Tobias Lear, along with Stephen Pleasonton, a State Department junior official who Coxe would later describe as his

² Letter from Henry Jackson to James Monroe, March 26, 1816, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/03-10-02-0249> (accessed January 4, 2022).

³ Letter from William Lee to James Madison, February 16, 1816, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/03-10-02-0249> (accessed January 4, 2022).

⁴ Mann, 300.

⁵ “Letter from an American officer in France,” *National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), November 18, 1816, 2.

⁶ Letter from Tench Coxe to James Madison, May 8, 1816, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/03-11-02-0022> (accessed January 4, 2022).

“friend.”⁷ Lear, in a “Certificate Recommendatory” dated May 7, 1816, responded that Coxe’s duties in Tunis had been “arduous” at a time when the United States “had no vessels of war in the Mediterranean to protect our commerce,” and he pointed to the “heavy expenses” Coxe bore during his service.⁸ Months later, in September, with no apparent action on his request to Pleasonton, Coxe, from his home in New Jersey, wrote directly to Secretary of State James Monroe and pleaded essentially the same case that Lear had presented in May, citing:

The many years of my life which have been usefully devoted to the public service in the consular office at Tunis, while we had no vessels of war to protect our commerce in the Mediterranean, during a period of extreme difficulty, upon a salary scarcely adequate to the necessary expenses of the station. . . .⁹

However, despite his effort, nothing ever came of Coxe’s bid for the consular post in Bordeaux.¹⁰ Four years later, in 1820, Coxe made an effort to return to the military, writing to former President James Madison in search of an appointment as commandant of the Marine Corps. On October 16, 1820, the current commandant, Anthony Gale, had been dismissed from both his

⁷ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to James Madison, October 20, 1820, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-02-02-0120> (accessed January 4, 2022).

⁸ Tobias Lear Statement, May 7, 1816, HMS/MLR Entry Number: A1 760, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of James Madison, 1809–1817. M439, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State, 1763–2002 National Archives at College Park.

⁹ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to James Monroe, September 2, 1816, HMS/MLR Entry Number: A1 760, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of James Madison, 1809–1817. M439, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State, 1763–2002 National Archives at College Park.

¹⁰ President Madison formally nominated Daniel Strobel as consul in Bordeaux on December 16, 1816; the Senate approved the nomination by March 1817 (*National Intelligencer* [Washington, DC], March 7, 1817, 2). In 1831, Strobel, in a report to Secretary of State Martin Van Buren on the organization of the U.S. consular service, essentially confirmed the complaint of Coxe and Lear about the expenses of the job. “There were not enough Americans settled abroad whose circumstances enable them to hold the office of consuls, and discharge the duties of that situation as they ought to be performed, for the slender and precarious emoluments to be derived from a few fees,” Strobel wrote. “Accordingly, experience has demonstrated, that, here and there an exception, our consulates have proved injurious to most of the individuals who have unwarily gone out to occupy them, and have done so under erroneous impressions of their value in a pecuniary point of view, which has plunged many of them into difficulties and embarrassments; whilst the struggles and shifts that some among them are consequently compelled to make for a livelihood, are often of a nature to derogate from their official character, and to injure its efficacy.” (Charles Stuart Kennedy, *The American Consul: A History of the U.S. Consular Service, 1776–1924* [New Academia Publishing, Washington, DC, 2015], 89–90.)

office and the Marine Corps after his court martial conviction on several charges, including drunkenness. Coxe seized the opportunity and, a few days later, taking pen in hand at his Sidney estate, wrote to Madison, claiming that unnamed Marine Corps officers did not believe that he had ever resigned from the Corps and would be glad to see him as commandant, an office to which he was entitled, Coxe claimed, because of his seniority in the Corps. Arguing that he had never actually resigned his Marine Corps commission in 1809, Coxe reminded Madison that he had paid his respects to the then president after his return from Tunis in 1816:

. . . and stated the very disagreeable situation in which I was placed, after having served my Country so long, during an absence of more than ten years, under so many discouraging circumstances, and with the express approbation of my superiors. You were good enough to say that you had always considered me as attached to the Marine Corps, and that you had appointed a Consul to succeed me under the idea that I wished to return to my post.¹¹

Coxe then appealed to Madison “to address a line” to President Monroe in his favor. Madison replied to Coxe that he did not recall their conversation, but agreed to “drop a few lines” to Monroe, adding, however, “they can add nothing as you will perceive, to his means of appreciating your case.”¹² In his note to Monroe, Madison advised the president to consult the official records to decide the status of Coxe, although he said of Coxe, “Of his personal qualities and accomplishments, my impressions are favorable.”¹³ A note from Monroe indicates that he had forwarded Coxe’s letter to the secretary of the navy, but, as in the case of Coxe’s request for an appointment to Bordeaux, nothing ever came of this appeal for reinstatement.¹⁴ But it was not to be Coxe’s final effort to return to government service.

¹¹ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to James Madison, October 20, 1820, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-02-02-0120> (accessed November 16, 2021).

¹² Letter from James Madison to Charles D. Coxe, November 7, 1820, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-02-02-0126> (accessed November 16, 2021).

¹³ Letter from James Madison to James Monroe, November 8, 1820, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-02-02-0127> (accessed November 16, 2021).

¹⁴ Letter from James Monroe to James Madison, November 16, 1820, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-02-02-0131> (accessed November 16, 2021). Lt. Col. Archibald Henderson was appointed Marine Corps commandant on October 17, 1820, one day after Gale’s dismissal and

Back in March 1819, Townsend Stith, a Virginia-born U.S. Army captain, had been appointed consul in Tunis.¹⁵ Stith unexpectedly resigned from his post in August 1823,¹⁶ and on his way back to the United States with his family, he died at Gibraltar on about November 2, 1823.¹⁷ With a vacancy in Tunis, William Shaler, the U.S. consul general in Algiers (the successor to Tobias Lear), named navy surgeon Samuel D. Heap in what seems to have been an interim appointment as Stith's replacement. Heap arrived in Tunis on December 15, 1823, and quickly opened talks to revise the 1797 agreement governing U.S. relations with the regency.¹⁸ At the same time, word of Stith's death had reached Charles D. Coxe in New Jersey, who quickly appeared at the door of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in Washington to plead his case. "Mr Coxe . . . of New-Jersey was here," Adams wrote in his diary, "applying for the appointment of Consul at Tunis, vacant by the Death of Townsend Stith—Coxe has been heretofore an applicant for the Office of Consul General at Algiers."¹⁹ A month later, Coxe again visited Adams, now to receive "his commission as Consul at Tunis."²⁰ On July 19, 1824, Coxe was informed by the secretary of the navy that he would "be provided transportation in CONSTITUTION and must be ready to sail in 3 or 4 weeks so as not to delay the ship. As Congress has not appropriated any monies for the

before Coxe had even begun writing his letter to Madison. But Coxe was correct on one essential fact: If he were still considered a Marine Corps officer in 1820, he would have enjoyed seniority over Henderson (appointed second lieutenant on June 4, 1806, more than six months after Coxe's appointment), and seniority was a major determinant of leadership appointments.

¹⁵ "Appointments by the President, with the Consent of the Senate," *National Intelligencer*, March 6, 1819, 3.

¹⁶ Amos Perry, *An Official Tour Along the Eastern Coast of the Regency of Tunis* (Standard Print Co., Providence, Rhode Island, 1891), 106.

¹⁷ *Alexandria Gazette & Advertiser*, January 6, 1824, 3.

¹⁸ Evelina Gleaves Cohen, *Family Facts and Fairy Tales* (Erie Printing & Publishing Co., Philadelphia, 1953), 12.

¹⁹ John Quincy Adams Digital Diary, January 2, 1824,

<https://www.masshist.org/publications/jqadiaries/index.php/document/jqadiaries-v34-1824-01-02-p201> (accessed November 22, 2021).

²⁰ Adams Digital Diary, February 2, 1824,

<https://www.masshist.org/publications/jqadiaries/index.php/document/jqadiaries-v34-1824-02-02-p220> (accessed November 22, 2021).

purpose, you must pay for all your needs during the voyage but not for the passage itself.”²¹ On October 9, Coxe spoke with a sympathetic newspaper reporter in Trenton, who wrote:

This gentleman, with a noble spirit of disinterested benevolence, which is worthy of the highest commendation, is desirous of ameliorating the condition of the people amongst whom, as American Consul, he is about to reside; and for this purpose has projected a plan for improving the state of agriculture and of the mechanic arts among the subjects of the Bey. For the accomplishment of this meritorious object, instead of expending the amount of money allowed for presents, in musical snuff-boxes, repeating watches, and a long catalogue of trinkets, fitted rather for show than for usefulness, he intends to purchase and take out with him oxen, carts, ploughs, harrows, rakes, forks, hoes, harness of different kinds, and a variety of agricultural and mechanical implements, such as they are destitute of, and greatly need.²²

Coxe and his family boarded the USS *Constitution* at the New York Navy Yard on October 11, 1824, and, after delays, the ship sailed for the Mediterranean on October 29, arriving at Gibraltar nearly a month later. The *Constitution* then sailed for Tunis where Coxe, his family, and their goods were transferred to another ship to bring them into Tunis (allowing the *Constitution* to avoid possible quarantine in European ports). They arrived on December 11, exactly two months after leaving New York. An officer of the USS *Ontario*, the ship delegated to bring the Coxe family into Tunis, recalled that the ship’s captain, John Nicholson, and Coxe were rowed to shore. “Upon our reaching the Consular house,” he wrote, “we found a very agreeable family, Dr. Heap of the Navy, his wife and five children. Mrs. Heap is the sister of Commodore Porter, an accomplished and pretty woman. The next morning very early, a message was sent to the Bey, requesting he would appoint an hour when we should wait upon him: ten o’clock was fixed, his usual time being sun-rise; and accordingly, about nine o’clock, Dr. Heap, Mr. Coxe, Captain N-, and myself proceeded in a carriage with two wheels . . . to the Palace of the Bey. . . .”²³ On January 8, 1825,

²¹ Letter from the secretary of the navy to Charles D. Coxe, July 19, 1824, M 209, Miscellaneous Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy, 1798–1886, in National Archives, M-209.

²² *National Journal* (Washington, DC), November 16, 1824, 3.

²³ *National Journal*, August 19, 1826, 3.

Thomas Macdonough, captain of the *Constitution*, wrote to the Navy Department about “the reception given to Mr. Coxe,” explaining that the new consul “had been well received despite reports he would not be accepted because of ‘the prejudice of the Bey against his character.’”²⁴ Coxe, writing later to Secretary of State Henry Clay, clarified that he was not on good terms with Heap because, in part of a letter “in which a local official had asked Heap to inform his Government that Coxe was not acceptable to the Bey . . . Coxe had learned that the Bey had understood that the American consul there in 1815 (Mordecai M. Noah) was to have been reappointed and that the objection was against the latter rather than himself.”²⁵ This was the first acrimonious exchange involving the two consuls, Heap and Coxe. More would follow.

By March 1824, Heap had completed negotiations with the government of Tunis on revisions of the 1797 “treaty of peace and friendship,” talks that he had begun soon after his arrival in the regency. He forwarded the completed amendments to Washington on June 13 and, after Senate ratification, the new convention was officially proclaimed on January 21, 1825.²⁶ The following October and again in a dispatch to the State Department in February 1826, Coxe, apparently unaware that Heap’s agreement had already been ratified, complained about the amendments. Hunter Miller, a twentieth-century attorney and diplomat who analyzed U.S. treaties for the State Department, explained that Coxe criticized “in considerable detail the alteration in the four articles of the earlier treaty which were made by this convention.” In part, Miller added,

²⁴ Letter from Thomas Macdonough to the Navy Department, James F. Hopkins, ed., *The Papers of Henry Clay: Secretary of State 1825*, Vol. 4 (The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 277–278.

²⁵ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Henry Clay, *Ibid.*, 306–307.

²⁶ The four amended articles were preceded with the explanation that they had been accepted so “that the United States should be placed on the same footing with the most favored Nations having Treaties with Tunis, as well as to manifest a respect for the American Government and a desire to continue unimpaired the friendly relations which have always existed between the two Nations.” (See Hunter Miller, ed., *The Avalon Project—Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, The Barbary Treaties*, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/bar1824t.asp (accessed November 23, 2021).

“those comments of Coxe complained of the fact that Heap acted without instructions; in part they relate to clauses of the treaty which were not altered by Heap; and in general they seem to have been written with the purpose of putting the course of Heap in an unfavorable light.”²⁷

Coxe’s strategy with respect to Heap seems to have failed. In April 1826, Secretary of State Clay wrote to Coxe to inform him he was being replaced in Tunis by the person Coxe regarded as his nemesis, Samuel D. Heap. Coxe, Clay wrote, “has been appointed Consul U.S. to Tripoli,” and he sent Coxe his commission, his credential letter, a letter of credit, and “instructions promoting friendly relations with the Bashaw and the selection of the customary present.”²⁸ Coxe, in a letter to Clay, acknowledged receiving the notice of his reassignment on December 27, 1826, “by the hand of Dr. S. D. Heap,” complained about the long delay in its delivery “and of the neglect by the Department of State to answer his communications.” Coxe also reported that the Bey had refused to receive Coxe’s presents, explaining that his “expectations had been raised very high” by Heap’s treaty.²⁹ On February 15, 1827, Heap wrote to his father from Tunis, having been delivered there from Marseilles by Commodore John Rodgers aboard the USS *North Carolina*.

Mirroring Coxe’s scorn, Heap wrote:

Mr. Coxe, who was suffering under the mortification of being superceded and transferred to a much less desirable situation, had not less industriously than foolishly circulated a report that Commodore Rodgers was his particular friend and that not satisfied with the course I had pursued towards him, would not afford me a vessel of war; and that in consequence of representations, he, the Commodore, had made to the Government there was no doubt but that I should be directed to repair to Tripoli. His mortification was complete when he found that the Commodore had brought me himself.³⁰

²⁷ Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America: Documents 41–79: 1819–1835* (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1931), 145, 149.

²⁸ Letter from Henry Clay to Charles D. Coxe, April 21, 1826, Hopkins, Vol. 5, 266.

²⁹ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Henry Clay, February 24, 1827, Hopkins, Vol. 6, 238.

³⁰ Cohen, 15.

“Thus,” Heap continued, “on the 27th of Dec. after having twice traversed the Mediterranean and Atlantic, after having visited Italy, France and Spain and our dear native land . . . we arrived at a happy conclusion of a series of voyages.” Heap added one additional disparaging comment about his predecessor in Tunis, noting that he (Heap) had received the congratulations of the foreign consuls in Tunis who “appeared to be much gratified to see us again in Tunis—few or none of them, for many months passed, have had any intercourse with Mr. C. whose habits of intemperance and litigious disposition render him totally unfit for genteel society.”³¹

Coxe was reassigned to Tripoli to replace Thomas D. Anderson, who had been appointed in 1819, but, according to his family, had contracted “a disease in the eyes, by which he was deprived of vision.”³² In early September 1827, Anderson wrote from Leghorn (Livorno) that he remained in the Tuscan port ““by permission from the State Department for the benefit of his eyesight” and that he was “in daily expectation” of Coxe’s arrival in Tripoli “when the seals and records of the (consular) Office will be delivered to him by Mr. (Joseph Nicholas) Morillo.”³³ By the time Anderson wrote his letter, however, Coxe and his family had already arrived in Tripoli, and Morillo, apparently the consular assistant, wrote to Secretary of State Clay to advise him of the official changeover. Beyond that, however, Morillo went on to advise Clay that Coxe, now in possession of the consular house, had “seized and detain’d the furniture of Mr. Anderson under the pretext that it belonged to the United States,” whereas, Morillo said, it was widely known in Tripoli that Anderson had purchased the furniture from his predecessor. In addition, Morillo claimed that Coxe’s behavior had already “created a great excitement, and amongst the Consuls

³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

³² “Report to Accompany Bill S. 301,” March 29, 1852, 33rd Congress, 1st Session (Senate), Rep. Com. No. 187, *The Reports of the Committees of the Senate of the United States for the First Session, Thirty-Third Congress, 1853–54* (Beverly Tucker, Senate Printer, 1854), Vol. 2, Rep. Com. 187.

³³ Letter from Thomas D. Anderson to Henry Clay, September 6, 1827, Hopkins, Vol. 6, 1010.

the highest disgust,” words reminiscent of Heap’s comments in Tunis. Coxe’s conduct, Morillo wrote, could only have been explained “on the ground of insanity or habitual intoxication,” stating that many of the foreign consuls in Tripoli had informed him “that they would have no further intercourse with Mr. Coxe than Official etiquette required. . . .”³⁴ As if to confirm Morillo’s claims, Wilhelmina Françoise Amélie Louise Clifford Kocq van Breugel, the wife of the Dutch consul in Tripoli, recalled in her memoir:

Mr. Coxe, the American Consul, a crude and severe gentleman, was married to a Maltese, Fortunata Caravanni (sic). Whether the lady’s condition was in accordance with her beautiful first name, the lucky one, is very doubtful. After all, her husband made too lavish sacrifices to Bacchus, and was in a far from friendly mood after indulging in it. Wife and child often suffered the consequences of his fatal passion. Had his brain not been clouded by the drink, then he could be witty, sometimes satirical, but sometimes offensive.³⁵

In that same memoir (edited by her son-in-law, Marie Adrien Perk), the wife of the Dutch consul also recalled a diplomatic quarrel involving elements of big-power politics, romance, daring exploration, intrigue, and the somewhat awkward involvement of the newly arrived American consul, Charles D. Coxe.³⁶ Coxe arrived in Tripoli in 1827. He had been preceded into Tripoli two years earlier by the then 30-year-old Alexander Gordon Laing, a Scottish officer in the British Army and an explorer who was focused on becoming the first European to visit Timbuktu, then regarded in the West as a fabled trading city of possible great wealth. Not long after Laing’s appearance in Tripoli and just two days before his departure for Timbuktu—more than two thousand miles distant across the Sahara—on July 14, 1825, he married Emma Warrington, a daughter of the longtime British consul in Tripoli. Laing reported his arrival in Timbuktu more than a year later, on August 18, 1826, having experienced extreme difficulties, including multiple

³⁴ Letter from Joseph Nicholas Morillo to Henry Clay, August 20, 1827, Hopkins, Vol. 6, 939.

³⁵ Marie Adrien Perk, ed., *Zes jaren te Tripoli in Barbarije* (J. Minkman, Arnhem, Netherlands, 1875), 59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 51–53, 92–93.

wounds, disease, and robbery. After spending about a month in the city and fearing continued local hostility, Laing departed Timbuktu. Three days later, he was murdered and decapitated.

These events took place in a competitive environment in the North African region, notably featuring the two major European powers, Britain and France, a contest evidenced in microcosm in Tripoli, where the British consul, Hanmer Warrington, exercised considerable leverage. “The only European power which could in the 1820s challenge British ascendancy in the regency was France,” explains scholar Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, “whose consul L. Charles Rousseau became engaged with Warrington in a constant duel for influence since his arrival in Tripoli in 1825.”³⁷ In an attempt to exert his own power, the ruling pasha in Tripoli, Yusuf Qaramanli, appointed Hassuna D’Ghies as foreign minister, who, as Abun-Nasr writes, “apparently was given the task of curtailing the local influence of the consuls. Warrington, who had most to lose from Hassuna D’Ghies’ insistence on conducting business with the consuls in a way which prevented their intervention in local affairs, used the death near Timbuktu in 1826 of the English explorer Major Laing as an occasion to force the pasha to dismiss his foreign minister.”³⁸ Warrington became convinced that Laing’s papers describing Timbuktu had been seized and delivered in Tripoli to Hassuna D’Ghies, who then turned them over to the French consul, Rousseau. According to an account reflecting Warrington’s assertions and published in 1830 by a London journal, the Tripoli ruler intended to question D’Ghies, who, “having received a hint of what was going on, took refuge in the American consulate, from whence he was conveyed the same night, and in disguise, on

³⁷ Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 202. British historian E. W. Bovill observed that Warrington’s close ties with the ruler of Tripoli made the consul “intolerably arrogant to the other consuls. He tried to dominate them and was constantly interfering in their affairs, even to the extent of reporting to the Colonial Office the American consul’s ‘indicate expression’ before the French consul’s wife. He was, in consequence, perpetually quarrelling with his foreign colleagues.” Warrington’s “bitterest feud,” added Bovill, “arose from his implacable hatred for Baron Rousseau, the consul of France.” (E. W. Bovill, “Colonel Warrington,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 131, No. 2 [June 1965], 163.)

³⁸ *Ibid.*

board an American vessel then in the road, which, on the following morning, put to sea.”³⁹ This same British narrative acknowledges “the exertions of the whole corps of European consuls in Tripoli, especially the consul of the Netherlands, to get at the real truth,” adding, however, that the conduct of Coxe did not appear “to be deserving of any such recommendations. His exertions were employed only to rescue from justice a man implicated in a charge of murder and robbery. (W)hat interest he had in the rescue of this man could not be understood by the rest of the consuls.”⁴⁰ That same article includes a letter said to have been addressed by Coxe on November 20, 1829, to Warrington in which Coxe contritely states: “I have been most perfectly deceived and treacherously imposed upon in the affair of Hassuna D’Ghies, of which you are aware, and which I really feel it my duty to acknowledge. . . . I can now fully declare that I am thoroughly convinced that the said D’Ghies did receive the papers of the unfortunate traveller, Major Laing, here in Tripoli.”⁴¹ The British narrative asserting the theft of Laing’s papers followed a long, detailed, and negative review of the journals of the French explorer Auguste René Caillié, who reached Timbuktu in April 1828 and then returned to France, giving him the distinction as the first European to return alive from the Saharan city.

Historian Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, tending to represent current scholarship on these events, writes that “Warrington claimed, without any substantial evidence, that Laing’s assassination had been plotted by the *pasha* and D’Ghies, that the latter had given Laing’s papers to the French consul in return for a forty percent reduction of a debt which he owed him and that Caillié had never set foot in Timbuktu and the diary he had published under his name was compiled from Laing’s papers.”⁴² In the *pasha*’s attempt to placate Warrington, Abun-Nasr explains, the Tripoli

³⁹ *The Quarterly Review* (London), Vol. XLII (January & March 1830), 466.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 469.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁴² Abun-Nasr, 202.

leader offended the French, following which French warships appeared in Tripoli, forcing the pasha to sign a treaty that, among other things, included the pasha's denial of the French consul's involvement in the Laing affair.

Coxe's motives in assisting D'Ghies's escape from Tripoli are open to question. Robert Greenhow, an attorney, was well placed to assess at least some of the background, having become a translator, librarian, and interpreter at the State Department in Washington in 1828.⁴³ In the November 1834 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Greenhow published the first of several installments of what he called "Sketches of the History and Present Condition of Tripoli, with some accounts of the other Barbary States" (later gathered in an 1835 book). Greenhow began by observing that given Tripoli's judicial system, "where punishment is entirely disproportioned to offence, no unfavorable inference could be fairly drawn from the flight of the accused." Beyond that, Greenhow added:

The D'Ghies family had been uniformly the friends of the Americans, and Hassuna although suspected of too much devotion to the interests of France, upon the whole bore a fair character, and was on terms of friendly intimacy with the family of Mr. Coxe. The charge against him was of a strange nature, and not one likely to be substantiated; he protested that he was innocent of all improper conduct with regard to the unfortunate traveller, that the British Consul was anxious to procure his destruction from motives of personal enmity. . . ."⁴⁴

Greenhow also cited an incident that, in his view, soured Coxe's attitude toward the British consul, Hanmer Warrington, even though the event occurred years before Coxe's arrival in Tripoli. The incident involved one of Coxe's predecessors in Tripoli, Richard B. Jones, along with one of the more colorful characters to appear in the regency during that period, Peter Lisle, otherwise known as Murad Rais. Lisle, born in Scotland, became a seaman on British ships and, when facing

⁴³ David K. Jackson, *Poe and the Southern Literary Messenger* (The Dietz Printing Co., Richmond, Virginia, 1934), 31.

⁴⁴ Robert Greenhow, *The History and Present Condition of Tripoli, with Some Accounts of the Other Barbary States* (T. W. White, Richmond, Virginia, 1835), 56.

court martial, joined the crew of an American schooner that was subsequently captured and brought to Tripoli. Lisle converted to Islam in about 1796, adopted the name Murad Rais (honoring a seventeenth-century North African pirate and convert who adopted the same name), and moved steadily up through the ranks until he became the equivalent of high admiral of Tripoli's navy. With an evident distaste for Americans, in 1803 he led the boarding party that captured the grounded USS *Philadelphia* in Tripoli's harbor, with scornful words for the commanding officer, William Bainbridge. Also among the *Philadelphia*'s crew was a young midshipman, Richard B. Jones, who, nine years later, was posted by the United States as consul in Tripoli. In September 1818, according to Greenhow, Jones was attacked and beaten in Tripoli by men who were suspected to have been slaves of Murad Rais. Jones wrote to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams that after being "assaulted" by one of the men, two others appeared. "They came but not empty handed," Jones explained, "the one with a hoe and the other with a club, and assaulted me in the most violent manner. . . . They left us a moment to seek a sword at the wall, and returned again to attack us, but a sufficient number of persons had now collected to prevent further violence. But not until my right hand was mangled from a blow from the hoe and I had several other contusions on my shoulder, arms, breast and thighs."⁴⁵

"Investigations were made," wrote Greenhow, "by the results of which this suspicion was confirmed, and Morat finding himself in danger, sought an asylum in the British Consulate."⁴⁶ Jones demanded the banishment of Morat Rais while the British consul, Warrington, maintained that the admiral was British and subject only to his judicial authority. In his letter to the U.S. secretary of state, Jones angrily pointed to his underlying complaint about Warrington:

⁴⁵ Letter from Richard B. Jones to John Quincy Adams, September 27, 1818, Letterbook of R. B. Jones, U.S. Consul at Tripoli, MS 40, Special Collections & Archives Department, Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy.

⁴⁶ Greenhow, 36. There are many variant spellings of both Rais's surname and his given name (Murad and Morat are among the latter).

The conduct of the English consul has been violent and irregular in the extreme, the cause is too obvious, the different representatives of Europe from the present political state of that continent have felt themselves compelled to give way in many instances to his vain pretensions and extravagant views. I alone have universally opposed him when our interests and rights either personal or national have come in contact and because my pretensions have been generally founded on justice and equity I have most generally prevailed. . . . I have no doubt in my own mind that there was an actual collusion between the Bashaw and the English Consul to screen Murat Rais from merited punishment. The principles aroused by the English Consul are of so dangerous a nature that they cannot be too soon combatted, and his attempts to set up himself as sovereign arbiter between the representatives of all other nations and the Bashaw too soon exploded and he exposed to that ignominy and contempt his conduct merits.⁴⁷

Murad Rais was eventually banished from Tripoli, although he returned after about three years with the acquiescence of Jones.

Beyond the 1818 friction between the American consul Richard B. Jones and the British consul Hanmer Warrington, Coxe's attitude in the Warrington/D'Ghies dispute was also colored, according to Greenhow, by the fact that Warrington "had on various other occasions advanced pretensions to superiority over the Consul of the United States, which were unfounded and insulting."⁴⁸

D'Ghies, after seeking refuge with Coxe, was taken aboard the USS *Fairfield*, which had just sailed into Tripoli's harbor, prompting Warrington to angrily complain to Coxe that D'Ghies had been "proved guilty of fraud and theft and suspected of murder."⁴⁹ Coxe replied evenly that "he had yet to learn how and when the guilt of Hassuna had been established."⁵⁰ However, according to Greenhow's account, later testimony seems to have convinced Coxe of D'Ghies's

⁴⁷ Letter from Richard B. Jones to John Quincy Adams.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 56. Author Frank T. Kryza asserts that Coxe, "with the memory of the British capture and burning of the White House still fresh in his mind, loathed all things British." (Frank T. Kryza, *The Race for Timbuktu* [Ecco, New York, 2006], 260.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

involvement with the disappearance of Laing's papers and so he admitted to Warrington "his conviction that the communications of the unfortunate traveller had been thus disposed of."⁵¹

The following year, 1830, Warrington launched a new project reflecting his concern that in Tripoli, "For years the mortal remains of the Protestants were at the mercy of the jackals and their bones exposed on the surface of the Earth. . . ." ⁵² As writer John Wright explains, "the cemetery project was supported by other members of the tiny British expatriate community and by the Consuls of Denmark, Sweden-Norway, the Netherlands, and the USA."

The project was brought to a head with the death of the American Consul, Charles J. (sic) Coxe on 23 September 1830. Warrington performed 'the last sad Burial Service over his remains'. As Warrington reported to London, the Protestant community had asked the Roman Catholic authorities in Tripoli if Coxe could be laid 'in their most respectable burial ground', but the request had been refused. The Protestant Consuls were shocked to see 'the Catholic Gate closed against their colleague and to see his body consigned to that earth which, as the Moors observed, would have received a dog'. In consequence the four Protestant Consuls met five days later, on 28 September 1830, and agreed to obtain a small piece of suitable land, wall it round, and have it consecrated as soon as possible."⁵³

Wilhelmina van Breugel, wife of the Dutch consul, recalled that one of her babies was the first body that was entrusted to the earth in the new graveyard. Not long after, she said, the American consul Coxe died, and his remains were treated with great solemnity and⁵⁴ paid the last respects by all his colleagues. Coxe's grandson, John Coxe Caruana, writing generously of his grandfather, said he "had a symmetrical (sic) figure, was graceful in carriage and dignified in manner, resolute in enforcing discipline when necessary. Relaxed and social in intercourse with

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² John Wright, "More Light on Tripoli's Protestant Cemetery," *Libyan Studies*, Vol. 38, 2007, 54.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Perk, 145. Researcher and writer Dorothy Thorn visited the cemetery in 2001 with Abdulhakeem Amer Tweel, a Libyan who has studied the burial ground. "Many of the graves seem to have lost their gravestones," Thorn later wrote, "but Abdulhakeem has recorded those that remain. . . ." Coxe's gravestone is not among the remaining monuments listed by Thorn. (Dorothy Thorn, "Consul-General Hanmer Warrington and the Old Protestant Cemetery in Tripoli, Libya," *Libyan Studies*, Vol. 37, 2006, 86.

friends, he was devoted and lovable as husband and father, hospitable and likable with his intimates whom he welcomed to his roof.”⁵⁵

The widowed Fortunata Coxe remained in Tripoli with her children for a short period but long enough for her to later submit a claim to the U.S. government for payment to herself and her son,⁵⁶ who fulfilled the duties of acting consul in Tripoli until he was replaced early in 1831, temporarily, by a naval lieutenant and then by a retired naval officer, Daniel S. Macauley.⁵⁷ Coxe’s grandson, John Coxe Caruana, recalled that after first visiting Valletta (Malta) and Marseilles, the Coxe family sailed for New York,⁵⁸ where they arrived on January 20, 1832, aboard the ship *Pleiades*.⁵⁹ The family then settled at the Coxe family estate in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, where, on July 31, 1836, Fortunata’s daughter Rebecca married Carmelo Caruana, a Malta-born businessman who had traveled to the United States with the Coxe family four years earlier.⁶⁰ In

⁵⁵ John Coxe Caruana, Letter to Edwin N. McClellan.

⁵⁶ Roger B. Taney, then the U.S. attorney general (later the chief justice), wrote a memo in 1832 noting that Charles D. Coxe “had died while in office, and his widow and family have been obliged to return home at their own expense; and Mrs. Coxe presents a claim against the government for these expenses.” Taney concluded, as a result of Fortunata Coxe’s claim, that the government should pay widows of consuls the salary their husbands would have received for three months along with funeral expenses, incidental and contingent expenses, and compensation when the son “discharges duties of consul.” (Roger B. Taney, “Provision for Widows of Consuls Who Die in Office,” May 31, 1832, in *Opinions of Attorneys General: August 21, 1791 to August 30, 1838* [Washington, DC, 1851], 824.)

⁵⁷ A Connecticut newspaper belatedly published a letter dated January 24, 1831, from an unnamed naval officer in Gibraltar stating erroneously that Coxe had died “about three weeks since” but also reporting that “Lieut. Ridgeway, U.S.N. is to fill the vacancy thus occasioned, for the present.” *Connecticut Gazette* (New London), March 16, 1831, 3. The U.S. Treasury approved contingent expenses for Coxe’s son (\$79.50) and Ebenezer J. Ridgeway (\$415), “who acted as consuls after the death of Charles D. Coxe, until the arrival of Daniel S. McCawley (sic), from 1st October, 1830, to 29th May, 1832. . . .” (*The Reports of Committees of the Senate of the United States, During the First Session of the Thirty-Second Congress*, Vol. I [Washington, DC, 1852], 157.)

⁵⁸ John Coxe Caruana, Letter to Edwin N. McClellan.

⁵⁹ Listed on the *Pleiades* manifest are: Fortuna Cox, 36; John Cox, 17; Rebecca Cox, 16; Lucien Cox, 15; Francis Cox, 12; John B. Carana, 62; Dr. Carmela Carana, 29. *Registers of Vessels Arriving at the Port of New York from Foreign Ports, 1789–1919*, Microfilm Publication M237, roll 15. National Archives at Washington, DC.

⁶⁰ Ancestry.com. *New Jersey, U.S., Marriage Records, 1670–1965* [database online]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016 (accessed December 13, 2021). The surname Caruana often appears as Caravana, as in this record. There is no available linkage of the family of Fortunata Caruana Coxe to the family of her son-in-law Carmelo Caruana. According to one newspaper, “When Charles D. Coxe was sent to the Barbary states by the President as envoy during the Algerian troubles, he stopped at Malta with his family, and it was then that Mr. Caruana met his beautiful daughter, Miss Rebecca Coxe, who he afterward married.” (“Carmelo Caruana’s Funeral,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 15, 1895, 4.)

early 1846, the Coxe home and its property were advertised for sale⁶¹ and, according to one report, Fortunata Coxe sold it to Aaron Van Syckle.⁶² In 1850, Fortunata Coxe was living with her son John and his family in Brooklyn.⁶³ She died on May 26, 1856.

During his years in Tunis and Tripoli, Charles D. Coxe was both witness to and a participant in the transformative events that brought the United States closer to what Frank Lambert describes as its “goal of free trade in a mercantilist world. With the defeat of the Barbary powers, American merchantmen could sail the Mediterranean without wondering if a Corsair would pounce on them from hidden covers.”⁶⁴ Coxe, thanks to his New Jersey ancestors, was born into a substantial estate and inherited a powerful social and political network, both of which allowed him a choice of vocations. His decision to represent the interests of his country abroad, while also evidently motivated by his own commercial and cultural interests, placed him at the center of North African affairs, which, by his own testimony, he negotiated successfully. In 1809, he wrote to Secretary of State Robert Smith:

I am happy to have it in my power to announce to you that (except some alterations with H. Excy. The Bey concerning the rate of duties to be paid by American Merchants) I have uniformly, since my residence here, had the most unequivocal proofs of his respect for me personally, and of his friendly disposition towards the U. States. It is true that on the arrival of so many valuable cargoes from the U. States, without any of our ships of war in these seas for their protection, I was somewhat apprehensive for their safety, but the recent friendly conducts of the Bey has entirely dissipated those apprehensions which I am now convinced were too hastily admitted.⁶⁵

Later, with the Barbary states subdued and peace in Europe, the Atlantic “brought in millions through trade. As a result of peace, reciprocity replaced retaliation, and America gained

⁶¹ *Hunterdon Gazette*, January 14, 1846, January 21, 1846.

⁶² Cynthia Hellerman, “Hunterdon Home Dates to Year of Washington’s Birth,” *Courier-News* (Bridgewater, New Jersey), February 17, 1989, D21.

⁶³ Ancestry.com. *1850 United States Federal Census* [database online] (accessed December 13, 2021).

⁶⁴ Lambert, 201.

⁶⁵ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Robert Smith, August 9, 1809, Charles D. Coxe papers.

time to grow in wealth and power. . . .”⁶⁶ Coxe faced continuing challenges in the years leading up to his death in 1830; his legacy was one of involvement in two of the most challenging and distant outposts of his country as it began to emerge on the world stage.

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⁶⁶ Lambert, 202.