

COMMERCIAL PHILANTHROPY:  
AMERICAN MISSIONARIES AND THE AMERICAN  
OPIUM TRADE IN IZMIR DURING  
THE FIRST PART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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This article explores the interactions of American missionaries and opium traders in and around Izmir (then called Smyrna), focused on Protestant Christian evangelism of its Christian Orthodox residents, in the first part of the nineteenth century. It argues that American missionaries placed confidence in the humanitarianism of American international commerce, even commerce involving opium. Opium was the main commodity that first drew American traders to Izmir, where they bought opium and shipped it for sale in China, and on which, despite its growing controversy there and in America, they made great profits. The missionaries' faith in 'free trade' helped to rationalize their efforts and focus on those Eastern Mediterranean peoples, especially Armenians, who were likewise engaged in commercial activity, in order to reform the peoples of the Ottoman Empire.

In his novel, *White Jacket*, published in 1850, Herman Melville wrote, Americans 'bear the ark of the liberties of the world. . . . And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do good to America, but we give alms to the world.'<sup>1</sup> Melville, a complex American who advocated international trade as a source for democracy but condemned missionaries, actually would have found some common ground with Rufus Anderson, secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the largest American missionary organization in the nineteenth century. Anderson gave a charge to a missionary on his way to the Ottoman Empire in 1848, declaring, 'Never was it so evident that Christians cannot innocently live to themselves . . . [nor] so evident that this great and free nation of ours exists not for itself alone but more perhaps than any other nation for the benefit of the entire world.'<sup>2</sup> Melville and

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Anderson alike identified the impulses of self-interest and Christian philanthropy that brought the first Americans to Turkish shores, in Izmir (then called Smyrna) in the first part of the nineteenth century. Long before any substantial American diplomatic or military presence developed in the Eastern Mediterranean, that is, there were what has been called the key social figures in early American history, merchants and Protestant ministers.<sup>3</sup>

This article explores their interactions in and around Izmir, focused on trade and evangelism of Orthodox Christians in the first part of the nineteenth century. It argues that American missionaries placed confidence in the humanitarianism of American international commerce, even commerce involving opium, the main commodity that first drew American traders to Izmir. Such belief helped to rationalize the missionaries' focus on those peoples likewise engaged in such international commercial activity, in order to reform the Orthodox Christian and, through them, the Muslim peoples of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>4</sup>

### The Emporium of the Ottoman Empire

Izmir, commonly referred to then as the 'Paris of the Levant', dazzled Americans who came there. With its population of nearly 150,000 in the mid-nineteenth century it would have been the third largest city in the United States at the time.<sup>5</sup> Its diverse population of Western Europeans, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, as well as Turks, made it a unique city, 'an essentially extraterritorial port city,' a Turkish port but, as foreign visitors remarked, a cosmopolitan republic, largely under the jurisdiction of European laws invoked by Western consuls and merchants, 'at the intersection between two vast civilizations, one Islamic and the second Christian,' the 'rendezvous of merchants from almost all parts of the world.'<sup>6</sup> One of the first American missionaries in Izmir, Levi Parsons, wrote, 'I cannot describe Smyrna. . . . The people are of all ranks and complexions. . . . What would you think of a man approaching you, of gigantic stature, long beard, fierce eyes, a turban on his head . . . long flowing robes, a large belt, in which were four or five pistols and a sword?'<sup>7</sup> When they arrived in the city, most foreigners, called 'Franks', were taken normally by donkey ride along 'Frank Street' to the city's casino, which had rooms for billiards and card playing, a library complete with European newspapers, a ballroom, and a gambling hall.<sup>8</sup>

Izmir, though one-third smaller than Istanbul, dominated the trade of the Ottoman Empire through the nineteenth century, including trade with regions further east in Anatolia as well as international trade with the West. The city developed as a major international port in the mid-sixteenth century

by drawing export trade in Iranian silk, which until the early eighteenth century constituted over half of the city's exports.<sup>9</sup> In the eighteenth century cotton became the city's major export commodity, remaining so until the American cotton empire, enabled by the cotton gin, attracted European buyers away from the Izmir cotton market (although the city's cotton trade recovered somewhat during and after the Civil War). In the late eighteenth century American traders began arriving in Izmir, a destination more prominent and accessible than other Ottoman port cities, such as Aleppo and Istanbul.<sup>10</sup>

Americans first came apparently to purchase raisins, but by the early nineteenth century a small American colony developed in the city for a different commodity, which was opium. At this time the world opium trade was dominated by the British East India Company, which exported opium from its colony of India to China. The trade was lucrative, and Americans joined it, although the American-Turkish opium trade amounted to only about one-tenth the size of the Anglo-Indian opium import into China.<sup>11</sup> Because the United States was a weak force in the world its traders could hardly seek to gain access to Indian opium without British permission, thus they focused on Turkey, a leading opium producer and not a British colony.<sup>12</sup> Izmir was the destination of opium grown in the Anatolian hinterland, where state-licensed brokers, mostly Jews and Armenians, negotiated and bought, on behalf of the exporting Izmir firms, from Turkish merchants. Camels then brought the opium, typically around the beginning of June, to Izmir, where, again on behalf of American and European exporters, Jewish and Armenian brokers judged the opium for color, weight, and scent. Only rarely, indeed, do records show Muslim Ottomans active in the Izmir market, sending opium abroad: a Dutch trader described in 1847 the opium trading by a 'rich Turk' as 'very strange'. Muslim merchants did not assume western protection and as a result often could not compete with their non-Muslim peers.<sup>13</sup> Until 1811 Americans traded at Izmir under protection of the British Levant Company, paying the same duties as did British traders.<sup>14</sup>

A British loyalist named George Perkins fled America during the American Revolution for Izmir.<sup>15</sup> Coincidentally, George Perkins was the relative of Thomas Handasyd Perkins, of Boston, the founder of one of the largest American international trading firms of the early American republic. With the gaining of independence in 1783 American maritime trade lost the protection of the British Navy. American ships thus became exposed through the 1820s to depredations by British and French warships seeking to prevent American trade from benefiting the other side, as well as Barbary corsairs, erroneously called 'pirates' in American documents, seizing American ships and men to

hold for ransom. Nevertheless, the firm of James and T. H. Perkins wrote to George Perkins in Izmir in 1796, remarking that European wars ‘opened some new channels for the American commerce in the Mediterranean.’<sup>16</sup> In 1803 Perkins and Company established a branch in Canton, China, the city that was the main *entrepôt* for the importation of opium into China. Although the Chinese emperor had banned the import of opium in 1800 because he realized it was addicting the Chinese people and draining China of hard currency, the Perkins headquarters in Boston wrote to its China branch ‘respecting the article of Turkish Opium; its value.’<sup>17</sup> Ships from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston began carrying Turkish opium in 1804. In 1805 Thomas Perkins wrote John Cushing, the representative of the Perkins firm in Canton, that since opium could be bought in Turkey at \$2 per pound, ‘great profits may be made on it’, since the price in China at the time was \$10 per pound.<sup>18</sup> In 1811 David Offley, of the Philadelphia shipping firm of Woodmas and Offley, established the first American commercial house in the Levant.<sup>19</sup> The Izmir trade of J. & T. H. Perkins required it to open its own office in the city in 1816. From these origins, trade in opium from Izmir, bound for China, would become the main American export from the Middle East through the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

### The Arrival of Protestant Missionaries

Not long after the first arrival of American opium merchants, the other important expatriate from American society at the time, the Protestant missionary, came to Izmir. Two American missionaries, Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk, arrived on behalf of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). The ABCFM, America’s ‘first large-scale transnational corporation’, was, like J. & T. H. Perkins, headquartered in Boston.<sup>21</sup> Seeking the moral redemption of the world, the ABCFM sent out its first missionary in 1811, to India. The Eastern Mediterranean, however, was the setting for biblical narratives and home of Jews and Orthodox Christians, although since the Middle Ages the location of Muslim conquest and settlement. Missionaries believed, therefore, that the area had been degraded by people who were ignorant of or did not follow biblical teaching. Moreover, this region lay outside formal European colonial possession, a point illuminated when Samuel Newell was obstructed from establishing a mission in India by the East India Company. Newell wrote to the Board headquarters in Boston encouraging establishment of a mission in Turkey, emphasizing that ‘A mission to Western Asia would be all our own, free from the objections . . . to establishing our mission in British India.’<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the commercial port of Izmir became crucial for American missionaries, as it was for American traders. ABCFM headquarters noted in 1821 that:

The active commerce [that] is carried on from the many islands and ports in the Levant . . . furnish the means of conveying books and tracts to distant and populous regions. . . [H]ow essentially will this commercial intercourse promote every plan, adopted for the permanent improvement and spiritual benefit of the people.<sup>23</sup>

In particular, one missionary wrote, ‘Smyrna is by far the best situation in the Levant for a permanent missionary establishment . . . having a frequent communication with all parts of the Ottoman empire . . . the best place in those regions for learning [languages] . . . for security and liberty,’ and for ‘an extensive printing establishment’ to serve the region. Another confirmed, Izmir ‘is the largest and most commercial city. It would be the best port of entry for Western Asia.’ American missionaries following merchants’ trade routes unshielded by the U.S. military in fact differed from patterns among European imperial powers.<sup>24</sup>

### The Paradoxes of the Opium Trade

So it was merchants and ministers who first represented America in the Ottoman Empire, and both groups first settled in Izmir. Striking, at least with hindsight, is that Americans in this Ottoman coastal metropolis came in pursuit of such ostensibly contradictory objectives. American traders’ imports of Turkish opium into China in exchange for tea and silk netted them large profits. Stephen Girard, John Jacob Astor, and Thomas H. Perkins, all purchasers of Turkish opium at Izmir, became America’s first millionaires.<sup>25</sup> The enrichment that they sought, that is, appears material and self-centered.

The fact that the commodity mainly sought after at Izmir was opium might be expected to have raised missionary concerns. Yet Americans’ opinion of the Turkish opium trade at the time was divided. Opium seems not to have struck its American merchants, on one hand, as an inappropriate trading commodity. Izmir had supplied Americans, as subjects of the British Empire, with opium throughout the eighteenth century, although, owing to the British Acts of Trade, that trade was indirect, through England, until American independence.<sup>26</sup> Exploiting trade openings during wars between Britain and France, Americans opened direct commerce with the Levant after the Revolution, as it was one of the few lucrative trading places not

dominated by a European power. Of course, opium was an important painkiller and sedative. In 1782 Hector St. John De Crevecoeur remarked in *Letters of an American Farmer* how women of Nantucket, Rhode Island ‘adopted the Asiatic custom of taking a dose of opium every morning’ to endure the absence of their whaling husbands.<sup>27</sup> David Ramsay, the American historian and physician, recommended opium to the educator and signer of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Rush, as a cure for venereal disease in 1784. The ailing Benjamin Franklin used opium extensively late in his life.<sup>28</sup> In his scientific instructions to the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, President Thomas Jefferson encouraged administration of opium as a cure for ‘watchfulness’, or insomnia, and Lewis bought a half-pound of ‘Opii Turk’ in Philadelphia in preparation for the pioneering western expedition.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, opium was known as a potentially addictive and destructive commodity of Asian origin—and therefore morally questionable—well before the association of opium-smoking with Chinese people beginning during the Opium Wars.<sup>36</sup> From the early modern era Muslim religious leaders and even sultans had attempted to curb or, periodically, to outlaw popular diversions of public smoking and coffee drinking.<sup>31</sup> These efforts were largely unsuccessful. The apparent indolence of coffeehouse patrons, coupled with the observations of travelers in the Ottoman Empire of the eating of opium paste or its drinking in liquid form, provoked Anglo-Americans to associate opium with Turkish moral corruption throughout the modern era (notwithstanding similar immoral habits taking hold in the West).<sup>32</sup> A British physician’s 1700 treatise *Mysteries of Opium Reveal’d* described opium not only as a panacea but also a sacrilegious aphrodisiac, popular among ‘Infidels of Turkey and the eastern nations (where polygamy is allowed) [who] use opium so much.’<sup>33</sup> An American reviewer of the English writer Thomas de Quincey’s 1821 *Confessions of an Opium Eater* remarked at de Quincey’s description of his euphoric but increasingly terrifying opium induced hallucinations, ‘It should seem incredible, that any person would coolly . . . choose a substance . . . which though it may dispel present anxiety . . . is yet certain to remain in his system a future poison.’<sup>34</sup> Popular American literature of the early nineteenth century associated the Turkish custom of smoking tobacco through a water-pipe with both opium-smoking and Asian indolence. A children’s schoolbook declared, ‘The Turks are a grave people, and also kind to those who think as they do, but they are cruel to [C]hristians. They smoke opium.’<sup>35</sup> An American periodical interpreted the Opium War of 1839–1842—although American commerce benefited from its outcome of greater access to Chinese markets—as an indication of

British militarism, 'carried on in utter disregard of the rights of nations and men, attest[ing to] a rapacity, which should unite all civilized nations against her.'<sup>36</sup> Bostonians' outcry against former U.S. President John Quincy Adams's address to the Massachusetts Historical Society justifying British actions in the First Opium War was hardly the first reaction in the United States against the opium trade.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile American missionaries came to Izmir not to stop the opium trade but to reform Eastern Christians. They focused increasingly on Armenians in Turkey as a means to reach the 'whole mingled population' of peoples of the Near East. According to the ABCFM headquarters, 'It [was] to be hoped . . . that no small part of those who bear the Christian name, would willingly and gladly receive the Bible into their houses, and . . . become active in doing good . . . towards . . . the Jews, Mahommedans, and Pagans.'<sup>38</sup> Missionaries anticipated that Armenians, once reformed and gathered into viable Protestant communities, might themselves evangelize the other monotheistic religious groups of the Middle East. When Rufus Anderson, the ABCFM secretary, visited Istanbul in 1843, a missionary there told him that 'Armenians were the traders of the empire', particularly well placed, and therefore with whom missionaries could build relationships.<sup>39</sup>

But ABCFM literature parodied the self-enriching goal of commerce. One report urged 'Christians [to] learn what is meant by not living to themselves . . . not limiting their beneficence to the narrow circles of their immediate . . . communities, [and thus] may do good unto all men. Their merchandise and their hire...shall not be treasured, nor laid up.'<sup>40</sup> To an Armenian congregation the famous missionary and educator Cyrus Hamlin declared, 'We have made . . . very great sacrifices coming to you. We have acted as fools, for your sake. . . . Is our land [the United States] a poor, unsuccessful, decaying land, from which its children flee to find a home elsewhere? Is it not the land to which all nations are sending their children?'<sup>41</sup> On the eve of his departure for Izmir Levi Parsons preached, 'Every devoted Christian will enquire, not where he can . . . obtain the most wealth, but where he can most successfully . . . promote the salvation of men. . . . Better, my brethren wear out and die in three years, than live forty years in slothfulness.' Samuel Hopkins, the founder of the ABCFM, coined the term 'disinterested benevolence' to refer to missionaries' improvement of the lives of non-Christians through good work and religious reform. Missionaries in the Near East embraced this doctrine, offering moral and practical education.<sup>42</sup>

The missionaries, therefore, anticipated that their modeling and teaching about Jesus's example of pacifism, sacrifice, and faithfulness would improve

and redeem the lives of the peoples of the Levant. If prosperity could be enjoyed in the process, so much richer the blessing, although missionaries condemned pursuit of material riches.

Thus, these two groups of Americans in Izmir—merchants and missionaries—appear to have had opposite purposes. With hindsight, we might expect historical sources to show tension or conflict in their interactions, but there is little evidence of this.

Instead, missionaries sought out opium merchants for counsel, encouragement, and companionship. In 1820, soon after the missionaries Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons arrived in Izmir, they wrote, as published in the *Missionary Herald* newspaper, ‘The Messrs. Perkins received us very politely and assured us of their friendship and assistance.’<sup>43</sup> The *Missionary Herald* reiterated the fraternity of their letter, reporting, ‘the missionaries were received with cordiality by all gentlemen . . . particularly, the Messrs. Perkins, eminent merchants in that city.’<sup>44</sup> A year later Fisk left Izmir for a journey to Ephesus, accompanied by a Turkish janissary, an Armenian, and two Greeks, as well as ‘Mr. George Perkins of Smyrna and Thomas and Joseph Langdon of Boston.’<sup>45</sup> George Perkins and Joseph Langdon were both representatives of American opium-trading companies, by then long established in Smyrna.<sup>46</sup> In Ephesus Fisk noted that he ‘found a few Greeks at work on the ruins. . . . I gave them some [religious] tracts, which they promised to give to their priests.’<sup>47</sup> Let us wonder if Fisk gave Perkins and Langdon the same didactic literature.

Missionary reports also indicate an active relationship with David Offley, a U.S. commercial agent who later became U.S. diplomatic consul. Offley was a Quaker, but in Izmir married an Armenian or Greek woman. He had initially come to Izmir representing the trading firm of Woodmas and Offley of Philadelphia, which traded extensively in opium bound for China.<sup>48</sup> Offley’s major achievement was to convince the Ottoman government not to charge American traders higher customs duties than they charged European traders. With Offley’s initiative the Ottomans effectively recognized American traders as a distinct foreign nationality in the Empire, although this would not be made permanent or official until the Treaty of Navigation and Commerce of 1830.<sup>49</sup>

However, Offley also assisted American missionaries in Izmir. On one occasion he tipped off missionaries in Smyrna that the city governor was looking for a certain ‘Armenian priest’, whom the governor wished to deport. Offley advised the missionary Daniel Temple ‘by all means to place [the man] in concealment’. Temple also wrote approvingly of Offley’s intercession with the provincial Ottoman governor, who had complained



that the missionary press was printing works that 'make violent attacks upon [Islam]'. 'Mr. Offley on my authority assured [the governor] . . . that our real and declared intention was to print elementary works for the purpose of . . . education of the young among Christian and Turk of the country.'<sup>50</sup> Missionaries occasionally held religious services on Offley's property. In a pattern that would be repeated elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, missionaries relied on the influence of traders to practice what became known as 'Christian philanthropy', the line between commerce and humanitarian benevolence blurring in the process.

Despite residence in Izmir for many years, American missionaries and merchants there were always a small minority of the city's population, thus perhaps encouraging their banding together. 'Merchants from all countries reside in Smyrna', wrote Fisk in 1820, 'enjoy[ing] their political and religious opinions and practices. There are at least six or eight foreign consuls in the city who afford protection to the people of their respective countries and decide all differences among them and between them and the Smyrneans according to the laws of civilized nations.'<sup>51</sup> Even after a quarter-century of missionaries' immersion in the peoples and cultures of Izmir, the missionary Mary Van Lennep wrote in 1844, 'We Protestants are a feeble band in the midst of Greeks, Catholics, Jews, Turks, and Armenians.'<sup>52</sup> The 'feeble band' of Americans in Izmir mainly hailed from New England (although Offley was from Philadelphia). Their common ethnic and regional background, together with their small community, served to draw them together.

Thus it seems inconceivable that missionaries were unaware that American traders with whom they were interacting were trafficking in opium, headed for distribution in China. The first American missionary to China, E. C. Bridgman, began to write in 1832 in the newspaper the *Missionary Herald* from the port city of Canton, of opium as one of the 'greatest evils afflicting Chinese society', and described how 'the practice of smoking the "black commodity" is widely prevalent, from the royal palaces to the meanest hovels, exerting, from one end of the empire to the other, and through all the ranks of society, a most deadly influence.'<sup>53</sup> In the same issues in which it printed Bridgman's condemnation of opium consumption in China, the *Missionary Herald* published numerous accounts by ABCFM missionaries in Turkey, though none included any similar criticism of the drug there. An American newspaper in 1829 printed an indirect condemnation of opium in a letter of the Presbyterian missionary Josiah Brewer, who extolled the character of Turkish people as 'mild, honest, hospitable and temperate'. Among them 'the practice of eating opium does not exist to any considerable extent; Mr. Brewer says he has seen tens of thousands of Turks, and never

observed one making use of the drug.’ Yet it is intriguing that no missionary publicly commented on or criticized the opium trade of Izmir, conducted by American traders and their Greek and Armenian counterparts.<sup>54</sup> What was the perspective of ABCFM missionaries in Izmir about Americans’ involvement in the city’s opium trade?

American opium traders themselves did not often reveal their perspective on the morality of their trade. In 1819 Perkins and Co. in Canton noted the opium trade ‘is considered a very disreputable business and viewed by the Chinese in the same light as smuggling.’ Nevertheless, ‘If to be got at three dollars we can afford to make the Mandarins view it in a more favorable light.’<sup>55</sup> Normally, however, the papers of David Offley and Thomas Handasyd Perkins reveal little behind the dry calculations and meticulous directions of traders working global markets in London, Boston, New York, Canton, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Izmir.<sup>56</sup> Their assumption was perhaps that trading partners in all ports of call entered into transactions voluntarily. Therefore they bore no particular responsibility for any harm a commodity such as New England rum or Turkish opium might cause.<sup>57</sup> The opium trade, of course, was completely legal in the United States and the Ottoman Empire, and was maintained by Chinese traders despite its outlawing by the Chinese government. Meanwhile, many successful merchants lavished wealth from the opium trade on philanthropic institutions in Boston and Philadelphia, including the Perkins School for the Blind and the Wagner Scientific Institute, thus becoming remembered for their funding for the arts and generosity towards the poor and underprivileged of these cities.<sup>58</sup> Reticent about the international dimensions or consequences of the opium trade, which conversations may have been embarrassing and obstructed good social relations with well-to-do merchants in Izmir, American missionaries in the city may simply never have considered its destructive aspects beyond the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps they would have missed the irony that strikes us today in the description by an American tourist of Izmir’s foreign community living ‘over warehouses of opium in a state of cordial republican equality that is not found even in America.’<sup>59</sup>

### **International Commerce and ‘Civilization’**

It is important, also, to note that Americans and missionaries in particular at this time did not assume peoples of the Levant were ‘heathen’, in contrast to how they often described the peoples of China, India, and the Sandwich Islands. When the missionary Samuel Newell wrote to the Board headquarters in Boston encouraging the establishment of a mission in Turkey, he emphasized

this very point. Muslims, Jews, and Orthodox Christians were monotheistic peoples 'as high on the scale of intellect as any people in the world.'<sup>60</sup> Likewise, the Ottoman Empire, unlike the Empire of China, tended to be considered as abiding by the international 'law of nations,' which governed 'civilized' nations.<sup>61</sup> Americans who supported British prosecution of the Opium War of 1839–1842, perhaps most famously John Quincy Adams, cited the fact that China's refusal to trade with western nations illustrated its refusal to embrace the law of nations. American observers in contrast noted with praise the Ottoman Empire's gestures of support for free trade. During the War of 1812 an American newspaper observed, 'Among the civilized nations of the world, the principles of maritime law . . . give equal privileges and protection to all. . . . They are even acknowledged by the Turks, as little as that people are supposed to regard the established maxims of law and justice.'<sup>62</sup> American commentators praised the end of the Ottoman Empire's monopoly on opium exports in 1839, though accomplished under British pressure, as a turn towards 'free trade' and thus a sign of Ottoman enlightened reform: 'The grand commercial principle of Turkey is free trade; monopolies are prohibited, and commerce only limited and restricted by the extent of supply and demand. . . . The national character and aspect of the Turk is thoroughly Oriental . . . [but] compared with other Orientals, the Turk is honest, and his word may be trusted.'<sup>63</sup> American missionaries' capacity for humanitarian empathy with 'others', as suggested by their tolerance of the opium trade despite its harm in China, was shaped by the assumptions they shared with secular Americans about peoples within and outside 'civilization'.

While missionaries did not seek to end Izmir's opium trade, they did seek to reduce its residents' consumption of alcohol. This attitude was shaped by the religious revival of the Second Great Awakening beginning around the turn of the nineteenth century, the core belief of which was that an individual committing sin could repent, and through his own moral effort could obtain salvation rather than depending only on God's will for his eternal destiny. This emphasis on individual agency to achieve salvation manifested in a 'postmillennial' view that Christ would return to Earth upon the perfection of human society, not only in America but around the world. Thus the early American republic saw an explosion of reform movements, seeking to root out moral and social imperfections. The formation of the American Board itself was one product of the Second Great Awakening. Another, and perhaps the largest reform movement, was the temperance movement, which sought to cure Americans of their habit of drinking alcohol to excess.<sup>64</sup>

ABCFM missionaries embraced temperance wholeheartedly, and sought to cultivate abstinence from alcohol in Turkey. Actually, to their surprise, American missionaries discovered that many Muslims of the Near East already practiced such abstinence. Ironically, this phenomenon became a popular rhetorical weapon in American temperance literature, to embarrass American consumers of alcohol into reform by pointing out the sobriety of this Oriental people, whose possible conversion to Christ became far less likely because of the exports to the Near East of New England distilleries. One American reverend lamented, 'I have been in the port of Smyrna, where barrels of New England rum . . . distilled damnation . . . may be seen lying on the wharf, with the Boston stamp.' Another praised the Turkish porters of Izmir for their physical strength, attributing their prowess to the fact that 'they are all water-drinkers'. The culture of alcohol consumption among Greeks and Armenians, on whom the missionaries relied to reach Muslims, doubled the missionaries' quandary.<sup>65</sup>

One American missionary's reaction to alcohol production in Izmir, in fact, suggests something about missionaries' perspective on the American opium trade. In 1838 the *Missionary Herald* newspaper carried the account of a missionary who observed the 'manufacture and use of intoxicating liquors in Smyrna.' 'My attention', related the missionary,

was strongly attracted to . . . droves of camels, which almost blocked up the road, on their way to the city. They seemed to amount to thousands. . . . They were carrying grapes to the Smyrna market. . . . Considering these fruits of the fertile Ionia, as destined for some foreign and less genial clime, I often said to myself, here one may feel and realize something of the grandeur, the sublimity of commerce.

This missionary examined the buildings where the camels were discharging their cargo. 'My musings about the sublimity of commerce were soon at an end. What I had been admiring was the sublimity of the wine manufactory and the [*raki*] distillery, and the fruits of Ionia, instead of going to bless some distant clime, I found converted into poison for the ruin, temporal and eternal, of her own citizens.' The missionary conducted further investigation to calculate the volume of alcohol produced and consumed by Smyrneans, then concluded, 'My heart sickens with the subject. . . . I have said enough to give you some idea of one of the great obstacles which a missionary in Smyrna has to encounter.'<sup>66</sup> Again, the American temperance movement was in full swing at this time, whereas Americans' full-throated opposition to *domestic* opium consumption was still perhaps a generation down the road.

Still, this anecdote suggests that for American missionaries in Izmir, commerce was virtuous if it was conducted honestly, without government interference or protection, and involved commodities locally produced, but headed for distant consumption 'beyond civilization'. On the other hand, commerce conducted outside these categories could bring swift missionary condemnation. Different from the trade in opium bound for distant China, this manufacture and consumption of alcohol was performed by local traders, and in a way that the missionary could see the effects of its consumption, characteristics that made a shocking impression, and one vastly different from what, implicitly, was his attitude towards the opium trade.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the singular role of Izmir as the dual focus of American missionaries and merchants began to decline. With greater religious freedom and thus more opportunities for sharing Protestant Christian teaching, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions elected to shift missionaries towards Istanbul and Anatolia, reducing the centrality of Izmir for their proselytizing efforts. The 1856 decree of Sultan Abdülmejid I known as the 'Hatt-ı Hümayun', proclaimed under pressure of European powers after the Crimean War, promised religious equality and suggested a new tolerance for Armenian and Greek Protestants especially in Istanbul, drawing American Board missionaries up the coast.

American missionaries, however, would return to Izmir in the 1870s, primarily as teachers. In 1878 a female missionary, Maria West, for example, wrote of Izmir upon her arrival in the city two years earlier as both a 'burned over district', alluding to its intensive evangelistic activity in the first part of the century, but also as an 'abandoned field', owing to earlier missionaries' dispersal. West taught 'moral instruction and English' at an Armenian school operating in the city, which as she wrote, 'worships the goddess of pleasure and fashion' because 'French infidelity is poisoning the very foundations of family life under the guise of liberal learning.' Apparently the city's cosmopolitan culture did not dazzle this American missionary, who was perhaps even more morally conservative, or more nationalistic, than the first generation of American Board emissaries.<sup>67</sup>

Regarding the opium trade, during the first half of the nineteenth century the Americans were completely identified with Turkish opium in both Izmir and China, to the point that a Chinese official in Canton asked an American sailor in the city in 1839 if Turkey 'did not belong to America, or form a part of it.'<sup>68</sup> In the 1830s the British government removed the East India Company's monopoly on trade in Indian opium, thus British merchants and ships came to Izmir to compete with Americans, cutting into the American monopoly on Turkish opium, and American merchants likewise expanded

their East Asian trade, although an 1880 Sino-American treaty prohibited the opium trade. Still, opium out of Izmir, bound for the United States to meet the demand of the American pharmaceutical industry, remained the main American export from the Middle East until the twentieth century, and the basis for an American trade deficit with the Ottoman Empire, exceptional for both countries' international trade at the time.<sup>69</sup>

American merchants and missionaries had ostensibly different motivations of commerce and religion to come to the Ottoman Empire first at Izmir, but they in fact shared a belief that the city was a glittering example of how American international commerce could both provide a basis for moral reform in America and 'do good' in the world. For these first Americans in the Middle East, even opium was an unexceptional commodity of global commerce, an instrument of both rational selfishness and sentimental philanthropy, and thus an element of God's providence for the world's redemption. The irony of such a statement suggests the distance that has developed between beliefs about religion and beliefs about capitalism in the West over the last two centuries.

### Notes

1. Melville quotation from Bradford Perkins, *Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776–1865* (New York, 1993), 9. See Paul Lyons, 'The Global Melville', in Wyn Kelley, (ed.), *A Companion to Herman Melville* (Malden, 2006), 52–67.
2. Rufus Anderson, *Charge to Reverend Thomas Laurie* (South Hadley Mass., 1848).
3. Vernon Parrington, *Romantic Revolution in America, 1800–1860* (New York, 1927), 272.
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