

AN IMPORTANT FIGURE IN THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF TURKISH-AMERICAN TRADE RELATIONS:  
CONSUL GENERAL GABRIEL BIE RAVNDAL  
(1865-1950)\*

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ABSTRACT

*This article studies the life of an American Consul General, Gabriel Bie Ravndal (1865-1950), who significantly contributed to Turkish-American commercial relations. Remaining relatively low until the late nineteenth century, bilateral trade started to multiply and for the Ottoman Empire/Republican Turkey reached a remarkable level in the following period. During this period of expansion in bilateral trade, Ravndal was sent to Beirut and later Istanbul as the American diplomatic representative. Spending most of his career in the Ottoman/Turkish territories, Ravndal particularly focused on developing the Turkish-American trade. He pioneered the American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant and the American Club in Istanbul. He led the publication of Levant Trade Review, which presented financial, economic and commercial information about the region. Furthermore, he prepared to-the-point commercial reports, sought to remove obstacles to trade expansion, and increased awareness of the business communities in both the Ottoman Empire/Turkey and US. Hence, the study of Ravndal's life presents detailed information about the bilateral trade as well as the activities of the American business community in Istanbul. In addition, the study will provide some details about the influences of the radical changes on the American commercial strategy and the contribution of the American Foreign Service to the development of American trade.*

*Keywords*

*Turkish-American Trade, Gabriel Bie Ravndal, American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant, Foreign Trade, Business Community.*

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## Introduction

The academic literature on Turkish-American relations has generally concentrated on diplomatic ties and the activities of American charity institutions, and missionaries in the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The economic side of their relations has been relatively neglected, and thus, some aspects of their commercial ties have remained a blind spot. In this context, Leland Gordon's doctoral dissertation stands out as the leading source of mutual trade between the two nations from the eighteenth century to 1930.<sup>2</sup> Other works in this area have generally used data and information from his work. However, Gordon's dissertation provided little information on the institutions of the American business community in Istanbul. Another detailed work titled *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East 1900-1939* by John A. Denovo focuses on whole Middle East and therefore provides no information about Gabriel Bie Ravndal. Charles Issawi studied the Levant region in his books *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* and *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914* with referring to the American activities in the region but does not present details about Ravndal or relevant American institutions in Istanbul.

Similarly, Murat Koraltürk, in his book *Türkiye'de Ticaret ve Sanayi Odaları (1880-1952)* (Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Turkey, 1880-1952), also presented limited information on the American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant (ACCL). In addition, Gabriel Bie Ravndal, who pioneered and supported these institutions, has only been covered in the context of his political and diplomatic reports and interviews on mutual ties between the U.S. and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey.

Hence, to fill the gap in the existing literature, this article is centered on the life and work of Ravndal, with particular attention to his leadership of the American business organizations in the Levant and his efforts to develop American business in the region. The study of his tenure in the Ottoman Empire and the early years of Turkey will demonstrate the institutional organizations of an American business community in a far-flung and economically

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<sup>1</sup> The Ottoman Empire/the Ottomans/the Empire refer to the country before 1923 while it was named as Turkey after 1923 in this article.

<sup>2</sup> Leland Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey 1830-1930*, Unpublished Ph.D. diss., The University of Pennsylvania, 1932.

underdeveloped part of the world and provide insight into the lives of American businessmen in Istanbul. Furthermore, the study will show how an American diplomat in the Levant worked to increase American commerce in the region after the failure of Dollar Diplomacy<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, the support of the American Foreign Service to the American commercial interests and how the regional changes in the relevant period affected the Ravndal's strategy for commercial development will be studied through Ravndal's published works, such as *Turkey: A Commercial and Industrial Handbook*. Finally, the article will briefly document the history of the ACCL, and its international efforts to improve relations between the two nations.

### Historical Background

Ottoman/Turkish-American diplomatic relations started in the last years of the eighteenth century when the United States signed a treaty with the Barbary States of the Ottoman Empire in the North Africa to assure the security of American ships plying between the Levant and American ports. As Turkish-American commercial relations continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century, the U.S. acquired the status of "the Most Favored Nation" in 1830, increasing the bilateral trade in both quantity and value.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1. The Ottoman Empire/Turkey and U.S. trade from 1832 to 1925.<sup>a</sup>**

Year	Turkish Imports from the U.S.	Turkish Exports to the U.S.	Total Trade Volume	Trade Balance
1832	\$64,722	\$923,629	\$988,351	\$858,907
1842	\$125,521	\$370,248	\$495,769	\$244,727
1852	\$265,825	\$556,100	\$821,925	\$290,275
1862	\$442,721	\$959,692	\$1,402,413	\$516,971

<sup>3</sup> Dollar Diplomacy was an American foreign policy of extending loans for the infrastructure and production to increase the American influence in Caribbean, Latin America and Asia in the first quarter of the 20th Century. For further details, please see Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World, The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930*, Harvard University Press, London, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Harry N. Howard, "The Bicentennial in American-Turkish Relations", *Middle East Journal*, Volume 30, No 3, 1976, 291-310.

1872	\$1,209,443	\$866,719	\$2,076,162	-\$342,724
1882	\$1,829,166	\$3,315,647	\$5,144,813	\$1,486,481
1892	\$206,350	\$4,969,029	\$5,175,379	\$4,762,679
1898	\$382,665	\$4,444,415	\$4,827,080	\$4,061,750
1902	\$774,552	\$8,895,740	\$9,670,292	\$8,121,188
1912	\$378,168	\$19,208,926	\$19,587,094	\$18,830,758
1915	\$994,120	\$12,228,707	\$13,222,827	\$11,234,587
1920	\$42,247,798	\$39,766,936	\$82,014,734	-\$2,480,862
1922	\$15,980,548	\$21,682,492	\$37,663,040	\$5,701,944
1925	\$3,351,286	\$14,648,177	\$17,999,463	\$11,296,891

<sup>a</sup> Orhan Köprülü, "Tarihte Türk Amerikan Münasebetleri" *Belleten*, 51 (200), 1987, 927-947; Gordon, *op. cit.*, 46-47.

As shown in Table 1, the bilateral trade generally produced a surplus for the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey, thanks to the high volume of agricultural export. However, Ottoman purchases from the U.S. remained limited and were mostly confined to cotton manufactures and petroleum in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Increasing, in particular, after the American Civil War (1861-1865), the sale of petroleum products and arms led to the growth of American exports. During the 1870s, Ottoman imports exceeded its exports to the U.S.<sup>6</sup> However, the mineral oil and arms trade declined towards the end of the century, and, in 1898, the Ottomans imported less than \$400,000 of American goods while their exports reached over \$4.5 million.<sup>7</sup> In these years, the Ottomans mainly imported cotton-wool manufactures, metal manufactures, and agricultural implements, while, thanks to the rising demand from the American market, exports included tobacco, licorice root, and carpets, as well as fruits, nuts, hides, and skins, and wool from the 1890s onward.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A. Üner Turgay, "Ottoman-American Trade during the Nineteenth Century", *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, No 3, 1982, 189-246.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon, *American Relations*, p. 43, 51. For detailed information, please see: Ali İhsan Gencer et al., *Türk-Amerikan Silah Ticareti Tarihi*, Doğu Kütüphanesi, İstanbul 2008.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Treasury Department, the Bureau of Statistics, *The Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Year Ending June 30, 1898*, Volume I, Government Printing Office, Washington 1899, LX-LXIII.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1079-1080, 1158-1159 and 1175-1176.

Even though trade was the first contact between two countries, the most extensive development took place after the two American missionaries, Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk landed in Izmir in 1820. They were the members of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which became more visible in the Empire through schools, colleges and charity institutions.<sup>9</sup> The first station was set up in Beirut and the first Protestant American School was launched in the same city in 1824.<sup>10</sup> As of this date, these institutions proliferated, and American schools in the Ottoman Empire reached 209 in 1913, with 25,992 students enrolled. Over time they became the largest American direct investment in the Empire.<sup>11</sup> These schools and institutions operated mainly for the Armenians and Bulgarian minorities, which created closer relations between these communities and the U.S.

As a result, the U.S. consular representation increased especially after the 1830 Treaty, and American consular missions spread to different parts of the Empire. In 1911, there were 14 American consular offices in the Empire and the local representatives in 10 Ottoman cities.<sup>12</sup>

By 1911, rising trade volume, expanding missionary institutions, and American consular service constituted a relatively large American community and network throughout the Empire. When Ravndal arrived in the capital of the Empire, Istanbul was reported to host the largest American community between Rome and Manila, which enabled Ravndal to pioneer organizations with the American community in the country.

### The Life of Gabriel Bie Ravndal (27 June 1865-23 March 1950)

Ravndal was born in Sogndal, Norway, on 27 June 1865. His father was a teacher and a banker at the same time. At the Royal University of Norway,

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<sup>9</sup> Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, *Kendi Belgeleriyle Anadolu'daki Amerika*, Arba Yayınları, İstanbul 1989, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Kocabaşoğlu, *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Çağrı Erhan, "Ottoman Official Attitudes Towards American Missionaries", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, No 31, 2000, 315-341.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Register of the Department of State*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1911, 48.

he completed his undergraduate education in 1883 and took his graduate degree in 1884. In 1885, he decided to emigrate to the U.S., which entirely altered his life.<sup>13</sup> Settling in South Dakota in the U.S., he worked in farming, lumber, mining, and transportation sectors until he re-entered the University of Minnesota from where he graduated in 1888. Following his graduation, Ravndal started to work as a teacher and then a civil engineer.<sup>14</sup>

Due to extensive Scandinavian migration to the Dakotas, an active Scandinavian publishing network attracted Ravndal. He got a job in Fargo, North Dakota, as the Dakota newspaper editor, before moving to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in either late 1890 or early 1891. He worked as the editor of the *Syd Dakota Ekko*, published in Norwegian, until 1898. He was one of the founders of the Northwestern Scandinavian Singers' Association. He became its first president (1891-93) and he worked with the Norwegian-Danish Press Association as its Secretary-General.<sup>15</sup>

Ravndal was also active in politics. He became a member of the Republican Party, and he became a representative to the South Dakota Legislature from the Minnehaha District and served there from 1892 to 1894. In 1893, Ravndal led the proposal for South Dakota to participate in the famous World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and he chaired commission to organize the South Dakota participation in the exposition.<sup>16</sup> Following his active and versatile working life, Ravndal entered diplomatic service and went to

<sup>13</sup> "G[abriel] Bie Ravndal", *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Volume 38, James T. White & Company, New York, NY, 1953, pp. 437-438. In the biographical directory of the South Dakota Legislature, he was recorded to have graduated from the University of Christiania. These were the different names for the same university and it continues service under the name of the University of Oslo. "Highlights from UiO's history", <https://www.uio.no/english/about/facts/history/>, Accessed 15 July 2019.

<sup>14</sup> "Gabriel Bie Ravndal", *Biographical Directory of the South Dakota Legislature*, The Council, South Dakota, 1989, p. 914; "Educational", *Mower County Transcript*, 28 December 1887, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Odd Svree Lovoll, *Norwegian Newspapers in America: Connecting Norway and the New Land*, Minnesota Historical Society Press, Minnesota 2010, 145-160.

<sup>16</sup> *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 437-438; "Gabriel Bie Ravndal", *SD Legislature*, [http://sdlegislature.gov/Legislators/Historical\\_Listing/LegislatorDetail.aspx?MemberID=1203%20](http://sdlegislature.gov/Legislators/Historical_Listing/LegislatorDetail.aspx?MemberID=1203%20), Accessed 15 July 2019.

Beirut as a consul on 22 January 1898 (see Appendix 1).<sup>17</sup> After seven years of service in Beirut, Ravndal became Consul General for Dawson City, Canada, in 1905. While in Dawson City, he provided information for American businesses about business opportunities in the gold mining sector in Canada and Alaska and new improvements in Canada's transportation.<sup>18</sup> After a year in Canada, he became a Consul General in Beirut in 1906.<sup>19</sup>

After twelve years of service in Beirut, on 16 December 1910, Ravndal was dispatched to Istanbul, capital city of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>20</sup> His tenure in Istanbul was interrupted by World War I (WWI). On 4 May 1917, he was forced to leave the city and join the American delegation in France.<sup>21</sup> Working in the Paris American Mission at first, he was appointed as American Consul General in St. Nazaire and later Nantes Consul General from the beginning of 1918 until the end of the war.<sup>22</sup> In 1919, Ravndal returned to Istanbul but he maintained his duty as "Commissioner" as subordinate to the High Commissioner Admiral Mark L. Bristol until February 1921 when he was once again became the American Consul General (see Appendix 2). Following his appointment to Istanbul for the second time, Ottoman/Turkish-American relations entered a new phase when the Ottoman Empire incurred severe political turmoil. The Allies occupied different parts of the Empire its economy collapsed, and the Ottoman authority was confined to the capital city and its vicinity. The U.S. was also a part of the Allies, which would decide on the fate of the Empire. In this period, some Ottoman journalists proposed the establishment of an American mandate regime in the country since there did not happen a firefight between these two countries and the U.S. was not perceived as a threat for the Empire. On the contrary, President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) approved the Greek Occupation in Izmir. He declared his desire for the foundation of an independent Armenia in the Ottoman territory. This situation deteriorated the American image in the Empire although the shift in the American policy after the opposition of the American Senate and the success of the Nationalist Movement

<sup>17</sup> *Congressional Record*, 55 Cong., 2 sess., 22 January 1898, 864.

<sup>18</sup> "Alaskan Exposition", *East Oregonian : E.O.*, 4 January 1906, 7; "Gold Dredging Boats to Work Alaskan Rivers", *The Washington Times*, 25 August 1906, 10.

<sup>19</sup> *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 437.

<sup>20</sup> *Congressional Record*, 61 Cong., 3 sess., 22 February 1911, 3152.

<sup>21</sup> "24 Americans Fleeing Turkey", *The Washington Herald*, 13 May 1917, 6.

<sup>22</sup> *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 437.

under the command of Mustafa Kemal paved a new way for two countries' mutual relations.<sup>23</sup>

In September 1925, after a quarter-century of diplomatic service in the Ottoman and later Turkish territories, Ravndal was appointed as the American Consul General in Zurich. As a mark of his successful works and contributions, he left Istanbul in October 1925 after a farewell reception which almost all the members of the American community in Istanbul attended. *Levant Trade Review (LTR)*, which was published by the ACCL, stated his contributions:

"Ravndal is well known for the catholicity of his interests beyond the duties of his position. Since his arrival at Constantinople there has not been a single community enterprise among the Americans in which he has not had a large share, either in initiating the project or in supporting it."<sup>24</sup>

For three years, serving in Zurich, in 1928, Ravndal was appointed as the American Consul General in Hamburg, which had a commercial importance for the American trade. In 1929, he was transferred to Berlin as the American Consul General and worked there until his retirement in 1930. He stayed 32 years of service in the American Consular Services.<sup>25</sup> After he retired, he travelled throughout Scandinavia to collect information, which he would use to write about the Vikings.<sup>26</sup>

Ravndal also authored books that included detailed information about various topics. *Turkey: A Commercial and Industrial Handbook*,<sup>27</sup> was a compre-

<sup>23</sup> Kenan Özkan, *Milli Mücadele Dönemi Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri 1918-1923*, Ötüken Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2016, 78; Sait Yılmaz, *Türkiye'deki Amerika*, Kaynak Yayıncılık, Ankara 2017, 75.

<sup>24</sup> "Consul General Ravndal Leaves Near East for New Post in Switzerland", *Levant Trade Review (LTR)*, October 1925, 411-412.

<sup>25</sup> "U.S. Foreign Service Changes", *LTR*, September 1928, p. 342; *Register of the Department of State* Government Printing Office, Washington 1930, 40.

<sup>26</sup> M.P. Dunlop, "Distinguished Service", *American Foreign Service Journal*, June 1950, 46; "G. B. Ravndal Club Speaker", *The Times News*, 31 October 1905, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ravndal, *Turkey: A Commercial and Industrial Handbook*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1926.

hensive book, which provided a historical, geographical, economic, commercial and demographic profile of Turkey. His book, *Turkish Markets for American Hardware*,<sup>28</sup> gave details about conditions and opportunities for American products in the country. Another one, *The Origin of the Capitulations and of the Consular Institution*,<sup>29</sup> was about the history of capitulations in the Near East and conditions in the Ottoman Empire. He also told the history of the Vikings in Eastern Europe in *Stories of the East Vikings*<sup>30</sup> and wrote a chapter on "The Scandinavian Pioneers of South Dakota" for *the South Dakota Historical Collections 12*.<sup>31</sup> Apart from these, Ravndal helped to establish the American Consular Association. He published his articles and writings in the Association's publication, *the American Foreign Service Journal*.<sup>32</sup>

Ravndal was married to Ms. Dorothea Magelssen on 14 September 1893 and had five children –Sarah, Inga Bie, Christian, Olaf, and Eric– on whom his long career in the Ottoman Empire also had an influence.<sup>33</sup> Sarah Ravndal worked as the Istanbul Representative of the Near East Relief, while Olaf worked in the Istanbul Branch of the American Express Company.<sup>34</sup> Christian graduated from Robert College, the most prominent American educational institution in Istanbul, and completed his B.A. in the U.S. Christian followed in his father's footsteps and joined the American Consular Services, for whom he undertook significant posts during the first years of the Cold War, serving

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<sup>28</sup> Ravndal, *Turkish Markets for American Hardware*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1917.

<sup>29</sup> Ravndal, *The Origin of the Capitulations and of the Consular Institution*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1921.

<sup>30</sup> Ravndal, *Stories of the East Vikings*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis 1938.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald F. De Jong, "Dakota Resources", *South Dakota History*, Volume 15, No 1, 1985, 66-114.

<sup>32</sup> "Looking Backwards on the Occasion of Consul General Ravndal's Retirement", *The American Foreign Service Journal*, November 1930, 413-414.

<sup>33</sup> *Biographical Directory of the South Dakota Legislature*, 914.

<sup>34</sup> Advisory Board in Istanbul, *The American Hospital and School of Nursing in Istanbul*, Constantinople, 1930, 11; "Personalialia", *LTR*, November 1921, 992.

as the envoy and ambassador to Hungary and Czechoslovakia, respectively.<sup>35</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal died in Orlando, Florida on 23 March 1950.<sup>36</sup>

## Diplomatic Career in the Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Turkey

### Gabriel Bie Ravndal in Beirut (1898-1911)

Ravndal's first place of duty in the Ottoman lands was Beirut, one of the Levant's principal trade centers and a sizeable non-Muslim population. Starting in 1824, Americans founded various educational institutions. By 1903, the American had 60 schools built in Beirut and its vicinity, including the Beirut American University.

When Ravndal arrived in Beirut in 1898, the American Consulate, opened in 1836, was not known for capable and competent diplomacy and had not attained significant success in the region.<sup>37</sup> One of Ravndal's act was to help American Jewish citizens who tried to settle in Jerusalem by mediating with the Ottoman officials for permission to the American migrants in the region.<sup>38</sup> The general American policy was to avoid having any controversy with the government, and thus leaving the matter to the Ottomans. Ravndal followed the same policy.<sup>39</sup>

A 1903 incident in Beirut created a severe crisis between the American and Ottoman governments. Vice-Consul in Beirut and Ravndal's brother-in-law, William Magelssen was attacked on his way to his office. The American

<sup>35</sup> "Christian Magelssen Ravndal (1899–1984)", *U.S. Department of State*, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/ravndal-christian-magelssen>, Accessed 16 July 2019;

"C. M. Ravndal Ex-Ambassador Dies in Austria", *The Washington Post*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1984/10/28/cm-ravndal-ex-ambassador-dies-in-austria/bac979d2-d6fb-4c27-9ec3-beabb8db76bb/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.7be4f957c866](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1984/10/28/cm-ravndal-ex-ambassador-dies-in-austria/bac979d2-d6fb-4c27-9ec3-beabb8db76bb/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.7be4f957c866), Accessed 15 July 2019.

<sup>36</sup> *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 438.

<sup>37</sup> Ruth Kark, *American Consuls in the Holy Land, 1832-1914*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1994, 86-92.

<sup>38</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States 1898*, Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 1901, 1089-1090.

<sup>39</sup> Ruth Kark, "A Communication: Ottoman Policy and U.S. Attitudes Regarding Land Purchase and Settlement by American Jews in Palestine", *Journal of Israeli History*, Volume 14, No 12, 1993.

Minister in Istanbul, John Leishman, mistakenly reported to the US State Department on 23 August 1903 that Magelssen had been murdered. The American government then dispatched a naval squadron to the Ottoman seas to force the Ottomans to accept American demands in this case as well as issues related to indemnities for American institutions damaged in 1893-96.<sup>40</sup> However, the American Mission in Istanbul corrected the error in the cable, notifying the government that the Vice Consul was alive.<sup>41</sup> Since the American press and the American government paid too much attention to this incident, Ravndal presured both local and central Ottoman authorities to solve the problems; find the culprits and increase the security for Consular staff. Reşid Bey, the Governor of Beirut, informed the American Legation in Istanbul about the arrest of the suspect. He, however, rejected any allegation of a "premeditated intention."<sup>42</sup> Reşid Bey had already caused disfavor among Beirut's citizens and foreign representatives due to his inability to provide order in the city. He soon was transferred to Bursa following complaints from diplomatic representatives, including Ravndal. As a result, İbrahim Halil Pasha became the new governor.<sup>43</sup>

Ravndal worked as American Consul General in Beirut during the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, ignited by the revolts in the Balkans against the Hamidian rule, ushered in a new era. When Abdul Hamid II had to restore the 1876 Constitution and call for the reconvention of the Parliament, demonstrations took place all over the Empire. People in Beirut participated in the

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<sup>40</sup> In this period, there were several Armenian uprisings in the Ottoman Empire, in which some American missionary institutions were also damaged. Çağrı Erhan, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Kökenleri*, İmge Kitabevi, Ankara 2015, 313-340.

<sup>41</sup> "Vice Consul Lives but Warships will Go to Turkey", *Ottumwa Semi-Weekly Courier*, 1 September 1903, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States 1903*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1904, 774.

<sup>43</sup> Sinan Kunalp, *Son Dönem Osmanlı Erkân ve Ricali (1839-1922)*, Isis, İstanbul, 1999, 27; Zafer Orha, *Beyrut Vilayeti'nde Osmanlı İdaresi (1887-1909)*, Unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Istanbul, 2017, 53-55; *Foreign Relations of the United States 1903*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1904, 777.

demonstrations too, to celebrate the Constitution. Ravndal reported the demonstrators' sincere excitement despite disturbances.<sup>44</sup> To Ravndal, the Hamidian rule represented an "outdated regime" that caused the country's underdevelopment. He was thus optimistic about the Revolution.<sup>45</sup>

Ravndal also reported an inter-communal conflict that broke out in Adana a city, located in southern Asia Minor and of a large number Armenian population at the beginning of the twentieth century. In April 1909, the conflict between Armenians and Muslims reached its peak in Adana and in its vicinity. Both sides gave casualties until the central government's interference. Ravndal continuously informed the American Government about the incident. He sent field reports by the American missionaries together with his comments and opinions. In his reports, he stated that the community leaders from each side took mutual responsibility and he thus did not blame the Ottoman Government.<sup>46</sup>

Ravndal coordinated American aid to Armenians in Adana and other regions affected by the intercommunal strife. He cooperated with the American Red Cross Headquarters to collect funds and aid, and sent personnel to the region for relief work for the Armenians.<sup>47</sup> He helped to end conflicts in Latakia [Lazkiye] by allying with the French squadron.<sup>48</sup> During these events, his activities were applauded in the American press and he was even awarded the American Red Cross Medal of Merit in 1909.<sup>49</sup>

During his stay in Beirut, Ravndal took a number of positions in different civil society organizations. Between 1898 and 1902, he served as a Board Member for the Syrian Protestant College and during the 1909 Adana Events, he presided the Beirut Relief Committee. Besides, he pioneered and chaired

<sup>44</sup> Elie Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies*, Frank Cass and Company Limited, New York, NY, 2005, 134.

<sup>45</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal, *Turkey: A Commercial and Industrial Handbook*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1926, 160.

<sup>46</sup> Yücel Güçlü, *The Armenian Events of Adana in 1909: Cemal Pasa and Beyond*, The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Maryland, 2018, 216-218.

<sup>47</sup> From Ravndal to Assistant Secretary of State, 26 July 1909, "Relief Work in connection with recent disturbances in Asia Minor and Syria". General Records of the Department of State, 1763–2002, Record Group 59, Series: Numerical Files, 8/1906-1910, Box 24, M862 Roll 1059, National Archives, Washington, DC.

<sup>48</sup> "Latakia Saved", *The Arizona Republican*, 27 April 1909, 1.

<sup>49</sup> *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 437.

the foundation of the Beirut Chapter of the American Red Cross in 1909, which was the first American Red Cross branch abroad.<sup>50</sup>

Ravndal was aware of the importance of developing American trade and business in the region. He informed American businessmen to direct their attention to the Near East. He also publicized American products in the Ottoman local markets. His reports were published in the American press and reached further in the U.S. He supported American enterprises in Syria and thus provided information about the existing concessions, market conditions, specifications of products, and trade opportunities in the region. He became an intermediary between the local, trustworthy businessmen in Beirut and American exporters and manufacturers. He ordered American product samples for display in Beirut.<sup>51</sup> Ravndal notified American businessmen about and the concessions, and translated applicable laws. He introduced American firms to prospective local customers.<sup>52</sup> Further, he sought to expand the U.S. bilateral trade and helped American companies to increase profits.<sup>53</sup>

Ravndal's expectations and evaluations about the future economic performance of the Ottoman Empire were perhaps a little exaggerated. However, as an American diplomat in the Ottoman Beirut, his duty also included support of American trade and business in the region. Apparently, he succeeded in developing and expanding American business. The Department of State approved his achievements and therefore he was sent to Istanbul. Likewise, in the American Congress, his promotion was recorded as an indication of the merit-based promotion system in the Consular Service.<sup>54</sup>

#### **Gabriel Bie Ravndal in Istanbul (1911-1925)**

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the American government was in a period of commercial and economic expansion towards new markets. Since the beginning of the century, the Turkish-American trade was on the rise both in quantity and value. The volume of bilateral commerce grew

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<sup>50</sup> "American Red Cross", *The Orient*, 15 March 1911, 1.

<sup>51</sup> "Syria wants American goods", *The Evening Times*, 8 September 1899, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal, "Concessions in Turkey", *Monthly Consular and Trade Reports Part II* (N. 357), Washington 1910, 48; "Holy Land Waking Up", *The Minneapolis Journal*, 22 May 1901, 1.

<sup>53</sup> "To Import Raw Silk Direct", *The Times*, 16 May 1901, p. 6; "Windmills in Syria", *Washington Sentinel*, 10 February 1900, 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Congressional Record*, 6 Cong., 1 sess., 21 July 1911, 3152.

from \$8 million in 1900 to almost \$19 million in 1910.<sup>55</sup> To support these efforts, American consular missions in the Empire provided active support for the Chester Project, a railway and mining project, when the venture was first presented to the Ottomans in 1909.<sup>56</sup> Support grew higher with the new appointments to consular posts in Istanbul. First, Ravndal became the new consul general in Istanbul on 19 December 1910.<sup>57</sup> William Woodville Rockhill, one of the authors of the "Open Door Policy"<sup>58</sup> and a leading actor in American commercial success in China as the American Ambassador, was appointed the new American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire on 24 April 1911.<sup>59</sup> Even though the Ottoman Parliament failed to ratify the Chester Project, the U.S. gradually increased its economic share in the region and in the Empire through trade, new institutions and new companies. After the failure of Dollar Diplomacy through the Chester Project, American businesses did not engage in large-scale investment until the establishment of the Ford Assembly Plant in Istanbul in 1929.<sup>60</sup> However, Ravndal took another path to develop commercial relations. He founded non-governmental organizations

<sup>55</sup> *The Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Year Ending June 30, 1900*, v. I, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1900, 56-58; *The Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States for the Year Ending June 30, 1910*, v. I, Government Printing Office, Washington 1911, 1208-1265.

<sup>56</sup> John A. DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East*, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1968, 76-78. The Chester Project comprised two thousand kilometers of railways to be built in Eastern Asia Minor and Upper Mesopotamia. The project included the exploitation of natural resources along the railway lines. For further information about the Chester Project, please see: Bilmez Bülent Can, *Demiryolundan Petrole Chester Projesi (1908-1923)*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 2016.

<sup>57</sup> *Register of the Department of State*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1913, 40.

<sup>58</sup> Open Door Policy: the American policy emerging in the last decade of 19th Century to enable the free trade in China and the Far East. For further details please see Michael Patrick Cullinane and Alex Goodall, *The Open Door Era, United States Policy in the Twentieth Century*, Edinburg University Press, Edinburg 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Alfred E. Hhippsley, "William Woodville Rockhill", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, Volume 47, No 2, 1915, 367-374.

<sup>60</sup> Ford Motor Company established a plant in Istanbul in 1929 to address the auto demand of Near East countries. For further details, please see Aslı Odman, "Serbest Mıntıka'dan Amerikan Pazarı'na Tophane Rihtımı: Ford Motor Company Exports Inc., İstanbul otomotiv montaj fabrikası 1925-1944", *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, Volume 12, 2011.

to unite businessmen to remove obstacles for increasing trade and investments. Although the trade volume between two countries constituted a small share of overall American foreign trade, tobacco, fruits and nuts, rugs and opium were imported in large amounts. Furthermore, these exports provided a trade surplus to the Empire and later Republican Turkey that generated foreign currency that could be used in trade with other countries.

### *American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant*

Chambers of Commerce are regional unities/organizations formed by business people. They are pressure groups to facilitate lobbying for their interests before governments. As well as setting up chambers in their countries, businessmen also found organizations abroad to facilitate their business.

American businessmen established such organizations particularly in the countries with which the U.S. had significant commercial interests. The American Chamber of Commerce in Paris that was established in 1894 pioneered the American Chambers abroad and served as an example for the other American Chambers with its by-law.<sup>61</sup> It was followed by the American Associations of Trade and Commerce in Berlin,<sup>62</sup> the Russian-American Chamber of Commerce in Moscow in 1914 and the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai in 1915.<sup>63</sup> In Berlin and Paris, the Chambers were established upon the American businessmen's initiatives while the American consular officers led the foundation in Moscow, Shanghai and Rio de Janeiro. These Chambers did not get American financial support and funded their services through the membership and subscription fees, advertorials in their publications and specific service fees.<sup>64</sup>

Levant, which can be defined as the Eastern Mediterranean region including Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, Cyprus and the southern parts of the Balkans, had a historically important role in the world trade. As a transit commercial

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<sup>61</sup> Charles P. Kindleberger, "Origins of United States Direct Investment in France", *Business History Review*, Volume 48, No 3, 1974, 382-413.

<sup>62</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal, "American Commercial Organizations in Foreign Countries", *LTR*, December 1913, 206.

<sup>63</sup> "American Chamber of Commerce for Russia", *LTR*, March 1914, p. 388; Kenneth J. Blume, *Historical Dictionary of U.S. Diplomacy from the Civil War to World War I*, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, 2017, 39.

<sup>64</sup> Jay E. Fitzgerald, "American Chambers of Commerce in Foreign Countries", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 94, 1921, 122-126.

route for the exchange of commodities, Levant had prominent ports of Izmir, Beirut, Pireaus, Salonika and Istanbul. Dominated by the Venetians, the French and British, Levant also attracted the American merchants.<sup>65</sup> As a result, upon his arrival in Istanbul, Ravndal organized a meeting in 1911 to establish a chamber of commerce. He, together with the prominent American companies in the Levant that participated in the meeting, founded the American Chamber of Commerce for Turkey.<sup>66</sup> Ravndal was the Honorary President of the Chamber from the beginning. He played a key role in the Chamber's activities and operations until he left Istanbul. The Chamber accepted members from the U.S. and the countries in the region. The number of members rose from 60 at the first meeting to 376 in June 1911 and to 572 in 1913.<sup>67</sup> Powerful merchant families in the Ottoman Empire, such as Nemlizade Brothers, Whittals, and Audi Family, joined the Chamber by 1913.<sup>68</sup> The Chamber included more than 100 US based companies, like the Standard Oil Company of New York, Ford Motor Co., A. B. Farquhar, International Harvester Co., Studebaker, American Tobacco, and Gary Tobacco.<sup>69</sup> In addition to the leading companies and merchants, Suleiman al-Bustani, the Minister of Commerce and Agriculture; Halil Bey, President of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies, also joined the Chamber. Besides, Talat Bey, later Grand Vizier, attended the Chamber's events and activities.<sup>70</sup>

During the 2nd Annual Meeting, its name was changed to the American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant, thus covering Istanbul's whole commercial hinterland (see Appendix 3).<sup>71</sup> While the Chamber's headquarters was located in Istanbul, the ACCL expanded through Beirut, Izmir, Salonica,

<sup>65</sup> Despina Vlami, *Trading with the Ottomans The Levant Company in the Middle East*, I. B. Tauris, New York, 2015, pp. 87-96.

<sup>66</sup> "Empire News", *The Orient*, 8 March 1911, p. 6; "American Chamber of Commerce for Turkey", *The Orient*, 29 March 1911, 4.

<sup>67</sup> "Summary of Members by District", *LTR*, June 1911, XX; "Summary of Members by District", *LTR*, June 1913, XXXI.

<sup>68</sup> "Classified List of Members" *LTR*, June 1913, I-XXXI.

<sup>69</sup> "Classified List of Members", *LTR*, December 1912, I-XXVII.

<sup>70</sup> "The Chamber's Program", *LTR*, March 1916, 393; "Suleiman Effendi Bustani", *LTR*, June 1913, 76; "American Relations with Turkey", *LTR*, September 1914, 179. Please also see: Syed Tanvir Wasti, "Halil Mentese-the Quadrumvir", *Middle Eastern Studies* Volume 32, No 3, 1996, 92-105.

<sup>71</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal, "The Annual Meeting", *LTR*, February 1921, 100.

Athens, Patras and Cairo.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the ACCL became the first American chamber abroad to join the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and even founded a branch within the Philadelphia Commercial Museum in May 1913.<sup>73</sup> But, later, ACCL quitted the initial plan of increasing its branches within other commercial organizations. Because, it aimed to increase its efficiency by basing its activities on legal status in the U.S and thus ACCL started a new organization in January 1916 by incorporating in Washington, DC to.<sup>74</sup> After a two year interval starting from 1917 because of the World War I, the ACCL resumed its activities in 1919.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, in March 1921, the American Section of ACCL was founded. The adopted constitution for this section allowed only American members, but being a member of either the American Section or the ACCL in Istanbul was considered sufficient to benefit from the services of both sections.<sup>76</sup>

The organizational expansion of the ACCL in the Levant could not go further following the post-WWI era. Then, ACCL branches sought to establish separate bodies. The Board of Directors of the ACCL, involuntarily, permitted to name themselves as "Associated Chambers."<sup>77</sup> In December 1922, the American Section of the ACCL restructured under the name of "the Federated American Chambers of Commerce of the Near East" by incorporating the American Chamber of Commerce in Greece and the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, thereby old branches came together once again.<sup>78</sup>

The most significant activity of the ACCL was to publish *Levant Trade Review*. This magazine aimed to promote American products in the Levant, to introduce business opportunities in the region, and to lobby for the elimination of barriers to the development of bilateral trade. With reports, articles,

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<sup>72</sup> "Our Sixth Annual Meeting", *LTR*, December 1915, 215.

<sup>73</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal, "American Commercial Organizations in Foreign Countries", *LTR*, December 1913, 206-208.

<sup>74</sup> "Incorporation in America of the American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant", *LTR*, December 1915, 319-320.

<sup>75</sup> "American Trade Drive in the Near East", *LTR*, June 1919, 5-8.

<sup>76</sup> "American Section American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant", *LTR*, April 1921, 260-264.

<sup>77</sup> "E Pluribus Unum", *LTR*, July 1919, 83-84; Oscar Gunkel, "To Branches of the American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant", *LTR*, October 1919, 282.

<sup>78</sup> "Organized to Aid Near East Trade", *New York Herald*, 6 December 1922, 13; *LTR*, January 1922, 5.

statistics, photos, and other documents provided by consular and American missionary institutions' staff, businessmen, and academics, LTR reflected conditions in the region and promoted American business and trade.<sup>79</sup> In 1931, ACCL that could not go further under economic hardships, especially after the Great Depression of 1929 and with Turkey's protectionist economy stopped publishing LTR.

Being active from 1911 until 1930s, the ACCL managed to exercise far-reaching influence both in the region and in the United States through its organizational network and LTR. First among its influences, the ACCL was an active part of the American policy towards the region and it played a role in rising American influence and presence in Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, LTR supported American interests by supporting the idea of free trade through the Straits as an extension of the Open Door Policy. Furthermore, the Chamber put extensive effort to bring an American financial institution to Istanbul and to establish a direct steamship line between the region and the U.S., efforts that were successful after WWI and created better conditions for American companies.<sup>81</sup> Further, officials from the ACCL and its affiliated organizations in the U.S. contributed to improving American attitudes towards Turkey. To this end, he developed close relations with the American press, commercial and governmental organizations.<sup>82</sup> It worked hard to persuade American business delegations to visit the Ottoman Empire/Turkey to see commercial opportunities.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the ACCL held seminars for American businessmen in the United States about market conditions and business opportunities in the Levant through tours during which Chamber officials visited major American cities.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *LTR*, November 1923, 610.

<sup>80</sup> Gordon, *American Relations*, 155-156; Louis P. Cassimatis, *American Influence in Greece, 1917-1929*, The Kent State University Press, Kent 1988, 13.

<sup>81</sup> "American Banking in the Levant", *LTR*, September 1913, 116; "The America Levant Line", *LTR*, June 1912, 96; "The Guaranty Trust Co. at Constantinople", *LTR*, July 1920, 584.

<sup>82</sup> "Promote Trade in the Near East", *The Akron Register Tribune*, 26 May 1921, 6; "Promote Trade in the Near East", *New Mexico State Record*, 27 May 1921, 3.

<sup>83</sup> "American Commercial Delegates Will Visit Constantinople", *LTR*, November 1922, 730.

<sup>84</sup> "A tous les membres américains de la Chambre de Commerce Américaine pour le Levant", *LTR*, August 1919, 113-116.

The ACCL and its branches in the U.S. not only contributed to American business expansion in the region but also supported the Ottoman Empire/Turkey in various ways. As a business organization, the ACCL became a part of the Turkish-American rapprochement after the Turkish War of Independence and it lobbied against a bill in the California Legislature to prohibit the import of tobacco from the Empire in 1921.<sup>85</sup> The ACCL also participated in the pro-treaty group to push the American Congress to ratify the Lausanne Treaty of 6 August 1923, which would reestablish the formal political and diplomatic relations ruptured in 1917 during the World War I. Moreover, the ACCL sent formal petition to support the treaty in the Senate to resume official relations between the two countries, Turkey and US.<sup>86</sup> When the weak organization of Turkish people in the U.S. was considered, these efforts can be inferred to be crucial for the reestablishment of Turkish-American relations.<sup>87</sup>

When the ACCL was compared to other American Chambers abroad, it can be said that they shared the same ideals. Yet the specific legal, political and economic conditions in the region caused differences in the organization of these institutions. Firstly, the American Chamber of the Commerce for the Levant established branches outside of the Ottoman Empire. Athens, Salonica and Patras in Greece, Cairo in Egypt (under British rule), Bucharest in Romania (failed) hosted ACCL branches until the end of the World War I. Actually, Istanbul was the regional commercial and financial hub of the region, and therefore, the American institutions and companies generally installed their Levant headquarters in the city, similar to the European governments and companies. Furthermore, the city served as a junction to exchange European goods with Eastern products, which attracted merchants to the city and formed a more extensive business community than the other Levant centers.

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<sup>85</sup> "The American Section Addressed by President Thomas and Consul Maynard", *LTR*, January 1922, 3-6.

<sup>86</sup> Mark Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Volume 16, No 33, 1984, 349-365.

<sup>87</sup> Veysi Akin, "Amerika'da Türk Lobisi: Türk Teavün Cemiyeti", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol. XX, 2004, 453-522. Despite these efforts in the early years of twentieth century, the organization by Turkish migrants in the U.S. remained limited until twenty first century. For more details, please see: Esra Pakin Albayrakoğlu, "Amerikan Siyasetini Yönlendirmede Türk-Amerikan Derneklerinin Rolü", *Türk Dünyası Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları Zirvesi Bildiri Kitapçığı*, Ankara 2014, 367-371.

However, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the WWI and a gradual declining commercial importance of Istanbul resulted in the emergence of these branches abroad as separate entities.<sup>88</sup>

#### *Istanbul Chapter of the American Red Cross and the American Hospital*

In addition to his efforts in commercial cases, Gabriel Bie Ravndal also helped to found the Istanbul Chapter of the American Red Cross.<sup>89</sup> Besides, Ravndal was one of the founders of the American Hospital in Istanbul opened on 20 August 1920.<sup>90</sup>

#### *American Luncheon Club*

Ravndal pioneered the foundation of “a permanent organization” to bring the whole American community together. Upon his offer in the meeting on 22 June 1921, the American Luncheon Club was established and concluded to hold its meetings at the Istanbul Branch of the Guaranty Trust Company of New York every Friday at 1 p.m. Further, Ravndal was elected as the President of the Club and all Americans were invited to join the club. The American Luncheon Club had 97 active members as well as 47 one-time participants in June 1922. Meetings were held every Friday with distinguished speakers from leading companies and commercial organizations, and diplomatic representatives. In the first year, the Club organized 38 events and hosted 1781 participants in total.<sup>91</sup> Speakers at these events included the Councilor of the ACCL in the US, Near East managers of the American companies, and representatives of the Levantine countries to the U.S.<sup>92</sup> The American Luncheon Club merged with the American Women’s Luncheon Club on 22 January 1923 and changed its name to “the American Club of Constantinople.”<sup>93</sup>

#### *Istanbul Golf Club*

<sup>88</sup> “E Pluribus Unum,” *LTR*, July 1919, 83-84.

<sup>89</sup> “American Red Cross”, *The Orient*, 15 March 1911, 1; “Constantinople Chapter of the Red Cross”, *The Orient*, 29 March 1911, 2; “Constantinople Chapter of the American Red Cross”, *The Orient*, 5 April 1911, 2.

<sup>90</sup> “American Hospital in Constantinople”, *LTR*, August 1920, 656-658.

<sup>91</sup> American Club of Constantinople, *Year Book of the American Club of Constantinople*, n.p., 1922, 1-4.

<sup>92</sup> “American Men’s Luncheons at Constantinople”, *LTR*, June 1924, 258.

<sup>93</sup> “The American Club of Constantinople”, *LTR*, February 1923, 63-64.

Ravndal was also a member of Bosphorus Golf Club, which was located in Istanbul. After the declaration of the new republic, he was one of the pioneers of reform at the club, which changed its name from Bosphorus Golf Club to the Istanbul Golf Club and allowed Turkish members.<sup>94</sup>

### **Gabriel Bie Ravndal's Views on Major Issues**

#### *Economic issues*

The US experienced a fast industrial growth after the Civil War and therefore directed its focus to the other countries to sell its manufacturing surplus and supply its industry with new raw materials. In the first place, Caribbean and the South America attracted American investments in mining, agriculture and shipping lines in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the end of this century, the American commercial interests turned their faces to China. Hence, "Open Door Policy" was declared to assure the American entry into the Chinese market and "Dollar Diplomacy" came into use to increase the share of the American businesses in Chinese economy from 1899 and onwards. Besides, the American government supported the American oil companies to obtain concessions in the Latin America to increase the petroleum supply to the homeland.<sup>95</sup> When Ravndal came to Istanbul in 1911, these American struggles for creating new markets for the American companies were involving the Ottoman Empire and the region. For instance, the Chester Project which mainly aimed at reaching the Middle Eastern oil reserves through railway construction was on the agenda. Additionally, there were American companies operating in the tobacco, oil, fruits and mining, which mainly supplied the American demand for these products.<sup>96</sup>

Ravndal was generally optimistic about Turkey. He had great economic expectations from the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey, especially

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<sup>94</sup> "Consul General Ravndal Leaves Near East for New Post in Switzerland", *LTR*, October 1925, 414. Although the website of the Istanbul Golf Club mentions Ravndal as the U.S. Ambassador, there was no American official in Turkey with the Ambassador title until 1927. The title of Ravndal was Consul General. "IGK, The Oldest Sports Club in Turkey", *Istanbul Golf Kulübü*, <http://www.igk.org.tr/en/Club/Pages/History.aspx>, Accessed 29 July 2019.

<sup>95</sup> Jeffrey A. Frieden, "The Economics of Intervention: American Overseas Investments and Relations with Underdeveloped Areas, 1890-1950", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 31, No 1, 1989, 55-80.

<sup>96</sup> Gordon, *American Relations*, 64.

about the bright economic future of the region that he conveyed through the LTR and reports to the American business community.<sup>97</sup> He closely followed and analyzed local business conditions in the region and notified American companies about commercial opportunities from the beginning, thereby contributing to the development of American trade in the region. For instance, he published articles on the Ottoman motor market, which promised an expansion in later years, and gave detailed explanations about legal requirements and customer preferences in March 1916.<sup>98</sup> As Ravndal predicted, the motor vehicle market in Turkey expanded steadily, especially after the declaration of the Republic in 1923. American companies gradually dominated the motor vehicle sector. The annual export of American companies in Turkey reached over five thousand cars per year, constituting about 50 percent of the whole Turkish market. It culminated when Ford Motor Company established an assembly plant in Istanbul in 1929.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, Ravndal contributed to the promotion of American tractors in Turkey and the region where economy was mainly agrarian. While fifteen tractors out of three hundred tractors in the Empire in 1914 were of American origin, by 1925, six hundred of the 750 tractors in Turkey were American made.<sup>100</sup> Ravndal also helped to introduce American agricultural equipment to the region, in which American companies obtained a significant share in the following years. For example, he advised local merchants to import American agricultural equipment in Syria.<sup>101</sup> Ravndal also reported on the probable rise in the import of flour to Istanbul in the postwar era in his article published in LTR in 1915.<sup>102</sup> His forecast was accurate, as flour shipments from Istanbul's traditional sources such as Romania, Russia and Anatolia were ruptured. Flour scarcity in the city was relieved with American imports and by 1920 American companies led the market with about three hundred thousand sacks a month, which surpassed \$8

<sup>97</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal, "Beirut", *Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries during the Year 1901*, Volume I, Government Printing Office, Washington 1902, 1028-1029; "Turks Tricked Germans, Say American Experts," *New York Tribune*, 7 November 1919, 4.

<sup>98</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal, "Automobiles in Turkey", *LTR*, March 1916, 397.

<sup>99</sup> "1930 Motor Vehicle Exports to Near East", *LTR*, February 1931, 59; "Ford Motor Company Exports Inc.", *LTR*, February 1930, 41-46.

<sup>100</sup> "Engines in the East", *LTR*, December 1914, 290; "Modern Agricultural Machinery and Methods in Turkey", *LTR*, February 1925, 48.

<sup>101</sup> C.H. Poe, "Ephesus in 1911", *The Farmer and Mechanic*, 14 March 1911, 13.

<sup>102</sup> Gabriel Ravndal, "Flour, Rice and Glucose for the Levant", *LTR*, December 1915, 241.

million per year until the custom duties increased in 1923. Raising the taxes on wheat and flour import almost completely terminated importing these products from the U.S. and the trade volume between two countries shrunk.<sup>103</sup>

Ravndal sought to develop bilateral trade. However, he was not included in the investment attempts of the American companies. This can be attributed to the failure of the Chester Project. The American consular missions actively supported the Chester Project and directly intervened in the process. However, after the failure of the project especially due to the German opposition, the American foreign missions carefully stayed out of the open rivalry against the European Powers.

#### *The American Policy towards Turkey*

Ravndal's career in the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey coincided with very turbulent years in the region, which underwent radical changes and significant transformations. The frontiers were readjusted and new nations emerged. At the end of the WWI, the Ottoman Empire signed the Armistice of Mudros and had to wait for the peace settlement at the Paris Conference. As one of the most experienced officials in the U.S. State Department, Ravndal contributed to the American policy towards first the Ottoman Empire and then new Turkey via his reports, "American Tasks in Turkey." He prepared the report while in France in October 1918.<sup>104</sup> In the report, he detailed the American policy towards the Ottomans (see Appendix 4). He proposed:

- The establishment of an independent Armenia (on Ottoman Territories) under American Mandate
- The formation of a separate Kurdish province
- The cession of Thrace to Bulgaria
- Rejection of Italian zones of influence in Antalya and Izmir

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<sup>103</sup> "Percent of Export of Wheat and Flour from the United States" *LTR*, January 1924, 30.

<sup>104</sup> Kamil Necdet Ar, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri Çerçevesinde Ermeni Meselesi (1918-1923)*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul 2011, 400.

- The foundation of a Free State on the Straits, centered in Istanbul.<sup>105</sup>

The last two issues were mostly related to commercial issues rather than political ones. First, Italy was economically and industrially more powerful than the Balkan countries and had a larger share in Ottoman imports as compared to the United States.<sup>106</sup> Thus Italians posed a probable threat to the development of American interests in the region through its capacity to dominate the region economically. In addition, the principal Anatolian port that American companies conducted trade through was Izmir and Ravndal seemed to favor maintenance of the status quo in the region by leaving the city in Ottoman territory. As a consequence, he opposed the Italian invasion in Anatolia to prevent the rise of a new commercial rival in the region. Besides, Ravndal opposed the Greek invasion of Izmir and after the occupation; he stated his opinion that only the Greeks could arouse such a reaction even if it was ignored by President Wilson.<sup>107</sup> However, Ravndal seemed to be in favor of the Bulgarian invasion of Ottoman lands while opposing Italy and Greece. The cession of Thrace to Bulgaria can be attributed to the old and intense relations between the American missionary institutions in the Ottoman Empire with the Bulgarian people. Among the leaders of the Bulgarian independence, there were many graduates of the American schools. Moreover, a Bulgarian minister in the Washington, DC was a graduate of Robert College. The Bulgarian minister had good ties with ACCL and participated in the American Luncheon Club event on 4 November 1921.<sup>108</sup>

Another important issue in Ravndal's report was the regime of the Straits, this sea passage was of vital importance to deliver American products to Black Sea countries, Iran and Caucasia, and to access local products such as carpets, filberts, and rose oil. As a result, in the opinion of American officials, the sovereignty of a single country over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles

<sup>105</sup> From Ravndal to Secretary of State, "American Tasks in Turkey", 1 October 1918, Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1914-1931, Record Group 256, File Unit: 867.00B-867.4016, Volume 513, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/26839971>, Accessed 10 July 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Şevket Pamuk, *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Dış Ticareti*, Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, Ankara 1995, 77.

<sup>107</sup> Orhan Duru, *Amerikan Gizli Belgeleriyle Türkiye'nin Kurtuluş Yılları*, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2017, 12-13.

<sup>108</sup> "Minister Panaretoff at Constantinople", *LTR*, November 1921, 994.

was assumed to be a possible threat to the safe and sustainable conduct of American trade. Therefore, Ravndal advised a policy that applied the “Open Door Policy,” which aimed to expand American trade through equal regulations and free marine policies. Considering the rapidly developing American manufacturing industry's needs and interests, he advocated the foundation of a free regime in the Straits to secure free passage for American ships. Therefore, Ravndal advised a policy that applied the “Open Door Policy,” which aimed to expand American trade through equal regulations and free marine policies.

Ravndal expressed his ideas on different occasions. When he was in France, he proposed the American Delegation to form a commission to visit the Empire and inspect conditions in the Eastern Anatolia.<sup>109</sup> Despite the failure of the American attempt, another commission was set up with the participation of only American representatives. This commission was known as the King-Crane Commission, which started to function in June 1919.<sup>110</sup> This commission interviewed Ravndal on 5 August 1919. He told during the interview that the Turks were still incapable of having self-government. In his opinion, Turks needed a mandate regime. He also specified , as he had stated in his report, for the necessity of Armenian, Kurdish and Istanbul mandate regimes.<sup>111</sup>

In addition, after the World War I, some Ottoman/Turkish intellectuals also suggested the establishing an American Mandate in the Empire to assure the country's survival. Even a Wilsonian League was set up in Istanbul in 1919. Halide Edip, who was a famous writer and a graduate of American Girls' College at Scutari (Üsküdar, Istanbul), supported such views.<sup>112</sup> LTR supported this idea as well and even published an article about the possible

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<sup>109</sup> Andrew Patrick, *America's Forgotten Middle East Initiative: The King-Crane Commission of 1919*, IB Tauris & Co. Ltd., Croydon 2015, 32.

<sup>110</sup> Laurence Evans, *Türkiye'nin Paylaşılması ve ABD Politikası: 1914-1924*, Milliyet Yayın, n.p, 1972, 147.

<sup>111</sup> King-Crane Commission Digital Collection, “Memorandum of interview with Gabriel Bie Ravndal”, 5 August 1919, Henry Churchill King Papers, 1873-1934, RG 2/6, Box 128, Folder 3, Oberlin College Archives, Ohio, <http://dcollections.oberlin.edu/cdm/ref/collection/kingcrane/id/490>, Accessed 16 July 2019.

<sup>112</sup> Halide Edip, *The Turkish Ordeal*, The Century, New York 1928, 15-16.

cost and advantages of a mandate regime. Interestingly, LTR published articles about the business opportunities in future Armenia which would be founded in the Eastern Anatolia. Nevertheless, the magazine welcomed the declaration of the republic in Turkey as well. Even though Ravndal was not the sole editor/publisher of LTR, he had a role in shaping the attitude of ACCL and LTR. Hence, Ravndal seems to conform to the American state policy towards the region and shaped the magazine's policy accordingly. He was active members of ACCL and American Luncheon Club. He made LTR to publicize American interests in the region. He also sought to keep these institutions away from the conflicts with the Ottoman central and local authorities.

Abolition of capitulations that had earlier granted significant economic, political and judicial advantages to foreign countries, harmed Ottoman-American relations. In 1914, when the Ottomans abrogated the capitulations, the U.S. severely opposed the abolition of its judicial and educational privileges.<sup>113</sup> Ravndal authored a book on the capitulations. He does not trust the Ottoman judicial system and therefore argued against abolishing the existing judicial privileges.<sup>114</sup> Just before the peace conference in Lausanne, he reiterated his view on the judicial capitulations. He stated that unless a fair trial of foreigners was guaranteed, judicial capitulations should not be abolished.<sup>115</sup>

Two main points can be deduced from Ravndal's proposal. First, the American commercial interests had a grave impact on the determination of the diplomatic stance of Ravndal. his efforts seem to have been concentrated on the continuance and development of American businesses in the region with utmost benefits in the most suitable conditions. Secondly, the missionary activities had created more intense relations between the Americans and the Armenians and Bulgarians, which resulted in American inclination to providing them with political advantages. Ravndal seemed to have this tendency as well and took a similar way to this inclination.

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<sup>113</sup> Henry Morgenthau, *Büyükelçi Morgenthau'nun Öyküsü*, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul 2017, 102-103.

<sup>114</sup> Gabriel Bie Ravndal, *The Origin of the Capitulations and of the Consular Institution*, Government Printing Office, Washington 1921, 108.

<sup>115</sup> "Turk Troops Obey Armistice Terms", *The Evening Star*, 13 October 1922, 2.

## Conclusion

Gabriel Bie Ravndal was a naturalized American citizen born in Norway and immigrated to the New World. His career included various jobs and experiences which took him from the U.S. to different cities in the Ottoman Empire and Europe. He spent most of his career in the Ottoman and later Turkish territories and therefore played a direct part in most American initiatives in the region. When he was sent to the Ottoman Empire with an official job, no American business organizations or publications existed. American banking firms and the American Red Cross did not have branches in the region either. There was no direct shipping line between the two countries.

Ravndal demonstrated exceptional performance during his consular service and left an outstanding legacy in his places of duty.<sup>116</sup> He paid particular attention to developing American business in the Levant, which made major contributions to the expansion of Turkish-American trade and business, which was also a solid indication of the contribution of the American Foreign Service to the development of American commerce. He aimed at bringing opportunities to the attention of local and American businessmen. He brought people into the same organizations. He also lobbied for the removal of obstacles that prevented the development of mutual trade between the countries. He prepared detailed reports, books for government publication, and articles for American newspapers; he published LTR to establish contact between local businessmen and their American counterparts; organized conferences and seminars in Turkey and the US, introduced the local merchants' way of conducting trade to the American businesses; and attempted to host business delegations from the U.S. He helped to publicize American products in the Levant. He also pioneered the foundation of institutions to enable the American community to gather, communicate, network and share information in the Levant in which the social life and networking was relatively slow and weak in comparison to the Western countries. Besides, there were different countries and cultures in the Levant. The needs, laws, and business traditions were of much variety. However, the American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant, the American Club of Constantinople, and the Federated American Chambers of Commerce of the Near East, all launched in part by Ravndal, became leading institutions that brought together American, Turkish, Near

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<sup>116</sup> Dunlop, "Distinguished Service", 46.

Eastern and Balkan businessmen and merchants around a common ground of commerce and networking. He lobbied to eliminate trade barriers such as the lack of an American banking institution and direct steamship line between the U.S. and the Levant. The demands of the businessmen were conveyed to the American authorities, which resulted in a direct steamship line to Istanbul and the opening of a banking branch in Istanbul. In spite of the rupture after the American entrance into the World War I, these institutions resumed operations in 1919. In addition, these institutions supported and worked for the ratification of the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 and the re-establishment of official relations between two countries. Also, the Beirut and Istanbul branches of the American Red Cross continued their activities to provide help to the local people and cooperated with the Ottomans during WWI. The Istanbul branch opened a hospital in the city which still continues to operate.

Despite ongoing wars and territorial losses of the Empire and the harsh competition by the European industrialist nations, the value and volume of bilateral trade between the two countries climbed. A huge amount of American flour was brought to the Istanbul markets and American cereal grains dominated the Turkish market until 1924. The American motor industry obtained the largest share of the Turkish market in the 1920s, which climaxed when the Ford Motor Export Co. established an assembly plant in Istanbul in 1929. Turkish exports remained stable in spite of small losses in value and quantity and Turkey maintained its trade surplus. While the rise in bilateral trade resulted from many different causes, such as the growing auto industry and U.S.'s vast agricultural production, through his efforts, institutions, books and reports Ravndal was a key contributor to this commercial expansion. His to-the-point reports helped American companies determine suitable products for the Turkish markets, while the institutions that he pioneered supported the removal of barriers against trade and lobbied for improved bilateral commerce through direct shipping lines, banking branches, and legal and diplomatic regulations.

In conclusion, Ravndal left a significant mark in the Levant and Turkey due to the institutions he pioneered and to the intense work he put in to increase business and trade between the United States and the countries in the region. While developments in mutual trade cannot be solely attributed to Ravndal's effort, his contributions can be said to have played a remarkable

role in this venture. This article attempts to study an American bureaucrat, his life, political career, and position in the international arena. Biographical studies that this article stands for help to give voice to such an essential figure and allow the reader to evaluate political events of the time more fully.

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## APPENDICES



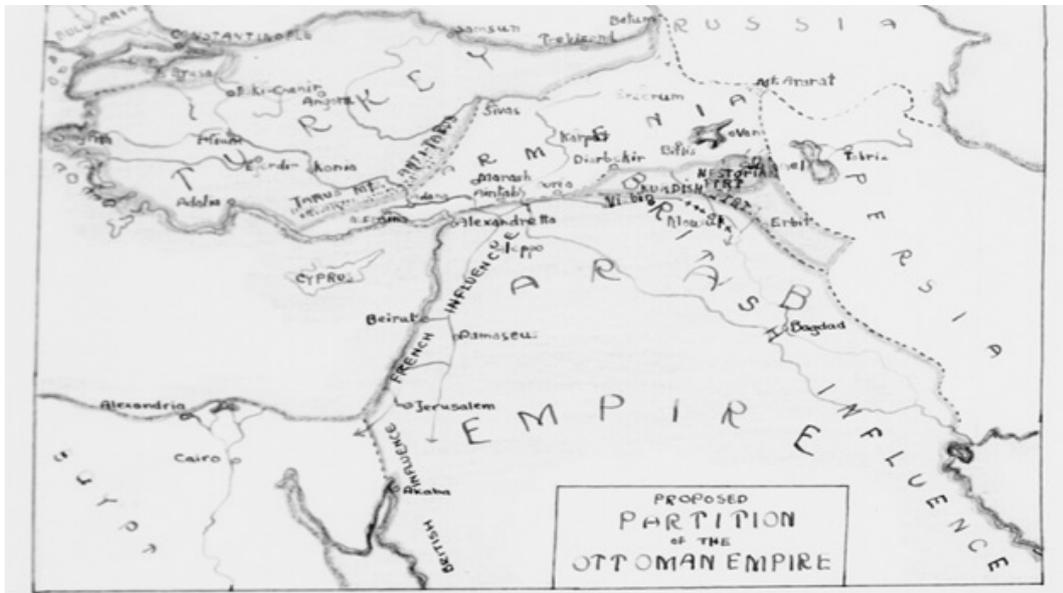
**APPENDIX 1.** Ravndal in Beirut (New York Tribune, 9 May 1909, 2)



**APPENDIX 2.** Ravndal in Istanbul (LTR, February 1921, 101)



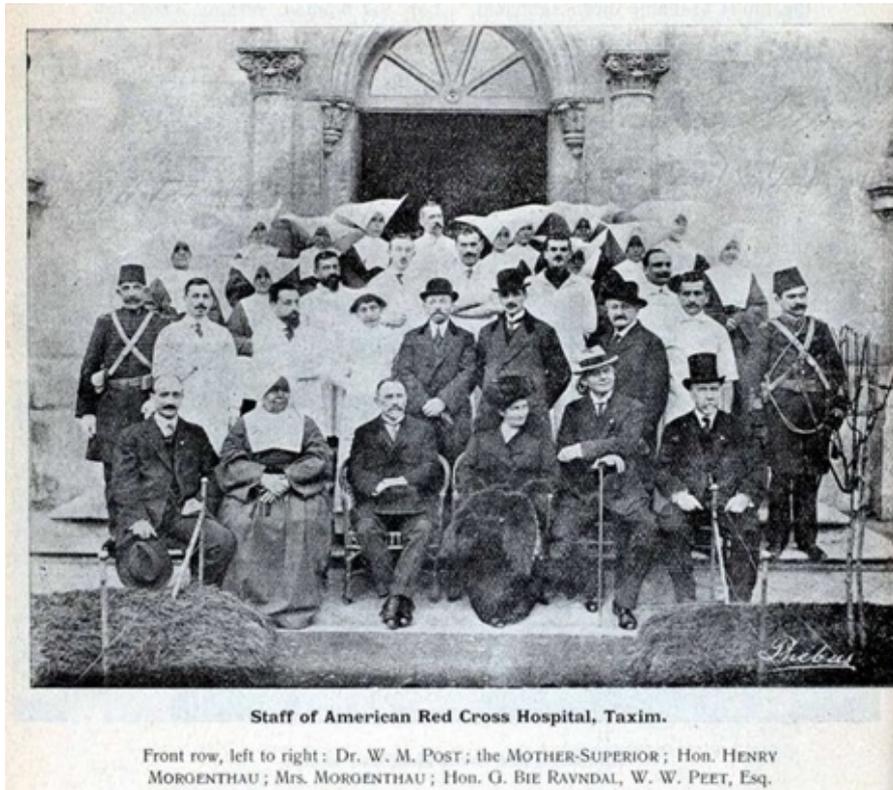
**APPENDIX 3.** ACCL Office in Galata in Istanbul (LTR, February 1921, 101)



**APPENDIX 4.** Partition Maps (From Ravndal to Secretary of State. 1918. "American Tasks in Turkey." U.S. National Archives, 1 October 1918)



APPENDIX 5. ACCL Board Meeting (LTR, 6 (no. 3, December 1916), 217.



APPENDIX 6. Ravndal at the Red Cross Hospital (LTR, 5 (no. 1, June 1915),6.

“TÜRK-AMERIKAN TİCARİ İLİŞKİLERİNİN GELİŞİMİNDE ÖNEMLİ BİR İSİM:  
BAŞKONSOLOS GABRIEL BIE RAVNDAL (1865-1950)”

Özet

*Bu çalışma, Türk-Amerikan ticari ilişkilerinin genişlemesine önemli katkılar yapan Amerikan Başkonsolosu Gabriel Bie Ravndal'ın (1865-1950) hayatını incelemektedir. Ondokuzuncu yüzyıl sonlarına kadar nispeten düşük seyreden ikili ticaret, takip eden süreçte Osmanlı İmparatorluğu/Türkiye için artmaya başlamış ve kaydadeğer bir seviyeye ulaşmıştır. Karşılıklı ticaretteki bu genişleme dönemi esnasında Ravndal, Beyrut ve sonrasında İstanbul'a Amerikan diplomatik temsilcisi olarak gönderilmiştir. Kariyerinin çoğunu Osmanlı/Türk topraklarında geçiren Ravndal, özellikle Türk-Amerikan ticaretinin gelişmesi üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır. Amerikan Levant Ticaret Odası ve İstanbul'daki Amerikan Kulübü'nün kurulmasına öncülük etmiştir. Bölge hakkında finansal, ekonomik ve ticari bilgiler sunan Levant Trade Review'in çıkarılmasını sağlamıştır. Ayrıca, isabetli ticari raporlar hazırlamış, ticaretin genişlemesinin önündeki engellerin kaldırılmasına çalışmış ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu/Türkiye ve ABD iş dünyası arasında farkındalığı artırmıştır. Bu nedenle, Ravndal'ın hayatının incelenmesi Amerikan iş dünyasının İstanbul'daki faaliyetlerine ek olarak ikili ticaret hakkında da detaylı bilgi sunacaktır. Ek olarak, bu araştırma Amerikan ticari stratejisindeki radikal değişimler ve Amerikan Dışişlerinin Amerikan ticaretinin gelişmelerine katkısı hakkında da bazı bilgiler içerecektir.*

“ Anahtar Kelimeler

*Türk-Amerikan Ticareti, Gabriel Bie Ravndal, Amerikan Levant Ticaret Odası, Dış Ticaret, İş Dünyası.*