



Steam over the Bosphorus: Ideas and Projects for the Bagdad Railway

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In the 19th century the Eastern Mediterranean became an ideal terrain for financiers, geographers and engineers who surveyed crucially important natural sceneries for construction of canals, railways and port works, against an international background where a vital stage in the development of a market economy was in progress.

The combination of favorable physical features was in fact of fundamental importance for implementation of two schemes that would have redefined the geography of trade, namely the overland passage through Egypt and railway to the Persian Gulf, two closely interconnected projects that aroused bitter international rivalry.

The Euphrates Valley Railway was first conceived in the 1830s and revived again under the aegis of Germany when the occupation of Egypt in 1882 had put an end to British ambitions for alternative routes.

In 1841 the French writer and politician Saint-Marc Girardin considered Istanbul as 'necessary and natural' in view of its positions on world routes, intended by nature as 'haven' for trade and cultural exchange. Opening the way for a wide range of scenarios (the original idea of a southern connection from the Syrian coast to Basra, or the northern route via Istanbul and Ankara, or else a junction at Izmir using its efficient railway network) the Bagdad railway challenged the role of Istanbul in Eastern Mediterranean.

Based on research carried out at the School of Architecture, Politecnico di Milano, this paper will compare the great 19th century projects with their underlying strategic vision, attempting to discover how certain groups (ethno-religious communities, groups of interest, etc.) foresaw their futures based on the actual, and possible, resources of a given territory and geographic location.

We will conclude discussing future scenarios, considering major projects are under construction at Istanbul such as the Marmaray, including an underground station close to terminal of the Orient Express. Concerning central areas rich in memories of the past - whether archaeological findings or more recent monuments - this project present opportunities for a fresh approach to the structure and topography of this legendary city.

KEY WORDS: Urban transformation and land use: housing and squatter settlements, commercial and industrial districts, transportation and infrastructure.