

HEJAZ RAILWAY - THE RAILWAY OF PANISLAMISM

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Ascribing an exclusive political role to an economic enterprise is, at most partially valid, though if searched for, an ideological bias can be detected everywhere. *The Hejaz Railway* is a victim of this approach, and not only in the well arranged introduction to this book¹ but throughout.

The book contains a manuscript in both Arabic and English written (probably) in 1900 by Muhammed Arif, a Damascene Arab. It is entitled "The Book of Eternal Happiness—The Hejaz Railway". Dr. Landau's work consists of finding and publishing this manuscript and adding to it a survey-like introduction.

The introduction which relies heavily on political writings, is lucid and penetrating. Specialists and nonspecialists alike will appreciate the comparative information about the Ottoman railway system in general and the Hejaz Railway in particular. According to the author, the reasons behind railway construction within the empire by the end of the nineteenth century were primarily political and military (pp. 9, 13). This view might be supported by the prevailing political conditions and by an analysis of the role of foreign capital, but not by the arguments given by M. Arif. The sub-title of M. Arif's work, "A Case of Ottoman Political Propoganda", is not well substantiated in the book, which only provides some plausible suggestions about it (p. 22). Rather in M. Arif's manuscript one finds clear analysis with concerted facts and even quantified discussions about the economic and financial benefits of the railway. Then, it is difficult to conclude whether M. Arif "intended to serve Hamidian propaganda" (p. 22) or to activate

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¹ Jacob Landau, *The Hejaz Railway and The Muslim Pilgrimage A Case of Ottoman Political Propaganda*. Detroit, Wayne University Press, 1971. Introduction, map, English translation of Muhammed Arif's manuscript, illustrations, glossary and index, 294 pages.

Ottoman circles to construct the railway by providing them with economic and other reasons.

What is particularly important and equally neglected even within this well versed introduction is that during the period of the reign of Abdülhamid II the domestic productive forces had a rapid expansion within a stable framework².

True, this was achieved at the cost increasing the foreign debt, and hence, foreign influence. But the disintegration of the empire was halted, temporarily at least, which could not have been achieved without simultaneous economic growth. Contrary to general opinion we must say that the empire could not be held from coming apart with simple intrigue and *tour de force*.

Furthermore, two political characteristics of the Hamidian era ought to be mentioned. Firstly, immediately after assuming power the sultan disassociated himself from the Young Ottomans, the Western influenced officers, that had enthroned him. And, secondly, the majority of Arabs supported the Ottoman rule.³ Only within this economic and political framework can the structure of the infamous Hamidian balance be examined.

These deficiencies do not reduce the quality of the introduction where the other aspects of the manuscript are authoritatively set forth.

M. Arif provides a very detailed description of the pilgrimage roads from Damascus to Medina and Mecca and of the pilgrimage ceremonies themselves. One finds discussions on customs, living conditions, religious rituals and even mails which altogether make the work an enlightening source of historical information for historians of religion, sociologists and folklorists. Yet the heart of the arguments is the economic benefits of the railway.

All the discussions are supported by quotations from the Koran, religious anecdotes, proverbs etc., i.e. they are presented with a religious dressing. But M. Arif is keenly aware that "wordly affairs" are "the

² Vedat Eldem, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun İktisadi Şartları Hakkında Bir Tetkik* (A Survey on the Economic Conditions of the Ottoman Empire), İstanbul, 1970, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, reviewed in the METU STUDIES IN DEVELOPMENT No: 2, Spring 1971, pp. 365-68.

³ Zeine N. Zeine, *Arab - Turkish Relations and The Emergence of Arab Nationalism*, Beirut, Khayat's, 1958, pp. 55, 58.

basis of religion" (p. 117). He provides examples and figures on how, historically, the religious leaders were occupied with trade and commerce. Consequently in the analysis of M. Arif, the pilgrimage and trade are intermingled (p. 107). Then, the rest follows without difficulty: after the construction, which would bring cheap, fast and secure transportation, the amount of visitors and merchants – and commodities – would increase tremendously "by twenty and thirty times" (p. 125), hence, trade and production would be stimulated. These are obvious. But, the question to which M. Arif addressed himself was *how* advantages were to be realized.

During the pilgrimage people would "make deals" and "form companies". "Men ask around about persons with whom they would like to trade or enter into a partnership". (p. 114). The pilgrimage also accelerates the formation of industry and broadening its scope. With the railway the craftsmen would travel extensively, practice in various places, and learn new crafts. Agricultural products, which are produced only for local use, would be produced for market since because of the railway "the produce would not spoil" (p. 116).

The importance of producing for market manifests itself in emphasis put on the practice of fairs. And M. Arif is aware of that :

The importance of such gatherings, in previous times and in our own, is known. The Arabs held a large fair in Mecca, the 'Ukkaz Market', which they would attend, coming from all parts (or occupations). This fair became famous. Nowadays, Europeans too have shown considerable interest in general gatherings (p. 116).

The author is dissatisfied with the circumstances where domestic production has declined because of the increase in imports. The way to cope with this is not merely imposition of tariffs or prohibition of imports, but to increase domestic production for which the construction of the Hejaz Railway was considered paramount. He cites :

... (our) people are guilty of neglecting to learn several trades for which there is general need. These are now imported, but it is necessary to study them and introduce them into our country so that we can manage without depending on others. Then our wealth would stay with us, our strength and finances would not decline, our lands would not remain

neglected and our men and animals unemployed-while we are waiting for imports! (p. 119).

Moreover, the railway construction would result in price stabilization, search for mineral resources, and spread of the education.

After dealing with these general benefits of the railroad, M. Arif attempts to show how different regions and people would profit. For example, "the net income" of the Hejaz Bedouins, who were supposedly opposing the project would increase by about 4000 per cent (p. 170).

Not being an economist and writing during a period of what is called "the railway mania"⁴, M. Arif cannot be accused of not realizing that transportation is only one aspect of general economic development. But two points are clear:

a) The economic role of the government is reduced to providing only transportation and education, which is unusual within a socio-economic setting where the central authority is expected to have a leading role;

b) relationships between the way of living and the other aspects of social life are closely intervoven.

Events after the construction may have prevented the full realization of the benefits. But a short comparison will give an idea as to what extent the valuations of M. Arif were accurate. The Baghdad Railway brough about 12.500 and 20.000 kurushs total revenue per kilometer in 1911 and 1913, while figures for the Hejaz Railway were about 20.000 and 21.000 kurushs respectively⁵. It should be added that the cost of construction of the Hejaz Railway was about 2/3 less than the others and profits were high because no interest payment was involved on the construction capital⁶. Therefore, one can find sound reasons which would justify the construction on purely economic grounds.

Despite his "political" interpretation Dr. Landau has done a great service by placing the entire work before the public.

⁴ For an interesting discussion on the subject see Henry Grote Lewin, *The Railway Mania and its Aftermath 1845-1852*, Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1968, New edition, introduction by C. R. Clinker.

⁵ V. Eldem, *op. cit.* p. 163.

⁶ *Ibid.*