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## The Project of Hejaz Railway Construction: A Historical and Historiographic Review

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**Abstract:**

*One of the last attempts to raise the prestige of the Ottoman caliphate during the reign of Abdul Hamid II was the initiative of the Sultan in the construction of the Hejaz railway, which was to provide an easier and a faster access for pilgrims to the shrines of Mecca and Medina.*

*At the end of the 19th century, as well as during several previous centuries, the main link between the Ottoman administration and the Hejaz residents were the gifts and the donations from the Sultan of the Caliph to religious figures, the sheikhs of the tribes and the population of sacred cities.*

*Of course, such a grandiose construction could aggravate the financial debts of the Ottoman Empire, but, according to preliminary calculations, the road had to pay off, and besides, to glorify Abdul Hamid II. In this regard, the goals and the objectives of this study are to analyze the official ideology of the Ottoman Empire and ideological projects implemented in practice during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in the form of influence on the social-political situation in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the influence of Islamic unity ideas on Muslims embodied in practice by the carrying out the propaganda campaign for the implementation of the Hijaz railway construction project.*

**Keywords:** Ottoman Empire, Hejaz Railway Construction, Politics, Ideology, Islamic Unity.

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## **1. Introduction**

In the Ottoman Empire of the second half of the XIXth - the early XXth centuries the state ideology consisted of theoretical and applied components. Practice is understood as the visualization of power, propaganda and the manipulative actions that the ruler and the ruling elites produce in the imperial space in order to maximize their own power. In this regard, it is interesting to see the way the state ideology worked for the development of the economy.

The possibility of linking the Damascus and Red Sea by railroad lines was first proposed to the Ottoman government by the American engineer of German origin Charles F. Zimpel in 1864 (Philipp, 1985; Nicholson, 2006). In 1872 the German engineer Wilhelm von Pressel, invited by Sultan Abdul Aziz, expressed the opinion that the delivery of servicemen to the Hijaz area would be the most convenient by rail. He prepared the project for the construction of the 4670-kilometer line Haydarpash-Basra (Philipp, 1985; Özyüksel, 1988; Yeniay, 1964).

## **2. Methodology**

The aims and the objectives of the study are to analyze the state ideology of the Ottoman Empire, aimed at the management of the economic and the social-political life in the country. In this regard, an interesting tool is the influence of state power and individual state institutions on Ottoman society, as well as the influence of the ideas of Islamic unity on Muslims. This assumes the analysis of the mass consciousness evolution among the Muslim population, both in the empire and outside it. In this regard, the changes Muslim views concerning Ottoman Sultan Khalifa authorities, the attitude of the Muslim intellectual elite to the economic innovations of the authorities, etc. are important.

## **3. Results**

The analysis of the source base and historiography allows us to develop the picture of this economic project implementation in the framework of state propaganda. In 1874, the need for the construction of a railway in this region was requested by the Ottoman army major Ahmed Reshid. In his opinion, the road had to pass from Damascus to Mecca, and from there to Jeddah (Ochsenwald, 1980). Another project was introduced in 1878 by the Englishman Elphinstone Dalrml.

In the 80-ies of the XIXth century the idea of building a railway was described in the note by the Minister of Public Works Hassan Fehmi Pasha (Dinçer, 1971). Next was the project proposed by the governor and the commissar of Hijaz, Osman Nuri Pasha. In 1884, he proposed the construction of a railway line between Damascus and Hijaz and a telegraph line (Hülägü, 1994). The projects focused on the

importance of building a railway between Jeddah and Mecca, which was supposed to secure and facilitate the pilgrims' journey.

The next proposal for the construction of the road came in 1891 from the serviceman of the Ottoman army Suleiman Shefik. In his opinion, in the event of war with England or another European state, the Suez Canal could be closed, and cargo and servicemen could not be transported by sea. Therefore, he proposed to build a railway line, which was supposed to connect the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.

In the 1890-ies there were new construction projects in this region of the railway: Ahmed Izzet-efendi (1892), who headed the administration of the Jeddah's Waqf. The railway, in his opinion, was to help the Sultan to strengthen the power of the Ottoman Empire (Tahsin Paşa, 1990), the English project of the Arab Railway (1896) and other projects (Philipp, 1985).

The journalist Muhammad Inshallah spoke about the need to build a railroad from Damascus to Mecca and Medina by the Ottoman Empire for the Muslims around the world. In August 1897, he put forward his project, in which the donations of Muslims from all over the world were indicated as a source of financing for the first time (Gülsoy, 1994; Philipp, 1985).

The most important thing for the Islamic empire was to find the sources of the project funding. Prior to the fundraising among the Muslims, loans were taken from the Ottoman "Ziraat Bank". The total amount of credit was 480,000 lire by 1908 (Eldem, 1970; Gülsoy, 1994).

One of the important components of this project was the organization of donation collection among Muslims. In Istanbul, they founded the "Commission for donation collection". In the centers of volosts, counties and provinces, the branches of this "Commission" were formed (Gülsoy, 1994). The increase in financial affairs made it necessary to create a new structure on July 1, 1903 - "Financial Management of the Hamidiye Hijaz Railway".

Muslim newspapers wrote that this railway will bring significant benefits of religious, social and economic nature. A huge help in the work of these commissions was provided by local administrations, village elders and imams. The first donation to the railway was made by the Sultan. He contributed 50,000 lire from personal funds (Gülsoy, 1994).

On average, 80,000 lire were collected in the vilayets. The largest amount of money was collected in the Hejaz vilayet (approximately 108,000 lire), followed by Aydin

(86,000 lire), Khudavendigar (81,000 lire), and the lowest donations were in Sanjak Izmit (6,000 lire), in Kudus (Jerusalem) (5400 liras), in Bingazi (3000 lire) and others (Ochsenwald, 1973).

The donations were contributed by both the lower and the higher ranks of the Ottoman army. The Ottoman newspapers reported that the adjutants of the padishah, Lieutenant-General Jelyaletdin Pasha, Abdullah Pasha, Yusuf Pasha, Mehmed Pasha, Tevfik Pasha donated about 50 lire each for construction and were awarded with silver medals (Malûmat, 1901).

However, the most interesting are the funds collected outside the Ottoman Empire. The greatest merit in the collection of funds organization were obtained by diplomatic centers and workers. Also, Islamic newspapers, religious societies and sects, committees for donation collection, religious figures, traders and nobles also provided significant assistance in donation collections (Ochsenwald, 1973).

A significant support for the construction of the railway was provided by the Muslims of India. The contacts with Indian Muslims were most active during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. At that time in India (especially on the territory of modern Pakistan and Bangladesh) many committees were created to collect donations (Ochsenwald, 1973).

Muhammad Inshallah played an important role in the success of the campaign on donation collection in India. Inshallah M. was the owner of Islamic newspapers "al-Vekil", issued in Amritsar, and "al-Vatan", issued in Lahore. These newspapers, on the one hand, called for Indian Muslims to help build the Hejaz railway in their articles, and, on the other hand, collected donations (Ochsenwald, 1973). In total, more than 150 committees have been established in India since the beginning of the campaign on donation collection from 1900. Of these, about 100 were in Deccan, the rest ones in Burma and Ceylon (Ochsenwald, 1973). The assistance to Indian Muslims continued until 1909.

A great help in donation collection for the construction of the railway was also provided by Egypt. All the cases of donation collection were under the jurisdiction of the Egyptian High Commissariat. Egyptian newspapers and magazines introduced readers to the road construction project and called for support. The newspaper "Raid al-Misri" compared it with the Suez Canal by the importance to the Islamic world (Munayyir & Landau, 1971), and the al-Mahar newspaper wrote that this project is necessary to protect holy sites (Ochsenwald, 1973). The Egyptian Khedive Abbas II and his family donated a considerable amount for the purchase of building materials (İmbert, 1981).

Simultaneously with the campaigns for donation collection, the counter-propaganda of the British government was conducted. The British pointed out that the road construction project is a utopia, and that the Ottoman Empire only tries to rob Muslims, calling them to invest in an unrealistic project (Rüştü, 1998).

The fundraising also took place in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, South Africa, on the island of Java, China, Sudan, the USA and Latin America, the Balkans, Cyprus, Austria-Hungary, Britain, France and Germany (Özyüksel, 1989a).

The project was supported by the Muslims of the Russian Empire, primarily by the Muslims of the Crimea: the inhabitants of Yalta, Sevastopol and Bakhchisaray. For example, from Yalta - the merchant Osman and Imam Abdul Hamid, from the nobility of Akmechetti - Abdul Mejid, etc. Donations were collected in the centers and regions of Russia - Orenburg, Kazan, Bukhara, Dagestan and Siberia (Özyüksel, 2000).

#### **4. Discussion**

The study of the propaganda campaign conducted regarding the construction of the Hejaz railway and the construction of the railway line has a significant historiographical tradition. Many studies were published based on archival materials, especially in Turkey. We will reveal only some of the most interesting ones. The article of one of the engineers of this railway line Nedret Nuri (1910) in the Journal of "Ottoman Engineers and Architects Community" (Nuri, 1910) represents not only the memories of a direct participant in the events, but also one of the first studies of this topic in Turkish historiography. In the English-language historiography, one of the first studies devoted to the construction of the Hejaz railway is Maunsell's (1908) article in the Geographical Magazine and the section in the monograph by Agnus Hamilton "Problems of the Near East" (Maunsell, 1908; Hamilton, 1909).

In 1948 two articles were published: Osman Erkin (1948), prepared based on the original source - "The note on the Hijaz Railway" (Hicaz Demiryolu Lâyihası), etc. (Toydemir, 1948).

The next period in the study of this problem was represented by the works of 1960-1990 devoted to the research in the field of faleristics: the articles by Ibrahim Artuk (1964) and Jevriya Artuk (1973) on the awards of the Hejaz railway, which were awarded for the contribution of donations on construction and for the help in fund raising on construction (Artuk, 1964; Artuk, 1973); I. Chetinyalchin's articles on the special awards of the Hejaz railway (Çetinyalçin, 1983), etc. The works of the professor of history William Oushenwald from the University of Virginia are dedicated to the study of the railway construction financing (Ochsenwald, 1973) and the article on the history of the Hejaz railway co-authored with Blake & King (1972).

In the 1980-2000-ies the world historiography, especially Turkish one, began to publish the works focused on the study of the state ideology of the Ottoman Empire and the economic history of the empire regions. So Hulusi Yavuz in the book "Ottomans and Islamism" wrote the section dedicated to the place of the railway line construction by the Ottoman Empire in the economic and political history (Yavuz, 1991). The monograph by William Oushenwald, where the author, drawing on a wide range of sources and historiography, examines the history of the Hejaz Railway is of note: from the very idea of construction, the campaign on donation collection and the participation of Muslims in it, both in the Ottoman Empire and outside it, before the construction of the line and its operation (Ochsenwald, 1989).

Let's note the article by Atila Batura devoted to the analysis of the source database, and examining the pamphlets of the event contemporary Ahmet Rifat (Batur, 2005-2006). Another major study is the work by Murat Ozyuksel. The author, based on the materials of the German archives, analyzed comprehensively the propaganda project as the theory and the practice of state ideology in Ottoman Empire economic problem solution (Özyüksel, 1989b).

A separate study was performed by the American historian J. Landau "The Hejaz Railway and the Muslim pilgrimage: the history of Ottoman political propaganda". The work includes the translation of the manuscript from Arabic devoted to the history of the Hejaz Railway, the contemporary of the events Muhammed Arif (Munayyir and Landau, 1971).

Let's also highlight here the section of the monograph "Railways in the Middle East" by the Lebanese researcher, professor of history from the American University in Beirut Shirin Khairallah. She examines the history of this project, the campaigning for the collection of donations in the Muslim press, the amount of funds collected and the main contributors, etc. In this work, the following idea is presented: a project development for the construction of a line and the participation in it of both Ottoman and foreign architects and engineers (Morawitz, 1978).

In the Russian historiography the history of the Hejaz railway construction is described poorly. Let's select the most interesting publications. For the first time, this topic was considered by the Captain Terletsky (1911), the contemporary of events. In his work, he noted the uniqueness of this project, indicating the originality of both the sources of financing and the implementation of the enterprise itself (Terletsky, 1911).

In the monograph by Fadeeva (1985) the attention was paid to the propaganda campaigns of the Ottoman empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Fadeeva, 1985). Fund raising campaigns for the construction of the Hijaz railway were considered in the work by Litvinov (2006).

In the monograph by Sibgatullina (2010) the section devoted to the history of the Hijaz railway where the analysis of the works of Turkish scholars is given, the publications in Russian Muslim newspapers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the memoirs by Captain Terletsky (1911) are presented. The author shows the place and the significance of this project in the spiritual life of Russian Muslims and the military and political history of the Ottoman Empire (Sibgatullina, 2010).

## **5. Conclusions**

The Sultan and his entourage, having the appropriate organizational and financial resources, and relying on sympathetic to the idea of spiritual unity, were able to develop and implement several propaganda projects, and the largest of them was the construction of the Hejaz railway. High Port using Islamic ideology successfully has solved an important financial problem of the project implementation connecting the parts of the Ottoman Empire by transport routes. The project, which seemed utopian, was implemented as soon as possible, and for a while the Ottoman Empire significantly strengthened its military-political and economic positions in the region.

## **6. Recommendations**

The materials of the article are of value to the researchers of the military-political and economic history of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century - the beginning of the 20th century. In this regard the analysis and the systematization of the directions and the features of traditional state ideology for the solution of various kinds of state problems in the countries of the East is of interest.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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