

Concessions and Mirages along the Lower Danube: The Town of Silistria in the Plans of Foreign Railway Promoters during the mid-1850s

Boriana Antonova-Goleva*

Abstract:

The paper focuses on three railway schemes from 1856 to 1857 that included the town of Silistria in their routes: the Varna and Silistria Railway, the Danube and Black Sea Railway, and the Medjidieh Railway. The primary aim of these rival projects' promoters was to engage in Danube and Black Sea grain production and trade. Thus, such infrastructures were designed to supplement other railway schemes along the Lower Danube and the Black Sea region, as well as in neighboring countries. As a result of their competition, urban centers along the Lower Danube, such as Silistria, featured at the center of Ottoman and Transottoman infrastructure enterprises during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: railways, Ottoman Empire, Silistria, Varna and Silistria Railway, the Danube and Black Sea Railway, Medjidieh Railway

1. Introduction

During the 1850s, the Ottoman Empire started to develop its own railway infrastructure. British capitalists, engineers, and speculators

* Ph.D., Institute for Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0303-9720
e-mail: b.antonova.goleva@gmail.com

played a key role in the early stages of this process. Many of these concession hunters were involved in a broad range of undertakings both in the Ottoman Empire and in other parts of the world. Some of them were also entangled in various social networks and interlocking company boards. They lobbied, therefore, for certain railway schemes that favored different regional Ottoman and Transottoman infrastructure enterprises. One of the regions that attracted the attention of many concession hunters in the mid-1850s was the area between the Lower Danube and the Black Sea coast, since it offered great commercial prospects. Thus, the cities and the towns in this part of the Ottoman Empire featured at the center of the rivalries between several British groups that had various interests in the region. The present paper focuses on one such case, and examines the place of the town of Silistria (Silistra, Turkish: Silistre) in three competing schemes from 1856 to 1857: the Varna and Silistria Railway, the Danube and Black Sea Railway, and the Medjidieh Railway.

During the mid-1850s the town of Silistria was part of the Ottoman Eyalet of Silistre. It was the center of the Sancak of Silistre and one of the commercial spots along the Lower Danube. However, Silistria had no significant role in regional trade compared with other urban centers like Rusçuk (Ruse) and Varna. The town's importance for the Ottoman Empire was rather strategic. It was a key stronghold on the Ottoman border and played an important role in the Ottoman-Russian military conflicts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and especially during the Crimean War.¹

After the end of the latter war and the liberalization of river navigation, trade along the Danube started to grow and intensify. Furthermore, in 1856 the Ottoman Empire entered the second stage of the Tanzimat reforms, and as part of its economic and technological modernization program, the imperial government invited western capitalists to develop a railway infrastructure in the lands of the Sultan. Various entrepreneurs thus became interested in the urban centers along the Lower Danube.

* I am grateful to Philip "FTA" Atanassov for preparing the maps for the present paper.

¹ Virginia Paskaleva, "Shipping and Trading along the Lower Danube during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Southeast European Maritime Commerce and Naval Policies from the Mid-Eighteenth Century to 1914*, ed. Apostolos Vacalopoulos, Constantinos Svolopoulos, and Béla Király (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs; Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1988), 131–151; Andrew Robarts, "Crimean War," in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters (New York: New York Facts on File, 2009), 161–162; Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853–1856)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 184–186.

At present, little is known about the significance of Silistria in the plans of the foreign railway promoters in the Post-Crimean Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Varna and Silistria Railway has not been examined at all by modern scholarship.² Perhaps the lack of studies on the topic is also because of the scarcity of sources. There are only a couple of documents that contain information about this project. They are held at the Ottoman Archive in Istanbul (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, hereafter BOA) and at the collections in The National Archives in Kew, London (hereafter TNA).

As regards the Danube and Black Sea Railway, and the Medjidieh Railway, there are several studies that examine different aspects of their history. Yet, the place of Silistria in these infrastructure projects as well as in the broader interests of their promoters in the region has not been examined so far. Unlike the sources available on the Varna and Silistria Railway, there is an abundance of information about the Medjidieh Railway project, and the Danube and Black Sea Railway. These include various official documents held at BOA and TNA, reports in the British

² The main studies on Ottoman railways in Rumelia are: Ali Akyıldız, "Balkanlar'a Osmanlılardan Miras Bir Çağdaş Medeniyet Ürünü: Rusçuk-Varna Demiryolu," in *Balkanlar'da İslam Medeniyeti Milletlerarası Sempozyumu Tebliğleri, Nisan 11-23 2000*, ed. Ali Çaksu and Eklemeddin İhsanoğlu (Istanbul: İslâm Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi, 2002), 123-145; Ali Akyıldız, "Bir Teknolojik Transferin Değişim Boyutu: Köstence Demiryolu Örneği," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 20 (2000): 313-327; Ali Akyıldız, "The Modernizing Impact of Technological Transfer: The Case of the Constanta Railway," in *Science in Islamic Civilization: Proceedings of the International Symposia 'Science Institutions and Islamic Civilization' and 'Science and Technology in the Turkish and Islamic World'*, ed. Eklemeddin İhsanoğlu and Feza Günergun (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History and Culture, 2000), 201-212; Yağub Karkar, *Railway Development in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1914* (Ann Arbor: Vantage Press, 1972); John H. Jensen and Gerhard Rosegger, "British Railway Builders along the Lower Danube, 1856-1869," *The Slavonic (and East-European) Review* 46, no. 106 (1968): 105-128. In fact, these studies focus on the history of the successfully implemented projects such as the *Rusçuk and Varna Railway* and the *Danube and Black Sea Railway*. Several other studies examine both successful and unsuccessful projects, like the *Medjidieh Railway*: Vahdettin Engin, *Rumeli Demiryolları* (Istanbul: Eren, 1993); Mihail Guboğlu, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Karadeniz-Tuna Kanalı Projeleri (1836-1876) ve Boğazköy-Köstence Arasında İlk Demiryolu İnşası (1855-1860)," in *Çağımı Yakalayan Osmanlı! Osmanlı Devleti'nde Modern Haberleşme ve Ulaştırma Teknikleri*, ed. Eklemeddin İhsanoğlu and Mustafa Kaçar (Istanbul: İslâm Tarih, Sanat, ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi, 1995), 217-247; Orhan Kurmuş, "British Dependence on Foreign Food and some Railway Projects in the Balkans," *METU Studies in Development* 2 (1971): 259-284; Yakup Bektas, "The British Technological Crusade to Post-Crimean Turkey: Electric Telegraphy, Railways, Naval Shipbuilding and Armament Technologies" (PhD diss., University of Kent at Canterbury, 1995), 115-119; Georgi Pašev, *Ot Tsarigrad do Belovo*, (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1965). However, they do not provide any information about the Varna and Silistria Railway project.

and Ottoman press, prospectuses, and other types of primary sources that provide data on these schemes.

Thus, examined in a broader context, the short history of Silistria's place in the railway projects of 1856–1857 reflects the main trends in early Ottoman railway development. It can also serve as an example of how the general patterns in nineteenth-century entrepreneurship influenced the Sultan's domains. Therefore, by revealing the place of Silistria in the railway projects of 1856 to 1857, the paper will address questions on the interrelation between the promoters of this line and those of other railway schemes in the region, and also how Silistria related to other Ottoman and Transottoman infrastructures.

2. The Varna and Silistria Railway Project

Little is known about the Varna and Silistria Railway project. According to the Memorial on the Varna and Silistria Railway – one of the few sources that provide information on this scheme – the construction of a trunk line between Varna and Silistria as well as the establishment of two entrepôts on the termini were proposed to the Ottoman government. In the memorandum, “the right of transit along the Railway with other privileges in the accompanying heads of Firman of concession” was also requested and a further extension of the line to Turtakia (Tutrakan, Turkish: Turtukaya) and Rusçuk was planned (see Map 1).³

The promoters of the Varna and Silistria Railway highlighted the advantages of the proposed scheme, as this was the practice with applications for railway concessions at that time. These advantages were grouped into three categories – commercial, political, and strategic. Since the memorial focused on the first category, the main purpose of this scheme was clearly related to regional commerce. According to the text, this railway was intended as an important transshipment connection between the Danube and the Black Sea.⁴ Moreover, Silistria's location was seen as suitable “for an inner emporium on the Danube,” which may also attract traffic from the Prut, Galatz (Galați) and Ibrailow (Brăila, Turkish: İbrail) and may compete with the Sulina canal route. Yet, the terminus at Varna was considered to be “capable of being rendered by connection

³ BOA, Hariciye Nezâreti Londra Sefareti Belgeleri (hereafter HR.SFR.3)/29/16/2/1, Note, London, 13 October 1856 and HR.SFR.3/29/16/2/2, Memorial on the Varna and Silistria Railway, London, 10 October 1856.

⁴ BOA, HR.SFR.3/29/16/2/2.

with the Lake of Devna." According to the memorial, after the completion of the Hungarian and Walachian lines and their extension through Bucharest to the Danube, the Varna and Silistria Railway would become an important link between Western and Central Europe and the Black Sea coast.⁵ Therefore, the promoters of the scheme proposed to establish a steam ferry at Turtakia that would be "capable of transporting whole Trains of Carriages without transshipment."⁶ According to them, "Varna if connected by Rail with Silistria must ere long eclipse Odessa."⁷

Many of the above mentioned claims sound exaggerated and unrealistic. It is unclear, however, to what extent the Varna and Silistria Railway promoters were aiming to convince the Ottoman government in their project's prospects, and to what extent they truly believed in the described advantages. Yet, it is certain that the group was interested in the commercial potential of the Lower Danube.

Who were the promoters who stood behind this project? E. Ward Jackson claimed to be the main originator of the scheme.⁸ His name was written as one of the project promoters in a note to the Ottoman ambassador to London, Kostaki Musurus, to which the memorial was attached.⁹ The memorial was signed by John Robinson McClean, Henry Robertson, Charles Manby, and Forbes Campbell.¹⁰ All of them, except Campbell, were civil engineers and were engaged in various infrastructure projects.¹¹ As for Campbell, he was not only a promoter of the Varna and Silistria Railway project, but also the agent of the group.

It is not clear when exactly this scheme originated. It was put forward at the end of 1856 and seems to be one of the earliest projects

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ BOA, HR.SFR.3/29/16/2/1.

⁷ Interestingly enough, the last statement was included in description of the political advantages of the line, BOA, HR.SFR.3/29/16/2/3.

⁸ TNA, FO 195/460, Embassy and Consulates, Turkey (formerly the Ottoman Empire)/ General Correspondence/ Banks, Telegraphs and Railways, 1854-1857 (hereafter TNA, FO 195/460) Letter from E. Ward Jackson, London, to Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, Constantinople, 3 October 1856.

⁹ BOA, HR.SFR.3/29/16/1/1.

¹⁰ BOA, HR.SFR.3/29/16/2/3.

¹¹ "Obituary: John Robinson McClean, Former President and Vice-President, M.P., F.R.S., 1813-1873," *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 38 (1874): 287-291; "Obituary: Henry Robertson, 1816-1888," *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 93 (1888): 489-492; "Obituary: Charles Manby, F.R.S., 1804-1884 (Secretary of the Institution, 1839-1859)," *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 81 (1885): 327-334.

from that period to include Silistria in its route. Initially, on 3 October, E. Ward Jackson sought support for his plan from the British ambassador to Constantinople, Stratford de Redcliffe.¹² In his letter to de Redcliffe he also claimed that “an attempt is now being made, by Mr. Thomas Wilson and other parties associated with him, to appropriate to themselves” his project of a railway between the Danube and the Black Sea. In fact, E. Ward Jackson was referring to the British promoter Wilson who in 1855 formed an Anglo–French–Austrian consortium together with Duke Charles de Morny and Count Ludwig von Breda, and applied for a concession for a canal between Rassoava (Rasova) on the Danube and Kustendjije (Constanța, Turkish: Köstence) on the Black Sea. In May 1855 the group received a firman for the concession, from the Ottoman government.¹³ Yet, in the summer of 1856 Wilson started a new round of negotiations with the Sublime Porte to transform it into a railway concession. It seems that E. Ward Jackson was also associated with the initial project. According to his letter to the British ambassador, “Mr. Wilson has abandoned his Canal scheme, as utterly impracticable, and seeks to oust me of my prior right.”¹⁴ Therefore, Ward Jackson proposed the Varna and Silistria Railway project as an alternative route that would unite the Danube and the Black Sea.¹⁵

Between 1855 and 1856 Forbes Campbell was also associated with the Anglo–French–Austrian consortium, since he represented it before the Sublime Porte. However, at a certain moment in 1856 he made a shift and became part of E. Ward Jackson’s group.

In addition to contacting Stratford de Redcliffe, by 13 October the group had presented the project to Kostaki Musurus and to Lord Clarendon, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.¹⁶ It is unknown whether this scheme was supported by the British government or if the Ottoman government was interested in it. The project was never implemented.

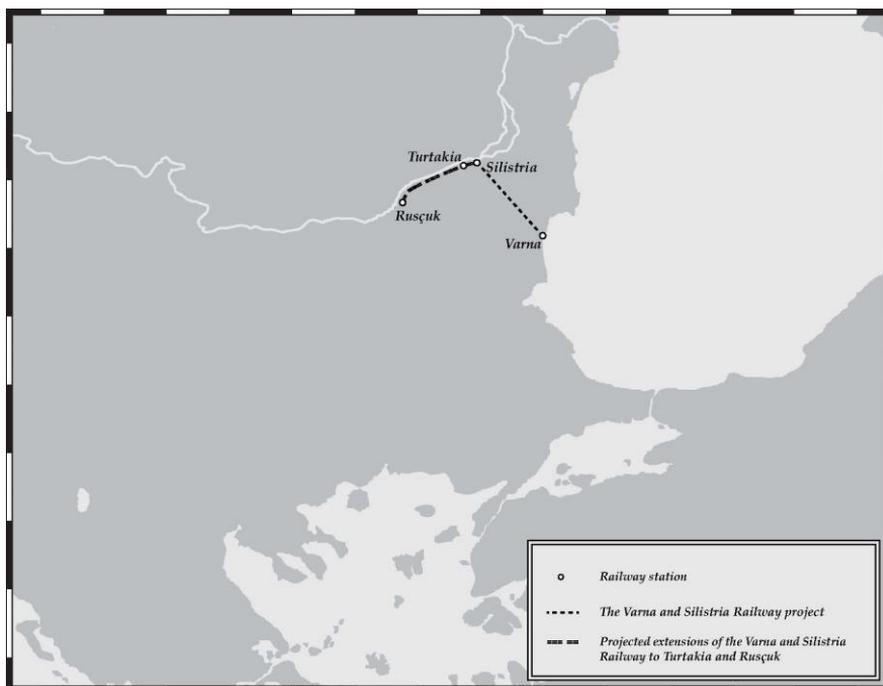
¹² TNA, FO 195/460, Letter from Ward Jackson to de Redcliffe, 3 October 1856.

¹³ Thomas Forester, *The Danube and the Black Sea: Memoir on their Junction between Tchernavoda and a Free Port at Kustendjije with Remarks of the Navigation of the Danube, the Danubian Provinces, the Corn trade, the Ancient and Present Commerce of the Euxine; And Notices of History, Antiquities, etc.* (London: Stanford, 1857), 48.

¹⁴ TNA, FO 195/460, Letter from Ward Jackson to de Redcliffe, 3 October 1856.

¹⁵ Nevertheless, Ward Jackson still claimed the rights on his project for a railway between the Danube and the Black Sea, *ibid.*

¹⁶ BOA, HR.SFR.3/29/16/1–2.



Map 1: The 1856 Varna and Silistria Railway Project

3. The Danube and Black Sea Railway

As already mentioned, initially the Danube and Black Sea Railway scheme started as a canal project. The negotiations for it between the Anglo–French–Austrian consortium and the Ottoman government began in 1855 and resulted in a firman granted on 5 May 1856.¹⁷ Subject to its agreement, a company called The Abdul Medjid Canal & Railway Company was to be established “for the construction and working of a Canal from a point near Rassova to a point in the Bay of Kustendjie.”¹⁸ A free port at Kustendjie was also included in the concession.¹⁹ Yet, in the late summer of 1856, Thomas Wilson started to make enquiries to the

¹⁷ On the negotiations over this project see TNA, FO 195/460; on this project see also Florian Riedler’s article “Integrating the Danube into Modern Networks of Infrastructure: The Ottoman Contribution” in this issue.

¹⁸ TNA, FO 195/460, Heads of firman granting Concession in perpetuity to Thomas Wilson of 20 Gloucester Square, Hyde Park, London, to Monsieur le Comte de Morny, Paris and to Monsieur Ludwig Von Breda, Vienna.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Ottoman government to shift the project focus from a canal to a railway line. In September of the same year, the final decision to construct a railway between Tchernavoda (Cernavodă, Turkish: Boğazköy) and Kustendjie was passed as this scheme was more feasible.²⁰

The changes made in the second half of 1856 also resulted in a shift in the project promoters involved. The company that put forward the railway scheme was still led by Thomas Wilson. Yet, the remaining promoters totally changed. The new board of directors included Samuel Cunard, William Philip Price, George Byng Paget, Josiah Lewis and William Johnstone Newall.²¹ As already mentioned, E. Ward Jackson and Forbes Campbell also dropped out of the project. Later on, John Trevor Barkley was appointed as the group's agent.²² The name of the undertaking was also changed to the Danube and Black Sea Railway, and the Danube and Black Sea Railway and Kustendjie Harbour Company was established in 1857.²³

Despite these shifts, Wilson, and later on his new joint-promoters, referred to the canal firman that claimed the right to transform the main concession.²⁴ The imperial government, however, required that the group submit an entirely new application, since "it cannot acknowledge to him [i.e., to Wilson] any right to change the concession of a Canal to that of a Railway, and if he wishes to obtain concession for a Railway he must make new propositions as any other party."²⁵ Thus, de facto in the beginning of 1857 the British group began new negotiations for the Danube and Black Sea Railway.²⁶ They were finalized in September 1857

²⁰ BOA, HR.SYS.587/15/6, Lettre de Thomas Wilson à Fuad Pacha, London, 23 August 1856; See also the documents in BOA, HR.TO.425/23/1-5; Forester, *The Danube and the Black Sea*, 51-55.

²¹ Later on, the members of the board of directors changed again and Thomas Wilson was not part of it anymore; Cunard became chairman and Price became vice-chairman of the company; Samuel Beale and Thomas Moxon also joined the board at different stages; C. Liddell and L. Gordon were appointed as engineers. TNA, FO 195/460, Letter from Samuel Cunard to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, Westminster, [London], 28 February 1857; Forester, *The Danube and the Black Sea*, 215, 227; BOA, Sadâret Divan-ı Hümâyûn Kalemî Mukâvele Kısmı Belgeleri (hereafter A.DVN.MKL).1/8/2/2-3, Receipt for firmans of concession, London, 16 October 1857.

²² TNA, FO 195/460, Letter from Cunard to de Redcliffe, 28 February 1857.

²³ TNA, Board of Trade (hereafter BT) 31/280/954; TNA, BT 41/182/1037.

²⁴ See for example FO, 195/460, Letter from J. Trevor Barkley to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, Constantinople, 24 March 1857.

²⁵ BOA, HR.SFR.3.29/10/6/1, Draft of a note from the Ottoman Ambassador [Kostaki Musurus], Bryanston Square, [London], 18 September 1856.

²⁶ TNA, FO 195/460, Letter from Barkley to de Redcliffe, 24 March 1857.

when the group received two firmans – one for a railway concession and one for a concession for the port of Kustendjie.²⁷

During the negotiations the application was suspended twice. The first suspension was between 16 March and 4 April 1857 and was caused by the claims of Austin Henry Layard, who headed the Medjidieh Railway – a rival scheme in the region. Layard's request to the Porte related to his attempt to renegotiate the terms of his concession. However, it was unsuccessful.²⁸ Thus, in the beginning of April 1857 the application for the Danube and Black Sea Railway concession was resumed.

A second suspension followed soon after.²⁹ This time the reason was a local group from the town of Şumnu (Shumen), which at that moment was applying for the Rusçuk and Varna Railway concession. The group was headed by several prominent Bulgarian merchants from this town, and it was also supported by some wealthy Turks from the region, as well as by the eminent Galata financier Jacques Alléon, who was the enterprise banker. Unofficially, the application was patronized by the local and central Ottoman government, chiefly by the Ottoman Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha.³⁰

In May 1857 the Ottoman railway promoters objected to the Council of Tanzimat,³¹ where the Danube and Black Sea Railway project was

²⁷ Forester, *The Danube and the Black Sea*, 215–225 or TNA, FO 195/804, Embassy and Consulates, Turkey (formerly the Ottoman Empire)/General Correspondence/From Black Sea, Kustendjie harbour dues, 1864–1868, Convention pour le Gouvernement Ottoman, d'une part, et la Compagnie du Chemin de fer du Danube il la Mer Noire et du Port de Kustendjie; TNA, FO 198/41, Southern Department and Foreign Office: Embassy and Consulates, Turkey (formerly the Ottoman Empire): Miscellanea/Claims and Concessions, vol. 3, Railways 1875–1879, Convention relative to the concession of the Port of Kustendjie, 1 September 1857/Convention relative à la concession du Port du Kustendjie, 1 Septembre 1857.

²⁸ Boriana Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs, Social Networks, and the Modernization of the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the 19th Century" in *Power Networks in the Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Balkans (18th–20th c.)*, ed. Dimitris Stamatopoulos (London: Routledge, 2020, forthcoming).

²⁹ It lasted from 19 April to 18 May 1857. For more information see TNA, FO 195/460 and especially the letters from J.T. Barkley to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe from 21 April 1857 until 18 May 1857.

³⁰ For more on the suspension and the local application for the Rusçuk and Varna Railway concession see Boriana Antonova-Goleva, "'Top-Down' or 'Bottom-Up' Modernization: Local Railway Entrepreneurs in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the 19th Century" (forthcoming).

³¹ The Council of Tanzimat was one of the main administrative bodies that discussed railway applications. After approving successful applications, they were referred to the Council of

initially approved. The local group claimed that the presence of the British company in the Lower Danube would have a negative impact on the river traffic, as well as on their own undertaking. Moreover, J.T. Barkley started negotiations with the promoters of the Rusçuk and Varna Railway, who stated that if the British group was “willing to surrender any claim to an extension of our Line to Silistria, the opposition of these persons will be withdrawn.”³² The discussions with the local group were finalized at the beginning of May, and the two parties reached certain agreements.³³ It seems that one of these agreements was that Wilson’s group would give up the claim for extending the Danube and Black Sea Railway to Silistria.

Thus, it becomes clear that these British promoters had interests similar to those of the Varna and Silistria Railway. It seems that their plan was in a very initial stage, as it was discussed neither with the British Embassy, nor was it mentioned in the negotiations with the Ottoman government. Yet it indicates a broader interest of the Danube and Black Sea Railway promoters in the region.

The main focus of the group was on the grain trade of the Lower Danube and Black Sea region. According to a preliminary report by the project’s main engineers, Charles Liddell and Lewis Dunbar Brodie Gordon, Kustendjie should be established as a well-regulated, “commodious” free port “where the grain of all the provinces may be concentrated by easy arrangements, much cheaper in the end than those of the rude system at present in use.”³⁴ According to their estimations, the grain that would pass through Tchernavoda would also be cheaper.³⁵ The joint-promoters believed that the port of Kustendjie would compete mainly with Odessa, and in more general terms with Russian trade in that region.³⁶ Moreover, according to them, “completed on a magnificent

Ministers for further authorization. After the applications were finally approved by the Sultan a firman and a convention were issued.

³² TNA, FO 195/460, Letter and Memoranda from J. Trevor Barkley to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, Constantinople, 9 May 1857.

³³ TNA, FO 195/460, Letter from J. Trevor Barkley to Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, Constantinople, 11 May 1857; a copy of the letter is also enclosed to TNA, FO 78/1262, From Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, from 3 to 15 June 1857, (hereafter TNA, FO 78/1262) Letter from Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe to the Earl of Clarendon, Constantinople, 18 May 1857, no. 437; *Journal de Constantinople*, no. 807 (21 May 1857).

³⁴ Charles Liddell and Lewis Dunbar Brodie Gordon, *Report on the Proposed Railway Between the Danube and the Black Sea (from Tchernavoda to Kustendjie) and the Free Port of Kustendjie* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1857), 9.

³⁵ Liddell and Gordon, *Report*, 9–10.

³⁶ Forester, *The Danube and the Black Sea*, 129–130.

scale, [Kustendjje] will be incontestably the most valuable in the Black Sea."³⁷

The group was also highly interested in "the capabilities of the Danubian Provinces as corn-growing states."³⁸ These were Walachia and Moldavia, and especially Bulgaria.³⁹ Therefore, it is unsurprising that the promoters of the Danube and Black Sea Railway planned to extend their project to Silistria. According to Tomas Forester's memoir "The Danube and the Black Sea", this town was "one of the most prosperous and commercial places on the Danube."⁴⁰

Thus, the Danube and Black Sea Railway promoters did not request any government guarantees from the Sublime Porte, contrary to railway concession practices in that period.⁴¹ According to the researchers Rosseger and Jensen, the company accepted this and other heavy responsibilities and unfavorable conditions of the concession, since it expected a great profit from its operation.⁴²

The activities of some of the persons involved in the Danube and Black Sea Railway project are also indicative of the group's interest in the region. Thus, in 1856, during the negotiations around Thomas Wilson's initial project for the Abdul Medjid Canal & Railway, another small-scale scheme mostly intended to support the canal project appeared. It seems that its promoters were associated with Wilson's project. According to the proposal by the Danube and Black Sea Company, who applied for the concession,⁴³ a railway between Ram or "Desira"⁴⁴ on the Serbian bank of the Danube River, and Baziaş on the Romanian bank was considered. Linking the railway with Vidin on the Ottoman bank of the river was also

³⁷ Ibid. 79-80.

³⁸ Ibid. 135.

³⁹ The name "Bulgaria" at that time designated the European territories of the Ottoman Empire located between the Balkan Mountain range and the Danube River.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 18-19.

⁴¹ In fact, this approach was initially applied to the Abdul Medjid Canal & Railway concession, TNA, FO 195/460, Memo in support of Clause III [that the Abdul Medjid Canal & Railway concession shall be "perpetual"] by Forbes Campbell, Therapia, [Constantinople], 9 August 1855.

⁴² Jensen and Rosseger, "'British Railway Builders,'" 111-112.

⁴³ The company which applied for the concession was formed in 1856 and initially was called the Danube and Black Sea Trading and Colonization Company. Its aim was to "purchase culture and colonization of Lands upon and for general Trading operations with the European and Asiatic Shores of the Danube and Black Sea." Later on, it was renamed the Danube and Black Sea Company, see TNA, BT/31/173/520; TNA, BT/41/182/1038.

⁴⁴ Desine, 20 km south of Ram.

planned, either via Pec⁴⁵ or via Porečki⁴⁶ and Negotin.⁴⁷ Yet this project was never implemented.

Several years later the engineers of the Danube and Black Sea Railway, Charles Liddell and Lewis Gordon, together with Thomas Page, also applied for a railway project in the region. In 1860 they succeeded in receiving a concession for a railway from Constantinople that passed through Adrianople (Edirne), Phillipopolis (Plovdiv, Turkish: Filibe), Sofia, and Niš, and which terminated at the border of the Serbian Principality, with a branch line to Thessaloniki (Turkish: Selanik).⁴⁸ The group, however, did not manage to fulfill the requirements that the imperial government made and they eventually lost the concession.⁴⁹

Liddell and Gordon also did common business with the family of another director of the Danube and Black Sea Railway and Kustendjie Harbour Company, William Johnstone Newall. In 1839 they, together with Robert Sterling Newall, a brother of W.J. Newall,⁵⁰ established R.S. Newall and Company for the commission of wire, ropes and machinery.⁵¹ The main activities of R.S. Newall related to submarine telegraphy. During the mid-1850s, R.S. Newall and Company became a leader in this field, and produced a significant portion of all the submarine cables of that period.⁵² During the Crimean War, in 1855, the company built the submarine telegraph between Varna and Balaclava. The chief engineer of the project was Liddell. In the same year, the company laid and maintained the submarine cable between

⁴⁵ Unidentified.

⁴⁶ Possibly Porečki zaliv.

⁴⁷ TNA, FO 195/460, Railway Between Kustendjie and Black Sea, Constantinople, 1856.

⁴⁸ Sublime Porte, *Railway from Constantinople to the Frontiers of Servia with a Branch to Salonica* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1860), 3, article 1.

⁴⁹ Engin, *Rumeli Demiryolari*, 47.

⁵⁰ See <<https://mcmanus168.org.uk/mcmanus168entry/george-h-newall/#source7>> (date of access 26 January 2020); <<http://www.fdca.org.uk/pdf%20files/LockitN.pdf>> (date of access 26 January 2020); Agnes Mary Clerke and Anita McConnell, "Newall, Robert Stirling (1812–1889), engineer and astronomer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004. Oxford University Press, <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19974>> (date of access 26 January 2020).

⁵¹ *The Railway Times* 6 (1843): 1065, 1089, 1113.

⁵² "Obituary: Robert Stirling Newall, F.R.S.," *Proceedings of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers* (1889): 335–336; Walter Peterson, "The Queen's Messenger: An Underwater Telegraph to Balaclava" First published in: *The War Correspondent: The Journal of The Crimean War Research Society*, (April 2008), reproduced in <<https://atlantic-cable.com/Cables/1855Crimea/index.htm>> (date of access 26 January 2020).

Constantinople and Varna.⁵³ R. S. Newall and Company was associated with other telegraph projects in the Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean, too.⁵⁴

It seems that Liddell and Gordon were central figures in the Danube and Black Sea Railway, since they also enlisted John Trevor Barkley to be an agent for the group. Subsequently, J.T. Barkley and his three brothers helped build the line.⁵⁵ During the 1860s, they also engaged in the construction of the Rusçuk and Varna line. Moreover, J.T. Barkley was the general agent of the group that negotiated the concession. He and his brothers were also engaged in the construction of the Bucharest and Giurgevo (Giurgiu, Turkish: Yerköy, Yergögü) line in the United Principalities of Walachia and Moldavia. These two railway projects also emerged as a result of prospecting for profit from the grain trade in the Lower Danube and Black Sea region.⁵⁶

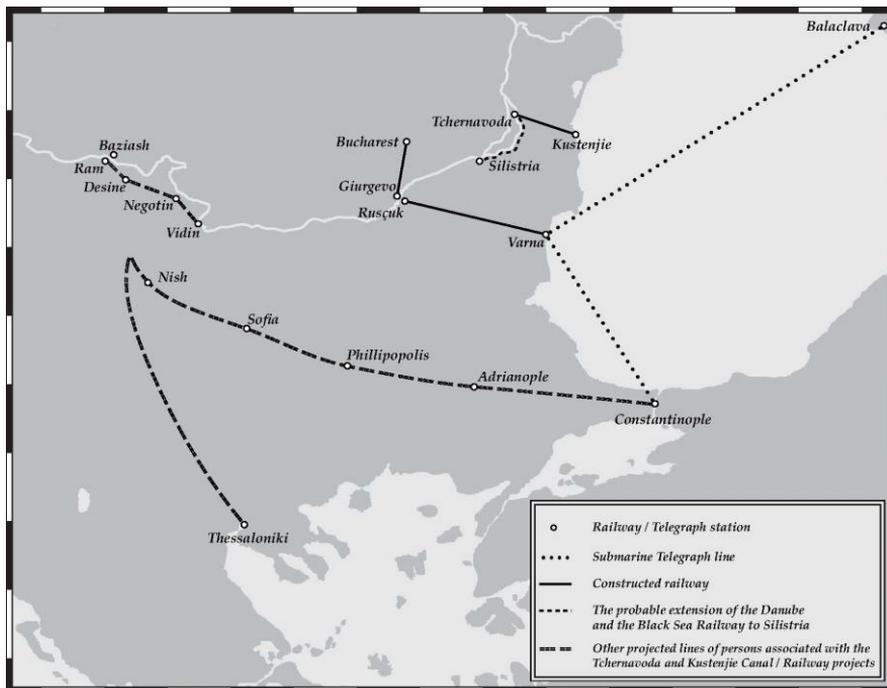
The review of the activities of the Danube and Black Sea Railway members shows their involvement in several successful and unsuccessful Ottoman and Transottoman infrastructure projects (see Map 2). Thus, their efforts to extend their projects to different urban centers along the Lower Danube, such as Silistria, suggest an enduring interest in the region.

⁵³ Bektas, "The British Technological Crusade," 39; Ivan Rusev, "Krimskata vojna (1853–1856) i izgraždaneto na p'rvite telegrafni linii v B'lgarskite zemi: Po novootkriti dokumenti ot frenskite arhivi," in *Sine ira et studio: Izsledvaniya v pamet na prof. Zina Markova*, ed. Konstantin Kosev, Iliã Todev, Elena Statelova, Olga Todorova, Plamen Božinov (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov", 2010), 371.

⁵⁴ Jorma Ahvenainen, *The History of the Near Eastern Telegraphs: Before the First World War* (Helsinki: Acad. Scientiarum Fennica, 2011), 23–26; 33–39; 52–57.

⁵⁵ Jensen and Rosegger, "British Railway Builders," 110–111.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 105–128.



Map 2: The Danube and Black Sea Railway and other railway and telegraph infrastructures undertakings in which Wilson's group was involved during the 1850s and 1860s

4. The Imperial (Medjidieh) Ottoman Railway Project

At the very end of 1856, another project that included Silistria in its route was presented to the Porte – the Imperial (Medjidieh) Ottoman Railway (hereafter referred to as the Medjidieh Railway).⁵⁷ This scheme was promoted by the British archaeologist, politician, and entrepreneur Austin Henry Layard in a letter to the Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha, dated 22 December 1856.⁵⁸ In fact, the application for the Medjidieh Railway was very unusual in many regards.

⁵⁷ This paragraph mainly follows Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs," which offers a detailed study of this railway project.

⁵⁸ BOA, İrade Meclis-i Mahsus (hereafter İ.MMS).9/393/4-7, Lettre de A. H. Layard à Son Altesse le Grand Vizir [Reschid Pasha], Pera, [Constantinople], le 22 Décembre 1856. In fact, Layard was not behind this project. It belonged to George Cruikshank, an artist, and Joseph Gibbs, a civil engineer. They presented their idea to the British archaeologist in the summer

Thus, for example, the initial negotiations between Layard and the Ottoman government were completed very quickly. In the very beginning of January 1857, both parties reached an agreement and by 15 January the Council of Tanzimat, the Council of Ministers, and the Sultan had all approved the project.⁵⁹ Several days later, on 23 January, a firman and a convention were issued.⁶⁰ According to the Medjidieh Railway Company's⁶¹ prospectus, this was "a dispatch of business unexampled in the annals of the Porte."⁶² Indeed, it was very unusual for the imperial government to so speedily approve such an undertaking.⁶³ The initial success of the negotiations for the Medjidieh Railway was most probably due to a combination of factors, and mainly to Layard's influential contacts in the Ottoman and British governments, the high interest of Sultan Abdülmecid in the project, and the favorable conditions for the scheme's execution.⁶⁴

One of the main advantages of the proposed project was that, as with the Danube and Black Sea Railway, the imperial government did not request financial guarantees.⁶⁵ In fact, some of the other conditions of

of 1856 and invited him to become chairman of the future railway company. Cruikshank and Gibb decided to involve Layard in the scheme since he had good positions both in the Ottoman government and among the British capitalist elite. Thus, according to their original plan, Layard was supposed to represent them in Constantinople. Yet, after arriving in the Ottoman capital, he started negotiations on his own behalf, and later on excluded Cruikshank and Gibb from the board of directors of the company. See: British Library, Layard Papers (hereafter BL, LP)/Additional Manuscripts (hereafter Add MS) 38985, Letter from George Cruikshank to A. H. Layard, 48 Mornington Place [London], 14 February 1857, ff. 129-130; Kurmuş, "British Dependence," 275-276; Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs."

⁵⁹ For the different stages of the negotiations' progress see *Railway Record* 14 (1857), 39; *Times*, 15 January 1857; *The Proposed Imperial (Medjidieh) Ottoman Railway, its Purposes and Prospects* (n. p. [London], 1857), 4; *Times*, 30 January 1857; BOA, HR.SFR.3/32/10/3, Copie, Lettre de Reschid à Monsieur Layard, Membre du Parlement, à Londres, 15 Janvier 1857.

⁶⁰ BOA, SFR.3/32/10/2-4, 7; the text of the firman is in BOA, A.DVN.MKL.2/13/4, ferman, Cemazi[yelevvel] 1273 (23 January 1857); for the text of the convention in Ottoman-Turkish see BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/1, mukavelenâme, n.d.; for an official French translation see TNA, FO 195/460, Traduction du projet de convention relative à la concession des chemins de fer de Constantinople à Roustchouk par voire d'Andrinople et d'Andrinople à Enos ou à un autre point plus convenable, 23 January 1857.

⁶¹ Officially the company was named the Imperial Ottoman Mejediyyé Company, the Imperial Ottoman Railway Company/Compagnie de chemin de fer Impérial Ottoman/Timür yolü kumpányasi-i Devlet-i 'Aliyye-yi 'Osmāniyye.

⁶² *The Proposed*, 4.

⁶³ Thus, for example, Wilson's group needed approximately a year to accomplish the negotiations for the Danube and Black Sea Railway, and to receive a firman for the concession.

⁶⁴ For more on this see Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs."

⁶⁵ BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/4/7, Lettre de A.H. Layard.

the concession were very unusual, too. According to the final agreement, the Medjidieh Company had to deliver the Porte a caution money (i.e., a financial guarantee that they would accomplish the concession) by 23 April 1857, that is, three months from the date that the firman was issued.⁶⁶ This unusually short period was not in line with the railway concession practices of the time, and it related to another peculiar condition of the Medjidieh Railway scheme. The Sublime Porte agreed the necessary survey of the route to be made after the company's submission of the caution money. Usually, such a survey would be made to calculate the funds necessary for the project's implementation. The caution money was also calculated on this basis. Therefore, while it was normally transferred after the preliminary survey of the route had been made, this was not the case for the Medjidieh Railway concession. Thus, under normal circumstances a much longer period for delivery of the financial guarantees was required.

In fact, Layard's group claimed that it had at its disposal several detailed surveys of the proposed route.⁶⁷ On this basis they insisted on delivering the fixed amount of £100,000 as a guarantee.⁶⁸ The Ottoman government, for its part, insisted that the caution money should be proportional to the cost of the line and that it should be adjusted in line with the route survey.⁶⁹ Thus, it seems that Layard's group was trying to avoid full payment of the required financial guarantee by delivering less money to the Porte.

The dispute between the promoters of the Medjidieh Railway and the Ottoman government led to a new round of discussions between the two parties. Yet, there was another reason for the renegotiation of the concession's conditions, on which Layard insisted – the proposed route. According to the initial project, a railway starting either from Rusçuk or Silistria, passing through Şumnu and Adrianople, and terminating at Enos or another convenient point on the Aegean coast was proposed. Several branch lines to Constantinople, Varna, Thessaloniki, Belgrade, and to other big cities in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire

⁶⁶ See articles 16 and 19, TNA, FO 195/460, Traduction du projet; BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/1; Engin, *Rumeli Demiryolları*, 46. According to the railway entrepreneurial practices, the caution money was two percent of the company's starting capital, i.e., the money necessary to execute a certain project.

⁶⁷ *The Proposed*, 5–10.

⁶⁸ Respectively the starting capital of the company was calculated at £5 million.

⁶⁹ BOA, HR.SFR.3/32/10/12, Télégramme du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères à l'Ambassadeur de Turquie à Londres [Kostaki Musurus], Constantinople, 14 Mars 1857.

were intended as well.⁷⁰ According to the final agreement with the Sublime Porte, the concession included the mainline Constantinople–Adrianople–Şumnu–Rusçuk with a branch line to Enos.⁷¹ It seems that Layard’s group was unsatisfied with this outcome, since it insisted on extending its privilege rights to build railways in the region between the Danube, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea.⁷²

The new round of negotiations was held between 16 March and 4 April 1857 and, as already mentioned, it resulted in the suspension of discussions with all other railway promoters in the region (including Wilson’s group). This second round of discussions, however, did not bring any positive outcome for Layard’s group.⁷³

The Medjidieh Railway promoters also faced problems with raising the caution money, although the Porte made some concessions by agreeing to reduce the amount of the financial guarantee and to extend the payment deadline until the end of May 1857.⁷⁴ Despite this, Layard’s group failed to fulfill this condition and ultimately lost the concession.⁷⁵

The Medjidieh Railway project attracts researchers’ attention not only because of its speculative nature. Interestingly enough, it seems that the emergence of this scheme related to the interests of various entrepreneurs and railway promoters in the grain trade between the countries neighboring the Lower Danube and the Black Sea, and namely the Ottoman Empire and Russia, but also Austria. Yet, a review of the project itself does not suggest such a conclusion. As already mentioned, the proposed railway route was supposed to start either from Rusçuk or Silistria, to pass through Şumnu and Adrianople, and to terminate at Enos or at another convenient point on the Aegean coast. Several branch lines to Constantinople, Varna, Thessaloniki, Belgrade, and other big cities of the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire were included in the project as well. The scheme’s various descriptions emphasized the importance of the Medjidieh Railway’s route for the region’s grain trade. The commercial role of Austria (with special regard to the Vienna–

⁷⁰ BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/4/1–2, Lettre de A.H. Layard; Engin, *Rumeli Demiryolları*, 44–45; see also the map in BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/7/1.

⁷¹ BOA, A.DVN.MKL.2/13/4; TNA, FO 195/460, Traduction du projet; BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/4, Lettre de A.H. Layard.

⁷² BOA, HR.SFR.3/32/10/9, Letter from A.H. Layard, Chairman of the Imperial Ottoman Mejediyé Company to K. Musurus, London, 10 February 1857.

⁷³ For these events see BOA, HR.SFR.3/32/20/1–35.

⁷⁴ For details about this see Antonova, “Foreign Entrepreneurs.”

⁷⁵ For these events see BOA, HR.SFR.3/33/12/1–14, as well as TNA, FO 195/460.

Kronstadt (Braşov)–Szegedin (Szeged) railway, which passed through Hungary and Transylvania and was supposed to provide a connection with Bucharest and the Danube) is highlighted. Walachia and Moldavia (and the Danube ports of Orşova, Ibrailow, Galatz, Giurgevo, Iassi, and the planned lines in the region), as well as Bulgaria and “Roumelia (the ancient Thrace)” (i.e., the Black Sea ports of Varna and Burgas, and the urban centers from the hinterland, as for example Şumnu and Adrianople) are also highlighted as important segments on this trade route. The planned terminal station at the Aegean Sea was expected to become an important port in the grain trade, too.⁷⁶

Although the idea to make Silistria the terminus of the planned route was abandoned, the promoters of the Medjidieh Railway pointed out that the railway would link Silistria and other big towns and cities in the region (such as Rusçuk, Şumnu, and Varna) with Constantinople and with one other.⁷⁷ A glance at the map attached to the letter to Mustafa Reşid Pasha from 22 December 1856 also shows that Silistria was an important station in the project, since it would also provide a link to Iassi via Galatz.⁷⁸ According to the initial project, associated with Cruikshank and Gibb – the originators of the scheme – one of the main advantages of the planned route was that it was expected to provide a link with the planned lines in Walachia and Moldavia.⁷⁹

Thus, the Medjidieh Railway was intended as an important infrastructure in the grain-trade route in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. An analysis of the activities of the people associated with the project also reveals their wider interests, and these extend beyond the Sultan’s state. Yet, who were the persons who supported the scheme? A list with the names of the directors presented by Layard to Kostaki Musurus sheds light upon this question.⁸⁰ It includes the names of several influential London bankers such as George Grenfell Glyn, Arthur Hankey, and Kirkman Daniel Hodgson. Prominent figures from the social, political, and financial life of Britain like Baldwin Walker (a member of the British military who served in the Royal Navy), Charles Bell from the firm J. Thompson, T. Bonar and Co., William F. Williams (a

⁷⁶ *Railway Record*, 13 (1856), 263; BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/4, *Lettre de A. H. Layard; Prospectus*, 9–10, 13–15; Antonova, “Foreign Entrepreneurs.”

⁷⁷ BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/4, *Lettre de A.H. Layard; The Proposed*, 11.

⁷⁸ BOA, İ.MMS.9/393/4, *Lettre de A.H. Layard*.

⁷⁹ *Railway Record*, 13 (1856), 263.

⁸⁰ BOA, HR.SFR.3/32/10/10, Committee of the Imperial Ottoman Railway Company appointed to wait upon his Excellency M. Musurus.

British Major General), and Henry Rawlinson (an Orientalist) were also among the members of the company. The Ottoman merchant Pierre J. Hava was a member of the board of directors, too.⁸¹ According to the list, John Hawkshaw was engineer-in-chief, William Richard Drake was solicitor, and Lachlan MacKintosh Rate was secretary of the company. Rowland Macdonald Stephenson was also added to the list.⁸² Perhaps Thomas Matthias Weguelin, another influential figure in the City of London, was associated with Layard's project as well, though he was not part of the company's governing body.⁸³

The scheme was also financially supported by the Ottoman subjects George Zarifi and Mihran Bey Duz, influential figures in the economic life of the Ottoman Empire,⁸⁴ as well as by a "certain Baltazzi."⁸⁵

During the 1850s and 1860s many of these people were engaged in various enterprises in the Danube and Black Sea region⁸⁶ as well as in Russia, another major exporter of grain. Some of them were involved in the Russian trade. Such was the merchant house Thompson, Bonar & Co., in which T. Bell and T.M. Weguelin were partners. According to Fraser's Magazine, the house had been involved in Russian trade for several generations and possessed an establishment in St. Petersburg;⁸⁷ Weguelin (who was of Russian origin) was governor of the Russia Company formed in 1855;⁸⁸ the merchant house P. Hava & Co. was oriented toward the Russian market, too, and had an establishment in Odessa. The house Zarifi Zafiropoulo and some members of the Zarifi family were engaged in the grain trade with the Danubian Principalities and Odessa.⁸⁹

⁸¹ In fact, although Hava was ready to provide a certain amount of money to financially guarantee the project, he refused to sit on the board of directors. This happened on 13 February, i.e., three days after Layard sent the list with the names of the board members to Mustafa Reşid Pasha, Kurmuş, "British Dependence," 280, n. 63.

⁸² His name was written at the end of the list with ink of another color.

⁸³ It seems that he also supported the scheme, Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs."

⁸⁴ BL, LP/Add MS 39054, Lettre de George Zarifi et Mihran Duz Bey à A. H. Layard, Constantinople, le 12 Janvier 1857, ff. 15-16; Kurmuş, "British Dependence," 280.

⁸⁵ Kurmuş, "British Dependence," 280. Presumably this was Théodore Baltazzi or Aristide Baltazzi, both of whom were prominent Galata bankers.

⁸⁶ In fact, in the same period when the Medjidieh Railway project appeared, most of them were engaged in the establishment and the governance of the Ottoman Bank. For more on this see Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs."

⁸⁷ Fraser's Magazine 28 (1843): 207.

⁸⁸ *The British Imperial Calendar, or General Register of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and Its Colonies (etc.)* (London: Varnham, 1854), 251.

⁸⁹ Haris Exertzoglou, *Prosarmostikotēta kai Politikē Omogeiakōn Kephalaïōn: Ellēnes trapezites stēn Kōnstantinoupolē: To Katastēma 'Zariphēs Zapheirooulos', 1871-1881* (Athens: Idryma Ereunas

Some of the persons associated with the Medjidieh Railway Company also took part in railway projects in Russia and the Austrian Empire. Thus, for example, Hawkshaw was engineer-in-chief of the Riga and the Dünaburg (*Daugavpils*) and Witepsk (*Vitebsk, Vitsebsk*) Railways in Russia.⁹⁰ The Lemberg (*Lviv*) Czernovitz (*Chernovtsi*) Railway in Austria, built in the 1860s, was another undertaking in which some of the persons associated with the Medjidieh Railway scheme were involved. These were L.M. Rate and E.R. Drake who took part in the establishment of the Imperial Royal Privileged Lemberg Czernowitz Railway Company in 1864. Rate became chairman of the board of directors in England and Drake was also a board member. The company of the latter, Messrs. Birhman, Dalrymple, Drake & Ward, was a solicitor firm, and the companies Messrs. Glyn, Mills, Currie & Co. and the Anglo-Austrian Bank (both of them associated with G.G. Glyn) were banking houses.⁹¹ According to the railway prospectus issued in 1869: "The extension of the Lemberg and the Czernowitz to the Black Sea had always been the ultimate desire and ambition of the direction since the establishment of the company. The guarantees of a prosperous future lie in this extension, be it either Odessa or to Galatz."⁹² Along with Odessa, Varna also occupied an important place in these plans.⁹³ For this reason extensions to Botoşani and Iassi were built later.⁹⁴

As for Layard himself, he was rather interested in the Asian parts of the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Mediterranean. According to the map of the Medjidieh Railway, the proposed route was supposed to link with other railway schemes in Western Anatolia. Its extensions would pass very close to Scala Nova (Turkish: Kuşadası), where Layard and two other directors of the Medjidieh Railway Company, Charles Bell and

kai Paideias tēs Emporikēs Trapezas tēs Ellados, 1989), 11–13; Vassilis Kardasis, *Diaspora Merchants in the Black Sea: The Greeks in Southern Russia, 1775–1861* (Lanham: Lexington Books 2001), 163; Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *Metarrythmisē kai Ekkosmikeusē: pros mia anasynthesē tēs Istorias tou Oikoumenikou Patriarcheiu ton 19o aiona.* (Athens: Alexandria, 2003), 64–65; Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs."

⁹⁰ *Railway Times* 20 (1857): 695; "Obituary: Sir John Hawkshaw, 1811–1891," *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 106 (1891): 325; Robert Henry Mair, *Debrett's Illustrated House of Commons, and the Judicial Bench* (London: Dean & Son, 1870), 282.

⁹¹ Charles Barker and sons, *The Joint Stock Companies' Directory* (London: King, 1867), 201; Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs."

⁹² W.J. Adams, *Bradshaw's Railway Manual, Shareholders' Guide, and Official Directory for 1869* (Manchester: Bradshaw and Blacklock 1869), 358.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ For this line see Ihor Zhaloba, "Leon Sapeiha – a Prince and Railway Entrepreneur," in *Across the Borders: Financing the World's Railways in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Ralf Roth and Günter Dinshobl (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 49–62.

Baldwin Walker, had another common venture – the Levant Mineral Company. This company was founded in 1856 in order to supply emery stone from Scala Nova and the Island of Naxos (in Greece).⁹⁵

Thus, the appearance of the Medjidieh Railway scheme involved persons and institutions with long-standing interests in various undertakings linked to the grain trade and other business activities in this part of the world (see Map 3).



Map 3: The Medjidieh Railway project from 1856, its extensions, and other infrastructure and commercial undertakings in which Layard's group was involved during the 1850s and 1860s

⁹⁵ *Railway Record* 13 (1856): 581–583.

5. Conclusion: Silistria in the Context of Ottoman and Transottoman Infrastructure Projects

After the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire started to develop railway infrastructure in its various regions. The territories between the Black Sea and the Lower Danube region were among the areas that attracted the attention of various capitalists and entrepreneurs from the very beginning of this process. Naturally, due to its location, Silistria, together with other urban centers along the Danube River was the focus of many railway promoters interested in commercial prospects, which this part of the Sultan's empire could offer. Thus, in the early stage of Ottoman railway development, three competing schemes included this town in their route. Several conclusions regarding their appearance, interrelationship, and their place with respect to other Ottoman and Transottoman railway infrastructures can be drawn.

The earliest of these schemes, from October 1856, was the Varna and Silistria Railway. It emerged as an alternative to the Rassoava/Tchernavoda-Kustendjie route and was the only project in which Silistria had a central role as a terminus. Yet, it had to compete with other schemes that sought to link the Danube and the Black Sea, namely, the Danube and Black Sea Railway, and the Rusçuk and Varna Railway. Perhaps because the first of them had strong political support from the British government and the second was of primary importance to the Sublime Porte, the Varna and Silistria Railway lost this competition.

At the end of 1856 and the beginning of 1857, Silistria appeared in the plans of other railway entrepreneurs, though it had a secondary importance. The lack of available information means that the plans of the Danube and Black Sea Railway promoters for this town remain vague and obscure. A general review of the group's intentions, however, shows that its members were interested in the grain trade along the Lower Danube, and they aimed to compete with Odessa over grain exports from the region. In this context, Silistria attracted the attention of Wilson's group. Again, owing to the competition with the Rusçuk and Varna Railway, the Danube and Black Sea Railway promoters were forced to abandon their plans to extend the line in this direction.

In the third scheme, the Medjidieh Railway, Silistria played an important role as a link to other Transottoman railway infrastructures in the Lower Danube region. Yet, this town was once again of secondary

importance as a terminus on the Danube and also as a connection to the Walachian and the Moldavian railway networks, because in the course of the negotiations with the Sublime Porte, Rusçuk was chosen as more suitable in this regard. The result of the discussions between Layard and the Ottoman government, however, did not satisfy the group. They therefore initiated a second round of negotiations to extend their powers to construct railway infrastructures in the European provinces of the empire. It is quite possible that Silistria may have been part of those plans again. Eventually, Layard did not manage to renegotiate the concession and fulfill his engagements with the Porte. Thus, the Medjidieh Railway project, as well as the plans for a railway connection to Silistria, were never implemented.

Analyzed from a broader perspective, the three projects reflected the different scales of interests of the various entrepreneur lobbies in this part of the world. Thus, the composition of E. Ward Jackson's group does not indicate the participation of its members in other undertakings in the region. In fact, most of its members were engaged in engineering, which also explains the weaker positions of the Varna and Silistria Railway compared with its rival counterparts.

Yet, the competitor group of T. Wilson had a much wider interest in the Lower Danube region. The participation of some of its members in various Ottoman and Transottoman projects in neighboring countries that bordered the Danube, e.g., the Principality of Serbia and the Danubian Principalities, leads to such a conclusion. Central figures in the Danube and Black Sea Railway included the engineers Gordon and Liddell, as well as J.T. Barkley. Unlike the members of E. Ward Jackson's group, they were engaged in various enterprises in the Ottoman Empire (mainly in railway entrepreneurship but also in telegraph construction), and thus had a strong position before the Sublime Porte.

Finally, Layard's group had the broadest range of interests compared with its counterparts. It sought out entrepreneurial opportunities in the countries neighboring the Lower Danube and the Black Sea, such as the Ottoman Empire, the Danubian Principalities, the Russian Empire, and the Austrian Empire. The members of this group were engaged in various types of undertakings, such as banking, railway entrepreneurship, commerce, etc. In fact, many of the persons associated with the Medjidieh Railway were held together by interlocking

directorships in various companies around the world.⁹⁶ Moreover, Layard's group had a strong influence in the Ottoman government. As a result of similar interests to Layard's and Wilson's group in the region, the Medjidieh Railway project became a strong competitor to the Danube and Black Sea Railway.

Viewed from this perspective, the choice of Silistria by both groups is evident. In fact, the three schemes reflect the growing global interest of different entrepreneurs in the Lower Danube and the Black Sea region in the Post-Crimean Ottoman Empire. Although they were never implemented, in the second half of the 1850s Silistria, together with other urban centers along the Lower Danube became an important element in the Ottoman and Transottoman railway infrastructure projects.

In fact, the process of modernizing transportation affected the region's urban network in various ways. On the one hand, because of the construction of various Ottoman and Transottoman railway infrastructures, many settlements expanded. By transforming Kustendjie and Varna into railway termini and by enlarging their ports, for example, these two cities emerged as important stops on the region's grain-trade route. On the other hand, Silistria was never linked to the railway, and thus remained only one of the important military strongholds in this border region of the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, it never grew as a significant commercial center like Rusçuk or other towns and cities along the Lower Danube. Thus, the bright perspectives for a prosperous future alluded to by the plans for a railway link to Silistria remained only a mirage in the foreign entrepreneurs' schemes.

⁹⁶ For more on this see Antonova, "Foreign Entrepreneurs."

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