

AHMET ERDEM TOZOĞLU, “DEMİRYOLU VE KENT 19. YÜZYILDA OSMANLI BALKAN ŞEHİRLERİNİN MEKÂNSAL DEĞİŞİMİ”

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Reviewer: Anıl Göç

Ahmet Erdem Tozoğlu's book, *Demiryolu ve Kent* (Railway and City), originates from his 2013 doctoral dissertation, which was written in English at Middle East Technical University. The author developed the research over nearly 10 years before its Turkish publication. It makes the book an adaptation rather than a translation of the dissertation.

The book is based on the primary sources, including archival documents, maps, plans, memoirs, periodicals and visual materials. The relevant academic literature, comprising dissertations, articles, books and other previously studies are also used. One of the main sources originates from the Ottoman archive. The majority of the other sources are drawn from Turkish and English literature, with

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additional use of German and, to a lesser extent French materials. In addition, the book incorporates a variety of visual materials, such as maps, photographs and plans, which help to contextualise the study and enhance understanding of the subject. However, the utility of some visual materials is constrained by technical issues, such as limitations in print quality.

This study basically asks how railway projects transformed Balkan cities between 1870 and 1912. It examines how railway transportation influenced civil architecture, the social environment and perceptions of time. The author argues that railways were the catalyst for Ottoman modernization. He identifies three main actors, the state, international figures and locals (*devlet, uluslararası figürler ve yereller*). The author evaluates changes through these actors and their relationships.

In the introduction, the author explains the methodology, sources and objectives. Following this, the book is structured into three main chapters. First part includes the general history of railways worldwide and within the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Balkans. In the second chapter, the author describes the construction and architecture of railway stations in the Balkans. Lastly, the third chapter primarily explores how this process changed the social and economic statuses in these cities.

At the beginning, the author indicates that previous studies on railway history had not reached an international readership. Therefore, he aims to frame the study from the modernization perspective, rather than solely focusing on the technical and economic history of railway projects. He also clearly emphasized that he avoided Eurocentric explanations in understanding Ottoman modernization.

In the second main title, the writer describes the general history of Istanbul, Thessaloniki (Selanik), Bitola (Manastır), Edirne and Alexandroupolis (De-deağaç), as well as their respective railway establishment processes. He uses primary sources in this chapter, such as archival documents, memoirs and various visual materials. The writer illustrates public opinion regarding these projects by analyzing newspapers. This approach helps to incorporate people's perspectives and understand the social dimensions of the projects. For instance, the

author discusses different arguments presented in newspapers against Baron Hirsch's Istanbul railway project (pp. 68-69).

The author's choice to describe the history of cities from ancient times to the 19th century is open to discussion. However, it can be said that each city's brief history was well-compiled and clearly summarized. On the other hand, some quotations and terms are sound questionable in terms of their historical accuracy. For example, a quotation from Basiretçi Ali Bey on page 82 is rendered in today's Turkish, which changes the original tone of Ali Bey's writing. This decision was presumably made by the author for reasons of fluency. In my opinion, the inclusion of the original Ottoman Turkish text in a footnote would have been more beneficial. Furthermore, some terms appear overly modernized or anachronistic, lacking of historical precision. For example, using "*Gülhane Tıp Fakültesi*" and "*Osmanlı Genelkurmay Başkanlığı*" (pp. 103, 171) instead of their original names "*Mekteb-i Tıbbiye*" and "*Ottoman Ministry of War*", or "*Harbiye Nezareti/Seraskerlik*", diminishes historical accuracy. If the original names had also been employed, the historical context would have been more precise.

The last main chapter focusses on the transformation of cities shaped by three actors: the state, railway investors, and local figures. The author examines the impact of these three actors on urban architecture and social change within these cities. He discusses local conflicts and their resolution between authority and railway companies. Firstly, the case of Alexandroupolis is investigated. This section details the reclaiming of lands initially allocated to the railway company and the subsequent construction of an administrative building and a public park (*millet bahçesi*) by the district administrator (*mutasarrıf*) Ebubekir Hazım Bey.

The author discusses the role of railways in political propaganda, citing Sultan Mehmed V Reşad's Balkan visit (pp. 220-226). This section is well-analyzed using primary sources, such as contemporary local newspapers and the other studies. It could be argued that İsmail Bey's memoir would also have been beneficial for this part, because he was one of Sultan Mehmed V's court servants and a primary source for the entire journey.¹

1 İsmail Bey. (2020). *Hâtıra-yı Seyâhat Selanik, Üsküp, Priştine, Kosova ve Manastır Notları*, haz. Adem Ölmez, Türk Tarih Kurumu.

Furthermore, the three examples presented (Ebubekir Hazım Bey's actions in Alexandroupolis, the conflict between the government and railway company during the construction of Edirne station and Sultan Mehmed V's visit for propaganda) may not be sufficient to comprehensively discuss the state's role and control over railways. However, it is understood that the author realized this limitation and strategically selected these examples to highlight the state's social and political influence.

The role of international actors is evaluated through the progression of railways in Alexandroupolis, Edirne, Thessaloniki and Bitola. The author particularly argues that establishment of Alexandroupolis as a city and its port was linked to the railway station's development. This argument is supported by maps and plans. The author cites the construction of railway settlements as the most distinct impact of railway investors on the transformation of cities.

The final chapter focusses on how local actors transformed cities through the influence of railways. Firstly, the author stated that the stations were established on public lands, often located on the outskirts of cities, in order to prevent additional construction expenses. Consequently, this led to the emergence of "station streets" (*istasyon caddesi*) in cities, featuring new commercial buildings such as hotels, cafes and clubs. These station streets are evaluated as a creation driven by local people. The author indicates that this transformation was a key element in the formation of modern cities. This transformation also fostered social, economic and municipal progress of these cities. For example, new tram lines were established in some cities to facilitate integration with railway stations.

In the end, summarily, the author argues that railways were one of the main actors in urban transformation, in terms of their physical, social and economic influence. This study examines this argument through the lens of on selected cities and the narratives of key actors.

Throughout the book, political and local history are evaluated with equal weight alongside the main subjects. Technical information is presented understandably. In addition, it incorporates significant aspect of city and urban history. In

conclusion, this book stands as a premier study interpreting Ottoman modernization through the lens of railway projects. Furthermore, in terms of different approaches to Ottoman modernization, as the author hopes, many comparative studies should be revealed in the future.