

## THE DYNAMIC OF LINEAR SETTINGS : HIJAZ RAILROAD

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### **Hijaz Railroad :Historical background**

The Hijaz Railway was originally built to transport pilgrims from Damascus to Madinah, where they would travel on to Mecca for the Muslim Pilgrimage. The idea was first put forward in 1864 during the height of the age of great railways around the world. And this idea came into being in 1908 where the Hijaz railway was fully constructed and used to transfer pilgrims to Mecca<sup>1</sup>. Before that, Muslim pilgrims traveled to Mecca by camel caravan. The journey between Damascus and Mecca usually took two months and was full of hardships. Since the Muslim calendar is a lunar calendar, the feast of Al Adha, when Muslims travel to Mecca to worship the black stone changed from season to season. Sometimes it meant traveling through the winter, enduring freezing temperatures or torrential rains. At the height of summer, it meant crossing scorching hot deserts. Towns and settlements were sparse and there were hostile Muslim tribes along the way, as well as the unavoidable attackers who preyed on pious pilgrims, as they made the 'once in a lifetime' pilgrimage, in obedience to their prophet Mohammed<sup>2</sup>.

The Hajj was a very arduous and risky undertaking requiring considerable preparation. Although coming from diverse locations, most pilgrims would have to make the last part of their journey through Arabia on one of several major Hajj routes. The main routes were Damascus to Mecca, Cairo to Mecca via the Sinai, Basra to Mecca, Sana'a to Mecca coastal route, Sana'a to Mecca inland route and Oman to Mecca via one of the Yemeni routes. Of these routes the most important were those that led from Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo. Over the centuries each of these routes developed various facilities for travelers which included wells, cisterns and dams, bridges, paved roads, markers and milestones, khans and forts<sup>3</sup>.

Of all the routes the Damascus route appears to be the oldest, following pre-Islamic trade routes. With the move of the caliphate from Syria to Iraq the Damascus route declined in importance, but the route was still used throughout the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, as testified by the fourteenth-century pilgrimage itinerary of Ibn Battuta and the existence of several Mamluk forts on the route such as those at Jize and Zerka. With the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk Empire in the sixteenth century the Hajj route was provided with new facilities and provided with fortified garrisons stationed in small forts along the route<sup>4</sup>. The forts were built not only to protect the water cisterns and wells (which were repaired at the same time) but also to provide an efficient postal service for the Hajj.

On the second of May 1900, Sultan Abd al Hamid ordered the construction of the railroad between Damascus and Mecca (the Hijaz Railroad Line). He appealed to the Muslims of the world for their emotional and financial support. Construction of the Hamidiye Hijaz Railroad was to begin on the first of September 1900, the 25th anniversary of his accession to the throne. It would be financed, built, and operated by the Ottoman Empire alone<sup>5</sup>.

The building of the Hijaz Railway presented a financial and engineering challenge. It required a budget of some \$16 million dollars, and this was at the turn of the century when dollars were worth a lot more than they are today<sup>6</sup>. Contributions came from the Turkish Sultan Abdul Hammed, the Khedive of Egypt, and the Shah of Iran. Other contributions came from the Turkish Civil Service, Armed Forces, and other various fund-raising efforts (which included the sale of titles such as Pasha or Bey to citizens who could afford the price of instant honor)<sup>7</sup>.

After the First World War, and until as recently as 1971,

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<sup>1</sup> PETERS, Francis, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> FAROQHI, Suraiya, *Approaching Ottoman History: An introduction to the Sources*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> J. S. Birks, J. S. *Across the Savannas to Mecca: The Overland Pilgrimage Route from West Africa*, London 1978.

<sup>4</sup> PETERSEN, Andrew, "Early Ottoman Forts on the Darb Al- Hajj", *Levant*, Vol. XXI, pp 97-117, 1989,

<sup>5</sup> PETERSEN, Andrew, "Early Ottoman Forts on the Hajj Route in Jordan", *Masters Thesis (Oxford, University of Oxford)*, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> OCHSENWALD, William, "Islam and the Ottoman Legacy in the Modern Middle East." *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, Brown, L.ed. New York: Columbia University Press, pp: 363-383, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> MACFIE, A., *The End of the Ottoman Empire: 1908-1923*, London, Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1988.

several attempts were made to revive the railway, but the scheme proved too difficult and too expensive. Road transport was soon established and, by the 1970's aviation had made rapid progress. The railway was soon abandoned and the huge old steam locomotives sat and rusted. But the romance of the railway remains alive<sup>8</sup>.

### **The Concept of Cultural Route: A new approach for cultural Heritage**

Over time, the notion of “monument” originally seen as an artifact in isolation from its context has broadened to include town centers, neighborhoods, historic towns, and cultural landscapes as cultural heritage categories. The elimination of chronological barriers has opened a path for the assessment of new elements as integral components of the cultural heritage. The concept of Cultural Routes represents today a qualitatively new approach to the notion of conservation of the cultural heritage.

Cultural Routes reflect interactive, dynamic, and continually evolving processes of human intercultural links as they manifest themselves in the cultural heritage. Within this context, the notion of Cultural Routes constitutes a new concept that enriches and illustrates the growing tendency to approach the cultural heritage from a multidimensional perspective, and contributes significantly to our understanding of this heritage. The innovation proposed by the term “Cultural Routes” reveals the heritage content of a specific, concrete phenomenon of human mobility and exchange: the communication routes that facilitated their flow and which possess—or possessed in the past—a specific and peculiar purpose.

Cultural routes defined by the international scientific committee on cultural routes<sup>9</sup> CIIC-ICOMOS in its draft of international charter on cultural routes, is to be as the following “Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and is also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality, which must fulfill the following conditions:

- a) It must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant

<sup>8</sup> USUL, İbrahim, 1999, From Istanbul to Madinah, A Documentary of History (The Hejaz Railway: Album of Photographs). Istanbul, Albaraka Turkish Finance House.

<sup>9</sup> Scientific conference of the CIIC ( Ferool, Spain, 1-3 October 2004): Identification, promotion and inventory of cultural routes.

periods of time.

- b) It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage”.

The Defining elements for cultural routes stated by CIIC\_ICOMOS are: context, content, cross-cultural significance as a whole, and dynamic character of Cultural Routes. Where context refer to natural setting, content refer to tangible elements that bear witness to its cultural heritage and provide a physical confirmation of its existence and cross cultural significance implies a value as a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts and gives the Route its meaning<sup>10</sup>. The dynamic character factor that acts as a conductor or channel through which the reciprocal cultural influences have flowed. The dynamic of a Cultural Route does not obey natural laws or casual phenomena, but rather exclusively human processes and interests, and is therefore understandable only as a cultural phenomenon. By understanding a Cultural Route as a set of dynamic elements of cultural communication between peoples, its cultural heritage assets can be appreciated in their true spatial and historical dimensions, which allows for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to the conservation of the Route as a whole.

### **Identification of Hijaz Railway as a Cultural Route**

In the 1st of September 1908, the railway officially opened, and by the year 1912 it was transporting 30,000 pilgrims a year. As word spread that the pilgrimage had just become easier, business boomed, and by 1914 the annual load had soared to 300,000 passengers.

The Stations on the Hijaz Railway could be categorized into two main types

- 1- The Terminus Type: Cities like Damascus or Madinah constituted main huge urban centers (a terminus where one ends or starts his or her journey). Usually, the design of the Station and its relationship with the railroad tracks respected this significant relationship, the tracks run into the Station proper to indicate a major stop on the Railroad Line.
- 2- The Rural Type: In towns like Amman, Qatrana, or Ma'an, the railroad tracks ran parallel to the Station indicating a usual stop but not a significant

<sup>10</sup> Meeting on Cultural Routes, Madrid (1994), International scientific meeting of the ICOMOS CIIC, Ibiza (1999).

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terminus. This type is labeled by (Daher 1991)<sup>11</sup>, as the Rural Type since it represented the nature of the towns in which these stations were built.

Hijaz Railway as a cultural route occurs in a natural setting ( Bilad Alsham and Alhijaz<sup>12</sup>) upon which it exert an influence and help to characterize and enrich with it new dimension as part of an interactive process at a different levels. The Hijaz Railroad Stations caused many enhancements to the towns they were introduced to. Rami Daher considered these changes had aided the different urban centers to prosper and develop due to the flux of pilgrims and travelers, trade relations, and the array of public works and buildings that was sponsored by the Ottoman State. The Hijaz railway was supported by tangible elements that bear witness to its cultural heritage. physical vestiges of the road itself such as its materials, routes, springs, markers, bridges or other structures, as well as other related elements such as hospitals, inns, coats of arms, places of devotion or worship, monasteries, customs, ports, towns, urban centers, were serving to give sense and meaning to the various elements that make up the whole railway.

And these physical elements determine the existence of Hijaz railway as being a communication route by itself presenting physical evidences of its historic path that include a dynamic factor that acts as a conductor or channel through which the reciprocal cultural influences have flowed. One Hajj tradition that continued into the 20th century was the various Hajj Fairs that were held on different locations (e.g., Muzayrib, Ma'an) south of Damascus on the way to the Holy Cities<sup>13</sup>. Such Fairs had a great positive impact on the development of such urban centers and on promoting regional Islamic interaction and trade. The Caravan Fair at Muzayrib provided a chance for pilgrims to purchase their needs before the Hijaz Railroad Line. In the 19th century, Muzayrib was to evolve into a major commercial center in Syria and was linked to Damascus through one of Syria's earlier train lines<sup>14</sup>.

Hijaz railway carried also a symbolic value as it

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<sup>11</sup> DAHER, Rami, "Legacy of Thought, Legacy of Building: Historical Train Station in Amman, Jordan." Masters Thesis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota), 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Bilad Alsham are counties of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine, Alhijaz is Saudi Arabia

<sup>13</sup> ROGAN, Eugene, 1999, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> FAROQHI, Suraiya, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj Under the Ottomans 1517-1683*, London, I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1994.

represent the route for the Muslim pilgrims for hajj. Hajj or pilgrimage, is one of the five pillars of Islam along with prayer five times a day, fasting, the giving of alms, and bearing witness that there is only one true God. Each Muslim is required to attempt at least once in a lifetime to visit the holy cities of Medina and Mecca. It is well known that Mecca was an important ritual centre before Islam and that it would have been visited as a shrine. Under Islam, however, the importance of visiting Mecca was greatly increased especially as the numbers of Muslims increased around the world.

Although Hijaz railway was constructed mainly to carry our pilgrims to Mecca, The Internal History of the Hijaz Railroad can be used as a way of measuring three major issues: The Ottoman Empire's ability to construct and finance a modern enterprise, the efficiency with which the empire could operate such a railroad, and the independence of the empire from Europe in personnel, finance, and material. The impact of the railway was also felt on the Bedouin who gained cash each year by guiding pilgrims to Mecca. With the loss of this cash, they began to feel resentful of the Ottomans, especially with increased taxation and conscription.

Resentment was also felt in towns and villages. there was a rebellion in Karak in 1910. Karak was about fifteen kilometers from the Hijaz station of Qatrana. The tribes in the area united together. The Tribes that were responsible for guarding the railway did not receive their pay, so they robbed a train, killed some railroad workers, and destroyed a section of track<sup>15</sup>. The 'Atiyya tribe then attacked the railroad near Ma'an. Qatrana station was destroyed, and the rail line taken up. The Turks were slow in responding, because many of their railroad cars were south of the destruction. Eight days later though, the Turks sent in troops and put down the revolt, executed some of the rebels, and looted the town.

The impact of Hijaz Railway was also reflected on how the railway brought with it a boom. As an example, while the railway was being built, over 1000 workers lived in the town of Ma'an. The Ma'anis thought that they were developing into a major center, but when the railroad construction ended, the workers all left, and Ma'an returned to a rural center. but the effect of Hijaz railroad had maintained an economic base later but not as expected from the local community there. The main impact on society

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<sup>15</sup> BROWN, L., "Memory, Heritage, and History: The Ottomans and the Arabs." *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, Brown, L. ed. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 100-114, 1996.

though, came in the Hauran district that could suddenly export their wheat to the world. Between 1903 and 1912 gain amounted to over half of the goods transported on the rail line between Damascus and Haifa.

The camel caravan owners were far from pleased by the construction of the railway line, as it posed a considerable threat to their livelihood. The railway journey was quicker and cheaper, and no-one in his right mind would contemplate spending £40 on an arduous, two-month camel journey when he could travel in comfort in only four days for just £3.50. Frequent attacks on the trains by the tribes and furious caravan operators, made the journey to Madinah a perilous undertaking for pilgrims, whether by camel or by rail. The pilgrim's honor was also at stake. It wasn't long before pilgrims who took the long and difficult camel route started calling the rail route the "women's route." It was ok for women and the sick to travel by rail, but real men, undertaking a real pilgrimage still traveled by camel caravan, just as the prophet Mohammed would have done.

Not only were pilgrims transported to Madinah, but the Turkish army began to use the railway as its chief mode of transport for troops and supplies. This was to be the railway's undoing, as it was severely damaged during the First World War (1914-1918), by Lawrence of Arabia and the Arab Revolt. The old Arab tribes that guided and guarded pilgrims now had the opportunity to turn their revenge on the railway. While many claim that it was not their intention to destroy the railway, but rather attack the supply lines of the retreating Turkish army, the railway was destroyed anyway.

After the First World War, and until as recently as 1971, several attempts were made to revive the railway, but the scheme proved too difficult and too expensive. Road transport was soon established and, by the 1970's aviation had made rapid progress. The railway was soon abandoned and the huge old steam locomotives sat and rusted. But the romance of the railway remains alive.

In actuality, parts of the Hijaz Railway still exist, and some of the sections are still functioning. It is possible to travel from Damascus to Amman, Jordan, on the old original rail line. Recently a Nabataea.net reader took the trip and documented it with pictures. Today, in 2003, the train still runs twice a week, taking all day to travel the same distance that it takes a car to travel 4 hours. The route south from Amman has been destroyed, but the train still runs from Wadi Hissa to Aqaba, transporting phosphates from the mines to the port. The line south into Saudi Arabia is no longer functioning, but railway enthusiasts still visit sites in Saudi, where there are a number of abandoned stations,

round houses and rusting locomotives and cars. Although Hijaz railroad do not function as it was to be. Countries of Jordan, Saudi Arabia are thinking of rehabilitate the line for tourist activities. Ideas were initiated to activate the Hijaz railroad and the main historic areas that used to be stations along the route.

## **Conclusion**

The consideration of Cultural Routes as a new concept or category does not oppose in any way the established categories of cultural heritage. Rather, it recognizes and enhances their significance within an integrated, interdisciplinary and shared framework. This approach enhances not only understanding and communication among the peoples of the world, but opens the door to increased cooperation in the work of preserving the cultural heritage.

The Hijaz railroad as a signified cultural route that have a historical and symbolic value lies within a category comprised of elements that are usually managed through multiple governmental agencies. Nevertheless, due to their wide scope and their value when considered as a whole, the preservation and management of Cultural Routes of national significance requires specific legal instruments and implies the full integration of the Routes within comprehensive development plans. For this reason, international cooperation is essential for research, assessment, and preservation of the assets that make up international Cultural Routes.

Before protection can be considered to Hijaz railroad, the nature and scope of threats and vulnerabilities needs to be identified. The main challenge will be in how could the management of protected townscapes and landscapes be extended to their setting, for example to sustain the distinctive character of the relation between town and country? And How can we address the specific needs of settings for Hijaz Railroad defined in an international or transcontinental context and develop co-operation activities within these settings?

### **Abstract**

The consideration of Cultural Routes as a new concept or category does not oppose in any way the established categories of cultural heritage. Rather, it recognizes and enhances their significance within an integrated, interdisciplinary and shared framework. This approach enhances not only understanding and communication among the peoples of the world, but opens the door to increased cooperation in the work of preserving the cultural heritage.

The paper will try to identify the Hijaz Railroad as a cultural route that has its own specific dynamic and historic functionality which reflect interactive movement of people as well as multi-dimensional continuous exchange of goods, ideas, knowledge and values. The Hijaz Railway was originally built to transport pilgrims from Damascus to Madinah, where they would travel on to Mecca for the Muslim Pilgrimage. The idea was first put forward in 1864 during the height of the age of great railways around the world, but it was not until 40 years later (1908) that the Hijaz Railway came into being. Before the Hijaz Railway, Muslim pilgrims traveled to Madinah by camel caravan following the footsteps of earlier commercial or religious routes.

The author will apply the defining elements proposed by CIIC International Charter on Cultural Route<sup>16</sup>. The identification process will be based on a set of tangible evidences and elements that witness to its significance and will take into account its natural and demographic geographic context, its functionality, its symbolic and spiritual dimension. The author at the end recommend and stress on the need to revive the national significance of the Hijaz Railroad and the necessity for preservation and management plan on regional level.

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<sup>16</sup> A third Approach, ideas for the drafting of an International Charter on Cultural routes, Scientific committee of International cultural routes, CIIC-ICOMOS. October 2004