

British Railway Company Cancellations of the Ottoman Empire in Western Anatolia

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JAMES WHITWALL, who was knighted by the Queen for his outstanding contributions to England's foreign trade, made the following statement regarding the construction of the railway in Western Anatolia: "The first step should be to construct the railways. Agriculture in the region will make tremendous progress once the railways are fully functioning". One of the most well-known of the 1061 English merchants in the 1850s, James Whitwall's statement would soon become reality following the construction of the Izmir-Aydın railway. At the same time, it would mark the beginning of the transfer of mail by train by British Railway companies outside Britain, and the first time that such a service would become available in the Ottoman Empire (Ref. 1).

At the turn of the 18th century, commercial relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire were concentrated in Western Anatolia. Izmir had been a very important trade centre for centuries; so much so that the British Levante company, which had many branches in locations considered strategically important, had also opened main branch in Izmir. The main factor behind this flow of British capital to the Ottomans was the role played by business companies. However, many British citizens migrating to the Izmir area also contributed substantially (Ref. 2).

British merchants corresponded with British companies for almost five years regarding the construction of a railway that would link Izmir to Western Anatolia. This correspondence resulted in the merchants finally being able to bring all the financial support needed from Britain for the construction of the Izmir-Aydın railway.

On 11 July 1856, Robert Wilkin, a famous British merchant who lived in Izmir, sent a request on behalf of Joseph Paxton, George Whytes, Augustus William Rixon and William Jackson, to the Ottoman government for a concession to be made for the construction of the railway (Ref. 3).

This request was discussed and examined in detail in Ottoman Government and on 2 August 1856, the outlines of the agreement that would be signed with the company were prepared. On 23 September 1856, it was decreed that the concession to build the railway was to be awarded to the group of British investors. One of the most important articles of the agreement was that it would be a 50 year concession, and that the company established by the British investors would be bound by Ottoman law and would be an Ottoman company. However, just a year after this concession was granted, it was relinquished to another British group who founded a new company called The Ottoman Railway Company from Izmir to Aydın in May 1857. The distance between Izmir and Aydın would be divided into three sections. The first section was from Izmir to Mount Selatin, a distance of 70 km. The second section comprised the tunnel through Mount Selatin while the third was the remaining distance from the mountain to Aydın. The Ottoman government approved of this plan and on September 1857, permission was granted for construction to begin.

28 December 1860 is an important date for railways in Izmir as this is when the Izmir-Torbalı line opened thus extending the line that started in Alsancak all the way to the Izmir province of Torbalı. The 133 km railway from Izmir to Aydın was completed on 7 June 1866 (Fig. 1).

On 4 July 1863, the Ottoman government granted a concession to build and operate a railway from Izmir to Cassaba (modern day Turgutlu). This concession was awarded to an English company called the Smyrna Cassaba Railway (SCR) which had been founded for this purpose by Mr. Edward Price. Price was hardly a novice. He was one of the pioneers of railway construction in England having worked alongside distinguished names such as Isambard Brunel and Robert Stephenson (Ref. 4).

The Smyrna Cassaba Railway company began construction in 1864 and the line was completed in



Figure 1. Commencement if the Smyrna Aidin Railway.

1866 despite suffering severe financial setbacks. In 1866, the stock market crashed which led to the collapse of railway shares including those of the SCR. The last part of the construction was financed by borrowing instead of selling shares which placed a great strain on Price's finances.

The SCR was awarded a second concession in 1871 for the extension of the line to Alaşehir. However, this concession was for operation only, as the line was being built by the Ottoman government. The company won a third concession for the Manisa-Soma line in 1887 which was completed in 1890. However, construction was once again funded by the Ottoman government.

The Ottoman government was always in need of finances and decided to nationalize the structure of the Smyrna Cassaba Railway. It exercised its right to purchase the concession and the part of the line it did not yet own. The concession was then sold to Nagelmackers, the founder of the International Sleeping Car Company, on 17 February 1893. On 12 July 1893, the railway operation was transferred to a new French company, the Société Ottomane du Chemin de fer de Smyrne-Cassaba et Prolongements (SCP), which was founded on 16 July 1893 (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Map of Izmir-Aydın railway and Smyrna Cassaba Railway.

It has been discovered that between 1865 and 1869, mail which was transported by rail from the central train stations operated by the British Railway companies were stampless while the rate was paid to a company official based at the station. It is also evident that money was sent via railways as it was thought to be more secure. Mail would be delivered to the nearest operating station for lines which were not on the railway route or which were still under construction. It is known that the British Company would also offer the services of a horse and cart to deliver the mail to its final destination (Ref. 5).

Four varieties of cancellations have been determined, Types 1 to 4 (Figs 3 to 6).



Figure 3. (Type 1) Double oval framed cancellation: O.R.C / POSTAGE PAID / SMYRNA AGENCY. Folded bilingual cover sent from Smyrna to Baidir.

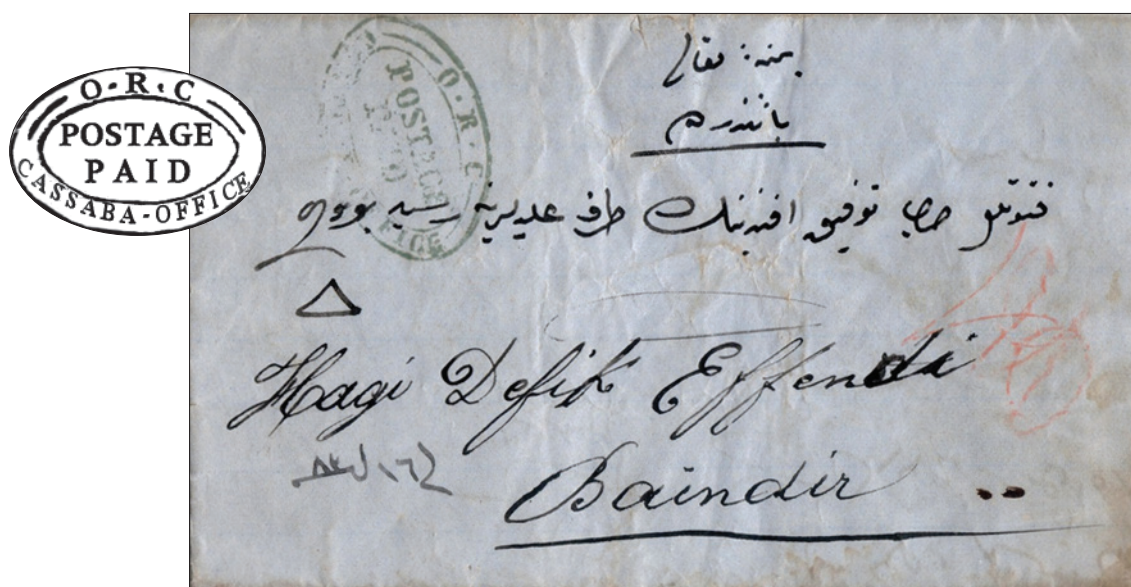


Figure 4. (Type 2) Double oval framed cancellation: O.R.C. / POSTAGE PAID / CASSABA-OFFICE. Folded bilingual cover sent from Smyrna to Baidir. Rate of 40 paras was noted in red pencil.



Figure 5. (Type 3) Single oval framed cancellation. The handstamp comprises a fine crescent moon and star. There is a concave, thick band above with O.R.C. below, the crescent and star in the middle and SMYRNA at the bottom. There are small symmetrical stars at both ends of the oval. Folded bilingual cover sent from Smyrna to Baidir. Rate of 40 paras was noted in brown ink.



Figure 6. (Type 4) Double oval framed cancellation: S&C.R. / POSTAGE PAID / CASSABA
This cancellation has a thinner frame. Note the four-pointed stars.

The postage rate (40 para) is handwritten separately on the envelopes. Examples using red, blue and black ink have been discovered. Some envelopes are addressed using both the Latin and Ottoman alphabets. On the other hand, some are addressed using only the Ottoman alphabet whilst others are also bilingual, but use Latin and Greek alphabets. The numbers in the upper left hand corner are thought to indicate the rate. "Postage Cover" (P.C.) is initialled by hand. Some envelopes are marked with talisman symbols which were believed to bring good fortune.

The stations on the Izmir to Aydın railway are Izmir (Punta Station), Kemer, Paradiso, Gazîemir, Triyanda, Torbalı, Ayaslug, Balatçık Station, Değirmencik, Kara Pınar and finally, Aydın Station (Ref 5).

Postage material from this time is extremely rare. The earliest one dates from January 1863 whilst the latest material dates to 1869. It has been determined that the routes of the envelopes were Izmir-Bayındır, Turgutlu-Izmir, and Izmir-Turgutlu.

The stations north of Izmir are Izmir Cassaba Station, Halka Pınar, Karşıyaka Station, Magnisa Station, Kasaba Station, Sart Station, Banaz Station and finally, Afyon Kara Hisar (Izmir Station).

The material presented here is unique as the concession agreement decreed that the revenue generated by the postal services was to be audited by the Ottoman government. The fact that these cancellations belong to the British companies who built the railways and that mail was transported on the trains can be considered proof that the investing company did not abide by the concession agreement in the early years. However, this period was considerably short as later on, numbered railway cancellations on Ottoman stamps began to be used.

The envelopes and cancellations are extremely important as they herald the start of postal services on the Asia Minor railways which were constructed and financed by British companies outside Britain.

References

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