

Bridges as Legacy of the Past and Symbolic Elements of Today's Landscape: Varda Viaduct in Adana, Turkey

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Abstract

Last half of 19th century marks the presence of railway system for the first time in Anatolia. It was the time of late Ottoman era on Anatolian lands when the boundaries of the Empire still stretched partially from Macedonia on the west to Baghdad, Hijaz and Egypt on the east and south. Constructing a railway system that connects these edges was one of the solutions thought to work in order to maintain control over Ottoman lands witnessing rebellions. Following a few attempts by Ottomans, all railways were constructed by foreign initiatives such as British, German and French firms and capital. Among them, the Berlin-Baghdad railway was one of the significant routes built between 1903 and 1940 with privileges given to German firms.

A major part of this route crossed through Anatolia from northwest to southeast, where the Taurus mountain range challenged the technical team as the most difficult landscape to come over. In order to cross a deep canyon of a creek on the mountain range in Adana province of Turkey, the construction of Varda Viaduct was planned, together with a self-sufficient settlement camp for the engineers and workers in charge of the construction. The camp settlement comprised of hospital, church, school, movie theatre and a mosque. It took thirteen years to complete all details from 1903 to 1916, when the first train crossed the viaduct that spans 172 meters. The structure was built 98 meters high on the masonry pillars having eleven ashlar arch spans with the help of false steel framework.

Today, the viaduct is still in service and known to be one of the symbolic elements in the landscape with the remains of the settlement around it. It is an important touristic destination in the vicinity, scene for wedding photography and was also featured in James Bond film Skyfall in 2012. In order to contribute to the limited studies on the Varda Viaduct, this research aims at re-defining the significance of the structure not only as an engineering product, but also as a witness of cultural, political, commercial connections in the past together with its meaning for the actual local community.