

Great Inventions of the 19th Century / Transportation

In Europe, the main impetus to the development of transport had been given by the Industrial Revolution to bring together two physically separated components: the industrial centres and the natural resources. The changes in transport affected relations between Europe and the Arab and Ottoman world. In general, innovations in transportation were celebrated with a deep trust in the triumph of progress. Contacts, travelling and trade became easier. However, both local policy and the international context also affected transport. Concessions were a way for European powers to enter Arab and Ottoman regions; the concessions' controversial presence was either accepted, as a way to speed up modernisation, or refused, as an obstacle to independence. Transport improved communication but at the same time it was a means to control and penetrate entire regions. The introduction of steamships and railways and the building of a network of roads vastly accelerated communication both outside and within the region.



Working Number: FR 023
Name: Panoramic view of the Isthmus of the Suez, tracing the canal between the two seas
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1855
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Louis Maurice Adolphe Linant de Bellefonds, also known as Linant Bey, was a French painter, traveller and explorer. In Egypt, he collaborated with Muhammad 'Ali Pasha and Sa'id Pasha and was appointed as director of the public works. He was one of the experts the governors hired in order to acquire technical know-how.



Working Number: JO 055
Name: Hijaz Railway Medal
Holding Museum: Numismatic Museum (Ahli Bank)
Date: 1900
Materials: Nickel
Curator Justification: The Hijaz Railway was built by Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid from 1900 (the fifth anniversary of his accession) onwards. Medals were given to the people whose donations contributed to the building of the railway.



Working Number: GR 019
Name: Works for the opening of the Corinth Canal
Holding Museum: Benaki Museum
Date: c. 1885
Materials: Albumen print
Curator Justification: The idea of the canal was revived after Greece gained independence in 1830 but soon abandoned for economic reasons. It was formally inaugurated on 23 April 1882. The canal was designed by the Hungarian engineer Béla Gerster with the assistance of the French Vincent Dauzats, a chief engineer of the Suez Canal.



Working Number: FR 018
Name: Panorama of the Compagnie Transatlantique (French Line).
Holding Museum: The "La Ville de Rome" steamer leaving the port of Algiers via Montenard
Date: National Library of France
Materials: 1889
Curator Justification: -
The French Compagnie Transatlantique was set up by the Pereire brothers. The company provided steamers to connect France with North Africa and Algeria in particular.



Working Number: TR2 072
Name: Silverware used on the Orient Express
Holding Museum: Istanbul Railway Museum
Date: 19th century
Materials: Metal
Curator Justification: The Orient Express evokes ideas of luxurious and innovative transport, long journeys and fascinating cities. The train connected Paris to Istanbul and its first journey was inaugurated in 1883. Its terminal in Istanbul was Sirkeci railway station, on the European side of the city beside Topkap# palace and Eminönü port.



Working Number: FR 132
Name: Illustrated guide and timetable for travelling in the Orient.
Holding Museum: Featuring description of Constantinople and the most important cities in Turkey, Egypt, Greece, etc.
Date: National Library of France
Materials: 1909
Curator Justification: -
The development of communication routes facilitated the development of tourism in the "Orient" and all its related services. This document is a general timetable with a list of Romanian steamers connecting with the Orient Express.



Working Number: JO 006
Name: Amman Railway Station
Holding Museum: -
Date: 1903
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The Hijaz Railway, built by the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid with the support of Germany, eased pilgrimage to the holy places of Islam. It also had other purposes: control of the Arab tribes and lands in northern Arabia and providing alternative commercial routes not controlled by the British Empire and its allies.



Working Number: DE 007
Name: Bayt al-Barudi steamship murals, Damascus
Holding Museum: Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, State Museums
Date: 1880-1925
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Cities on the Euphrates or Tigris experienced drastic changes, flourishing even more after the invention of the steamships. This impact led to numerous depictions of steamships in artwork, as shown in this mural. As symbols of the new era they represent the global exchange of goods, ideas and people.



Working Number: SP 055
Name: The First Train in Spain: Inaugurated 28 October 1848
Holding Museum: National Museum of Decorative Arts
Date: 1848
Materials: Dashboard; ink, watercolour
Curator Justification: This poster was created for the inauguration of the railway connecting Barcelona and Matarò (two important industrial hubs) in Spain. The poster highlights the deep impact of technology on the popular imagination, showing both the railway and a steamship in the background, as a celebration of a new era deeply transformed by technological innovations.



Working Number: PT 011
Name: The private carriage of Queen Maria Pia
Holding Museum: National Railway Museum of Portugal
Date: c. 1853
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The train was seen as a modern means of transport, highlighted by the fact that as an innovation it reflected the social structures of the period. In the mid-19th century, European sovereigns had their own private carriages, a visible expression of their power and modernity.



Working Number: IT2 026
Name: Poster for the International Exhibition of Milan, 1906, depicting the opening of the Simplon Tunnel
Holding Museum: State Library of Modern and Contemporary History
Date: 1906
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The opening of the Simplon Tunnel between Italy and Switzerland in 1906 is used as a striking image on the poster advertising the Milan International Exhibition. As similar works of those years show, technical innovations were exalted with an optimistic trust in progress.



Working Number: IT1 058
Name: An example of Italian colonial propaganda describing 'The first railway engine crossing Libya, causing astonishment and panic among the Arabs'
Holding Museum:
Date: Enrico Sturani Private Collection
Materials: 1910s
Curator Justification: -

This postcard of Italian colonial propaganda depicts the supposed effect of the introduction of trains on the population in Libya. The picture shows how a colonising country demonstrates its 'superior' technology and the 'civilisation' brought to the colonised territories.



Working Number: DZ 114
Name: The Algiers-Oran line
Holding Museum: Musée National des Beaux-Arts
Date: 1884
Materials: Reprinted and coloured
Curator Justification: This cartoon shows a satirical response to the redeeming idea of "progress" spread around the world in those years. At the same time, it is a vivid portrait of an event in the French colony by a so-called pied noir (a French person born in Algeria).



Working Number: TN 066
Name: La Goulette
Holding Museum: Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie
Date: 1861
Materials: Paper
Curator Justification: The port of La Goulette was restored by Muhammad al-Sadiq Bey as part of his programme of reforms to reinforce the economy, administration and military power of the Regency of Tunis. The aim was to make the port of Tunis a modern port for ships of big tonnage, connected to railways and other infrastructure.



Working Number: FR 016
Name: View of Istanbul: the Valide Sultan Mosque and the port
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 19th century
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The port of Eminönü developed in the 19th century as a modern landmark in the centre of Istanbul, where both ancient and modern buildings – mosques, palaces and Sirkeci station for the Orient Express – were located.
