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## THE MAP OF THE VILAYET OF THE DANUBE, 1869

КАРТАТА НА ДУНАВСКИЯ ВИЛАЕТ, 1869 г.

### Introduction

My introduction to Bulgaria began as an urban planner working on a joint UN/EU project for urban renovation and tourism inc. many historic buildings and sites – churches, schools, roman forts, across the country – this started in 1998, which were some of the hardest years of transition after the changes. I subsequently stayed on in Bulgaria for 12 years, later setting up my own property business and alongside more commercial project, continued working on restoring historic buildings when opportunities arose.

But the starting point for the research was the four years I was based in the Municipality of Rousse working in the UN project office. Early on I came across gravestones of 2 British army officers **dated 1854** in the main town square – the gravestones described how these soldiers of the Royal Engineers had been killed – ‘whilst on leave from their regiment in India, leading a troop of gallant Turkish soldiers against a superior Russian force in Giurgiu’ (Romania).

**Globalisation not new** then? Bulgaria/Romania/India/Turkey/Russia/England...

The two soldiers were the first British soldiers to be killed in the Crimean War – one has a famous brother – James Burke who went to explore Australia. Both were born in Ireland, which introduces another 2 countries into the story! The other Meynall – came from the village of Langley Meynall, Leicestershire and his family still lives there, and has done since 11<sup>th</sup> century Norman invasion – 2 gravestones illustrating the connections 150 years ago of at least 9 modern states.

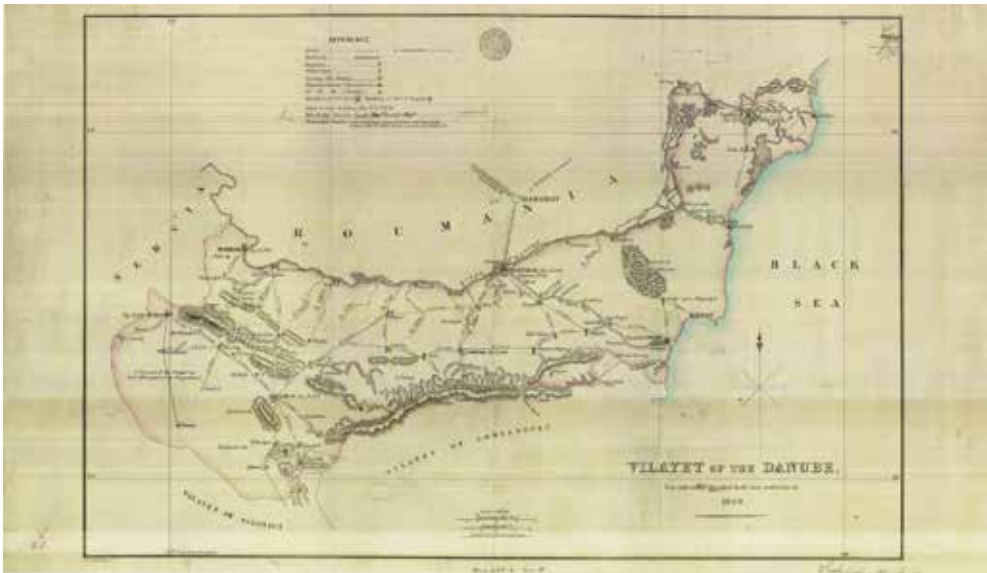
Began a search into the history of the town, and in particular the British connection, which to me was quite unknown. The PRO holds a very interesting collection of papers and correspondence from the British Consul in Rustchuk in the 19<sup>th</sup> C, and as part of my search I also began looking into the archives at the RGS and last year came across this map, which I wanted to talk on today. This paper is to be published this year in **Town-Ethnology-Socialism, Bulletin of the XIII National Ethnographical Conference, (Ruse, 2011).**

### 1. The map

This paper explores a map of the Vilayet of the Danube, which was produced in 1869 which is held by the Royal Geographical Society in London, and was deposited there in 1870. The Vilayet was a standard administrative region of the Ottoman Empire, established in 1864 and had as a main centre Rustchuk (modern day Rousse). The map itself is made by a British cartographer, EC Oulet, and although we don't know for sure, is likely to have been commissioned by Sir Robert Dayell who was Her Majesty's Consul at Rustchuk during this time.

The Royal Geographical Society in London was established in 1830 to further the knowledge and science of geography, and holds one of the largest collections of maps in the world. Over the years the collections have been added to by explorers, geographers, historians, soldiers and diplomats.

The Map entitled 'Vilayet of the Danube 1869' is of interest not just for the **geographical** information but for the **historical, political and cultural clues it contains including something of the cultural relations between Britain and Turkey-in-Europe at this time.** As one studies the map, it raises a series of questions – and at the same time – sheds light on the conditions and circumstances of life in the region at a period of ten years prior to Bulgaria's liberation. It is essentially a **snapshot in time** of an era, which was shortly due to pass, and where the territory in question would see the re-emergence of a Bulgarian nation, after centuries of Ottoman rule. In 1869 – when this map was made – the liberation of Bulgaria was by **no means a certainty**, and the map itself gives clues to this as discussed below.



## 2. The Map's origins

The Map itself was most likely commissioned by the British Consul in Rustchuk. The Consul at the time was Sir Robert Alexander Osborn Dayell, a Scottish aristocrat from a line of Barons. (His descendent, Tam Dayell MP was until very recently one of the UK's longest serving Members of Parliament – famous for badgering Margret Thatcher, esp over the sinking of the Argentinian ship , the Belgrano, sinking during the Falklands War.)

The presence of Sir Robert as Her Majesty's Consul to the Ottoman Empire in Rustchuk is symbolic of the **importance** to which the British government attached to the town, as strategic location within the Ottoman Empire, and the seat of the Turkish Governor-General for the entire Vilayet. This was not a consular 'backwater' - such locales were at places

like Sulina and Galatz where the Vilayet saw more junior vice-consuls appointed. The map illustrates quite clearly that Rustchuk was an important political centre (plus administrative, military, strategic river point etc), as well as an important interface between Christian and Muslim Europe.



The map itself exists as a plan of approximately 45 x 80 cm and covers the whole of the area of the Ottoman administrative region known as the ‘Vilayet of the Danube’.

### 3. So what does the map do?

One important function is that the map defines the actual borders of the Vilayet, which consisted of an area bounded to the north by the River Danube, stretching from Vidin in the west, along to Sulina on the eastern side at the Danube Delta and the Black Sea – to the east bounded by the Black Sea as far south as River Kamchik (modern day Kamchia). The Stara Planina Mountains form the southern border whilst the western border includes the area around Sofia and an area roughly approximate to the current borders of Serbia, Greece and Macedonia (FYROM).

The political dominance of Rustchuk is confirmed by the symbol of ‘Residence of the Gov’r Gen’l’ (Governor General) – Mithat Pasha at this time – and six towns indicated as the ‘Residence of Gov’r of Sanjak’ (the Turkish district governors answerable to the Governor General in Rustchuk) – Sofia, Nisch (Nis), Widdin (Vidin), Tirmova (Tarnovo), Varna and Tultcha.

But the existence of the map raises a number of interesting questions. **The first question to ask is why it was actually commissioned?** We can conclude that no similar map ex-

isted – at least in English – and that it fulfilled a need for compiling the information contained thereon. The level of detail shown on the map indicates that it would not be used necessarily for navigation, or cross-country travel. The level of details (lack of contours, land details, paths and tracks, etc incomplete information of all villages) are inadequate for navigation. This seems to indicate that it is the equivalent of a modern road map – in other words it tells you the basic locations of the major settlements and the distances (or time) required to travel between them. In this sense, for the purpose of the Consulate it would be ideal for planning travel within and around the Vilayet, which would be an occasional consular function.

The very creation of the map also suggests a ‘British imprint’ and perhaps supports Said’s views of the colonial attitude toward ‘other places’ which cannot really exist unless they ‘mapped out’ in a scientific way?

The RGS records also show that Sir Robert was had been a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, since 1859 whilst serving as the British Consul in Erzurum, (on Turkey’s Black Sea coast). Thus by the time he took up his post in Rustchuk in the 1860’s he had already a proven interest in geography, knowledge of the Ottoman Empire, and would have known about the existence, and quality of local maps, as well as the RGS role in cartography, and ability to assist in this task. The Society’s Accession Register (this is the register, which records the deposition of maps at the RGS archives) shows that the map was deposited there in 1870 – one year after it was produced. The map was deposited by its author [E.C Oulet ‘fecit’ – ‘made by’] whose name appears at the very bottom left hand side corner of it. The author, Mr Oulet, worked for the RGS as a Map Curator from around 1857 onwards, and is known to have produced at least 20 other maps between 1857 and 1869. It is also known that Oulet produced maps and copies from material sent to the RGS. It is therefore quite likely that the map was produced in London from information gathered and dispatched to him from the Consul at Rustchuk.

(The map itself states that it was produced ‘From information furnished by the local authorities, etc’. Hence the author may have never in fact visited the Vilayet himself but prepared the map in London based entirely on information provided to him from abroad. One assumes that in addition to the copy of the map deposited in London additional copies were then sent to the Consul at Rustchuk. (Note: The map was presented to the head of archeology and Director of Rouse Museum who had never seen the map) It is possible that a copy of the map stayed in rouse from 1869 until the liberation in 1878. It is known that in 1878, the British consulate was damaged by a Russian shell during the bombardment of Rustchuk, and that HM Consul at that time (Mr Reade) had to depart in somewhat of a hurry. It’s interesting to suggest that until last year - possibly the last copy of this map in Rustchuk was destroyed at that time, or hurriedly packed by Mr Reade as he fled south?

#### **4. Place names and politics**

Since the map has been produced in English there is also some transliteration which has been used to convert either Turkish (Arabic script) or Bulgaria (Cyrillic) place names into English. Hence slight variations such as ‘Widdin’ for ‘Vidin’ are more likely to denote

decisions on alphabet rather than a change of name. In other cases – such as Rustchuk – the name of the town has been altered to Rousse after the War of Liberation (1877–1878).

One noticeable and significant omission is that the term ‘Bulgaria’ is not used to describe any part of the territory. While neighbouring Romania and Serbia are both described in their contemporary forms, the state of Bulgaria would not emerge for some ten years hence. The use of the word Bulgaria was politically sensitive at the time – though in use by some, it would have been linked to insurgents and the growing nationalist movements within the Ottoman Balkan territories – the British map makers have therefore chosen the official term of Vilayet of the Danube in keeping with the official Ottoman region.

Also, various small towns and villages are indicated as having Turkish names which today have Bulgarian names (e.g. Torlak is now Tsar Kaloyan). Clearly in some cases the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire created a Bulgarisation of places names. But interesting not in all cases – Trastenik – a predominantly Turkish village outside Rousse bears a similar name – ‘Tirsenik’ – and the variation maybe due to translation, pronunciation or just time rather than a political decision to change the name, as is clear in the case of Tsar Kaloyan which was given the name of a medieval Bulgarian King to establish Bulgarian dominance.

Whilst some names have undoubtedly altered for political reasons, others have evolved or perhaps the author making the map thousands of miles away was simply making errors. For example, the Stara Planina Mountains are shown as a small mountain group to the north-west of Sofia and not a lengthy mountain range, which it represents. ‘Mt Hemus’ is indicated where today we would refer to the Stara Planina Mountain range. Mt Hemus is of course now Mt Botev, one of the leading revolutionaries.

In cases such as Tirnova (Tarnovo – without the ‘Great’) and Widdin (Vidin), the spellings probably reflect the problems of translating into English rather than any changes in the names of the towns in an official sense.

4 things going on: Actual changes reflecting political change ii) Slight changes (i.e. Rustchuk) to reduce Turkish sounds iii) difference due to spelling/alphabets i.e. Widdin, and iv) slight alterations/mistakes.

**Also not complete and many villages missing.**

## **5. Town and populations**

The map indicates the location and population sizes of the major cities in Bulgaria, which remain largely the same as today – Sofia, Varna, Rustchuk (Rousse), Tirnova (Tarnovo) and Widdin (Vidin). Aside from the low populations which existed in the region at this time, the most striking point is the relative sizes between the sizes of the towns which have altered the most – here, Rustchuk is the largest town in the Vilayet enjoying a population of 20,644 compared to Sofia’s 14,444. Varna’s is also larger than Sofia at 15,402. Indeed the second largest town is indicated as Widdin (Vidin) with a population larger than Sofia of 15,278. This is clearly a reflection of Rustchuk’s importance as an Ottoman regional capital, its location on the Danube and as an important political, trading and military post. The size of Vidin in relation to other settlements must also reflect its importance then in economic terms as a Danube city – and indeed the importance of the Danube as a centre for growth – in

contrast today it sometimes feels as if Bulgaria and Romania have turned their backs on the river Nis (16,497 population) in modern Serbia is also seen a significant town in the Vilayet.

The map also gives an insight into the scale of population increase - the total population for the 5 major towns (Sofia, Varna, Tirnova, Rustchuk and Widdin) in 1869 is approximately 78,000 compared to the approximately 3-4 million today. In considering these population sizes we must bear in mind that the ways of recording inhabitants is not mentioned and therefore it is not clear exactly what these population figures represent – for example does it include permanent residents only, or also military and temporary residents. Given that Rustchuk was a fortress town it is possible that there were soldiers based in the garrison here, which may or may not have been included in the census. Of significance are the relative decline of Rustchuk (Rousse) and Widdin (Vidin) and the population growth of Sofia, after its designation as the capital of the new Bulgarian state.

## 6. Times and distance

One of the most interesting elements of the map is the way it indicates distances and travel times between towns and places. What is **most fascinating** is the units used – both ‘Statute Miles’<sup>1</sup> (English Miles) and ‘Turkish hours’ are used to denote distance. A Turkish hour is indicated as equal to  $3 \frac{1}{4}$  Statute miles (or around 5.2 km).

It is unclear exactly how a Turkish hour was used but it is reasonable to assume a ‘Turkish hour’ indicates a unit of time to travel. My own opinion is that it is the average distance travelled by a horse at a walking pace – since 5.2 km an hour is too fast for a man on foot, and when travelling a longer distance it would be sensible to be using horse or animal transport of some kind. Furthermore, we know that the roads were of poor quality and that 5.2 km/hour is quite reasonable speed for horse and horse drawn vehicles.

The very imagine of ‘Turkish hours’ gives an impression of a slow, ambling donkey plodding along an Ottoman dusty track in 35 degrees – the lack of hard data about distance, gives a sense that ‘time’ is more favoured than hard scientific data such as miles. Miles are precise, but time is variable and depends on the person, the horse, the weather..... it can be seen as a more loose concept. But in fact even today we commonly use ‘time’ as a function of distance to express travel, where the time is more relevant. For example, in Rousse we talk about ‘driving 4 hours to Sofia’ rather than driving 230 km or we might describe a ‘2.5 hour flight’ between Sofia and London rather than flying 2,000 miles.

Thus, despite the loose and vague data, which is appears at first, the use of Turkish hours to express travel between towns is perfectly understandable given the journey times involved. It is also assumed that this is a distance unit used by the Ottomans themselves.

The map shows the extent to which travel across the Vilyet was an extremely slow process, compared to modern travel. For example, in 1869 the journey from Rustchuk to Tirnova consists of an 18-hour trip (4 hours to Tirsunik, 5 onto Bela (Byala) and a further 9 hours to Tirnova). For the 19<sup>th</sup> century traveller, planning a trip, this is far more useful information than to express the distance in Miles (or km).

Interestingly one can imagine that in summer Rustchuk to Tirnova would be a two-day journey with a stopover for feeding and resting man and horse. In winter, even more time

would be needed, and one can conclude that travelling was undertaken when necessary and sparingly, with a high degree of organization and preparation, and of course a similarly long return journey.

Rustchuk to Sofia indicates a journey of some 55 hours - which if broken down into 10 hours sections still requires 4-5 days travel for a one way trip - or if taken in one non-stop coach changing horses en route - at least a couple of days. Thus, the map shows how very far apart such places would seem and how little direct or face to face contact and communication people might have had with those outside their own towns and villages.

## 7. The Rustchuk-Varna railway

Interestingly, one function of the map is to **emphasise the importance and speed** of the new Rustchuk-Varna railway, which is described further below.

It is at this point that the advantages of rail travel become clear. It is **highly significant** perhaps that this map was produced one year after the completion of Bulgaria's first railway line from Rustchuk to Varna (opened in 1866 with British finance and technical support). The new line is shown on the map, and follows the same routing as the railway line from Rousse to Varna today.

The railway would have provided a greatly improved method of travel between the two towns. The old pre-railway route can be measured as 36 Turkish Hours - in other words up to 3 days of travel by horse drawn wagon. The new railway brought Varna within 4-5 hours of Rustchuk by train assuming a speed of 35 mph (50 km/hour). Even if rail speeds were slower, the journey was a significant time saving both for cargo and passengers, and one assumes also in terms of safety and immunity from weather conditions and other uncertainties - perhaps providing all year round travel as well in place of seasonal travel. It is also significant that Rustchuk-Varna rail link is indicated in geographical miles rather than Turkish hours - an indication that the railway brought a more modern way of judging distance than the older traditional time systems.

The rail link here provided both a significant trade advantage and also a military one linking the ottoman fortress town of Rustchuk directly with the Black Sea port of Varna. Bearing in mind the long term investment and planning required it can be assumed that the Ottoman authorities did not see the liberation of Bulgaria ten years later as either likely or inevitable. Too often in history, we look back at events as a seemingly inevitable flow of events. So a liberated and free Bulgaria would have seemed as inconceivable to the Ottoman authorities in 1869, as the end of the Socialist Republic and membership of EU and NATO did to the Communist leaders in 1979.

So the map provided a great piece of promotional work for British railways, and the 'insertion' of the railway line (measured in Miles) compared to the other distances (in Turkish hours) provides a good advert for railway builders and their investors. (Note Treaty of Berlin...the obligations of the new Bulgarian state to make payments due under Ottoman authorities were discussed in great detail).

## 8. Other features

The map reference also indicates a range of infrastructure such as the location of roads, railroads, hospitals, and telegraph stations (indicating ‘Turkish’ and ‘international’). There are nine international telegraph stations across the whole of the Vilayet, of which seven are located along the Danube or at the Black sea coast – the two exclusions being Shumla and Nische. Inland area, therefore, was relatively cut off from direct international communication. The remaining telegraph stations are indictonated as ‘Turkish’ presumably for internal communication within the Ottoman Empire. Interestingly, ‘orphanages’ were also selected by the author for inclusion. From this, one assumes they have some significance to the times as one would not normally expect such information on a standard map.

The nature of such maps is they provide an outsiders view on what is important and necessary for the user to know. In this case it is clearly a basic but view of this territory, which was at the time part of an Empire stretching from Tripoli to Rustchuk, though an Empire which was shortly to begin to shrink and within 50 years to completely collapse.

A fascinating and slightly amusing annotation appears in italics in the left hand corner of the Vilayet, due west of Sofia. It reads: ‘*This part of the Vilayet has been little explored by Geographers*’, – the and perhaps gives the biggest an indication of the view of the British at this time – if it’s not mapped by us, it don’t exist! Such a view might be more expected on a colonial map of darkest Africa, not European continent... No doubt, the local population would have differed in their opinion.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Statute Miles was defined by an English Act of Parliament in 1592, and became the standard miles throughout the USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand as well as the United Kingdom and is about 1,609 metres).