The novelty that this volume contributes to the research on both urban and territory history lies in its very theme, scope and the careful attention paid to all the facets of the key components regarding the modernisation of the “Old Kingdom” of Romania between the second half of the 19th century and World War I. The entire corpus of works on Romanian railways that was published until today particularly focuses on technical issues (railway rolling stock, infrastructure). Although important, such works do not circumscribe this phenomenon that is vital to the country’s modernisation by a broader and extremely complex background, which includes urban planning, territory planning and interventions on towns), architecture (the formal and stylistic pursuits of the railway buildings, primarily the train station buildings), its impact on civilisation and the collective mentality of the age, on its culture, etc. In his book, Toader Popescu opens up this broader and well-articulated perspective that tracks down the evolution of ideas related to railway transport and their actualisation, from catching up with the Western experience to the development of a local mentality expressed through discourse, doctrine and specific practice.

The volume consists of three parts, articulated in a well-defined structure, and illustrating the three major aspects of the relationship between railway and environment, as follows: The Territory, The Town, The Railway Station; they all proceed into a deeper understanding of the importance of the railway for modern Romania. Toader Popescu begins his inquiry in 1842, when the first documented intention to build a railway in Moldova was expressed, and continues until 1916, when Romania entered World War I.

In the first part, The Territory, the author discusses the relationship between railway and territory – a national territory on the point of being defined as such, i.e. according to its modern meaning. The railway and everything connected to it rightfully support the shaping of a national territory, simultaneous with the political actions in progress during the 19th century in regards to the forming of the Romanian state, actions that materialised in the 1859 Unification between Wallachia and Moldova. Being consistent with his proposed perspective, Toader Popescu analyses all the proposals of railway routes, starting with the one first documented in Moldova in 1842. This opens the road to several proposals that, until 1869, remain at this stage. The author points out that until that date, i.e. until 1869, after the Unification, the railway proposals were launched separately in Moldova and Wallachia; this suggests the lack of general public awareness regarding this subject. The author delineates the evolution of these intentions followed by major achievements in succeeding stages as follows: 1842-1859, an exploratory stage, with authors belonging to both the public domain of the Principalities and private persons; 1859-1869, when the initiative not only belongs to the private domain exclusively, but also to the newly created state, that formulates the legislation and implements certain mechanisms by request of the private domain; this stage ends with the inauguration of the first railway in the Principalities, namely the one between Bucharest (Filaret railway station) and Giurgiu; 1869-1879, when the major network is acquired on leasing terms, with H. B. Strussberg as major leaseholder; the 1879-1901 period, which the author defines as “the golden age” of railways, witnesses an actual construction boom – approximately half the length of the railways being built during the antebellum period – a time when the entire process of planning, designing, realisation and exploitation was carried out by the Romanian state; finally, during the last stage, until Romania’s entering the war, the pace of building less important railway connections has considerably slowed down; likewise, certain attempts of decentralisation failed to materialise. The stages delineated by the author include, in a broader synthesis, not only the intentions and the actual materialisation of the railways, but also the major groups interested in this action (whether private entities or the state), their goals, and the development of the planning mechanisms.

The author also marks some of the crucial effects on the territory following the emergence of the railways: local alterations through the modification of the farming land due to railway construction and its related elements, such as tunnels, bridges and engineering works of art; the restructuring of several road networks under certain circumstances; the reshuffling of the city hierarchy according to

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1 This study elaborates on the author’s doctoral thesis presented at ‘Ion Mincu’ University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest (under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Arch. Ana Maria Zahariaide).