



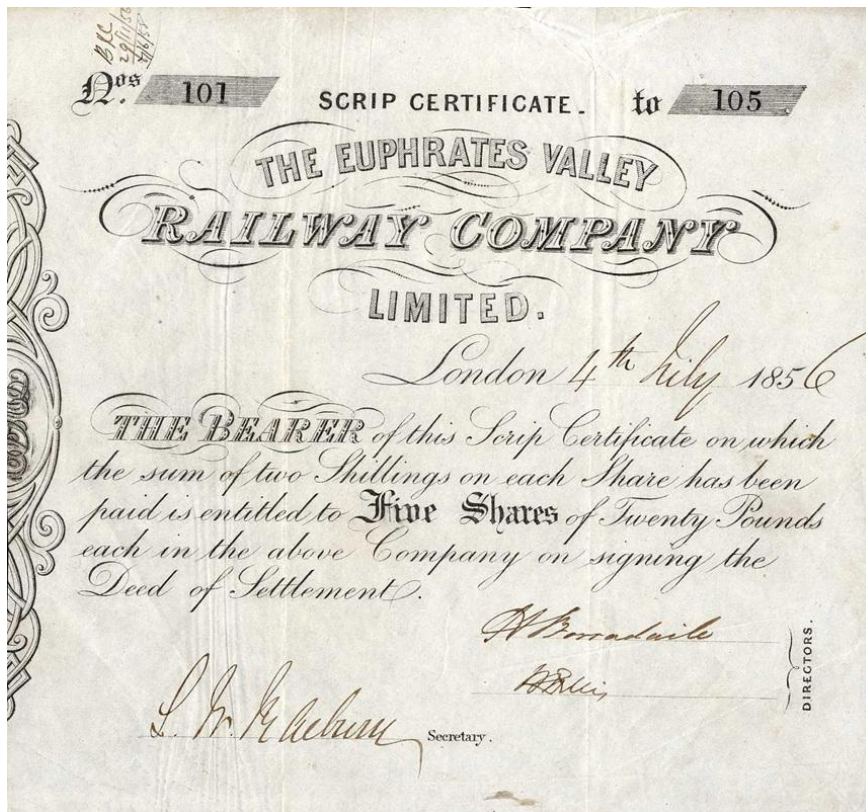
43rd Levantine Heritage Foundation Zoom lecture with guest speaker Darina Martykánová  
5 May 2026, 6.00 pm (UK time)

## Mysterious M. Falkowski: Railways and informal imperialism in the Ottoman Syria and Iraq

Since the Crimean War, Constantinople buzzed with foreign engineers. The Ottoman Empire's participation in an international alliance against Russia and the involvement of the Ottoman government in the global financial markets sped up the integration of the Ottoman domains into the world economy, which included an increased activity of foreign investors and a growing demand for technical expertise, as many of the most desirable investment opportunities were linked to technologies that were considered to require expert knowledge and skills. Mining, infrastructures such as roads, ports, railways and telegraphs, irrigation, but also urban development and manufacturing were among the most dynamic areas in which manual workers, technicians and even managers were often expected to have specific technical knowledge and skills. We tend to see engineers as useful tools of the state and of the profit-seeking capitalists, but they were much more than that. They shaped the central and municipal governments' policies concerning public works from within the administrative apparatus, but they also shaped investment and infrastructure development as partners in businesses, as investors and as employees granted a key role in decision-making. What is more, engineers intervened in public opinion, publishing letters and articles in general and professional press, appealing to the Parliament and, sometimes, actively engaging in institutional politics. Thus, the question of their allegiances, of their loyalties and of their worldview arises. Since Marx and Engels's classic works, there has been a robust discussion in history, sociology, and political science on the "nationality of capital". Is capitalism shaped by ideological stances and by national loyalties or is it, by nature, cosmopolitan, driven only by profit? The same could and should be asked for technical expertise. In my talk, I trace the career and life of an engineer linked to Poland, Russia, France, Great Britain, and the Ottoman Empire (and, indirectly, to India), to examine the notion of engineers as agents of informal imperialism.

Booking essential: <https://darina-martykanova-presentation.eventbrite.co.uk>

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Darina Martykánová is a historian who works at the Department of Modern History of the Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain. She graduated in Turcology - History and Culture of Muslim Countries from the Charles University, Prague. She is the author of *Reconstructing Ottoman Engineers. Archaeology of a Profession (1789-1914)*, Pisa 2021, and she edited a special section *Mastering the uncontrollable: The Ottomans and the use of modern technologies in History of Science* (December 2024). She is the author of many publications on the transnational history of professions, with particular focus on modern Mediterranean. She is the chair of the ICOHTC Turriano Prize for early-career researchers in history of technology.