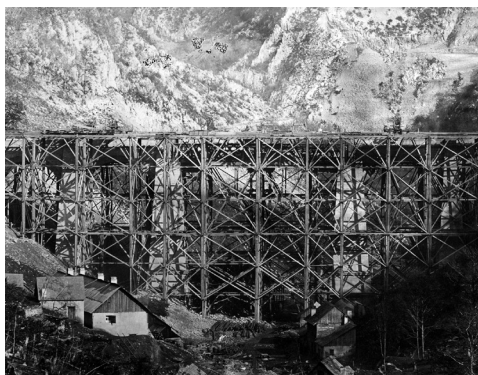


# George Bariț on Railways around the Middle of the Nineteenth Century

RADU MÂRZA



Jitin viaduct.

Photo by ANTON ROHRBACH (1863).

SOURCE: <https://www.technischesmuseum.at/museum/online-sammlung#sammlung/ui/%7B%22search%3A%22Steierdorf%7D/archive/detail/111008305>.

## Radu Mârza

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“THE IRON road” started to make its presence felt in Central Europe around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This first happened in the Austrian Empire, for the beginning in its Austrian parts, and subsequently also in its Hungarian areas. Beyond the numbers, the kilometers of railroad, the costs, and the construction materials that the official documents and the economic history provide, the testimonies of the contemporaries are very important in understanding what the development of the railroad network meant for society, for the common people.

George Bariț (1812–1893) is one of the personalities who need no introduction, at least not for the Romanian readers. He was a historian of Romanian origin, a journalist and entrepreneur active in Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó), Transylvania. At a time when the construction of railroads in Transylvania was still in the project stage, Bariț was among the first Romanians whose train travels are attested by the written sources. Before him, it seems that the first Romanians to travel by train were Petrace Poenaru (born

in Wallachia) and Ion Codru Drăgușanu (born in Transylvania), in 1831 and 1842–1843 respectively.

George Bariț was interested in the railroad from several perspectives. He was first and foremost a successful journalist, publishing his pieces in the Romanian written press of Transylvania, especially the *Gazeta de Transilvania* (Transylvanian Gazette) of Brașov. In this capacity he followed with interest the era's "hot topics," relevant for the Austrian Empire, Hungary, Transylvania, and, last but not least, for Brașov. On the other hand, he was a businessman interested in modernization, in the introduction of modern machines, willing to take business trips to Germany and Belgium for such matters. At the same time he also paid attention to elements pertaining to economic theory. From a fourth perspective, Bariț traveled and looked at the places he visited with curiosity and wrote newspaper articles and letters about his journeys, the latter often published in the press as well. I shall develop these four perspectives in what follows, in direct connection to the topic of railroads.

Throughout his life, Bariț contributed significantly to the development of the Romanian press in Transylvania, as he regarded it as a means of cultural elevation. As previously mentioned, his press articles contain many of his travel notes that can be interpreted as the

*observations of a national pedagogue who is deeply interested in everything that can be useful to his countrymen and, at the same time, of an intellectual sensitive towards the landscape, including the urban landscape and human diversity.*<sup>1</sup>

Other articles of his explicitly refer to railroads and from among them I have selected the earliest, published in 1847 and 1852 in the newspaper *Gazeta de Transilvania*. In one of these articles Bariț stated that he had previously had the occasion to travel along five railroads in Germany,<sup>2</sup> but it remains unclear when these earlier travels, previously unknown to the interpreters of Bariț biography and writings, took place.

**T**HE EARLIEST mention of the railroad probably dates back to 1838, when Bariț wrote in *Gazeta de Transilvania* about the fact that "an iron road is under construction between Vienna and Iaurin [currently Győr], which people can use to transport their goods down to the Raab River and then along the Danube." The total price of the construction amounted to 12 million crowns (he probably took this piece of information from the printed press of Pest or Vienna). The novelty resides in the footnote, where Bariț hesitantly explained that by iron road one refers to the metal rails on which the wheels turn so that they do not deviate from the track.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a close analysis of Bariț's earlier press

materials might reveal new surprises regarding the data and references to the topic of railways.

His first travels by train, well known in the existing literature, took place in 1847 and 1852. During the first trip Bariț traveled to Buda and Bratislava as a member of a delegation of the city of Braşov, aiming to lobby for the extension of the railway that linked Pest and Szeged through Arad towards Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) and Braşov, and not through Timișoara (Temeswar, Temesvár), as other interest groups desired. The delegation aimed to convince the ministerial decision-makers in Hungary to support their suggested route for the railroad.<sup>4</sup> The second trip attested in the surviving documents took place in 1852, and on that occasion Bariț traveled by train from Pest to Munich, Prague, and Dresden, with Belgium as the final destination; both travels are documented by press articles and by letters he wrote while travelling and which were subsequently published.<sup>5</sup>

Significant steps were taken in 1847 towards the introduction of railways in Hungary, and plans were already in motion for the extension of the new railroad network. The following segments were under construction or on the drafting board: Bratislava–Komárno–Pest, with a continuation towards Debrecen. Other routes were envisaged, such as Szolnok–Arad, Oradea–Tokaj, Cegléd–Kecskemét–Szeged and further to Arad or Timișoara.<sup>6</sup> The “iron road” thus reached the southern parts of the country and the line was planned to continue in the direction of Transylvania. Two variants were discussed: one along the Arad–Timișoara route towards the Danube (allowing access to the river and then to the Black Sea), the other starting from Arad—along the valley of the Mureş River—towards Sibiu and Braşov.

*The greatest difficulty will be to decide the route along which the iron road will enter Transylvania from Banat, as the site near the Mureş towards Lipova and Arad is very different from the one that crosses the Coşova to Făget. A valley opens above Dobra, starting at the village of Grind, passing by the forests of Coşova, and it seems that the road's rails can be installed here easier than near the Mureş, as the river has countless bends. Engineers are thus to decide the route of the railway, not the MPs, or the shareholders.<sup>7</sup>*

Each of the two routes suggested for the “iron road” had its supporters: the authorities of the counties and cities along the routes, interest groups (such as the city of Braşov, with Bariț one of the members of its mission), the independent press or the press affiliated to these interest groups, and last but not least the companies that were to build the railroad and their shareholders. General meetings of shareholders were organized, public meetings were held, and press articles were written on the subject.<sup>8</sup>

The series of articles that George Bariț published in *Gazeta de Transilvania* in the spring of 1847 are an excellent source for the early history of the railways in Hungary and Transylvania. As previously seen, Bariț was very much interested in everything that was happening in connection to the introduction of the railway, from several perspectives. He documented with accuracy the administrative steps, the economic aspects, but also the political interests that were put in motion for the construction and continuation of the railway. His articles do not necessarily reflect the chronological order of the 1847 events, as he obtained his information from several sources (he did take part in some of the events), but he hurried to make them all known to the readers.

As early as March 1847 a delegation of the construction company preparing the Szolnok–Arad segment traveled to Arad in order to study the most appropriate route for the continuation of the railway and to gauge the availability of the local authorities and of the settlements that would be crossed by the railway. At the same time, the mayor of Arad invited a delegation of the municipalities of Brașov and Sibiu to take part in a discussion on the same topic (he certainly invited representatives of other cities located along the future route of the railroad). A similar local meeting was organized in Brașov and those present were “unexpectedly enthusiastic.”<sup>9</sup>

The invitation from Arad reached Brașov with some delay, so the delegation of the city did not get there in time but, probably taking his information from other newspapers, George Bariț informed his readers in detail about the meeting in Arad. On 22 March 1847, in the “county hall” of Arad, Count Ferenc Zichy, the royal commissioner charged with the construction of the railways, met the representatives of the counties interested in hosting the railroad. Some of the latter, such as the delegates of the counties of Békés and Arad supported with great determination the necessity to bring the railway towards Arad and from there to Transylvania and even to “Moldo-Romania” (the Romanian Principalities). The delegates of Timișoara naturally pleaded for a route towards Banat. All those who spoke were unhappy with the contract already signed with the company building the railway and with the slowness of the procedures, and were ready to pledge that their cities would finance the construction of secondary lines from the main line towards Szeged, Arad, and Timișoara respectively.<sup>10</sup> As I shall indicate below, Bariț was realistic and understood that such an initiative involved great expenses and that the local authorities would have been unable to provide the required sums.<sup>11</sup> From Arad, Count Zichy, the royal commissioner, traveled to Timișoara and “gave the inhabitants exceedingly beautiful expectations.”<sup>12</sup>

Even if the delegation of Brașov never reached Arad in time for the meeting, it did travel to the meeting held in Bratislava on 24 April 1847; Bariț was one of the members of the Brașov delegation.<sup>13</sup> A delegation from Sibiu also took

part in the meeting. In one of his articles, Bariț ensures us that both delegations transmitted the enthusiastic message of the cities they represented in favor of the introduction of the railway.

*The trip of the delegates from Sibiu . . . to the general meeting of the shareholders of the central railways held on 24 April in Pressburg rather impressed us; however, even the most pessimistic among us started to nourish hopes when we found out that the three delegates from Braşov had passed by on 14 April . . . , and that Braşov was ready to step up in order to see the plan succeed. We heard men judging with a cool mind and saying: we are fully convinced of the endless benefits that the iron road brings; when the time comes we will spend the last kreuzer to buy shares.<sup>14</sup>*

The inhabitants of Braşov were therefore already prepared to buy shares in the company building the railway in order to support the construction of the rail line in Transylvania...

In fact, things moved much slower. At the beginning of April 1847, the general assembly of the shareholders of the railway construction company decided the route of the Cegléd–Kecskemét line that was to be continued in the direction of Szeged–Arad. Numerous rumors circulated and the inhabitants of Arad feared that the railway would bypass their town. Therefore the company sent word that they should be patient or build the rail line to Arad out of their own pockets...<sup>15</sup> The people of Arad, but also the inhabitants of Braşov and Sibiu, seem to have been, as previously indicated, enthusiastic and anxious promoters of the railway construction (“despite the fact that they will not be able to build the iron road out of their own pockets,” Bariț tells us), so they pressured the company and Count Zichy, the government representative.<sup>16</sup> Bariț felt the need to calm them down, pointing out the fact that

*This is a plan for giants, calculated at about 10 million, which cannot be completed in three days, but requires effort and years of scurrying. In Hungary, the Diet itself decided upon the matter of the railways in 1832; 15 years have passed since and the result is visible only now.<sup>17</sup>*

In May 1847, returning from Buda and Bratislava where he had gathered information on the construction of the railway and had seen the works in progress, Bariț provided a much more precise picture as compared to his March–April articles:

*The route of the central Hungarian railroad starts from the border of Austria, passes through Pressburg, on the left bank of the Danube, much of it crosses mountainous and hilly regions towards Strigonium, Vác, Pest, Cegléd, and then the Hungarian*

*Plain as far as Debrecen. Based on the published costs,<sup>18</sup> we have all seen that the entire line measuring 43 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> miles from the Austrian side to Szolnok (see the map)<sup>19</sup> is under construction in several places; the result is that some areas are completed, open, others have been started, while in other spots they are still digging.<sup>20</sup>*

These are the first steps of the project of introducing railways in Transylvania. Countering possible concerns, Bariş mentioned the very convincing example of Germany, where the idea of building railroads had been immediately welcomed:

*Two or three months prior this idea still made most people smile in derision, and we were never surprised by this. In Enlightened Germany, around 1836, one could hardly believe the railroads would be constructed; but smart men only needed 6 months to convince even the most distrustful, to energize them, and to win them over to the cause of those interested in the iron road that brings unexpected and infinite advantages...*

As we shall see below, several years later, when Bariş traveled by train to Germany and Belgium, he was able to see for himself the advantages of a developed network of railroads (by the standards of that time).

Still in 1847, in the context of his interest in the construction of the railway across Hungary and Transylvania, Bariş also presented other projects in articles he published in the *Gazeta de Transilvania*. In March 1847 there was talk in Vienna of building a railroad to Linz and then to Salzburg and Bavaria, as well as of the high profits of the company that managed steam navigation along the Danube and of the high number of travelers (790,851 travelers in 1846, 110,000 more than during the previous year).<sup>21</sup> Another railroad was about to be constructed between Oraviţa (Deutsch-Orawitz, Oravicabánya) and the Danube—envisaged to measure 8 miles in length and to be completed within two years.<sup>22</sup> This was a significant work of engineering, to be officially opened only in 1854. It was meant to be used for the transportation of coal extracted in the mines of Anina and Oraviţa (the STEG company) towards Baziaş, a small port on the Danube, where the coal was to be loaded on ships and transported further away. Passenger transport was inaugurated two years later. This railroad was inaugurated much earlier than those in Transylvania and it is the oldest in today's Romania.<sup>23</sup>

The journalist George Bariş paid attention to the issue of the actual construction of the railway and understood that the terrain it crossed dictated the route and the cost of the project. This was a challenge for the engineers who designed the railway, as they were forced to find solutions to overcome or avoid natural impediments, and the building company had to invest large sums for the difficult segments. All interested parties knew this all too well. As one can note in

the article published on 14 April 1847, two routes had been suggested for the railroad through Transylvania: the first from Arad through Coșova and Făget (Fatschet, Facsád) towards Timișoara, and the second following the meandering course of the Mureș River in the direction of Deva (Déva) and Alba Iulia (Karlsburg, Gyulafehérvár). At that time, the first route seemed easier to build from a technical perspective,<sup>24</sup> but, paradoxically, when the actual construction of the railway started two decades later, the engineers no longer thought that the meandering valley of the Mureș River was so much of a challenge. The first rail line built in Transylvania connected Arad, Deva, and Alba Iulia (it opened in 1868).<sup>25</sup> In 1847 Bariț did not fail to mention the fact that it was the engineers who had to select the most appropriate route, not the delegations of the cities or the shareholders, i.e. the groups that expressed (as one can implicitly understand from the journalist's words) subjective interests. He himself was part of such a group, but as a journalist he nevertheless reported objectively on the topic.

Returning to the relief crossed by the railroad and the costs involved, while traveling to Bratislava Bariț visited the construction site of the railway segment from Vienna through Gänserndorf and Marchegg towards Bratislava. There he had the opportunity to admire on-site two special works of engineering of that time: the viaduct called in Hungarian Vörös-híd (Germ. Rothe-Brücke, Slov. Červený most) (the original was blown up in the spring of 1945 by the retreating German army) and the tunnel at the western end of the train station in today's capital of Slovakia.<sup>26</sup> This is probably the first description of the construction of a railroad in Romanian literature:

*Thousands of hands, hundreds of carts that move, load, unload, dig, excavate, cover up, break rocks and boulders, tread and ram, cut wood, carve stone etc. etc.; the engineers, the technical personnel, the foremen inspect, give orders, encourage, argue, and remove the lazy workers. Nowhere does the wonderful liveliness of the workers create such a positive impression than right above Pressburg. There are hills with vineyards reaching as far as the woods; the settlement looks like that part of Brașov that starts from Mr. Vențel's garden and crosses the hills to St. Bartholomew's Church. There the designer first encountered a valley that could not be filled with soil and rocks as it was crossed by a rather large creek, right through the middle; the designer thus created a viaduct, which we could describe as a giant bridge set upon arches resting on 10 thick columns measuring about 3 fathoms, made only of large stone blocks weighing 2–3 hundredweights each; in the place where the valley was smaller they filled it with thousands of cartloads of soil, up to the point where the line again reached a hill; the designer then leveled the hill down to the horizontal line and subsequently continued to successively flatten and dig into the hill, reshaping it according to the needs of the project, until the point where he had to stop leveling the ground and, analyzing wisely, decided it would be cheaper not to excavate the*

*entire hill but only to dig a tunnel through it, until again reaching a flat section. He did just that: a tunnel measuring about 300 fathoms is almost ready! This was the most backbreaking work along the entire line above, and also very costly. Three miles of railroad towards Presburg together with the tunnel add up to four million silver forints! This sum is huge; on the other hand, the costs decrease considerably where the land is flat; still, great hardships await along the Danube, across the feet of the mountains, but if my eyes do not deceive me I strongly believe that in our Transylvania, along the entire line from Zam and Dobra to Braşov, one would not encounter greater difficulties than these in Upper Hungary.*<sup>27</sup>

This was land modeling, the new type of landscape crossed by the railroad that Toader Popescu referred to and that George Bariţ captured in his 1847 testimony.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, one notes that the Romanian journalist who was also a businessman also paid attention to the financial aspects that were often ignored by the public opinion (by “society”), as he wished for the railroad to be constructed as soon as possible, in order to benefit from it:

*However, society does not even ask about the hardships, as today’s skills can easily overcome them, and does not care about the capital, but its first question is: is there prosperous commerce, are there many cities along the railroad, is there a great movement of passengers . . .*<sup>29</sup>

Bariţ’s interest in the wide range of issues that the construction of the railways raised is remarkable. He returned to his concern for financial matters:

*The line between Pest and Vác is 4 ¼ miles long, and ca. 17,688 fathoms were opened until 16 July 1846, and in 5 ½ months it generated a gross income of 51,272 silver florins and 32 kreuzers, despite the fact that it passes right along the bank of the Danube and it competes with the ships. The section between Pest and Cegléd is open for the transportation of goods and it will be extended to Szolnok, i.e. 13 ¼ miles in total, in August this year at the latest. The difficult distance to Pressburg up and down will be ready mandatorily until the year 1848. On 25 April we will receive the news that Baron Rothschild will mainly invest in the line connecting Cegléd and Kecskemét. Who does not know the puszta, the blinding sands of Kecskemét?*<sup>30</sup>

Despite the high costs (the budget of the company building the railway reached 18 million florins and was certainly going to expand beyond that),<sup>31</sup> the perspectives were optimistic: “In 1 ½ years, the waggoneers will no longer have



to kill their horses in order to cross the sands of the Puszta and from there the Transylvanian travelers will reach Pest and Vienna in just a few hours,”<sup>32</sup> and the railroad would bring major benefits to Transylvania and its inhabitants: “Why wake up, why aim for communication, commerce, ideas, why not be content with the quantity of the polenta made in our country.”<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, the introduction of the railways in Transylvania took several decades. There were the 1848–1849 revolutions, and afterwards the neo-absolutist regime and the governments of Hungary had other priorities . . . The railroad only reached Arad in 1858, while the first railway line through Transylvania (Arad–Alba Iulia) was opened for circulation in 1868.<sup>34</sup>

**T**HE ARTICLES that George Bariț published in 1847 accurately reflect the concerns, debates, and fears in society, from the central level down to the “letters to the editor,” since the readers also wrote to the newspapers commenting on these latest issues.<sup>35</sup> Bariț himself, as a journalist, a political activist, and last but not least as a businessman, understood the issue of the railways in a complex way, quite remarkable for that time. He was also a theoretician who regarded the introduction of the railways from the perspective of the national economy, and even of the state and of international affairs.

Merchants were to benefit from the railway since they would be able to transport large quantities of goods and increase their profits. An important argument presented during the meeting in Arad on 22 March 1847 was precisely the “growth of commerce” that could be achieved through Arad, a city perceived at that time from the perspective of the introduction of the railway as a kind of gateway to Transylvania.<sup>36</sup> The interests of the landowners were also to be taken into consideration, as the railroad would cross their estates. Bariț was also aware of the point of view of the travelers (“personal communication”) and did not forget to mention the experience of other countries (“throughout Europe”), where it was common knowledge that the income attracted by the passenger railways was greater than that obtained from the transportation of goods.<sup>37</sup>

The perspective of the state was also taken into consideration. Bariț understood and supported the reasons why the Hungarian state (the Austrian Empire) had to manage the construction of the railroads: “Because there will be a time when the state who owns the most numerous iron roads and canals is the strongest, and such things will be greater weapons than their armed battalions.”<sup>38</sup>

In other words, in future the railway would hold strategic significance and the power of the states would be measured in miles of railway rather than in soldiers.

During the years following the events of 1848–1849, Bariț returned to his theoretical concerns related to the construction of the railways. He published press articles but also various memoirs addressed to Emperor Franz Joseph

(1860) and even to Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the ruler of the Romanian Principalities (1862). In the latter memoir he pleaded for the construction of railways in the recently united principalities.<sup>39</sup>

Regarding the Romanian Principalities, the 1847 initiative to build the railroad in Transylvania that I have mentioned above and which Bariț documented extensively also made reference to the idea of extending the network towards “Moldo-Romania.” In the same article, Bariț included pieces of information on the initiative of certain German entrepreneurs who had sent agents to Bucharest “in order to gather information concerning the construction of the iron road out of Wallachia (towards Turnu Roșu?, what will the inhabitants of Brașov say?)”<sup>40</sup> The two questions at the end of the quote highlight the competition between Sibiu and Brașov when it came to a railway connection with Wallachia, for strictly commercial reasons. Bariț very clearly stated that the metallurgical company owned by the Hoffmann family of Rusca Montană could have different interests: “The ironworks of Ruskberg owned by Hoffmann et comp. also got wind of this initiative.”<sup>41</sup>

George Bariț, a supporter of the railways, was also interested in theoretical aspects, especially the economic dimension of the railways and of transportation in general. This is a less known aspect of Bariț’s life and activity that few researchers have highlighted.<sup>42</sup> One should also mention here Vasile Netea’s older observation that Bariț’s economic education and his concern for the topic of transportation were influenced by István Széchenyi’s economic writings, which he might have known since the beginnings of his career in Blaj.<sup>43</sup>

**T**HE SECOND train trip that George Bariț took and that is attested by preserved documents took place in 1852. On that occasion he traveled on business to Belgium, taking the train from Pest towards Vienna and Munich, through Dresden and Prague. This trip is documented in a few letters that he wrote during the voyage.<sup>44</sup> It differed from the first trip that he took in 1847, which is documented in the press articles he wrote. The 1852 letters, also published in the Romanian press in Transylvania (*Gazeta de Transilvania, Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură*)<sup>45</sup> almost exclusively talk of the author’s travels by carriage, steamboat, and train. These precious memoir-style fragments do not mention the theoretical aspects of railway construction, like in 1847, nor do they mention the landscape and the nature, but rather the practical aspects of travelling, the other travelers he encountered on the train, the train stations, and certain technical details. In the very beginning of the trip by train, in Szolnok, Bariț noted the signs of the progress that the railway had triggered: “Since the iron road reached Szolnok, the main street has been paved with cobblestone down to the bridge over the Tisza River.”<sup>46</sup>

From there, he travelled along the “ironclad road” until Buda, staying at the Queen of England Hotel and visiting the city. The chain bridge made quite an impression:

*In the morning, until the time came for the train to leave, we walked to the Danube and watched in awe that wonder of Hungary that is the chain bridge over the Danube, a triumph of human craftsmanship and science, which we had wanted to see since its completion,<sup>47</sup>*

an opportunity to meditate on the importance of education, through which the nations acquire the architects, engineers, and mechanics who bring about progress. From Buda Bariç crossed by train the capital of the empire and then Munich, Dresden, and Prague, cities that he described over several pages.<sup>48</sup> In Germany he was impressed by the development of the railway network:

*Germany is currently crossed straight towards Switzerland, France, and Belgium by three main railroad lines, one longer than the other, but all three exiting from Leipzig, which functions like a hub; one of the lines crosses Saxony and Bavaria and—when it is completed (in a year)—it will end in Bodensee, Switzerland; another line goes more towards the center, across Weimar, Gotha, to Frankfurt, Mainz, and Wiesbaden, and then reaches the Rhine; finally, the third passes more to the north-west and makes a wider half circle until Cologne. I chose the latter as it is the only one completed so far and provides a continuous route to the Belgian border . . .<sup>49</sup>*

He watched with interest the other passengers. In the train to Prague he had a polite conversation with a citizen of Dresden<sup>50</sup> and somewhere in Germany he watched the travelers from a distance.

*This time I was not able to converse very much with my companions in the car, namely, a British merchant who spent his time reading and sleeping, two bragging Jewish capitalists, one of whom told me how he had fled Dresden for reasons of bankruptcy, but had been able to regain his financial standing in Brussels, and a North American, also a capitalist, who had gone from rags to riches, as he himself confessed—I had enough time left to perform more frequent observations on the very temperament and character of the Germans and to discover that everything I had read about them in the best authors is mostly true.<sup>51</sup>*

George Bariç also had an insight on an aspect that was to become important several decades later for the train travelers’ evaluation of their experience: the speed prevented them from visiting certain cities (or at least seeing them) and

prevented them from admiring the landscape. Talking about the 24 hours during which he crossed the distance between Leipzig and Cologne (500 kilometers), Bariț indicated that he could have claimed to have visited the cities of Halle and Magdeburg, since he had crossed them during the night, as it also happened with the cities of Braunschweig and Hannover.<sup>52</sup>

Like five years before, in 1852 Bariț was also interested in the technical aspects of railway construction. For example, he narrates that between Cologne and the city of Tirlmont (today Tienen, in Belgium):

*One travels through 21 tunnels, some shorter, some unexpectedly long, cut into, dug, and carved through mountains and rocks. Starting from Verviers no tunnel could be dug, so the train is raised by a steam engine set on the crest of a hill which sets in motion numerous iron wheels set close to one another along the road, which support wire ropes connected to the axles of the cars. This is yet another of the marvels achieved by the wonderful technical sciences that are still so little taken into consideration in our land.*<sup>53</sup>

This was an ingenious technical solution meant to compensate for a difference in level, considering the fact that a tunnel could not be built. Bariț was duly impressed.

In line with the paragraph above, one must note the issue of the terminology that the author employs.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanians had to develop specialized words in their language for numerous fields of activity. George Bariț best reflects the uncertainty in adopting neologisms pertaining to the railways, even if he was constantly interested in railroads for three or four decades. He initially used the term “drumuri ferocate” (ironclad roads) for “căi ferate” (railways), “curte” (yard) for “gară” (train station) (“curte” was a translation from the German “Hof”), “trăsură” (carriage) and “căroi” (large cart) for “vagon” (train car); on the other hand, he adopted right from the beginning the term “locomotivă” (locomotive).<sup>55</sup> In 1838, Bariț explained in a footnote what the iron road was: “By iron road one understands the flanges of the wheel that are made of iron so that the wheel does not come out of the rail.”<sup>56</sup>

As early as 1847 he used the terms “viaduct” (viaduct) and “tunel” (tunnel), but explained them through descriptions, indicating that his readers had no previous referents for these words. He was unaware of the word “terasament” (embankment), but he also described it because at that time it was missing from the Romanian language. From this perspective, his description of how the viaduct and the tunnel in Bratislava were built in 1847<sup>57</sup> is a nice exercise in linguistics.

The train station was an essential stage of any train travel during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as it still is today. Most travelers are interested in train stations. Some do

cross them obliviously, believing that train stations are just places where the travel by train starts or ends, but others are interested in the architecture of train stations, while yet others care about the atmosphere and the human landscape that animate them. Some travelers make reference to the services that train stations provide: the ticket office, the platform, the waiting room, the restaurant, and the newspaper stand, or to the employees: agents, ticket sellers, baggage handlers, the employees of the post office, the customs office, and the passport “reviewers.”<sup>58</sup>

George Bariț was the first Romanian traveler to speak of the train station as component of the journey by train during his 1852 travel from Pest to Munich and Dresden and eventually to Belgium. His description of the train station in Magdeburg, where he arrived at night, is probably the first description of a train station in the Romanian language:

*I will never forget that I also visited Magdeburg. I arrived there about 2 ½ hours after midnight, under an ugly autumn rain, discovering that I was in a yard where four ironclad roads meet, coming from Berlin, Hamburg, Hannover, and Leipzig. I could see the cars and the locomotives being changed for hundreds of travelers, some going in one direction, some in another, knowing that ever since Lipsia [Leipzig] my trunk had been sent by idiotic expeditors ahead of me to God knows where [to Deutz, says Bariț in a footnote], and finding myself even in danger of getting into a car that could end up in Hamburg instead of Berlin (this really happens a lot if one is not aware and careful). I was also very hungry and dead tired as it was night and I could not find the restaurant, and not even dared to search for it for fear of missing the train, and eventually discovered the following notice displayed on the wall in Magdeburg: “man hüte sich vor Lumpen,” namely, beware of those who cut your pockets and hunt for moneybags and wallets—and during all these troubles I was constantly pushed about. The confusion that reigns in Magdeburg because so many rail lines meet in a single yard is unparalleled. In those minutes of confusion I knew not whether to swear or laugh, and found the fault within myself for being so insecure and fearful of traveling; then I saw a British family being equally fearful and the mother yelling at the conductors in broken German: “niederträchtig! niederträchtig!,” and I pulled myself together and thought it was shameful for a choleric Romanian to appear more phlegmatic than some Englishmen, who are known for their carefree and phlegmatic ways during unpleasant situations, so I started to yell at the conductors even louder asking them to show us the train to Cologne. This gained me time to eat at the restaurant. May this be of use to all Romanians who will travel through Magdeburg, especially during the night.”<sup>59</sup>*

I have included here this large fragment from Bariț’s text due to its great documentary and cultural value. Bariț discovered for himself the problems that have

plagued all train travelers since the appearance of the railways, when they end up in an unknown place. It is not only the travel by train that is exceptional in character, as one is given to understand in other parts of his memoirs, but also his experience in the “railway hub” of Magdeburg...

Trains left Magdeburg in four directions, to Berlin, Hamburg, Hannover, and Leipzig, and this must have impressed the traveler arriving from an area without railroads and who had experienced simpler train stations so far, such as those in Buda, Bratislava, or Prague. At a late hour of the night and in rainy weather, hungry and tired, Bariț was afraid of getting into the wrong train, or missing the right one (so despite being hungry he did not even dare to search for the restaurant in the train station), and was also afraid for his luggage (handled by the “expeditors”—the railway employees) and of pickpockets, as instructed by the notices displayed in the station. It seems that thieves of this type already existed in Germany in 1852, specializing in robbing those who travelled by train. Even an English family, people whom Bariț knew to be phlegmatic by definition, lost their temper on the platform of the train station in Magdeburg...

In a word, Bariț’s 1852 experience is representative for what all travelers went through during the early days of the railway era when they reached the big European train stations. His account should be included in all cultural histories of train travel...

**I**N THE pages above I have followed George Bariț, a Romanian scholar from Transylvania, as he traveled by train around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, writing in the press and theorizing about the construction and functioning of the “iron road.” For the early history of European railways, Bariț must be recognized for the multiple perspectives from which he regarded the railways: first as a journalist, then from a political, economic and financial perspective, and finally from a strategical point of view. At the same time, quite interesting is the way he perceived the European railways from the vantage point of Transylvania. On the other hand, for the contemporary Romanian society, his interests are complex and go way beyond the level of interest that his community showed to the railways, which were still a distant goal at that time. The paragraph from the article published in 1838 shows how insecure Bariț himself was in defining what the railroad was.

However, due to him and to other travelers and authors, the railway became part of modern life, a symbol of the new times that was well received by the population of the province when the first locomotive rushed along the line leading from Arad to the heart of Transylvania.



## Notes

1. Mircea Anghelescu, *Lâna de aur: Călătorii și călătoriile în literatura română* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2015), 63. For Bariț's travels, see 63–68.
2. *Gazeta de Transilvania* (Brașov) 10, 26 (31 March 1847): 101.
3. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 1, 4 (2 April 1838): 15.
4. Olimpiu Boitoș, *Lupta lui G. Barițiu, în 1847, pentru introducerea căilor ferate în Transilvania* (Brașov: Tip. Astra, 1945).
5. Olimpiu Boitoș, *Întâiele călătorii în Apus ale lui George Barițiu* (Sighișoara: Tip. Miron Neagu, 1947).
6. George Bariț, "Drumu de fer în Transilvania," *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 21 (13 March 1847): 84; *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 33 (24 April 1847): 129–130. For the beginnings of the railways in Hungary, see P. M. Kalla-Bishop, *Hungarian Railways* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), 23–27.
7. George Bariț in *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 30 (14 April 1847): 117. It is interesting to discover that the same actors were at play and the same issues were discussed during the 1850s–1860s, just before the effective construction of the first railroad segments in Transylvania; see Hilde Mureșanu, "Proiecte privind construirea primelor căi ferate în Transilvania," *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie* (Cluj-Napoca) 17 (1974): 272–279.
8. An overview in Boitoș, *Lupta lui G. Barițiu*.
9. Bariț, "Drumu de fer în Transilvania," 84.
10. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 26 (13 March 1847): 102.
11. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 33 (24 April 1847): 130.
12. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 26 (31 March 1847): 102.
13. *Ibid.*, 101.
14. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 30 (14 April 1847): 117. See also Mureșanu, 272–279.
15. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 33 (24 April 1847): 129–130.
16. *Ibid.*, 130. See also *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 26 (31 March 1847): 102.
17. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 33 (24 April 1847): 130.
18. The budget published in the newspapers by the railway construction company.
19. Unfortunately, the map was in fact not included in Bariț's article.
20. George Bariț, "Naintarea drumurilor de fer în Ungaria," *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 35 (1 May 1847): 137. See also *id.*, "Drumu de fer în Transilvania," 84; *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 26 (31 March 1847): 101.
21. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 26 (31 March 1847): 102.
22. According to Bariț, "Naintarea drumurilor de fer în Ungaria," 138.
23. C. Botez, D. Urma, and I. Saizu, *Epopeea feroviană românească* (Bucharest: Sport-Turism, 1977), 45–47. See also "Calea ferată Oravița-Baziaș," accessed 15 April 2020, <https://urbanism.oravita.ro/calea-ferata-oravita-bazias/>.
24. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 30 (14 April 1847): 117.
25. For the beginnings of the railway in Transylvania, see Botez, Urma, and Saizu, 51–55; Kalla-Bishop, 48–56. A more detailed approach in Mureșanu, 269–279. See also

- Cristina Purcar, “On the Wrong Side of the Track: Railways As Urban Boundaries in the Towns of the First Transylvanian Railway,” *Urban History* 37, 1 (2010): 68.
26. Radu Mârza, “Un viaduct de cale ferată de la Bratislava,” accessed 15 April 2020, <https://peregristorii.wordpress.com/2018/08/25/un-viaduct-de-cale-ferata-de-la-bratislava/>.
27. Bariț, “Naintarea drumurilor de fer în Ungaria,” 137.
28. Toader Popescu, *Proiectul feroviar românesc (1842–1916)* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2014), 96.
29. Bariț, “Naintarea drumurilor de fer în Ungaria,” 137.
30. Ibid., 137–138.
31. Ibid., 138.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Purcar, 68.
35. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 26 (31 March 1847): 101.
36. Ibid., 102.
37. Ibid., 101.
38. Ibid.
39. Ioan Chindriș and Alexandru Matei, “George Bariț, un om al cetății: Calea ferată în Transilvania: Fragmente,” *Manuscriptum* (Bucharest) 18, 2 (1987): 138–145; Nicolae Cordoș, “Memorialul lui George Barițiu referitor la prima cale ferată din România,” *Apulum* (Alba Iulia) 7, 2 (1969): 203–210. See also Vasile Netea, *George Barițiu: Viața și activitatea sa* (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică, 1966), 153–155.
40. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 10, 26 (31 March 1847): 102.
41. Ibid.
42. Netea, 152–155, 245; Mircea Popa, “George Bariț—călătorul,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “George Bariț,”* Series Historica, 42 (2003): 89–100; Toader Ionescu, *George Barițiu: Monografie*, pt. 1 (Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint, 2013), 145–161, 486–512.
43. Netea, 152.
44. Boitoș, *Întâiele călătorii în Apus*, 48–82; see also Netea, 243–247; Anghelescu, 66–67.
45. Boitoș, *Întâiele călătorii în Apus*, 25.
46. Ibid., 60. A comment by the author on G. Bariț’s idea of progress at pages 40–43.
47. Ibid., 61.
48. Ibid., 61–68.
49. Ibid., 69.
50. Ibid., 68.
51. Ibid., 70–71.
52. Ibid., 69.
53. Ibid., 77. See also “Herbesthal Railway Station,” accessed 15 September 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbesthal\\_railway\\_station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbesthal_railway_station).
54. An introductory comment in Boitoș, *Întâiele călătorii în Apus*, 34.
55. On the origin of the term, see Botez, Urma, and Saizu, 387, footnote 1.
56. *Gazeta de Transilvania* 1, 4 (2 April 1838): 15.
57. Bariț, “Naintarea drumurilor de fer,” 137.



58. From the rich bibliography dedicated to train stations, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley–Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 171–177 and Micheline Nilsen, *Railways and the Western European Capitals: Studies of Implantation in London, Paris, Berlin, and Brussels* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). See also Popescu, 111–235.
59. Boitoș, *Întâiele călătorii în Apus*, 69–70.

## Abstract

### George Bariț on Railways around the Middle of the Nineteenth Century

The paper focuses on George Bariț (1812–1893), a Romanian historian, national activist, journalist and businessman from Transylvania. He was strongly interested in railways, which were at that time a very new mode of transportation in Transylvania and Hungary. As a lead journalist at the *Gazeta de Transilvania*, a Romanian newspaper published in Brașov (Kronstadt, Brassó), he wrote many articles on the design and construction of the railway network in the country, regularly informing his readers on the topic. He saw in the railways a way through which transportation, economy and society in general could progress. He was also a theoretician of the construction of railways, pointing to the necessity of involving the ministerial and local authorities, the challenges of the terrain crossed by the “iron road,” and the financial costs involved. An important contribution is his description of the effective construction of a viaduct and a tunnel near Bratislava. Bariț experienced transportation by train in its early decades: in 1847 he took the train from Buda to Bratislava, while five years later he travelled by train through Germany to Belgium and wrote newspaper articles and letters describing those experiences. As a traveler he saw numerous aspects pertaining to train journeys around 1850: the transformation of the art of traveling by train (speed, landscape), the social behavior of the fellow passengers, the train stations and their challenges, without forgetting the technical progress.

## Keywords

George Bariț, Transylvania, railway construction, 19<sup>th</sup> century