

Entangled Histories of the Balkans - Volume Three: Shared Pasts, Disputed ...  
a cura di Roumen Daskalov, Alexander Vezenkov IN RETE, PARZIALMENTE

---

“România, o țară înconjurată de români” - Nicolae Iorga

---

<http://www.roconsulboston.com/Pages/InfoPages/Commentary/Balkan.html>

COMMENTARY: IS ROMANIA A BALKAN STATE ? by N. Iorga

*The question is often asked about Romania whether it is Central European, East European, South East European, or Balkan. In 1930, the noted intellectual, prime minister, and statesman, Prof. Nicholas Iorga, tackled the subject in a short article by the title: Is Romania Balkan State? [Note: Romania is spelled as Roumania in his article]*

In recent times the characterization of a *Balkan* country has too often been applied to Roumania. Mr. Maurice Pernot, an able French journalist, in a book just published on Southeastern Europe, groups Roumania with Greece, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, as do the Italians, who have coined a new name, *Balcenia*, and applied to all the old provinces of the Byzantine Empire on both the right and left banks of the Danube.

Where does the Balkan Peninsula begin? A comparison with the two other peninsulas of Southern Europe may help to answer the question. Spain begins at the Pyrenees; their continuation, the sierras, are merely the frontiers of her provinces. Italy begins at the Alps, with the Apennines forming the backbone of her body. In the third peninsula, the role of the Pyrenees and the Alps does not belong to the Carpathians - Central European mountains connected with Poland and Czechoslovakia and stretching with their prolongations toward the West - but to the particular peninsular mountains called the Balkans [*the Turkish word for mountains*]. The connection of the Balkans to the South with the Carpathians is interrupted at the Iron Gates by the Danube. The Rhodope Mountain is the only sierra continuing the Balkans to the south, while the Pindus may be considered the Apennines of the peninsula. This system of mountains - the Balkans, the Rhodope, the Pindus - makes all of the Pindo-Balkan provinces a separate unit quite distinct from Roumania, whose Moldavian plains extend toward the Russian steppes, and whose level Wallachian cornfields belong to the Danube Valley.

Etnographically, the differences are not so easily discernible, obscured as they are by some strong common elements. Both shores of the Danube shared the Thracian ancestry, the Greek influence in the vicinity of the Pontus, the Romanization of the people, the occupation of the Roman Empire, and the flood of the Slavonic invaders. But, to the North of the great river, other influences left their mark: that of the Scythians upon the Thracian Getae, especially in Moldavia, and that of the Germans upon Western Transylvania, the mountainous domain of the Dacians.

Notwithstanding the belated character of the Roman colonization in Dacia, at first through husbandmen and artisans and later through Trajan's colonists, this new nation was not long exposed to the domination of the barbarians, who went farther in search of richer treasures and better abodes, leaving but few words to be added to the old stock of clear Latinty. Thus, in contrast with the Balkans - where the Roman language did not survive except on the shores of the Adriatic, in the fastness of the Pindus, and in the wider spaces of classic Thessaly - Roumania, from the Danube to the Beskids, from the Tisa to the Dniester, remains to this day a Latin-speaking land.

Historically, the Balkans were in possession of the Byzantine emperors. The later, Slavonic rulers - Bulgarian and Serbian - merely imitated the Byzantine system of government, not so highly centralized but nevertheless unified by the continuous influence of a central authority approximating the old imperial power. As for the

Carpathians, they did not come under the pale of the Empire; nor was there any substitute to exercise a like influence.

While on the right bank of the Danube the cities continued to flourish as trading and religious centers, in the Roumanian lands across the river rural life came to be the sole remaining reality. The Roumanians peasants lived patriarchally in their scattered villages, each of which was autonomous. The most powerful of their dukes, at first mere leaders under whom the villagers organized themselves in time of war, became in due course a *Domn*, with authority over his subjects akin to that of the Byzantine rulers; but his domain was the *Roumanian country* in the strict national sense, and not the ambitious copy of the Eastern Roman Empire which the Balkan States had become. Between the Balkans and Roumania there could not have been a more strongly marked political contrast.

In the Balkans, upon the passing of the Christian régime to the Turks, the old system was preserved under the new masters without any essential change. But in Roumania the recognition of Turkish suzerainty by the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia did not connote a curtailment of their authority. These princes continued as the natural protectors of the Oriental Church, with the patriarchs of Antiochia, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Constantinople ranging themselves under their guidance. As the crowned heads of all Orthodoxy, they ruled unhampered by any immixture of Turkish authority, then limited to the fortresses of the Danube which were considered the possessions of the Sultans. Thus is explained why Turkish pashas commanded at Buda, but never in the Roumanian capitals, where the cross remained at the pinnacle of the political organization. And yet, historians continue to group the Romanians with the "Balkan Christians" who broke their fetters and became free at about the same time, as though Romanian freedom had ever been interrupted during the nearly five hundred years of vassalage under the Sultans.

With Yugoslavia a neighbor of Italy, Greece a Mediterranean country, and continental Turkey but the small prolongation in Europe of an Asiatic Empire, the Bulgarians remain today the only Balkan people, and Bulgaria the only Balkan state.

SOURCE: *Roumania - A Quarterly Review*, Vol. VI, Number 1, 1930, p. 14.

NOTE: A thorough and compelling contemporary analysis of this question was developed by Professor Sorin Antohi.\* in a book-length work entitled *Romanian and the Balkans: from cultural bovarism to ethnic ontology* ([link](http://www.iwm.at/read-listen-watch/transit-online/romania-and-the-balkans/)). <http://www.iwm.at/read-listen-watch/transit-online/romania-and-the-balkans/>

\* Sorin Antohi (b. 1957 in Romania) is Professor of History at Central European University, Budapest. His most recent publications include a book, *Imaginaire culturel et realite politique dans la Roumanie moderne. Le stigmat et l'utopie* (Paris- Montreal: L'Harmattan, 1999), a collective volume he co-edited with Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), and an edited book, *Religion, Fiction, and History: Essays in Memory of Ioan Petru Culianu* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2001, 2 vols.)