

## N. IORGA – HISTORIAN OF THE BLACK SEA IN A REGIONAL GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

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### **Abstract**

The great Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, of universal reputation, does not have a special work relative to the “question of the Black Sea” – as he has for other “waters” (rivers, seas, “oceans”) – but his problem, which he addresses in a direct connection with the actions of human factors and in the context of the geopolitics of the times, from Antiquity to its time, is found in other special works: “The Black Sea, with its addition, is part of the Mediterranean system. Therefore, everything that happens in the Mediterranean has immediate repercussions on us as well” – said our first great geopolitician in a university lecture from 1914 on the “issue of the Mediterranean Sea”. In his view, the role of the seas and oceans, of the great rivers – to which he dedicated special volumes –, is analyzed in direct connection with the surrounding or neighboring geo-political space, as shown in “The Danube Question” [*Cbestiunea Dunării*] (Lessons at the War School, in 1913). In 1938, N. Iorga will hold another conference, this time in front of the members of the Romanian Maritime League – all intellectuals – in Bucharest, entitled “The Romanian People and the Sea” [*Poporul românesc și Marea*] – an extensive review of our connections with the Sea, with the waters in general, highlighting their place in maintaining the vitality and permanence of the Romanians as descendants of the Romanized Thracians, of “the connection that the Romanian people had with the sea, and not only with the Sea, but with the waters in general”; the importance of rivers, of flowing waters in general, of puddles and ponds in the daily life of Romanians is underlined; but also of the medieval Romanian states in the geopolitical context throughout the centuries – the Mușat Voivode “Roman, around 1390, proudly called himself: ‘Prince from the Mountain to the Sea’ [*Domn de la Munte până la Mare*]”.

**Key words:** *N. Iorga, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Danube, Geopolitics.*

### **Introduction**

Ago three years was the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Nicolae Iorga (June 5/17, 1871–November 27, 1940), the greatest Romanian historian, of recognized international reputation. Recalling his huge personality at this international conference we consider it as timely as possible, more elected that his scientific concerns did not bypass geopolitical issues either.

Recalling the work of the one who was, at the same time, one of *the apostles* of the Romanian nation means, no less, to reveal that the creative destiny of N. Iorga is an exception in the entire history of Humanity; how many people wrote and published like Iorga – over a thousand (more precisely – 1,359 book titles, of various lengths, published during his lifetime, bibliographies totaling no less than 165,656 printed pages) and about 25,000 articles (Theodorescu, 1978: 11), “thus becoming mankind’s greatest polygraph”? (Smântănescu, 2021: 5-6).

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He is not only the greatest historian of the Romanian nation (in which there are also numerous pages about the “Georgian” *Antim Ivireanul* [Anthim the Iberian] (Dură, 2016: 153-162; Akhaladze, 2016: 11-32) – “a Spiritual Beacon and a Confessor of Faith” (Teodosie, 2016: 7-10) –, his ancestry, dignities, achievements, and era (Iorga, 1909: 2; Iorga, 1937: 609-623) – personality widely (Ghenghea, Moga, 2021: 314: “The figure of Anthimus was not an exception and so far, for the segment 1990-2020 we have identified more than 200 articles, studies, and books regarding the life, activity and accomplishments of Anthimus of Iberia”) studied, edited, and honored in contemporary Romania, the year 2014 being declared by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Patriarchate as *the Commemorative Year of the Saint Hierarch Antim Ivireanul and Church Printers*, on which occasion numerous works appeared (Dură, Mititelu, Zară, 2016; Chițulescu, Bădără, Croitoru, Dumitrescu, Feodorov, 2016; xxx *Sfântul Ierarh Martir Antim Ivireanul*, 2016; Bora, 2018), author of dozens of books dedicated to universal history, member of numerous foreign Academies – but he was, equally, a teacher, a politician, a tireless traveler, a researcher who rummages endlessly through the archives, an incomparable lecturer, literary critic and historian, a powerful memoirist, the journalist with the longest and most constant presence in Romanian daily press (he wrote at least one article every day, in the period 1903-1940), dramatist (he wrote – less known – most plays in Romanian literature!), and also a talented poet or feared polemicist.

N. Iorga, “un géant du Danube” (Bourgues, 1931: 2), is, without a doubt – or should be – one of the existential pillars not only of our nation, but also of European Culture and Historiography, the great French historian Jérôme Carcopino (1881-1970) revealing that “Iorga cannot be defined in a specialty, nor is it limited to an era or a country. He is a force of nature”; and another will record that he “avait toujours été préoccupé de la valeur morale de l’histoire, de l’aide qu’elle peut apporter à la marche chancelante de ‘humanité’ ” (Roques, 1941: 19).

One of the remarkable historians of contemporary Romania (member and current president of the Romanian Academy), Professor Ioan-Aurel Pop, summarized last year: “It was said about Nicolae Iorga that he wrote more than an ordinary person could read in one lifetime, that he was the most famous Romanian scholar – being alive – in the international erudite world of all time (47 universities raised their flags in the bay after his untimely death), it was said that he was the last encyclopedist and the last polyhistor in Romanian culture, a volcano, a titan, like the heroes of Greco-Roman mythology. This titanism can be seen from the number of creative fields he frequented, but also from the number of disciplines, directions and themes from history approached by the creator named Nicolae Iorga. During my student years, we, those of my generation, were taught a basic rule, at a time when bibliography searches were not done digitally and required a real investigation: before starting any topic in national history or universal, we had to see if the subject was somehow not addressed by Nicolae Iorga. And most of the time, I found real grains of gold in Iorga, because – paraphrasing Terentiu – nothing that is history was and has not remained foreign to Iorga. Anyone who approaches certain themes of Nicolae Iorga’s creation (because no one can deal with the entire work), if they are an honest person, remains overwhelmed as if by an extraordinary intellectual force” (Pop, 2021: 17-18).

### The First Romanian Geopolitician

Through many of the great scientist's studies and works, he is entitled to be considered the first Romanian geopolitician [Joița, 1997: 261-264; Spinei, 1998: 6-80; Hlihor, 2001: 53-58; Lascu, 2001: 231-235; Lascu, 2024: 46-67], at a time when Geopolitics was conceptualized as such.

Romanian Geopolitics, through his works, “constituted a response to the approaches of the German geopolitical school promoted especially by Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer, with obvious tendencies to leave the sphere of science, turning into ideology. Thus, since 1917, in the lectures held in Iași, entitled *Cugetare și faptă germană* [German Thought and Deed] (significantly reissued around the Second World War), as well as in his lectures at the Academy of Commerce (entitled *Îndreptări noi în concepția epocii moderne* [New Directions in the Conception of the Modern Era]), or in those held at the University of Bucharest (*Dezvoltarea imperialismului contemporan* [Development of Contemporary Imperialism]), our great scholar makes a broad indictment against the ‘false national conception’, promoted by the protagonists of the German geopolitical school who allocated exclusively to the German spirit ‘creative initiative’ or ‘revolutionary spontaneity’ which they decided ‘the future of civilization’. The same guiding principles and ideas are found in his courses entitled *Chestiunea Rhinului* [The Rhine Question] (1912); *Chestiunea Dunării* [The Danube Question] (1913); *Chestiunea Oceanelor* [The Question of the Oceans] (1919); in the Universal History course (1933-1934), but especially in the one held in 1938 at Vălenii de Munte: *Hotare și spații naționale* [Borders and National Spaces], in which he declares: ‘What is the idea that must be fought not only as disturbing the peace, but also as an idea that threatens civilization (...). It is the idea of the need for space for a nation, the idea of Raum, as the Germans say’. But the foundation of Nicolae Iorga's entire geopolitical approach lies in *Teoria vitalității popoarelor* [The Theory of the Vitality of Peoples], through which he highlights the role of culture and religion as factors of resistance to armed aggression. Thus, the spiritual dimension of a people is the determining factor of resistance to assimilation, Nicolae Iorga speaking of ‘cultural borders’ or ‘conquest without domination’. *Afirmarea vitalității românești* [The Affirmation of Romanian Vitality] course, held at Vălenii de Munte (1939-1940) is edifying in this sense” (Săgeată, 2015: 5-16).

The presentation and analysis of the facts is not done by N. Iorga from a geopolitical conceptual perspective, as he is not “enthusiastic about the possibility of applying the methodology of the sciences in historical research”, accepting only “analysis methods specific only to certain disciplines bordering on history” (Hlihor, 2001: 52-53).

Iorga's contemporary exegete – a well-known Romanian specialist in the history and theory of international relations – states, based on the works studied, that “This explains why the Romanian scholar with such vast and diversified concerns did not get involved in the dispute of ideas of his era regarding the scientific disciplines which are appropriate to the research and analysis of international relations or the foreign policy of states. It is not known whether Nicolae Iorga was aware of the debate on the place and the role of Geopolitics in the analysis of the political phenomenon of the era. It is certain that during the period when the fundamental works of Geopolitics appeared in the Anglo-Saxon and German worlds, the polyhistor lectured a cycle of universal history at the

Higher School of War [*Scoala Superioară de Război*], which through its vision and interpretation *came very close to the geopolitical interpretation of history international* (our emphasis). Are the geopolitical reflections that emerge from the courses held at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in front of student officers coincidental?” (Hlihor, 2001: 53).

As Professor Hlihor notes, “It is pleasantly surprising that by the way he presented *the Rhine problem* in historical succession, as a dispute of interests, Nicolae Iorga *made a clear distinction between the geopolitical phenomenon and the geopolitical theory* (our emphasis). The geopolitical phenomenon has appeared at least since a state had the ability/force to impose its interest or sovereignty in a space other than the one on which it was constituted as an independent political entity. The theory appears at an appreciable distance, when people sought to explain and theorize the conflict of interests in different geographical areas”; he shows that, referring to *the problem of the Rhine*, citing Nicolae Iorga stated, “Something we see today was also encountered 1800 years ago and even better, because *the problem of the Rhine* has existed since before the beginning of the Christian era: this problem has existed for over 200 years”; and: “it can be easily seen that in N. Iorga’s view, space does not necessarily determine advantages for states in conflict of interests, but their ability to promote them in a region with potential for development or with strategic military importance”. Referring to *the Rhine Question*, the Romanian historian stated that “The struggle for the Rhine had been fought for centuries before the emergence of the French nation. There was a time when the Rhine was an object of dispute between three great historical powers of a national or political nature” (Hlihor, 2001: 54; Iorga, 1912: 22).

In truth, N. Iorga also has a modern vision regarding the causes for which vast regions of the planet become geopolitical fields in which the active participants, then the Great Powers of the time, will assert their interests (Hlihor, 2001: 57-58). “I say from now on that one reason for the orientation of German life to the West and the return to the Rhine is the economic development of the Rhine regions, of the cities near the great river, the exchange of goods being done much faster and more safely on this way. These cities of the Rhine, thanks to their trade connections, become very rich, gather an ever-increasing population, and cause the states that are in their vicinity to be transformed” (Iorga, 1913: 27). He shows that there is a direct link between the resources/wealth of a territory and the state’s place in the power equation: “wealthy territories and undefended territories – what can be more apt to encourage conquest?” Later, he notes that the expansion of the war from the European continent to the Oceans constitutes a beginning, within world history, that would become a practice of a geo-strategic nature in contemporary times: “The first conflict that occurs between political factors and economies prepared to dispute their domination of the world is that between Cromwell’s England and contemporary Spain (...). It was the first increase in territory across the ocean that England gained through state struggle against a rival country” (Iorga, 1919: 45-46). During the world conflagration, America intervened “and decided it because she understood what danger German oceanic imperialism united with continental imperialism could turn out for her, and because she felt as a vital need the freedom of the Atlantic waters and the guarantee of this freedom against the enemy of yesterday, as well as, by chance, and towards today’s friends” (Hlihor, 2001: 58; Iorga, 1919: 3).

### Historian of the Danube, Seas, and Oceans

As I have already shown, both in fundamental documentary research – such as the volume *Studii istorice asupra Chiliei și Cetății Albe* (published in 1900) – and in volumes originating from university lectures – such as *Chestiunea Rinului* [The Rhine Question] (with the subtitle *Istorie a Europei Apusene în legătură cu această chestie* [History of Western Europe in Connection to This Matter]) (1912), *Chestiunea Dunării* [The Danube Question] (subtitled *Istorie a Europei Răsăritene în legătură cu această chestie* [History of Eastern Europe in Relation to This Matter]) (1913), *Chestiunea Mării Mediterane* [The Mediterranean Question] (subtitled *Istoria Europei de Miazăzi în legătură cu această chestiune* [History of Northern Europe in Relation to This Matter]) (1914), or *Chestiunea Oceanelor* [The Question of the Oceans] (with the specification in the subtitle: *Lección făcute la Școala de Războiu* [Lessons Held at the War School]) (1919) –, for N. Iorga, the role of the seas and oceans, of the great rivers is analyzed in direct connection with the surrounding or neighboring geo-political space. And the place of the Romanians – clearly, it is understood, in *The Danube Question* – as a factor of permanence, is constantly revealed: “what creates an admirable unity in these regions, with all the difference of those who fight on the banks of the Danube, is this fact: the existence of a special people that he feeds, he eventually defends, he maintains continuity in these places.

And this people of ours was created as if specifically for this purpose. In those destructive clashes, in which often one and the other of the fighters come out completely worn out – like storm clouds that collide in lightning and break apart, as if nothing is left of them but a few drops of water it breaks out –, in these clashes, the permanent factor was needed, which was us”.

The quoted works were elaborated, almost all of them, until 1913-1914, when “Nicolae Iorga was already a mature historian, who had distinguished himself through a phenomenal productivity in the most diverse problems of national and European history – as he revealed in 1998, during the reprinting of the *Question of the Danube*, its editor, Acad. Victor Spinei. He had accumulated everything that was humanly possible in the field of medieval studies, leaning competently on the themes of ancient and modern history. He had exceeded the age of four decades by only two years, but he had published more than dozens of colleagues together, numerous contemporaries – with all the usual lack of discernment and objectivity that manifests itself almost everywhere and always in relation to the spirits that break the patterns of normality – building up that it undoubtedly bore the stamp of genius” (Spinei, 1998: 9).

In a recent synthesis regarding N. Iorga’s vision on the “policy of Romanian waters”, but also on the importance of the seas – especially the Mediterranean Sea –, a well-known contemporary maritime historian showed that “beyond this issue of the members of the Romanian Maritime League (The Romanian Maritime League was an organization founded in 1927 for the propaganda, orientation and defense of the water interests of the whole of Romania, among the personalities of the Romanian culture to confer under the generic name “Our Waters, Danube and Sea” [*Apele, Dunărea și Marea Noastră*], was Professor Iorga, February 23, 1938, in the hall of the “Carol I” University Foundation, he presented, with the usual aplomb, which captivated the auditor, the fourth conference, entitled The Historical Permanence of “Our Rights to the Danube and the Sea” [*Permanența istorică a drepturilor noastre la Dunăre și Mare*] – our note) and,

implicitly, of public opinion, on our natural rights over inland waters and the legitimacy of asserting our spirit as navigators not only in the Pontic basin, but also in the Archipelago as well as on the vast Planetary Ocean, his works clearly defines the interest of the great powers for river supremacy continental and maritime spaces (our emphasis), regardless of the era and the state of peace or belligerence” (Moșneagu, 2021: 57-68).

Highlighting the geopolitical importance of the Mediterranean Sea, in the *Introduction*, to Lesson I, N. Iorga emphasizes: “First, universal history was treated in these lessons from the point of view of the Rhine question: the enmity between two peoples, between two series of peoples for the domination of the Rhine region, and around this question the Rhine people grouped themselves especially all the chief things concerning the history of the European West. But as the European West has often depended on the East – I have shown how as often as the question of the Danube gains importance, so often does the question of the Rhine lose its importance, the same powers being taken from one place and going to another, and Louis XIV being able to go to the Rhine when the Austrians are occupied on the Danube – it was treated from this point of view, besides all the history of the West and a good part of the history of the East”. He shows that the question of the Danube, “means nothing more than the question of the inheritance of the Eastern Roman Empire, because all the peoples of the East – and not only of the South East, but also of the North East, therefore also Russia – are interested in this question: who rules the Danube, therefore its mouths and therefore the Black Sea” (Iorga, 1914: 7); and extending the analysis to the Mediterranean basin, he points out: “The question of the control of the Mediterranean Sea is much wider than it might seem at first. We are included in its development; we too have a role, although our warships have never sailed on this sea for the purpose of opposing the ships of another nation; we are still mixed in it because the Mediterranean Sea continues, in fact, through the two straits that border the Sea of Marmara - in this finished Sea and it to the North through the Sea of Azov. Thus, the Black Sea, with its addition, is part of the Mediterranean Sea system. Therefore, whatever happens in the Mediterranean immediately affects us”. Also, Iorga, showing the interdependence of the maritime space beyond the Turkish straits, reveals the scope of geopolitical influences that affect the Romanian people: “influences of trade, of civilization in general and, very often, also influences of political domination, which come not only from the East, beyond the Dniester, from the West, across the Hungarian steppe, from the South, from the Balkan Peninsula, but also by the other way, maritime (Iorga, 1914: 11)”.

In his analysis, the Romanian historian specifies the broad geopolitical spaces, arguing, with examples and analogies provided by history, that “this question of the Mediterranean Sea does not only include the seas connected to the Mediterranean Sea, therefore the Sea of Marmara, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, but up to let the issue of the Ocean also arise, very late, with the maritime discoveries from the beginning of the modern era, and the European part of the Atlantic Ocean, i.e. the Western coast of Europe, does not provide material for its special research, but it is related to the rule in the Sea Mediterranean. Today, England, having its connections in the Mediterranean Sea, can send a fleet around Constantinople and the Atlantic Ocean thus dominates the Mediterranean Sea.

If France had weakened more, if Italy had not risen, if Greece had been unable to build up a navy in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, competing with Italy, the English influence would more and more dominate in this region – England, where the heart of English power is, keeping, of course, the world situation it has now. If therefore the Ocean now dominates the Mediterranean, there was a time when the Mediterranean dominated the ocean, and here was the center of all naval problems. It was the living Sea, whereas today, if the Mediterranean Sea is still a living Sea, and this is indisputable, much more alive in terms of proportions and the fact that there is an exchange between the economic life of two worlds, it is the Atlantic Ocean.

And perhaps a time will come when, resurrecting China [*Sic!*], through the Japanese or others, and growing even more, through a continuous increase in emigration, the United States, the Pacific Ocean will come to play the role of leader, just like that the Indian Ocean could have this role.

The fact is, however, that, during the time from the pharaohs until 1800, the living sea, the center of maritime exchanges, of economic influences that unfold from these exchanges, was the Mediterranean Sea” (Iorga, 1914: 15).

We will not insist in these brief connotations on the role of the Danube, in N. Iorga’s view, a detailed aspect studied by the Professor and well-known Romanian medievalist Victor Spinei (member of the Romanian Academy, president of the Historical Sciences and Archeology Section): “Towards unlike the Volga, which discharges its flow into an enclosed sea [the Caspian Sea], the Danube flows into a sea connected by the straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles [the Black Sea] and the Sea of Marmara to the Mediterranean, thus having access to all areas important planetary aquatics. Due to this circumstance, *the Danube problem was implicitly linked to that of the Pontic basin* (our emphasis) and that of the Straits. The full use of the river’s course in political or commercial terms, without western control of the Black Sea and the two straits flanking the Sea of Marmara, could never be effective. Although he did not lose sight of this reality, Nicolae Iorga ignored it in most divisions of his volume (lectures held at the Bucharest War School – our note), which only tangentially expands on his concerns and related issues from the Pontic basin, which of course remains damaging” (Spinei, 1998: 35-36).

### “The Romanian People and the Sea”

Regarding the writings of the great Romanian scholar of our topic – an interest that can be found, as I tried to show above, in various collateral works –, “The Black Sea, as a historiographical subject, is no exception. *Iorga dedicated numerous works* (our emphasis) to the Pontic basin, from the first years of his studies until the end of his career, which, despite the passage of time, retain their value even today. The directions approached were numerous and varied. The scholar published numerous papers aimed at clarifying important aspects of past political disputes over maritime control and was primarily interested in studying the impact the sea played in the lives of peoples and civilizations. Nicolae Iorga especially followed the actions and projects of the ‘big actors’ interested in controlling the strategic points and trade routes of the Black Sea, but he did not neglect the role of other riparian states in the contest of powers and alliances in the Pontic basin” (Cristea, 2021: 16).

And continuing his analysis – a valuable medievalist from the middle generation –, notes: “To support his points of view, the Romanian historian used various sources (portolans, maps, notarial documents, letters, diplomatic reports, chronicles, chancery documents, inscriptions, etc.) and a huge bibliography. All this, combined with an extremely high academic level (Iorga did not make any concessions to his readers who, in most cases, had a partial knowledge of a subject), with a style in which universal and Romanian history were intertwined in each paragraph and in which the historian made countless allusions to documents or historical realities from other spaces and other eras, made N. Iorga’s work a difficult obstacle to overcome even by the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the best specialists”.

And this author (Cristea, 2021: 18), in his analysis, emphasizes the interdependence between seas and rivers, *the Danube Question* approach implicitly imposing a history of the Black Sea: “the entire history of the Byzantine fleet, the entire history of the Turkish fleet, which is nothing but an imitation of the Byzantine fleet, shows us one thing, that between the Danube and the Sea is the most natural connection: it goes from one to the other. The Turkish ships came on the Black Sea and penetrated the Danube very high”.

Besides the twinning of Pontic history with that of the Danube, the understanding of the past of the Black Sea basin could not be done outside of the analysis of Mediterranean history. “The question of the control of the Mediterranean Sea is much wider than it might seem at first. In its development we are included, we also have a role, although our ships have never floated on this sea with the aim of opposing the ships of another nation; we are, however, mixed up in it, because the Mediterranean Sea actually continues through the two straits bordering the Sea of Marmara, the channel between the ‘White Sea’ of the Orientals and the Black Sea, into this finished sea, and it ends to the north through the Sea of Azov. Thus, the Black Sea, with its addition, is part of the Mediterranean Sea system. Therefore, whatever happens in the Mediterranean immediately affects us [...], what we suffer always depends on who rules the Mediterranean”. This global perspective suggests (Cristea, 2021: 18-19) that Iorga did not consider the ‘Great Sea’ as part of a much larger, Mediterranean picture, subject to all the transformations that took place in the ‘middle sea’ ”.

A global history of the Black Sea, “which includes not only the struggles for hegemony in this region and the exploitation of the resources of this area, but also the ghosts, legends, fears caused by the maritime space, remains to be written. Today there are few historians who would dare to attack a subject from Greco-Roman Antiquity to the present day. For the Black Sea there is, of course, Charles King’s book – *The Black Sea. A History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2005 [304 pp.] –, a well-written and well-documented work for the modern and contemporary period, but very succinct for the older eras” (Cristea, 2021: 19; a scientific synthesis more recently – Ghervas, 2017: 234-266; and also, for a contemporary geopolitical contextualization of our times – Haines, 2016; as well as, in context – Lascu, 2018: 77-110). Iorga focused his attention to a good extent on the medieval period, when the great Euro-Asian trade routes intersected in the ‘Great Sea’ ” (Cristea, 2021: 16-23).

The author points out that “the first large-scale work dedicated to the Pontic basin, with the title *Studii istorice asupra Chiliei și Cetății Albe*, would leave the impression



that the work is dedicated exclusively to the history of the two commercial centers. But that would be a wrong conclusion. The book covers a huge time segment from Antiquity to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is a bold attempt at a history of the Pontic basin in an era when many of the published documents, starting from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were practically unknown” (Cristea, 2021: 19-20).

Therefore, the “phenomenon” and “genius” Nicolae Iorga develops the Black Sea issue not only in adjacent specialized volumes or university lectures (without having a special work on the Black Sea, as it was shown); but also, in “vulgarization” articles or public conferences – such as the one held in Giurgiu, in 1908, under the title *A cui e Dunărea?* [Whose is the Danube?] Or the one held at the Naval League in Bucharest, in 1938, under the title *Poporul românesc și Marea* [The Romanian People and the Sea].

On the latter, we invite the lecturer to linger – going through a selection of the content of the latter – at this Conference; the specifically of Iorga orality also conquers today, frequent forays into apparently collateral details, an intellectual vivacity that also approaches a perceptible polemical tone – when speaking of the “views” of the Sofiot medievalist Petăr S. Mutavčiev (1883-1943), according to which “we are ‘the only people in the world who do not have a past’ ” – the continuous highlighting of the Romanians’ permanence in the Danube and the Sea, “which lives so much in our possession and consciousness and which is so much connected to all kinds of our ability to think and feel throughout our past”, the reprimands addressed to “our society”, the tone with moralizing nuances, more than once, and instructive, the abundance of knowledge, including philological, highlighting, several times, of the geopolitical-historical and “contemporary” contexts”.

### **Iorga’s Conference on the Black Sea** [Iorga, 1938; Cârlig, 2018: 145-155]

What you are asking me, after the research I have been able to do and after what I can foresee as other research that I have not had time to complete and which I probably will never complete, is undoubtedly a very hard. It would be less difficult for someone who had not made such research and who would not see what I see at the moment when I appear before you, to tell you a few things that may have escaped your attention and which have imposed themselves for a long time on my attention and duty in researching the history of the Romanians.

It is about the connection that the Romanian people had with the sea, and not only with the Sea, but with waters in general.

It is good to talk about this topic in a public conference, and here is why. We are not surrounded on all sides by friends: perhaps we do not know how to ask for them, in any case we cannot beg for them, and we cannot desire them beyond the margin of our interests as well as beyond the margin of our dignity. We are not a sympathetic people: we once thought we were, but we have been out of place for a very long time, and a lot of people look at us angrily, especially after we realized, and not in total, the natural program of any people, to master the land that it has had from generation to generation and where most of its people live. Since then, these eyes are directed angrily against us. There is almost nothing that is denied to us in our past. All the present values, as well as all the legitimacy of our existence, as well as all the aspirations for the future, are denied to us with a misunderstanding and sometimes with

unparalleled brutality. And our propaganda, which is very often done very badly, by inappropriate people and in an inappropriate form, this propaganda – does not catch on. Others defend the most unjust causes and find supporters everywhere –, I have only to mention the unfounded Hungarian propaganda, which is made with an Asiatic clumsiness and perfidy designed to disgust everyone, but which nevertheless finds supporters everywhere.

Therefore, in this area of ours, of our connection with the waters, we are denied, offended. We are told that the Danube is not ours, that in our waters, on the edge of our waters, we had predecessors, who therefore have more rights than us. Evidence is also sought in our vocabulary. Some of the critics know the names of our fish, others do not, but whether they know them or not, it is said that all these fish are designated by Slavic names – which really exist, but they have their own explanation –, and the conclusion is that we were not near the waters, why do we call the fish with names that do not come from our ancient Romanian linguistic heritage.

It is added that the fishing tools are also called by foreign names and therefore this means that we lived somewhere where there was no other water than only rainwater and water from melting snow. And we are going to examine here the foundation that such an assertion can have, clearly directed with hostility against us.

I would also like to say who is the one who, in this regard, was more active against the Romanians. He is a scholar from Sofia named Mr. Mutafciiev (Генюв, Чолова, Стоянов, 2016). I would add that his lordship's name cannot be considered as the most authentic Bulgarian name, because it comes from "mutafci" which is a Turkish term. By the way, Mr. Mutafciiev is a learned man: he did good studies in Byzantinology and received praise also from that youth of our historians who are very happy whenever I am insulted by a foreigner, because to take this foreigner in his arms, so Mr. Mutafciiev also had a certificate from this new historical school, so nice, above all, and noble in terms of its attitude towards its predecessors.

But Mr. Mutafciiev is certainly a man with many skills, who has his merits. She published, not too long ago, a book in her own Bulgarian language and after that she translated it into Franco-Bulgarian, or into Bulgarian-French with the help of a young lady who surely knows more good manners, for that certain rudeness towards us is faded; the translator's tone introduced a certain politeness that the author's tone was not capable of.

Mr. Mutafciiev, on whom you will forgive me for lingering so long, therefore completely removes us from Sea. From the Sea that lives so much in our possession and consciousness and that is so much connected to all our way of thinking and feeling in all our past.

This attack of Mr. Mutafciiev alone would still urge me to examine the arguments that he brings against our permanence in the place where we are. Because this is the purpose of the book: to show that we have no right to this soil, so often sprinkled with blood, on which we find ourselves and, at the same time, to show, to those who find it very easy, that we are "the only people of the world who do not have a past", the only people in the world completely devoid of history. Everyone has it, we don't have it, because of our unworthiness. Put in the most favorable circumstances, we did not know how to get anything out of these circumstances.

And this attack prompts me to examine some assertions and replace them with what seems to me to be a certainty.

But obviously, everything I can say does not represent so much a statement well built along the lines of historical doctrine, but rather a program. There are conferences that present only the conclusions of others, but I think that such conferences can also be admitted that present a program for others, when the one who presents the program has neither the age nor the time to complete these researches.

This is the sense in which I believe that the problem could be followed, according to a method that would be very useful for all areas of our life in the past and for all those that can emerge in the present from the better knowledge of these areas.

It will be about our waters of all kinds, those that stay, those that move and, on the other hand, the part of our people that is found on the edge of these waters. And the question is whether he was always there and whether, being there, he knew how to benefit from these waters.

In this way, the purpose of the conference is well defined from the beginning. Just today, thinking about this conference more than preparing it, I caught my eye a few lines of the great French historian, so connected by sympathy and through some studies, through some publications, to us, in the romantic years of in 1848 and after this date, Michelet [1798-1874], French historian, with pro-Romanian sympathies], who once thought, in 1851, and says so in a letter to Costachi Rosetti [Constantin A. Rosetti (1816-1885), publicist and Romanian politician], to those I am about to recommend now, and indicated the meaning which I think must be taken into account in these future studies.

He asked Rosetti to give him news about the Romanian folk poetry, so that this folk poetry may have a connection with the Danube – because he is interested in the Danube in the first place, but all our rivers are only a means of to feed and maintain the Danube; if you want, the Danube goes, through the waters that are given to it, to the most distant small springs in the mountain, from where the biggest rivers leave; it is a kind of Danube conceived more broadly, with everything that goes into its composition. One cannot speak of the Danube without rivers, just as one cannot speak of rivers without the Danube.

One cannot speak, I add, of the Sea either, considering the Danube as a closed river. The Danube is an open river and, namely, we have the opening of this river. Only the entire history of the Byzantine fleet, the entire history of the Turkish fleet, which is nothing but the imitation of the Byzantine fleet, shows us one thing, that between the Danube and the Sea is the most natural connection; it goes from one to the other. The Turkish ships came on the Black Sea and entered the Danube up to very high. If they didn't go, of course, to the place where those passes were made, with so much technical effort and with so much expense, from Iron Gates [*Portile de Fer*], but they reached Nicopole, for example, until where the crusaders' ships went, in 1445: the French ones of the Duke of Burgundy and of the Venetians, in the service of the Pope, when Vlad the Impaler [*Vlad Țepeș*] [Vlad the Impaler [*Vlad Țepeș*] (1431-1476), Voivode of Wallachia (1448, 1456-1462, 1476)], and his son were on our shores, who participated in this crusade and tested the French cannons so much, so that all around all the servants were smashed to pieces. And

on this occasion, you can see the connection, so natural, between the Sea and the Danube, and the Turks used this connection constantly, in all their wars.

But, concluding such a long parenthesis, here is what Michelet says, in this letter, which is given by a French professor who has been with us for a long time and has maintained an interest in Romanian history studies, Dr. Paul Henry, in the book to: *L'abdication du Prince Cuza* [It's about the volume *L'abdication du prince Cuza et l'avènement de la dynastie des Hohenzollern au trône de Roumanie*, Alcan, Paris, 1930 /xiv+485 pp./]. “Are there not poems of the river itself, songs of the boaters [*luntrași*], etc., singing the unity of the Danube, its genius and soul”?

He is therefore concerned with the Danube as a living being and this life then passes into the Sea.

“I would like”, continues Michelet, “to catch the lamentation and sigh of the great prisoner river in these special songs”.

Michelet was a man of happy formulas, and it is certain that what he says here, in this letter, represents one of the most beautiful formulas for embodying a thought in relation to what we call today geo-politics or anthropo-geography.

In this sense: the living rivers, the resurrected Sea through the waters that come from our rivers, and we, conceived as a living people, who find ourselves in connection with this life, is this conference.

At the beginning, I would like to see an observation regarding the criticism brought by Mr. Mutafciiev to our permanence, which we claim and which he denies, and in this field of waters. It is very true, as he says, that our fish they are called by Slavonic names and that the tools are not called by names borrowed from the Romans.

It would be enough, however, to say that we have sea, river, lake, which, this, is not a name adopted later as a neologism, because otherwise there would not be that phrase: “someone falls from the lake into the well”, and this means that “lake” [*lac*] is an old Romanian term. It would be enough to dwell on the names of ship and sailor, which come from the old Byzantine Greek language. It would be enough to point out the long canoe [*luntrea*], which can be found alongside other tools for floating, which do not have names coming from Roman antiquity, and the deck, so that it can be seen that we from the Romans, have inherited a set of words, a vocabulary whole, which is related to this domain of waters. And so it would not be appropriate to have for the shape of the waters, for the means of floating, from “long canoe” to “ship” [*corabie*], names that come from Roman times and, on the other hand, to admit that these fish, which are slippery, they slip out of our hands and immediately run to the more or less authentic representations of Slavism of the neighbors across the Danube, pleading for the opposite case.

Those who always look for the origin of things in the origin of names, do not notice that it is enough that, in the transmission of names from one generation to another, a new technique or a new trade is interspersed, for the name itself to be changed.

If, for example, there were a strong English or American fashion trade here, it would very easily happen that the names taken from the French in this field would be replaced by the names imposed by these other merchants. In this regard, we could also think of the confusions that occur in the minds of the so-called Ladins from Switzerland

and from the Italian Friuli, where the man no longer knows which is the *rumaș* word and which is the German or Italian word for the objects that are used. But here our old ball is at present liable to disappear from the common vocabulary, to be replaced by English terms which fit like a nut in the wall, but which we have adopted at the same time as the manner of hitting the ball other than with the hand, with the foot, with the elbow, even with the nose.

The fish is called with a Latin term. Therefore, if it is a Latin term for fish, and all the rest is related to technique and trade, all that remains is that from the pile of Slavic names we must necessarily draw the conclusion that we only had to take things which we did not know before.

And there is another example and a very interesting point to research, which has not been observed until now. It is known that around the lake Snagov (lake on the edge of which there were small settlements as well as a well-known monastery, near Bucharest – our note) there is a small world of very friendly fishermen. And these people use terms of Slavic origin, although some of them have completely pretended to be in Romanian. But here, I don't know under what influence, at one point the Lipovans from the Delta appeared there: it was thought that it was better to use these Lipovans instead of the fishermen there, even though the Lipovans seemed to me to be much inferior to the fishermen ours, as intelligence. But, if the Lipovans had stayed, it was very possible that a lot of things they brought would have only meant that some techniques came there together with their things and customs, and, together with them, the name. Or, if a great merchant had come from the West, and had made distinctions in regarding the kinds of fish, which we do not observe, and had preserved for them the name of home, then it is evident that this name would have imposed. Here are the ones that seem absolutely bright to me.

But we could come up with new arguments for our permanence in the field of water and other things. Everyone knows that at Tutrakan [*Turtucaia*] – which bears a name of Turanian origin, because Tutracan of the Bulgarians is older than our Turtucaia, who perhaps thought of turtledoves, as a poetic people that we are and who likes euphony –, they are our fishermen from very old times. However, their life has not been researched in all traditions, in all contexts, until now. A whole paper could be written about the fishermen from Tutrakan. Were they always there? Did they come out of nowhere? Are there not words preserved there that we don't know, ordinary ones distinguished from the silly ones?

But it is enough to find such a Romanian fishing center in order to say that on the Danube we have had a very long history and a permanence of several centuries.

At the mouth of the Danube, it is true that there are those Lipovans, but it is also necessary to know how long they have been there. They are Russian schismatics: when Peter the Great changed the character of the Russian Church and introduced forms that did not correspond to the past, a part of the Russians still held to the old religion; they are therefore Old Believers [*starovierți*], people of the “old faith” [*credință veche*], who could not stay in Russia and therefore emigrated from the old places in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But before the Lipovans came to the Delta, who could be there? Certainly, certain Greek elements, which could also be traced in the descendants of the ancient Greeks, who are no longer fishing today. Because the so-called Gagauzs

[*găgăntzi*] are not Cumans, but, as can be seen from their figure, the descendants of the Greek populations, very numerous, which were once found all along the shore of the Black Sea, because otherwise one would wonder how, of all these Greeks, so many, nothing left. When someone notices a very large population that no longer exists for some time, he must admit that the people of the past are preserved in those of today, whose violent disappearance or emigration cannot be accepted. Then let's not forget that the Slavic Vâlcov, whose name comes from *vâlc*, wolf, is only the translation of the Byzantine, perhaps Hellenic Lykostomon, wolf's mouth [*gura lupului*], transmitted through Genovesi.

Here in those concerning our antiquity in these parts.

But there is another argument. If someone goes near Bucharest, to Lehliu, a name that only means "the Polish" [*Polonul*] with a Turkish word – a completely new settlement –, and if he advances in these parts by Mostiște, what does he see? He sees lakes that at the moment are almost not used, but the research carried out by prehistoric people shows everywhere there, and only there, but along all our rivers and in the entire Danube valley, perhaps more so with us than with the Bulgars – the one that is very easy to explain, because in Bulgaria the shore is high and rocky, while in our country it remains low, with permanent floods and puddles –, an ancient life of our ancestors fishermen.

And I add that it is curious how Mr. Mutafciiev, who comes from places without ponds, denies the permanence in this area of the Romanians, who call the entire Danube basin "the Puddle" [*Baltă*]. But wherever there are waters, wherever there are puddles of these, they fed the ancient populations, as a recent study (Roska, 1935: 185-191) by Mr. Martin Roska shows for the West of Transylvania, in the *Bulletin of the Historical Monuments Commission*; such populations played the main role in those times and they also created the housing system; naturally, these forerunners of ours also had creativity in the field of tools.

And now, in a recent book (Slătineanu, 1938) by Mr. Barbu Slătineanu about *Romanian ceramics*, it is rightly stated that all the pottery of today is nothing but the continuation of the ceramics of those times: the pottery of today reproduces the forms and means of decoration of the pottery of then. The Thracians from these regions are therefore not only the ancestors of our physical being, but, at the same time, the founders of our entire popular culture, and this culture undoubtedly includes fishing, as evidenced by the fact that these ancestors preferred to settle in such places. All the roads that are followed now, passing precisely through this region with lakes, are prehistoric lands; where the *Mocan* [Romanian shepherd from Transylvania] walks today, the shepherd from those times walked, but where the fisherman is no longer in these times, there was once a fisherman who fulfilled his needs there.

Basically, all our past lives were arranged like this, according to the waters. They are *Olteni*, *Jieni*, *Argeșeni*, *Sireteni*, *Pruteni* (respectively, people from the river areas Olt, Jiu, Argeș, Siret, Prut – our note). Before the existence of the State, it was therefore the settlement determined by the river, and until today – the one that proves the importance of the river in our country –, to understand the purpose of the counties of our country, you must not take them on the horizontal line, but on the course of the river itself. On

this course, the same costume, the same songs, the same stories, the same elements of material and moral life.

But, if it is so, and it was so in all the places where our Thracian ancestors were, then how can someone deny us the right, whose older life is supported precisely on the course of the waters – the waters creating the political forms –, this right, it's just for the kitchen nomenclature of fish and a technical nomenclature of tools.

But, when Moldova was founded, specialists were brought for the fishpond.

We have several names for standing water. As for the puddle, “Balta” does not mean only a bordered puddle, but a whole region, from which the Mocans go to “the Puddle” [Balta], and the whole lower part of the country is “Balta”.

Now the question arises: when did we arrive at a water policy? We arrived from the times of [settlement] Celei with the fisheries of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but at least since Brăila was founded, which was once only a village, the village of an old man who was called Brăilă, after Brae, as in Brăiescu, Brăiloiu: this suffix *ilă* is very widespread, up to the *Păsărilățilungilă* [Long Bird] from Creangă's [(1837-1889), prominent Romanian writer] stories. Big ships used to come to Brăila before 1400, those *Kokken* that the Bavarian Schiltberger speaks of with a name that passed from the Italians, *coche* at the Germans. Therefore, around 1360-1400, there was a great trade there, which came from everywhere on the shores of the Black Sea, trade which, by the way, is nothing more than the continuation of the Greek trade of old.

Between the Greek colonies and between everything that was done from our Brăilă to the Odessa of the Russians and further from Odessa to the East, it is only the same form that returns.

I intend, if circumstances do not detain me here, to speak at the Congress of Historians in Zurich in August about “historical permanences” (he will also be present at this Congress, when he is elected vice-president of the Committee for the next five years; in his vision, “permanences” were: the land /geographic environment/, the race /the people/the idea/reason/ – our note), which means things that have not changed, or things that have disappeared and come back. All history is full of the ghost of things that were. We are now living in the realization made by the ghost of Dacia and the ghost of Michael the Brave [*Mihai Viteazul*]: The Greater Romania (*România Mare*: In 1918, the Romanian provinces of Bessarabia, Bucovina, and Transylvania unite with the Modern Romanian State /Romanian Kingdom/ – born on January 24, 1859, through the Union of Moldova with Wallachia –, resulting in Greater Romania – our note), the new Dacia was not made by diplomats or great strategists, but by the ghost of Decebal [King of Dacia (87-106 AD)] and Mihai, with the sacrifice of those who, being less learned, do not always listen.

So, through the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, *the Hellenic order of things was restored around the Black Sea*, and naturally, when an order of things is restored, one works with the descendants of those who once had it, even if these descendants speak a different language and bear a different name. We substituted ourselves for them of our own accord, and we are obliged to substitute ourselves much more, in the power of the right that our geography gives us, because it commands it, imposes it on us; to substitute ourselves, because there are no others who can do it, in the region where the Hellenic crown of Pontus Euxine, of the ancient Greeks, was once.

This formula could end this conference if I didn't have one more thing to add. Brăila is a foundation of the Wallachia [*Muntenia*] Lords/Rulers [*Domni*] from the era of Mircea [the Elder /*cel Bătrân*/, Voivode of Wallachia (1386-1418)]. At that time, Wallachia had the whole of the Lower Danube, because Bessarabia means only the "Country of Basaraba" [*Tara lui Basarabă*], of the creator of the Wallachian State: they were in this whole part that goes to the Mouth of the Danube.

The old Chilia is known to have been in the island, not on the northern shore, and was called by the Genovesi Licostomo, as I said: a term borrowed from the ancient Hellenes, which means Wolf's Mouth. And my late colleague Vîlsan [George Vâlsan (1885-1935), scientist (Professor, Geographer, and Ethnographer), member of the Romanian Academy], rightly observes one thing: that Vîlcov means the same thing in Slavonic, also "wolf" [*lupul*], even though Vîlcov is not in the place of Licostomo, but only because here the mouths of the Danube seemed to the navigators to have the shape of a mouth of wolf.

The Wallachians lords went from the farthest point of this "Bessarabia" to the East as they went to the West until Nicopolis, where, as we noted, it was found in the crusade of 1445 that large ships could reach. They could go even further in the West, but, for certain military needs, they didn't. John Hunyadi [*Ioan/Iancu de Hunedoara*] [Ioan/Iancu of Hunedoara (1407-1456) (Ioannes Corvinus, Hunyadi János) (father of Matei Corvin, King of Hungary), Voivode of Transylvania (1441-1446), Governor and regent of Hungary (1446-1453), and Captain-General of the Hungarian Kingdom (1453-1456)], the ally, had not come, and the crusaders stopped at Nicopolis. So, the big Venetian ships could go to Nicopolis, because even those under the Duke of Burgundy's flag were also ordered from Venice.

Suddenly, however, Moldova appeared, which was created with extraordinary speed. If we had the momentum towards the Sea that the Moldavians of Roman Voivode [*Roman-Vodă*] [Roman I Mușat /*Roman-Vodă*/ (+1400), Voivode of Moldova (1391-1394)] and Stephen the Great [*Ștefan cel Mare*, Voivode of Moldova (1457-1504)] had, they would rise – where? precisely at Baia, there in the Saxon city, *die Stadt Mulde* for them! The Maramures from Baia, just from the north-western corner of Moldavia, in a few jumps reached the Pont, and Roman, around 1390, proudly called himself: "Lord from the Mountain to the Sea" [*Domn de la Munte până la Mare*]. And, then, as the Genoese were at the Cetatea-Albă [White-Fortress] with the wonderful ruins of today, which must not be touched, because it is a profanation and a crime to touch the imbecility of today with this splendid trace of the past, in which Byzantium unites with Genoa, being then sealed with the seal of the Moldavian bour, there in the "white" fortress for us, because it was made of stone, which did not turn black, next to our wooden fortresses, which turned black, but being the "black fortress" for the Byzantines, Mauron Kastron, at Genovesi Moncastro, the Moldavians arrived there with the Hungarians, because the Emperor Sigismund [of Luxembourg (1368-1437), King of Hungary and Croatia (1387-1437), King of Germany (1411-1437), Holy Roman Emperor (1433-1437)], the King of Hungary, the one who came to Nicopolis against the Turks in 1396, had the goal of conquering the Danube and wanted to have this Licostomo. Then not the Muntenians, but the Moldavians saved the Danube for our race.



And, later, the Hungarians took other roads, so that we remained masters in these places. This is how also the Moldavian Chilia, beautiful and strong, on the left bank of the Danube survived.

### Conclusions

A polymath without equal in the history of humanity (in recent times he was included, among others, in the list of the first 500 personalities of humanity outstanding for erudition, encyclopedic knowledge and scientific and intellectual achievements: “Nicolae Iorga, 1871–1940, Romanian. History, philosophy, criticism. Also politician, poet and playwright” (Burke, 2020: 266), for the patriarch of Romanian Historiography there is practically no field of human activities on which he has not stopped, from the perspective of its existence and historical evolution; as, no less, the framing of one or another not only in the context of the era in question but also of the surrounding environment as such, the Man-Nature relationship, for example – so “cultivated” nowadays, including in historical research –, being a component essential, in his vision, in the evolution of humanity. And when the fundamental factor that is water – personified in rivers or rivers, in seas or oceans – determines the course of human existence, the revelation of the relationship between it and people, between it and their settlements, the influence on state formations (“waters creating political forms”) – in fact, of geopolitics (or “anthropo-geography”, as he says) – were “permanences” widely revealed in his historical research and writings.

The great historian does not have a special work relative to the “question of the Black Sea” – as he has for other “waters” –, but its problematic, which he approaches in direct connection with the actions of human factors, can be found in other specious works: “*The Black Sea, with its addition, is part of the Mediterranean Sea system* (our emphasis). Therefore, whatever happens in the Mediterranean has an immediate effect on us as well”, and “what we suffer always depends on who rules the Mediterranean Sea” – he revealed in *The Question of the Mediterranean Sea*.

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