

## PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: Jonathan Eagles, Stephen the Great and Balkan Nationalism: Moldova and Eastern European History

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some madrasa instructors gave lectures also in the university, and some madrasa students attended these lectures.

And thirdly, Prof. İhsanoğlu reveals in detail the introduction of modern western knowledge in the fields of astronomy, chemistry and other sciences to the Ottomans from the 17<sup>th</sup> through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The book provides also an extended bibliography as well as an index. It is a useful and insightful compilation of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu's contributive works in the field of Islamic and Ottoman science history. I recommend this volume as a valuable and unavoidable source for both scholars and students of Islamic and Ottoman learning tradition, theory and history.

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Jonathan Eagles,

***Stephen the Great and Balkan Nationalism: Moldova and Eastern European History,***

London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014, x + 272 pages,

ISBN 978-1-780-76353-8.

Jonathan Eagles' book, which is adapted from a postgraduate research undertaken at the Institute of Archeology, University College London, is a study on the figure of Stephen the Great [in Romanian *Ștefan cel Mare*], one of the pivotal characters in the Romanian history. The term "Romanian history" needs to be clarified here. As discussed in Eagles' work, Stephen the Great and his legacy are claimed by two independent but culturally and historically bound countries, Romanian and Moldavia, and their political discourse and historiographies.

The book consists an introduction, three main sections, a chapter titled "Postscript: Stephen the Great in the Moldovan Election Crisis of 2009", and chronology of the reign of the ruler, from his accession to his death in 1457 and aftermath until 1538, when Petru Rareș, the Prince of Moldavia were defeated by the Ottomans. In the first section titled "History", chapters provide a historical

overview of the Romanian ethnic homeland considering Romania and Moldova as if one historical entity, and then a detailed analysis of Stephen's reign, attempts to assert his status as the leading Orthodox ruler of South-Eastern Europe, the inheritor of the Byzantine emperors, even through his marriages. However, it must be stated that, although he put forward the religious purposes, in fact, Stephen the Great intended to achieve the secular political goals during his reign (pp. 44, 71).

The second section, "Memorialisation", and its three chapters discuss how his contemporaries interpreted the events, the achievements and the gestures during Stephen the Great's era. Eagles tried to find answers about how Stephen's reign functioned in the memory of the later generations, ranging from the chronicle writing and the construction of memorial buildings, to the appropriation of the political, social and cultural legacy of Stephen the Great by politicians and intellectuals from the nineteenth century onwards.

The third section of the book deals with the prince as a national symbol. The emphasis on the role of prince as an identity figure in both the republics of Romania and Moldova is discussed not through concept of nationalism, but through notion of "ethnosymbolism". Ethnosymbolism is not a theory, but an approach to nationalism, which allows researchers to consider the steps, and elements of shaping of national identity and the formation of nation states across a long time frame. According to Eagles, ethnosymbolism encourages nuanced analysis rather than polemic (p. 3). Thus, in the third section the author aims to discuss the legacy of Stephen via the principles of ethnosymbolism.

While Eagles's book makes various references to passing events, its main focus is on a medieval figure. The author emphasizes the importance of medieval history to understand the region, thus pays homage to the Professor János Bak, who always considered the essential role of studying the history of the Middle Ages. Moreover, Eagles aimed to meld medieval history and archeology in a manner that is the product of instruction in both disciplines (p. vii.).

The book is based on a good and detailed research on the history of the Stephen the Great's reign and his biography. Eagles states that the *voivode* of the Principality of Moldova for nearly 50 years, and a cousin of the notorious Vlad III of Wallachia -mostly known as *Dracula*- is little known in the West, in contrast to his reputation in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Yet, it must be pointed out that, not only in the west, even in the countries in the same region Ștefan III, is too little known. While there is no shortage of histories of Stephen the Great

written in mostly in Romanian, the amount of the works related to the same topic in “western languages” is limited.

The content of Eagles’ work reflects the inextricability of the figure of Stephen the Great in historical and current terms. Besides the ruler’s historical position in historiography, the public legacy of Ștefan III is powerful within the republics of Romania and Moldova: the statues of his image abound, schools and a university, even a metro station bear his name. Moreover, banknotes issued in the post-Soviet Moldovan republic had the Stephen’s crowned head on.

As the author states, the book has twofold purpose. The first and more “conventional” aim is to study the *voivode*, Stephen as a historical figure and his role and place in the formation of the Romanian nation-states. The second and the “conventional” purpose of the book is to discuss the legacy of Stephen in historical context. The essential questions lied in the book are: How did Stephen the Great’s legacy endure? How has it been utilized throughout the centuries? Why does the *voivode* play a key role as a national symbol and how does this work in practice? For the author, especially, the period between 1989 and 2007 -from the process of gaining independence of Moldova after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the overthrow of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania, to the accession of Romania to the European Union, respectively- needs particular attention for the shaping of Stephen the Great as a national hero and symbol, and his role as a bridge between past and present in these “Romaninan countries”.

Eagles’ book, also, proves another way of biography writing. Not only the events are presented chronologically, but also their influences both then and in the modern period –and even in “post-modern” times (p. 201)- are associated. Hence, the effort of the author in studying both the biography and process of becoming an identity figure and national hero of “Stephen the Great and Saint” (p. 79) in today’s nation states, Romania and Moldova, deserves to be appreciated.

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