

***Wallachian mobility and settlement along the Carpathian Arc*, eds. Mihai Dragnea, Miloš Marek, Grzegorz Jawor, and John Polemikos, Routledge, 2024, pp. 228**

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*Wallachian Mobility and Settlement along the Carpathian Arc* is an ambitious and deeply interdisciplinary volume that redefines the historical role of Wallachian (Vlach) mobility in shaping the cultural, legal, and ecological contours of East-Central and Southeastern Europe. Spanning nearly eight centuries, the book draws on methodologies from legal history, philology, sociolinguistics, environmental studies, and historical anthropology. The result is a compelling collective portrait of a mobile pastoralist group whose historical influence far exceeded their traditional marginalization in national historiographies.

The volume opens with an extensive introduction by Mihai Dragnea, Miloš Marek and Grzegorz Jawor. Rather than providing a brief overview of the volume, it contains essential information on the complexity of the Vlach issue and its historiographical approach. This is a truly encyclopaedic and clear study that can be recommended to anyone unfamiliar with the topic. This introductory chapter is followed by the first proper paper, a close philological analysis of *Synopsis Chronike*, a 13<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine chronicle, in which Anna Kotłowska reveals how the abridgement strategies employed by Theodore Skoutariotes—particularly his silences and omissions regarding the Vlachs—can be read as intentional acts of marginalization. The paper emphasizes that while Skoutariotes' text offers little direct information about the Vlachs, its editorial strategies reflect an imperial rhetoric of exclusion, making it an invaluable source for understanding the politics of representation rather than simply content.

Moving into the legal sphere, the volume turns to the evolution of *Ius Valachicum*, the Wallachian customary law. In her detailed contribution, Ela Cosma argues convincingly that this legal system was neither vague nor unwritten, but was repeatedly codified and practiced across Transylvania, the Făgăraș region, Croatia, and even parts of Moravia. Far from being an ethnic privilege, the law functioned as a flexible legal framework tailored to the pastoralist lifestyle. It enabled Vlach communities to balance mobility with legal recognition, and tied them into imperial structures as frontier defenders, tax contributors, and settlers.



The Slovak chapters by Miloš Marek and Oto Tomeček present complementary perspectives on linguistic and environmental impact. Marek examines the imprint of Wallachian migration in place names across northern Slovakia, tracing how terms like *grún*, *magura*, *kyčera*, and *urda*—often of Romanian or Slavic origin—entered local toponymy through pastoral channels. Tomeček, on the other hand, focuses on environmental change, documenting how Wallachian colonization transformed mountainous regions through sheep grazing, forest clearing, and the creation of upland pastures. His work highlights the biotic legacy of migration, with long-lasting consequences for landscape and biodiversity.

The theme of adaptation comes to the fore in Dana Caciur-Andreescu's study of the Morlachs in Venetian Dalmatia. Drawing on judicial records and administrative petitions from Zadar and Venice, she demonstrates how Morlach communities mastered the linguistic and procedural norms of the Venetian state. Her chapter reveals that multilingualism and performative legal behavior were central to survival in the imperial borderlands. Morlachs appear not as passive recipients of imperial governance, but as active negotiators, fluent in the legal and cultural idioms of both Venice and the Ottoman world.

This sense of cultural entanglement is deepened by Marta Šimečková and Vít Boček's linguistic analysis of early modern dialects in eastern Moravia. Their chapter classifies Wallachian borrowings into semantic categories related to herding, domestic life, tools, and terrain. They also identify grammatical borrowings, suggesting a complex process of language contact that went beyond vocabulary and shaped syntactic and morphological structures as well.

Identity formation—both from within and from the outside—is the focus of Petra Košťálová's contribution on the Moravian Wallachians. Drawing on 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century folk chronicles, she shows how the image of the “Wallachian highlander” was gradually codified through popular literature and later absorbed into the Czech National Revival. Although often stylized or folklorized, this image rested on real linguistic, geographic, and cultural distinctions. Ethnographic fieldwork cited in the volume confirms that Moravian Wallachia still retains a strong sense of regional identity today, often expressed through dialect, memory, and landscape.

Economic transformation under conditions of stress is addressed in Petr Odehnal's chapter on southeastern Moravia during the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Using registry books and manorial records, he documents how serfs migrated to Hungary in response to war and economic hardship, how farmsteads were subdivided, and how families developed new survival strategies under demographic pressure. His analysis reveals how pastoral colonization interacted with larger political and military upheavals, often producing more enduring effects than episodic invasions.

The final chapter by Ivana Spitzer Ostraňská turns to landscape history and toponymy. Her case study of the village of Halenkov, settled at the height of Wallachian colonization, traces how land use, small-scale farming, and local place names

have preserved the memory of pastoralist life well into the modern era. Despite socialist collectivization and subsequent urbanization, the continued cultivation of meadows and the survival of historical place names underscore the deep-rooted connection between human activity and the mountainous landscape. Spitzer Ostraňská convincingly argues that even contemporary cartographic practices must reckon with this vernacular geography, lest it be lost to bureaucratic abstraction.

What emerges from *Wallachian Mobility and Settlement along the Carpathian Arc* is a multifaceted, long-term portrait of pastoralist mobility as a transformative force in European history. Rather than casting the Wallachians as an ethnic footnote, this volume places them at the center of debates about law, language, settlement, and environment. The richness of its archival work, the variety of its methods, and the coherence of its thematic vision make it a landmark study of frontier societies. This is essential reading for historians of Southeastern and East-Central Europe, historical linguists, legal anthropologists, and anyone interested in how migration reshapes landscapes—both literal and symbolic—across time.

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