

Also, they identify the region as having had the quality of wilderness (13–14). Since the debate around “wilderness” and its reimagination during modernity is so central to environmental history, I wondered how the Prespa region might contribute to it. In spite of these shortcomings, the book is a useful and overarching examination of a storied, transnational Balkan region.

Luminita Gatejel. *Engineering the Lower Danube: Technology and International Cooperation in an Imperial Borderland.*

Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022. xvi, 331 pp. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Maps. \$95.00, hard bound.

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Despite the Danube’s centrality to the geography of the European continent, those who lived along its banks frequently complained that it flowed “in the wrong direction,” away from the economically advanced countries of Europe’s Atlantic rim. A series of rocky cataracts in the region of the Iron Gates and the natural silting of the Danube’s delta further reduced the river’s role as an access route to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. The new book by Luminita Gatejel offers a well-documented and well-written account of the responses of the European engineers, commissioners, and entrepreneurs to these challenges over the course of the nineteenth century.

Gatejel argues that engineers played a key role in the transformation of the Lower Danube, “converting visions into concrete technical projects” and keeping them alive when political decision makers lost interest or lacked resources (6). Animated by the engineers, the river regulation commissions emerged as “epistemic communities” exchanging and producing knowledge (8–9). They also exercised a form of “collective imperialism” or “hydroimperialism” with respect to some riparian states that lacked either the motivation or the technical expertise to regulate the river (11–13).

The first two chapters of the book are devoted to the early Habsburg and Russian efforts to reclaim the Danube for their own purposes. Motivated by mercantilist or military-strategic considerations, these efforts generated maps, surveys, and descriptions that rendered the river “legible” to potential readers, and created the preconditions for a variety of interventions “under the banner of reform and progress” (78–79). Gatejel demonstrates that the first Austrian project to improve the navigability of the Danube at the Iron Gates in the mid-1830s revealed a growing importance of civilian “experts” in state interventionist policies (97). In parallel, the early British and Austrian efforts to reverse the silting of the delta during the 1840s were frustrated by Russia’s uncooperative attitude; only the creation of the European Commission on the Danube (ECD) in the wake of the Crimean war (1853–56) promised to change the situation.

The ECD was part of the institutional and legal framework created at the Paris Peace Conference of 1856 to overcome “the physical, territorial, and legal fragmentation of the Danube” (131). However, the opposite occurred in practice as Ch. 3 and 4 demonstrate. Austria managed to secure navigation rights after the riverine states in the upper Danube,

whereas below the Iron Gates the principles of free trade prevailed at the expense of Ottoman territorial sovereignty (154). The first successful plan to reverse the silting of the Sulina branch sponsored by the ECD in the early 1860s transformed the commission into a permanent institution that would effectively govern the Danube delta for over eighty years.

Gatejel stresses that, with the predictable exception of Russia, the members of the ECD effectively sought to liberate navigation “from a grasp of a single empire to enable the free flow of merchandise” (199). This free trade vision accorded well with the organizational practices of the ECD, which successfully overcame the early disagreements between individual experts and commissioners representing the great powers. The engineering philosophy of the ECD’s main expert—Charles Hartley—was likewise consonant with the ideology and the internal ways of the commission. Hartley proceeded in a piecemeal fashion whereby a limited intervention was followed by an assessment of its impact on the river serving the ground for the next round of regulatory measures (179–180, 231).

Hartley’s strategy of effective negotiation with nature contrasted with a more comprehensive engineering approach adopted by his Austro-Hungarian colleagues at the Iron Gates as discussed in Ch. 5. Gatejel demonstrates how in the late nineteenth century the Hungarian government effectively marginalized both the central Habsburg authorities and the commercial stakeholders and “transformed the regulation of the Iron Gates into a Hungarian state-building measure and a symbol of national identification” (288). Although the interests of the local communities “never figured in the decision-making process,” the local impact of the project was not uniformly negative, writes Gatejel (287).

My only substantive criticism of the book is that in her account of the ECD’s piecemeal regulation effort, Gatejel does not discuss the social-economic consequences of the opening of the lower Danube to free trade. Improved possibilities for agricultural exports had after all contributed to the transformation of both Romania and the broader region into an agricultural periphery of western Europe, making it difficult to the present reviewer to love the ECD. Nevertheless, Gatejel certainly deserves praise for bringing a useful correction to James C. Scott’s sweeping attack on science- and technology-based state interventionism in *Seeing Like a State* (1998), as well as for demonstrating the complexity of human interaction with nature along the banks of Europe’s second-longest river.

Julieta Rotaru and David Gaunt. *The Wallachian Gold-Washers: Unlocking the Golden Past of the Rudari Woodworkers.*

Roma History and Culture, vol. 2. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2023. xxi, 285 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. \$82.00, hard bound.

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Who are the Rudari? The origins of this ethnic group, now found as a diaspora encompassing the Balkans, central, eastern, and western Europe, confounded generations of linguists, ethnographers, and “Gypsiologists,” who for centuries applied various methodologies to prove