

## THE DANUBE: A TEXTBOOK ABOUT EUROPE

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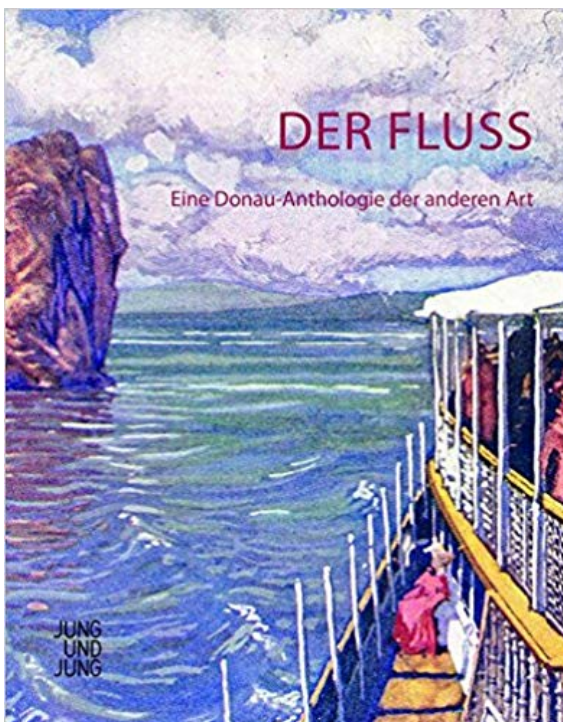
*Der Fluss. Eine Donau-Anthologie der anderen Art [The River. A Different Kind of Danube-Anthology]* /

Edit KIRÁLY & Olivia SPIRIDON (eds.); Jung und Jung, Salzburg und Wien, 2018, 492 p.

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*[...] die Donau entspringt im Schwarzwald, spielt mit Ulm, heiratet Wien, hurt Chilia Noua und stirbt im Russenmeer – gibt's über die Welt noch mehr zu wissen?/[...] the Danube rises in the Black Forest, plays with Ulm, marries Vienna, whores Chilia Noua and dies in the Russian Sea - is there anything more to know about the world?* (Andreas Okopenko, 1996, p. 262)



Andreas Okopenko's allegory of the Danube as the path of life, from cradle to grave, is a significant fragment of this comprehensive collection of literature works on the Danube, published as a beautiful German language 2018 hard cover book, by the Austrian Jung und Jung Publishing House.

The anthology is the product of a two year international research project called *An der Donau. Ein europäisches Literaturprojekt (On the Danube. A European Literature Project)*, supported by the *Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (Baden-Württemberg Trust)*, where both editors – Edit Király from *Eötvös Loránd University Budapest* and Olivia Spiridon from the *Institute of Danube Swabian History and Regional Studies (Institut für Donaschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde, IdGL) Tübingen* – have rich previous experience on the topic, being involved in several research initiatives

related to the historic-cultural Danube narrative.

The book is structured in 23 chapters, comprising texts on topics and places inspired by the stream – *Islands, Bridges, Fish and Fishermen, Boat and Wreck, Borders, Crossings, Wars, Defeats, Flight and Prosecution, Colours, Delta, Mouthing* – mirroring the diversity, contradictions, synchrony, displacement and history of the socio-cultural landscapes which transit from its spring to its outlet to the Black Sea.

Each of the chapters consists of several fragments of literature works, with the addition of a historic-cultural introduction to the topic, authored by the editors. The selected fragments are contributions of outstanding classic or contemporary authors, writers and poets of different nationality, mother tongue, experiences and views, all of them inspired by the Danube and their encounter with the river.

The fragments of novels, short stories, and poems date back from diverse periods and emphasize the various views, perceptions and interpretations of the major topoi of the Danube landscape, making the Danube a textbook about Europe, about its history, cultures, myths and people (Király & Spiridon, 2018).

The chapter *Imagined Geographies* details the ever changing perceptions of the Danube as projections studded with ideologies, revealing various views of the envisaged Danube Geographies, such as a disputed borderline between Christianity and Islam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or a guide which leads you from Occident to Orient, from Vienna to Constantinople in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Andreas Okopenko, Mircea Eliade and Nick Thorpe's literary works illustrate the capacity of the Danube as a focal point for time and space orientation.

The chapter *Islands, sunken* focuses on the Ada Kaleh Island, "a way too small of a place for a great Geography" as Egon Erwin Kisch (1972, p. 81) puts it, in his coverage about the sunken island. The stories gathered under this headline present aspects of the island ranging from its past martial importance, due to its position on the border of two major empires, across its oriental features, its fame as a smuggler paradise, until its late economic and political insignificance and no man's land, and finally its ultimate disappearance as the Iron Gates were built in the 1970s. From the fragments of the travel report of Johann Georg Kohl, the novel of Mór Jókai, the reportage of Egon Erwin Kirsch and the essay of Mircea Cărtărescu, we learn about the history and the myths of this threshold, which separates, but also links the chaotic world of the Orient with the sorted reality of the Occident.

A well selected spectrum of images, engravings and photos offers a glimpse of the variety of events, sites and sceneries the river creates or witnesses.

The anthology contains the exact sources of the cited fragments, inviting the reader to deepen his or her lecture in the selected and presented art works. Further on, the editors supplement the recommendations with an extended list of literature, films and documentaries which focus on the narrative of the Danube in history.

The volume extensively documents the power of the Danube to convey identity and shape behaviour, and exhibits the stream as a condensed cultural landscape of a vast part of Europe. The volume is a great source and full of surprises for all who are interested in the compelling stories of the Danube, both for leisure and scientific purposes.

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