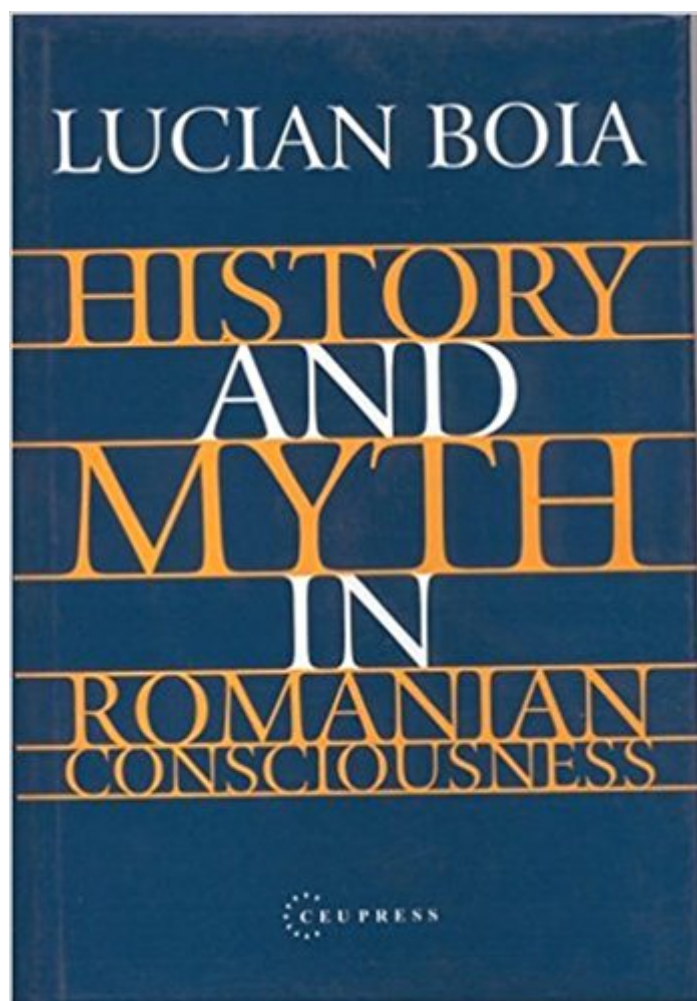


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History And Myth In Romanian Consciousness



Synopsis

Taken from the precept that there is a considerable difference between real history and discourse history, Boia points out that history is constantly reconstructed, adapted and sometimes mythified from the perspective of the present day, of present states of mind and ideologies. Boia closely examines the process of historical culture and conscience in nineteenth and twentieth century Romania, particularly concentrating on the impact of the national ideology on history. Based upon his findings, the author identifies several key mythical configurations and analyses the manner in which Romanians have reconstituted their own highly ideologized history over the last two centuries. In essence, the author has attempted to fully deconstruct the Romanian historiographic system and demonstrate the increasing acuteness of national problems in general, and in particular the exploitation of history to support national ideology.

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Customer Reviews

This book is extraordinary! It was a revelation for me, and an unexpected one! I did leave Romania in January of 1989, and I was then, as I am now, an avid student of history and politics. I never thought I would find a book on this subject that is extremely well documented, objective, constructive and a delightful read! And published in impeccable English! For anyone interested in the true history of Romania and the Romanians, this book is a must read. I cannot commend the author enough for his courage! In our days as in the past passion dominates reason for too many. And too many detest seeing their myths as they are, just myths. This book, and "Romania:

borderland of Europe" did fill a huge gap in Romanian historiography. It is for the first time that a scientific and objective analysis of all the sources meets a soul and a mind that are not afraid of logical conclusions or the backlash of those with opinions too entrenched in ideology and tradition. The book will lead the reader through the most important moments of the history of this most amazing country and will present the myths, the ways those myths came about and the facts that prompted their reconsideration and lead to the current view. This process is not only enlightening but also brings Romanian historiography in line with the historiography of its neighbors, closing centuries long gaps in understanding. The style is free flowing and light as a novel that you can't put down once you started reading. If you are interested in learning about the Romanians and the history of central and south-eastern Europe, read this book! It will take you way past of the level of the western born Dracula myths!

Prof. Boia's work can be read on two levels, one as Romanian history, and one as an historiographic case study, the history of a history. Mythologizing and editorializing on history are vastly important issues to understand as history is continuously re-evaluated, not just by the academy with new research or new sources, but contextually in the consciousness of the times. The clever citizen also does well to become more conscious of how historic "truths" may be selectively sublimated into myths as received wisdom and unifying forces over time, and how political and social rhetoric over time can "re-contextualize" the past and present to serve its own ends: "He who controls the past...." This book invites us down that road. As Romanian history, this is perhaps not a beginner's book; the international reader would do well to have a reasonable understanding of Romanian history and its key figures in broad outline, or better yet, to have spent some time in Romania (recommended in any case) first. I do hope the author's latest work, "Why Romania is Different", will come out in translation, because the country's difference is both interesting and too-often overlooked. My survival Romanian helps, and Romania is not the dark and venal place that the contemporary media and periodic attempts at social humor often portray. While Romania has many challenges and its own deep social and political issues, the international public and academy both could use a more thoughtful update to the author's "Romania".

Like all histories, Romania's history reflects not only the personal viewpoint of the historian writing the history, but also of the political environment of the moment. Tracing the history presented in various school textbooks over the years, the author notes the changes in the Romanian "heros" who are presented. And he uses the mythology built up around Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul), who

was the first to "unite" the three historic principalities of Romania, to illustrate how history can be rewritten to fall in line with current political ideologies. Mythology crept into Romania's history because history is normally written about the powerful people in a country. And Romania had few powerful people to raise up on a historic pedestal. So the Romanian historians often invented a hero or raised his actions from the obscure to the heroic level. Lucian Boia doesn't claim that this is some kind of intentional evil, but is often done simply because the Romanian people throughout most of their history have been village oriented people who were subdued by powerful kingdoms and empires who controlled the city (and about whom the history books were written). The book is a "must read" for anyone attempting to unravel the sometimes conflicting "histories" of Romania. And even for Romanians themselves who feel that their school history textbook was infallible and presented the only true history of Romania.

Good!

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