

---

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

**GAVIN BOWD**

**Un geograf francez și România:  
Emmanuel de Martonne (1873–1955)**

(A French geographer and Romania:  
Emmanuel de Martonne, 1873–1955)  
Translated from the French by ANA-MARIA  
STAN  
Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană,  
2023

---

**P**UBLISHED BY Cluj University Press in a translation by Dr. Ana-Maria Stan, this is a “revised and enlarged” version (259 pp.) of the princeps edition published by L’Harmattan (Paris, 2012) under the title *Un géographe français et la Roumanie: Emmanuel de Martonne (1873–1955)*, 217 pp.

Logically and chronologically structuring the book into chapters and sub-chapters with intriguing, well-chosen titles, the author—a reader at the School of Modern Languages, University of St Andrews, Scotland—successfully presents the education and professional evolution of the French scholar, his first contacts and long-lasting connections with Romania in general and with Transylvania in particular—his main field of research, in which he produced regional geography syntheses, in the context of the country’s affirmation on the European political stage as a national and unitary state after the Great Union of 1918, when *terra* and *ethnos* were assumed as the major axes of its statehood. Familiarized with the Romanian geographical realities after over two decades of thor-

ough research, de Martonne highlighted the “perfect geographical unity of Greater Romania along the outline of ancient Dacia” at the moment when its state unity was completed—an achievement to which the scholar had abundantly contributed.

Somewhat mischievously, Bowd remarks that de Martonne’s work was not strictly limited to the field of geography, being “strongly intertwined with history, therefore with political circumstances, which is visible in his long and passionate relationship with Romania” (p. 10). So he put himself “in the service of the cause of ‘Greater Romania’” as a “border draughtsman,” as a “missionary of France, especially in ‘liberated’ Transylvania,” as a “defender of the new frontiers against Hungarian revisionism and German geopolitics” (p. 10). Essentially correct, but clumsily expressed, this set of features ascribed to the “passionate” personality of de Martonne is at least strange for an author who wants to be equidistant.

The author rightly states that de Martonne “was a pioneer and a guide” for the Romanian School of Geography, warning the reader: “we will see how geography can be instrumentalized in political projects, in rivalries over territories and in identity debates” (p. 10). He concludes: “with Emmanuel de Martonne in Romania, we are actually at the borders of geography” (p. 10). This is an ambivalent expression, which leaves room for fallacious interpretations. In our opinion, we are at the very core of geography, given its usefulness in correcting some injustices that distort reality, a correction based on science, and

not on the influence of the most vocal and scheming political actor.

Reviewing the trajectory of de Martonne's training as a geographer, his attachment to Romania, developed over time, as a result of numerous "genuine Carpathian campaigns" (p. 16) into "the very young Romanian state" where even geography was "young" (p. 13), but with several notable achievements, such as the monumental work *The Great Geographical Dictionary of Romania* (5 volumes, 1898–1902), Gavin Bowd proves his solid documentation on the work of the French scholar in Romania.

De Martonne's activity is "intertwined" with Romania's emergence on the European political stage, and all these elements are described in suggestive chapters, such as: "A Geographer in Times of War" or "The Border Draughtsman," excellently documented with facts, events and attitudes, which are objectively presented. Although the new frontiers of Romania—to which de Martonne contributed through relevant expertise—"corresponded to the spread of the Romanian population," in accordance with the Wilsonian principles underpinning the Versailles peace treaties, "they were not incontrovertible: to the three friendly dyads—Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland—were added three inimical dyads—the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria. It was especially the Soviet power that threatened with questioning the postwar borders" (p. 87). A bitter but realistic finding formulated by de Martonne and presented by the author as the rationale for the next chapter, "From One War to the Next."

Gavin Bowd outlines de Martonne's activity after the Great War by referencing his "continued placement of his knowledge in the service of Romania," having

been "satisfied with the results of his work at Versailles" and, in his capacity as chairman of the International Geographical Union to which he was elected in 1931, his attempts to "defend the situation resulting from the Peace Conference" (p. 93) and to criticize harshly "any attempt at revisionism." The French scholar did not hesitate to "defend and represent Greater Romania" (pp. 93–97), in conferences, publications, etc.

His complex approach is presented in documented detail by the author of the volume. Less successful is, from our point of view, the subchapter entitled "The French Missionary in Cluj" (pp. 98–116), where the author misses the point of the Romanianization of a Transylvania that was deeply Magyarized at that time, as was, for instance, also the University of Cluj. To support his statements, he invokes Catherine Durandin's ideas regarding "Bucharest's cultural missionarism in Transylvania" (p. 98), which was fully justified, in our opinion, in order to strengthen the Romanian statehood.

As revisionist politics became increasingly vocal in the late 1930s, de Martonne's work "Against Revisionism" (subchapter, pp. 126–149) also became firmer. He was joined and/or supported—in conferences, or in the studies and analyses he published—by Romanian geographers, historians and sociologists, such as George Vâlsan, who unfortunately died at only 50 years of age in 1935, Gheorghe Năstase, Victor Tufescu, Simion Mehedinți, Laurian Someșan, Ion Conea, Sabin Opreanu, Nicolae Al. Rădulescu, Constantin Brătescu, Vintilă Mihăilescu, and Tiberiu Morariu, by historians such as N. Iorga, Gheorghe I. Brătianu or Constantin C. Giurescu, but also by Anton Golopenția: all of them, with very few ex-

ceptions, had tragic destinies, as most of them paid for their anti-revisionist attitude with death or with long years of imprisonment during the years of dictatorship.

A great many of them coalesced around the Romanian journal of geopolitics—*Geopolitics and Geohistory: The Romanian Review for the European South*, which Gavin Bowd dwells upon at length. He also discusses the birth and crystallization of Romanian geopolitics, as the Romanian geographic school harbored two orientations in the interwar period, towards the German and the French schools, which are accurately described and explained by the author.

Finally, the French scholar's work from the period of the Second World War, with its conjunctural political and military polarizations, as well as from the postwar period, when Romania and the other countries of Eastern Europe entered the Soviet sphere of influence with its entire set of negative consequences, are meticulously presented by Gavin Bowd with the help of documentary and bibliographical sources, some which will be new to the Romanian public.

Thus, the author notes that de Martonne "played a negligible role in drawing the borders of postwar Europe" (p. 185), and presents the attitude of the scientist towards the "new situation" and the ephemeral "French-Romanian reunion after the defeat of Germany" (p. 188). Despite the "division into antagonistic blocks" (p. 188), the French researcher glimpsed the possibility of "resuming links between Eastern and Western geographers" (p. 189), which was an idealistic goal at that time, because he was unaware of the brutality and perfidy of the USSR, the new major player of Europe. In short, cursory sentences, with few explanations, the author

points out the dramatic events that unfolded at a fast pace and shook the foundations of the Romanian nation: "in November [1947], Maniu was sentenced to life imprisonment," "Gafencu was forced into exile," "at the end of 1947, King Michael was forced to abdicate and the Romanian People's Republic was proclaimed," and "Tătărescu no longer found his place in this new world" (p. 185), all consequences of an unparalleled ideological purge.

Among other things, the author shows that at the University of Bucharest only 35% of the teaching staff from before 23 August 1944 had maintained their positions at the Faculty of History and Geography, and only 3.5% at the Faculty of Philosophy (pp. 193–194), following a massive purge that also targeted the libraries, where valuable Romanian and West European works were replaced by Soviet ideological literature. The author concludes, not without irony: "during this turbulent period, in the Romanian faculties, the emphasis was placed on physical geography, and the mountains did not complain about this" (p. 195).

After Stalinism began to subside in Romania, at some point there occurred a relaxation and a resumption of French-Romanian ties, described by Gavin Bowd in the subchapter "A Difficult Thaw" (pp. 195–210), with a focus on the transition from de Martonne's being labeled as "an imperialist" (p. 195)—although, "secretly, Romanian geographers maintained an interest in him"—to the recognition of his merits. Bowd ascribes Tiberiu Morariu "a key role" (p. 195) in bringing the French scholar back into the consciousness of Romanian geographers and "in the renaissance of geography in Romania" (p. 195). The author provides specific examples

and suggestive quotations relevant to this thaw, which evolved towards a total normalization of relations with the West in general and with France in particular. He discusses the “rehabilitation” of geographers and their work, as well as of sciences such as geopolitics, followed by “other rehabilitations” in the 1960s (p. 213), with all their nuances, which are masterfully delineated in the text.

Later, “French-Romanian exchanges would improve significantly” (p. 212), materializing in cultural events such as joint colloquia, publications, symposia, etc., which culminated in the Centenary Symposium celebrating de Martonne’s birth, an event that took place in Paris, Bucharest, and Cluj. At the University of Cluj, the colloquium dedicated to the centenary of de Martonne’s birth (27–29 September 1973) enjoyed the participation of the scholar’s daughter and of his former assistant, Robert Ficheux (p. 218), an event the author describes in full.

In the “Conclusions,” Gavin Bowd continues the series of examples, this time regarding the reconsideration of the great, recurrent themes pertaining to the geography and history of Romania, which were resumed after 1990 and the fall of the communist regime. He sees the emergence of a geographical literature “marked by anti-communism” (p. 232), when “there is an upsurge in cultural geography and especially the militant rehabilitation of geopolitics” (p. 232). The author deplors a series of ultranationalist attacks, occasioned by the republication of certain studies. He discusses the commemoration and full recognition of de Martonne’s merits on the celebration of the centenary of the Great Union in 2018–2019, presenting the symposia and exhibitions held in Alba Iulia, Oradea, and Cluj-Napoca, at a time

“when, under the threat of military force, the borders of Eastern Europe, including those of Bessarabia, are again called into question: the very borders the French geographer defended at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919” (p. 239).

To conclude, this is a well-documented volume, in which Gavin Bowd presents the complex activity of Emmanuel de Martonne, his special connection with Romania and its geographers, the crystallization of the Romanian geographic school and its evolution, closely related to local geopolitics over the course of the tumultuous twentieth century.

Unfortunately, after decades of almost miraculous achievements à tous azimuts, Romania came under the USSR’s evil influence in the mid-twentieth century. This distorted everything: geography, with researchers focusing mainly on physical geography; the country’s relations with its traditional allies, among them France, following the decoupling from the enlightened ideas of the West; interpersonal relations, including in the academic milieu, in the context of ideological indoctrination, with the perverse consequence that many faculty members started collaborating with the communist regime, etc.

The Romanian version of the volume appears more than a decade after the French edition, thanks to the translation of Dr. Ana-Maria Stan who, among others, also translated Jacqueline Jeannel’s *Ma Roumanie* (Cluj-Napoca, 2012), which makes frequent references to the founders of the Romanian University of Cluj and to the country that the daughter of the French scholar René Jeannel (1879–1965) calls a “pays de cœur,” describing, among other things, the effervescent academic atmosphere and interpersonal relationships in the Transylvanian city. Many others,

including Emmanuel de Martonne, have loved Romania, for whose affirmation he worked for a long time, as he also did for peace in Europe, in the good tradition of the French Cartesian spirit.

Perhaps Gavin Bowd's approach would have been more appropriate in this key, even though the historian, writing in a detached, British style, has managed to complete an excellent, difficult project: summing up, in 200 pages, the work of a great scholar, as well as the advancement of a large country, with its geography, is a risky enterprise, as evidenced by some less

fortunate allegations, which might be explained on account of the author's alert, concise style. The Romanian edition can whet the appetite for finer, more nuanced, more courageous analyses of the evolution of Romanian geography and, especially, of some Romanian geographers, considering that the volume offers precious data and information, some unique, even for the average knowledgeable reader. I therefore highly recommend the volume to a broad readership: geographers, historians, people of culture, and people whose "spirit of citizenship" is unadulterated.



ALEXANDRU PĂCURAR