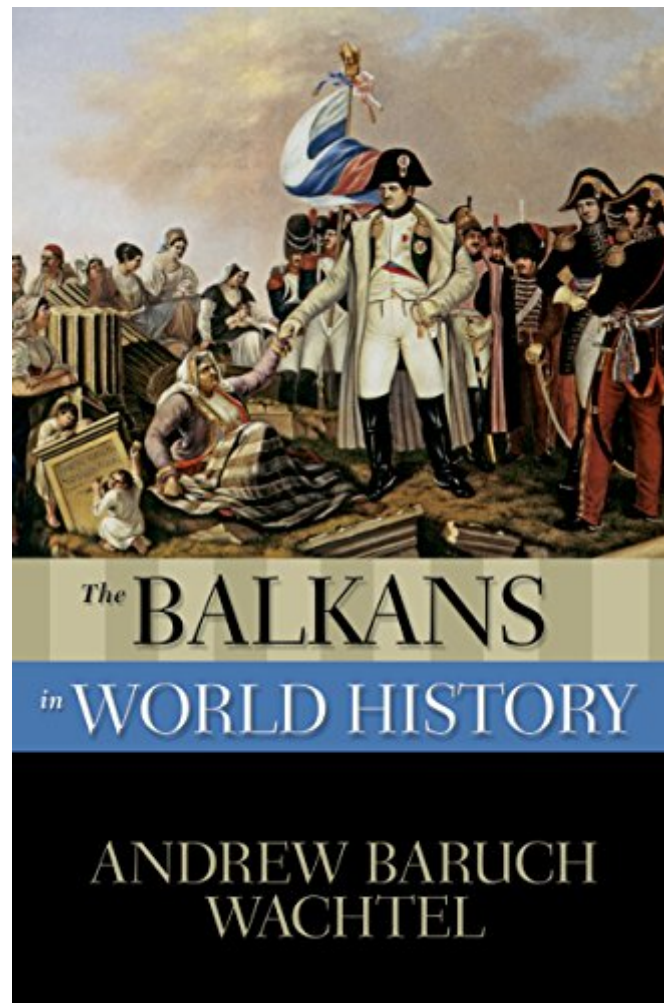


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The Balkans In World History (New Oxford World History)



Synopsis

In the historical and literary imagination, the Balkans loom large as a somewhat frightening and ill-defined space, often seen negatively as a region of small and spiteful peoples, racked by racial and ethnic hatred, always ready to burst into violent conflict. *The Balkans in World History* re-defines this space in positive terms, taking as a starting point the cultural, historical, and social threads that allow us to see this region as a coherent if complex whole. Eminent historian Andrew Wachtel here depicts the Balkans as that borderland geographical space in which four of the world's greatest civilizations have overlapped in a sustained and meaningful way to produce a complex, dynamic, sometimes combustible, multi-layered local civilization. It is the space in which the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, of Byzantium, of Ottoman Turkey, and of Roman Catholic Europe met, clashed and sometimes combined. The history of the Balkans is thus a history of creative borrowing by local people of the various civilizations that have nominally conquered the region. Encompassing Bulgaria, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Greece, and European Turkey, the Balkans have absorbed many voices and traditions, resulting in one of the most complex and interesting regions on earth.

Book Information

File Size: 6086 KB

Print Length: 164 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (November 5, 2008)

Publication Date: November 5, 2008

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00THHIVC6

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #656,312 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #247

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Europe > Eastern #413 in Books > Children's

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Customer Reviews

Fabulous short and concise history of the Balkans. I was so happy with this book because I was looking for a short and concise overview of Balkan history from prehistory up to present, to get an overview. The Balkan Region is a rich but very complex region, with a history of constant change in rulers, wars, and shifting cultures. It was a land that had pagan cultures, Greek and Roman, Slavic, Ottoman, etc. It has sensational culinary and viticultural history, with wines and olive groves planted for over 3,000 years. In preparation for planning a trip over there I wanted to try to grasp how and what the region is, from Croatia all the way down through Serbia, Montenegro and Albania and over the Accursed Mountains to Macedonia and Bulgaria to Turkey. This small book does a remarkable job covering all of this for a great overview. I highly recommend it.

Andrew Wachtel has put together a very useful summary introduction to a very complex area of the world; Wikipedia takes over 1500 words just to identify several of the definitions of the "The Balkans", and a similar introductory volume could be put together for many of the countries now included in the area. The Introduction emphasizes the complexity, focusing on the historical and cultural melting pot aspects of the area. Two measures: linguistic families in the region include the Slavic, Romance, Hellenic, Albanian, and Turkic language families, and the main religions are Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Sunni Islam. The first chapter covers the Balkans from prehistory to the Byzantine Empire, the second, the Medieval Balkans, the third, Ottoman Rule and the fourth the growing complexity of the 19th Century (1775 -1922). The fifth chapter, and perhaps the least satisfying, covers the 20th Century, with an almost unbelievable complexity. Wachtel's Notes are very useful, and they are easy to reach in the Kindle version from the basic text. The Chronology is perhaps the most useful part of the book; I found myself checking the text and then Googling for more information. And, of course, in a survey covering such a complex subject, the further reading section is essential, and struck me as a general reader as very comprehensive and helpful. Overall, I was very happy to find this book; it put many mysteries into context, and served as a key to further learning.***I re-read this book during a trip to Croatia last year, and even a college educated guide learned from the book. My admiration for it grew. Robert C. Ross
June 2012 revised May 2015

This is a great history book for beginners in Balkan history. It's quite short (about 100 pages), but still manages to cover the entire history of the region all the way back from prehistory to modern times. I always thought Balkan history would be way too confusing for a non-history expert to make

any sense out of, but this author manages to make things both understandable and interesting. My only complaint is that the chapter on the 20th century and more recent events could have been covered in a bit more detail.

First and foremost I enjoy reading this book. It delivers what is promised on the backcover. I am a novice at "Balkan" history so this is a good book for a beginning collection. I like the positive outlook. I was a bit taken aback though that the book was not longer. So before ordering, know that it only comprises 125 pages.

Good background on this part of the world, but I found the approach to be a little confusing. I'm used to names and dates to keep track of in order. I did seem to have a good grasp of the concepts affecting the history. It gave a good background for a trip I took there. I couldn't keep the people straight though.

Overall, like most of the other reviews, this is a good introduction to the Balkans. It is indeed short but there is lots of information without getting too bogged down in the details which is easy to do with Balkan history. My only "complaints" are minor in that I would have liked more on the Austro-Hungarian presence in the Balkans and I feel the book sort of fizzles out near the end. I would have loved more info and analysis on the Balkans more recent history after the Yugoslavian conflicts to properly understand where they are now.

I bought this book because I had read several novels dealing with the Balkans. I wanted a short history to put these novels in historical perspective. This book did it.

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