



## ★ **Troubled Water: A Journey Around the Black Sea**

**Jens Mühling**

**Simon Pare, Translator**

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Jens Mühling's colorful travelogue *Troubled Water* captures the history and cultures on the shores of the Black Sea.

The Black Sea has been a crossroads for warring and colonizing societies since human civilization began to take form in the Fertile Crescent. Along its contested shores, empires have risen and fallen, and people are constantly on the move, either voluntarily or by force.

Beginning and ending in the Crimean city of Kerch, Mühling spent one year traveling the shores of the Black Sea in search of an answer to what the sea represents today. Each country is given its own chapter, and a quote at the beginning sets the tone for what is to come.

The apparent neatness of the nation-states turns out to be a chimera: in each region, a mosaic of ethnicities, histories, and cultures who have rubbed up against each other for thousands of years is revealed. There are the Pontic Greeks, who trace their ancestry to the Greek colonizers of antiquity and still speak Greek, and the Tsalkan Greeks of the same origin, who speak Turkish instead. There are the Circassians, who went into exile in Syria in 1864, only to be forced to return a century and a half later, and the Cossacks, who were brought to Crimea to replace the Tatars and became the main persecutors of the Jews. There are also the Mingrelians, Abkhasians, and the falcon-loving Lazi.

Against a backdrop of demographic, political, and environmental change, the civilizations of the Black Sea are examined by looking at every situation from more than one angle. Simon Pare's vibrant translation from the original German brings out the literary qualities of the prose.

*Troubled Water* is an exuberant travelogue that reveals the complex civilizations that surround the Black Sea.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (May / June 2022)

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