

Romania: Landscape, Buildings, National Life in the 1930s

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Kurt Hielscher, Photographer

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First published in 1933, the new version of *Romania*, edited by Ernest Latham Jr., compiles more than three hundred images by the late photographer Kurt Hielscher, taken during visits from 1931 to 1932. It's an intriguing documentation of a place in a time when it was "slowly but irresistibly doomed to destruction."

Hielscher may be best known for the time that he spent stranded in Spain during World War I, and for the book of images that he produced from the two thousand plus photographs that he took while there. His eye for visuals was impressive, though his far-right politics and support of fascist regimes colored his subsequent work. That problematic dichotomy appears in *Romania*, which includes the original preface by Octavian Goga, a poet and Romania's future far-right prime minister, which celebrates a kind of peasant life that the government of the time wanted Hielscher to capture.

Hielscher's photographs show what certain slices of countryside life were like between the wars, and his landscape images capture the country's natural beauty. There are memorable images in both black and white and sepia. The Carpathian mountains look beautiful in these shots, from the distinctive limestone formations known as the "old women" to the Tataru Gorges cutting through the mountains. The architecture spans hill country farmhouses, ornate monasteries, and cemeteries full of decorated crosses made from stone or carved from wood. The people of various Romanian villages appear, some posing in groups wearing local clothing and others photographed at work in the fields or in town. One memorable picture shows a shop with newly made *opinka* shoes hanging from a clothesline; another features a shepherd in a field blowing a long metal horn.

Romania's everyday scenes mix with the grandeur of the natural and human-formed landscapes, providing a rare photographic record of Romania in the crucial interwar years.

JEFF FLEISCHER (November / December 2022)

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