

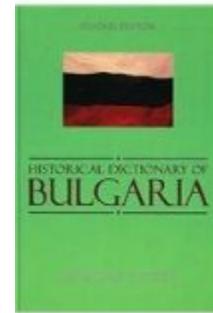
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Raymond Detrez. *Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria*. Historical Dictionaries of Europe Series. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006. lxiv + 638 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8108-4901-3.

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Published on H-Ideas (January, 2007)



A Compendium of Bulgaria's Experience

One of the main assets of historical dictionaries is their ability to evoke the complexities and uncertainties underwriting the historical developments of a country. General histories, with their objective for parsimony and linear patterns of development, more often than not tend to overlook the ambiguities and unintended consequences attending the construction, emergence, and maturity of any nation. In this respect, Raymond Detrez's *Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria* both conforms and confirms this quality of historical dictionaries. Written by one of the pre-eminent scholars in the field of Bulgarian studies, the fact that it is running into its second edition both attests to the quality of his product as well as the merits of his intellectual endeavor.

To the buffs of Bulgarian studies, Detrez's volume offers five hundred pages of cross-referenced entries detailing various aspects, periods, events, places, terms, organizations, and personalities from the historical, political, societal, cultural, and economic life of the country. At the same time, this historical dictionary provides an informative 30-page chronology of Bulgarian history as well as 108 pages of superbly organized bibliography. Its accessible structure can quickly point those interested in particular topics and issues to further sources of information where they can find the relevant knowledge. In fact, the extensive, detailed, and easy-to-use bibliography is one of the main assets of Detrez's dictionary.

Another central quality of his endeavor is the erudite and confident discussion of the post-communist period of Bulgaria. Many a commentator of the period of Bul-

garian democratization found themselves lost in the warren of political formations, parties, coalitions, and leaders that vied to influence the direction and speed of the country's transition. As a consequence, the maze of Bulgaria's post-communist experiences confounded scholars and analyst both within and outside of the country. In this respect, the history of the transition period has become a puzzle that any find difficult to comprehend if not outright unfathomable. In contrast, Detrez deftly untangles the many posers of Bulgaria's post-communist development and makes legible the complex pattern of interactions that characterized the transition period. At the same time, he also takes into account both the country's post-Cold War accession into a number of international organizations and makes available Bulgaria's integration dynamics into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. These accomplishments both attest to Detrez's extensive interest and knowledge of Bulgarian developments as well as his discerning assessment of their implications.

Detrez's *Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria* would also satisfy the tastes of those less experienced with the intricacies of Bulgarian history. The volume offers detailed, yet accessible, entries on a broad scope of subjects. Its comprehensive account of the development of Bulgarian statehood from pre-history to the present is likely to entice many to learn more about the country and its people. In this respect, Detrez's dictionary is not devoid of the romanticism of the medieval Bulgarian kingdoms, nor the dramatism of the many vicissitudes of the nation-building process. In order to make it easier for neophytes

of Bulgarian studies to come to terms with the complexities of Bulgarian history, Detrez provides detailed lists of all Bulgarian rulers, kings, prime ministers, and presidents. Furthermore, the *Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria* makes one aware of the intimate, if often complicated, relationship between Bulgaria and its Balkan neighbors.

The *Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria*, therefore, would benefit both advanced scholars and students of

Bulgarian studies. Detrez has produced a comprehensive, accessible, and up-to-date repository of Bulgaria's experience. At the same time, it would also be of interest to those interested in the broader field of Balkan affairs. In this respect, the *Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria* is not only an invaluable source of knowledge about the country, but also a book that is likely to stay as the main reference source on Bulgaria for a long time.

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Citation: Emilian R. Kavalski. Review of Detrez, Raymond, *Historical Dictionary of Bulgaria*. H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. January, 2007.

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