

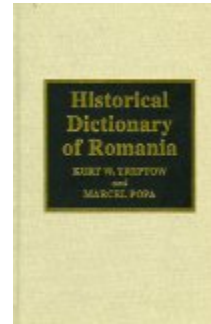
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kurt W. Treptow, Marcel Popa. *Historical Dictionary of Romania*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 1996. lxxviii + 311 pp. \$62.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8108-3179-7.

Steven Bela Vardy. *Historical Dictionary of Hungary*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 1997. xx + 704 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8108-3254-1.

Reviewed by Jim Niessen (Texas Tech University)
Published on HABSBURG (March, 1998)



Contrasting Points of Reference

The reader who expects differences in the presentation of these neighboring countries' history will not be disappointed. An obvious contrast is in the books' length, which is in inverse proportion to Hungary and Romania's current populations. Steven Bela Vardy offers a succinct explanation in his preface: "Hungary is a country whose past is greater than its present ... [and it is] less than thirty percent of its former self" (p. xi).

The two volumes provide the categories of information that one expects from the historical dictionaries published by Scarecrow, which now number more than one hundred and are a staple of every reference collection. The amount of material presented about Hungary is generally greater: four rather than two pages of abbreviations, four maps rather than two, and a chronology of forty rather than thirty-three pages. On the other hand, the authors of the Romanian volume devote more pages to their tables of rulers and to the bibliography that concludes their volume. The maps of Hungary are admirably clear and effective in tracing territorial evolution, those of Romania are unobjectionable but also not very helpful. Both books offer historical introductions and excellent ready reference in their front matter and alphabetical entries about persons, places, events, historical terms, and locally significant topics such as "Gothic Art and Architecture" and "Humanism" (in Hungary) and "Oil" and "Tourism" (in Romania). Each book has an extensive, chronologically and thematically organized bibliog-

raphy focusing on English language works. Also typical for Scarecrow, there are numerous cross-references within the entries, but no index to the volumes.

Given Vardy's interest in pre-Trianon Hungary, it is unsurprising that two-thirds of his historical chronology predates the twentieth century, while the proportion is reversed for Romania. Vardy is correspondingly strong on medieval rulers, battles, and institutions, though these are not neglected by Treptow and Popa, and he also devotes generous attention to regions, historical figures, and leaders of the Hungarian minority in the territories now ruled by Hungary's neighbors. Some entries of doubtful historical significance may be justified by the identification with their respective nationality in American popular perception, such as the actor Bela Lugosi and the gymnast Nadia Comaneci. Both books contain articles on present day politicians and political parties whose significance will fade with time, though Romania's President Emil Constantinescu, elected in 1996, is notably missing from the book on Romania.

The authors' previous publications offer a clue to the variations in coverage. We are indebted to Vardy, a senior scholar at Duquesne University, for the standard work in English on Hungarian historiography[1] as well as many related, more specialized works. The many entries on Hungarian historians, from medieval chroniclers to many of today's historians, provide insightful

assessments of their contributions and a listing of major works. Entries on historians in the Romanian volume are far fewer and less detailed: there are entries on Iorga and Xenopol, but none on the Giurescus or any contemporary historians. Vardy's extensive writings on Hungarian-Americans[2] are also in evidence in his dictionary. Many political groupings and prominent members of the Hungarian community in the United States are treated in separate entries. The companion volume has very little to say about Romanians abroad, who are a smaller and less politically active group than the exile Hungarians.

Kurt Treptow is a specialist on medieval and twentieth-century Romania and a translator of Romanian poetry who directs the Center for Romanian Studies in Iasi, Romania[3]; while Marcel Popa is the director of a Romanian reference publisher and a medievalist. There are many entries on Romanian poets, painters, and composers, who are treated on their own terms. Vardy includes entries on notable Hungarian artists, but they are fewer and the treatment is more political; outstanding opera composer Ferenc Erkel is surprisingly absent. Even specialists in Romanian history can benefit from some of the entries by Treptow and Popa on historical terms one may encounter in documents and secondary works without explanation, such as "Clucer," "Parcalab," "Pitar," "Postelnic," "Serdar," "Setrar," "Soltuz," "Spatar," and many other more or less obscure categories of Romanian officialdom.

There are disagreements of fact, interpretation, and tone in the entries the two books have in common. Treptow and Popa define Transylvania (pp. 202-207) as a "Romanian historical province" that had a Romanian majority population throughout the Middle Ages, enjoyed substantial autonomy within Hungary until incorporated "for the first time" into Hungary in 1867, whose people struggled to gain and retain unification with Romania. Vardy's much shorter article on Transylvania (pp. 684-86) emphasizes its multiethnic character and gives far less attention to the Romanian national movement there. Each dictionary cites figures selectively about the decision of 1940: for Vardy the "Second Vienna Award" transferred a territory with 2.2 million people and a fifty-two percent Hungarian majority to Hungary, while for Treptow and Popa the "Diktat of Vienna" (p. 215) transferred 2.7 million inhabitants, "the majority of whom were Romanians." The truth is somewhere in between many of these articles, but those of Vardy at times have a polemical tone: in the article on "Transylvanian Saxons" (pp. 687-68) the recent emigration indicates resistance to "as-

similation into a society that is still basically alien to their Western minds," while the "Treaty of Trianon" (pp. 689-90) was "in direct violation of the highly touted principle of national self-determination."

Vardy takes nomenclature seriously: his book includes a helpful six-page glossary of geographic terms, with variant forms in more than twenty languages. Repeatedly, he makes an issue of the Romanians' ethnic label with a consistent preference, explained in a special entry (p. 721), for the ethnic term "Vlachs" (*olahok* in Hungarian) for Romanians before the nineteenth century. A comparatively mild oddity of the ethnic terminology employed by Treptow and Popa is the spelling "Szeckler" for the Szeklers or *szekelyek*, whose preference for Hungarian language and identity is never mentioned. Typically for Romanian historiography, Treptow and Popa employ the Romanian spelling "Doja" for the Szekler peasant leader, Dozsa. Another preferred form of the Romanians is more confusing: the fifteenth-century general known in Hungarian as Pal Kinizsi (Vardy, p. 423) can be found in the Romanian volume only within the article on the "Banat" as Pavel Chinezul.

Thus one can compare sins of omission (the avoidance of Romania's multiethnic past) with those of commission: Vardy's provocatively stated terminological preferences and interpretations. Vardy also takes greater risks with the sheer volume he presents, occasionally makes errors of fact, and repeats himself. The use of "Vlach," the reference to "goulash communism" in characterizing the Kadar era, and an almost fatalistic portrayal of Hungarian-Romania tensions recur throughout the book and appear dated in view of the participation of Hungarians in Romania's ruling coalition since 1996. Entries on Istvan Tisza's "National Labor Party" and "National Party of Work" appear four pages apart and even differ slightly, but refer to the identical party. The entry on the Evangelical Church wrongly identifies the *egy-hazkerulet* as a subdivision of the *egy-hazmegye* (it is the other way around), and the entry on Laszlo Tokes gives an incorrect name for the Hungary party of which he is currently honorary president.

Shared authorship appears to have minimized factual errors in the Romanian volume. Reference books are inevitably derivative, and this need not be a fault, since the aim is to provide reliable information in compact, readily retrievable form. However, it is disturbing to find that much of the entry on the "Peasant Revolt of 1907" (pp. 159-60) appears to be an unattributed paraphrase, at times even direct quotation of Keith Hitchins' portrayal

of the revolt in *Rumania 1866-1947*, an important synthesis that is listed in the book's bibliography.[4]

The bibliographies that conclude both volumes are valuable contributions, particularly since they include recent works and articles that would be difficult to track down in other sources. One misses, however, the selectivity and annotations that ensure the continued usefulness of the national bibliographies by Thomas Kabdebo and the Deletants.[5]

Students, teachers, and specialists are likely to find these compilations useful. Clearly it is advantageous to consult them in tandem, given the contrasting historiographical traditions that they embody. This can be said for all the Scarecrow historical dictionaries, but most particularly for those of this region. I am reminded of the remark by an editor of *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* about the editorial challenge presented by the easy and immediate juxtaposition of related articles that are separated by many volumes in the print edition: their discrepancies suddenly stare one in the face. Unlike the Scarecrow historical dictionaries, East European history has no master editor.

Notes:

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Citation: Jim Niessen. Review of Treptow, Kurt W.; Popa, Marcel, *Historical Dictionary of Romania* and Vardy, Steven Bela, *Historical Dictionary of Hungary*. HABSBERG, H-Net Reviews. March, 1998.

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[1]. Steven Bela Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography* (Boulder: New York: East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1976).

[2]. Steven Bela Vardy, *The Hungarian-Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985).

[3]. The third, revised edition of Kurt W. Treptow, ed., *A History of Romania* (Iasi: Center for Romanian Studies, 1997) recently appeared. The book will be reviewed soon on HABSBERG.

[4]. Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 176-78.

[5]. Andrea Deletant and Dennis Deletant, compilers, *Romania* (Oxford; Santa Barbara: CLIO Press, 1985); Thomas Kabdebo, *Hungary* (Oxford, England; Santa Barbara: Clio Press, 1980). Both books are volumes in the *World Bibliographical Series*.

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