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Leo Schelbert. *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland.* Historical Dictionaries of Europe Series. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2007. 616 pp. $105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8108-4931-0.

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Switzerland's Place in the World

As historians of some of the territories that have come to be known as Switzerland, we had no idea that the engineer who built the George Washington Bridge, the discoverer of LSD, or Yul Brynner were Swiss, and thus we have certainly learned much from the *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland.* For introductory pieces of information organized by alphabetical entry or for almanac type statistics for population and geography, this is a useful source. The various essays on cities and the cantons of Switzerland are generally good, and they tend to be a bit stronger when dealing with events and developments after 1800. Additionally, Leo Schelbert does a thorough job of presenting economic developments and the functioning of the current state and its bureaucracy, as well as changes in religiosity and language use.

However, Schelbert has been given the impossible task of looking at the entire history of Switzerland in one volume and writing it all himself. If it takes two of us to give the *Dictionary* a reasonable review with a fairly broad base of knowledge, the publishers should have recruited groups of editors and contributors rather than one or two people to write these books in the Historical Dictionaries series offered by Scarecrow Press. Schelbert, born in Switzerland and a serious scholar of immigration to the United States, would have been an excellent choice for lead editor on a bigger project with contributions from others. Schelbert's expertise is on display, for example, with the excellent and informative entry on Swiss emigration (which begins on page 99). Elsewhere, he offers details in entries on specific immigrants or immigrant groups to the United States, such as the Amish or Swiss Mormons (pp. 11, 225). Moreover, he adds an entry on immigration to Switzerland (p. 171). However, he cannot be an expert on everything and therefore occasionally relies on an outdated historiography. In our minds this is the fault of the publisher who commissioned a poorly conceived project of a historical dictionary written by one person (or two in the case of Denmark, modern Italy, and Moldova, which are numbers 33, 34, and 52, respectively, in the series). Much of this critique, therefore, is directed at the publishers and the structure of the project rather than the author.

We work on the broadly defined Reformation and revolutionary periods, so we will focus our critique on these areas with a few additions. In the long introduction that opens the work, Schelbert gives an overview of Swiss history. There is in this section a somewhat discordant tone with the rest of the dictionary, because any attempt to paint an arc of history is necessarily interpretive. The overall nature of this historical section implies long, almost inevitable, progress toward modern Switzerland, an explanatory process that we reject. Instead, the author should have discussed the contingencies of Swiss history. Additionally, the introduction is uneven in terms of painting Switzerland as both part of Europe and exceptional (p. xi). Presenting a strong sense of Swiss exceptionalism appears to buy into some elements of Swiss national mythology. For example, Schelbert refers to Switzerland's seven hundred years of existence, and a section of the introduction that looks at the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is entitled the "Emergence of a Swiss Nation" (pp. xli, lxi). It is an unconvincing argument that a Swiss "nation" existed at this point. Instead of recognizing that the construction of a modern "nation" could not yet have taken place, Schelbert supports elements of the Liberation Tradition, which states that a local treaty among three rural cantons signed in 1291 reflects the emergence of something that can safely be labeled "Switzerland" (p. 208). This overemphasis on the continuity of the Swiss "nation" leads to such claims as the Swiss Confederacy emerged after 1250 and the argument that the confederation had de facto independence from the Reich in 1499 before legal sovereignty in 1648 (pp. 113, 150).[1]

A key period in the development of the Swiss polity was the Reformation. Switzerland was the birthplace of Reformed Protestantism, and for the general reader this dictionary offers some useful, though necessarily schematic, introductions to key individuals, groups, and places associated with the Swiss Reformation. Included are brief essays (just under two pages each) on Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger, the principal reformers in Zurich; and on John Calvin, the architect of the Reformation in Geneva, an independent republic that became the so-called Protestant Rome. The entry on the Reformation itself briefly recounts developments starting with the Zwinglian and Anabaptist movements in Zurich and its environs in the 1520s. While the chronology of events is quite sound, Schelbert makes some comments that will not pass muster with scholars of the Reformation. He rightly mentions the influence of the writings of Martin Luther and Erasmus, but Swiss reformers surely did not draw inspiration from Henry VIII of England, who broke with Rome for political reasons and left Catholic theology largely intact. Quite surprising as well is the author's claim that the Swiss Reformation "was not a popular movement, but was carried out by a network of theologians and politicians" (p. 279). It is undoubtedly true that most peasants were "only marginally interested" in theological issues both before and after the Reformation (p. 279), but we must not forget that Swiss magistrates were horrified at the popularity of the radical Conrad Grebler; that in Basel and Zurich the zeal for iconoclasm among the people far eclipsed that of authorities; and that the citizens of Geneva voted unanimously to embrace Protestantism in 1536, five years before Calvin was permanently established there.

The essay on Zwinglianism is slightly longer and definitely better than the one on Calvinism (though both reformers would have been appalled to read Schelbert's contention, in the entry on Anabaptism, that they had rejected "sacramental rituals" [p. 10]). No one familiar with the history of Geneva would describe it as a theocracy. All appointments of pastors had to be approved by the city council, and the fact that religious and secular leaders worked together in Geneva is aptly seen in the Consistory, a type of morals court–not mentioned in any essay–which was created by Calvin and served as a model for Reformed Protestants everywhere. Comprised of the pastors and elders, the Consistory could censure and excommunicate people for various sins but could impose no secular penalties. Rather, it could only refer miscreants to the city council, which had the exclusive authority to inflict punishments.

The revolutionary period (1750-1848) in Europe also saw massive changes made by the Swiss. However, Schelbert relies too much on the implication that any reforms were introduced from outside. The claim that the Helvetic Republic of 1798-1803 was fully conceived and imposed by the French revolutionaries is another element common to the traditional school of thought, which argues for Swiss continuity from time immemorial. In the entry on the ancien régime, Schelbert follows this school, and so ignores the massive reform discussions taking place in Enlightenment Switzerland (exemplified by missing entries on Johann Jakob Bodmer, Isaak Iselin, and Enlightenment societies, such as the *Helvetische Gesellschaft*, which would have been useful in filling this gap) (pp. 12-13). He argues that the "French invasion of Switzerland led to the collapse of the ancien régime," and paints the end of the Old Confederation in 1798 as an abrupt break brought about only by the French, rather than a development initiated by a small minority of Swiss patriots building on decades of discussion and developments in political thought (p. 17). The notion that the Helvetic Republic was a pure creation of decision makers in Paris should be refined to allow for the agency of such Swiss actors as Frédéric César de La Harpe (p. 161). Yet the entry on La Harpe ignores the key 1797-98 period of agitation for French support against Bern for the liberation of the Pays de Vaud (La Harpe's home territory, which was subject to Bernese rule) (p. 201). During this period, La Harpe shaped the intellectual framework for the French Directory's decision to intervene in Switzerland, but Schelbert leaves out this most important period for the future shape of Switzerland. There are also some minor factual errors in the pieces on Neuchâtel and Geneva; for example, the aristocratic regime of Geneva was overthrown (in favor of democracy) in 1792, and the republic was absorbed into France in 1798; the author places both events in 1797.

The end of the Old Confederation implies that a new state form emerged in its wake. Understanding the introduction of the Helvetic Republic is essential to understanding the long-term development of the modern federal state, which emerged after the 1848 Constitution. The writing of a new constitution, which established sovereignty in the federal government while allowing much cantonal autonomy, was made possible by the 1847 Sonderbund War (which has no entry but is mentioned often). In English-language debates on political structure, confederation refers to a decentralized structure in which the states (or, in this case, cantons) are sovereign, while federation implies some sort of overarching central power, whether weak or strong, as in the case of the 1848 Swiss Constitution. Although the offi-

cial name of the country remains the Swiss Confederation, the modern state form in the post-1848 period is a federal state. Schelbert, however, is inconsistent in distinguishing between confederal and federal structures of government. Early in the book, for example, he refers to a transformation "from confederacy to confederation" (p. lxxxi). However, later in the book his terminology changes to a more accurate "Switzerland's transformation from a league of states into a federal state" (p. 187).

In any work of this sort there are bound to be some idiosyncratic entries. Why, for example, are there four entries for members of the Piccard family, but none specifically devoted to Bodmer or Iselin (pp. 260-264)? Why is Iris van Roten included but not Annemarie Schwarzenbach? Certainly it is unfair to demand that the *Dictionary* be twice as long, but there were some surprising choices, often trending toward an entry on an individual "great man" (such as Henri Dufour) rather than an entry on an event (such as the Sonderbund War) or leaning toward a promotion of Switzerland. This latter tendency can be seen in such things as his argument that the Swiss political system "assures [that] political issues are well understood by the voters and extensively debated," or in his discussion of women's suffrage (p. 267). While technically true, emphasizing the point that the male electorate democratically voted in 1971 to give the vote to women misses the point that Switzerland was absurdly slow in recognizing female suffrage rights (pp. 383, 389). There is also some vague whitewashing throughout the book, including the claim that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's children "were brought up in orphanages" (p. 289). It is much more likely that these children died in foundling hospitals.

This understandable desire to paint one's home country in a positive light culminates in Schelbert's revisiting of the debate over the actions of Switzerland's banks during World War II. One of us has heard Schelbert speak movingly of having lived through the war in Switzerland and of the intimate knowledge he gained of the very real deprivation experienced by ordinary people in wartime. However, it is very possible to separate the actions of banks and people, and there is no need to overreact to the bad press Switzerland received in the 1990s. In the introduction, Schelbert writes that in response to claims of victims of the Nazi genocide having dormant accounts in Swiss banks, "a meticulous inquiry found these claims to be false" (p. lxxx). Perhaps some more extreme claims were overstated, but certainly claims of accounts were not false–any cursory reading of the Bergier Report, the Volcker Commission, or the Eizenstat special briefing of September 2002 will make clear that money confiscated by the Nazis found its way into Switzerland.[2] Schelbert himself acknowledges that the Volcker Commission found instances of dormant accounts belonging to victims of the Nazi genocide (p. 71).

Along these lines, in the entry on Jews, Schelbert quite legitimately points out that per capita acceptance of Jews into Switzerland after 1933 was higher than the rate accepted by either Sweden or the United States, but he neglects to mention the necessity of payment from the native Jewish population (pp. 176-177). He mentions worthy individuals, such as Carl Robert Lutz, who in his work as a Swiss diplomat saved sixty thousand to eighty thousand Hungarian Jews, but there is no mention of the shameful case of the also-worthy Paul Grüninger (pp. 218-220). Grüninger was the disgraced St. Gallen police captain who had worked to allow some three thousand Jewish refugees to cross the border into Switzerland and was punished by an unsupportive state for his violation of Swiss neutrality. He was not officially rehabilitated until 1996. This is not to dredge up older debates or to claim that the Swiss should be perceived as members of the Nazi Party; that is obviously not the case. However, Switzerland's record during World War II was mixed, just like almost every other country. We should confront that reality.

The *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland* undoubtedly would have been much stronger if contributions had come from a range of historians with expertise in different epochs. That said, this dictionary succeeds in providing in one volume a wide range of historical essays on Switzerland. It can definitely be a useful tool for anyone seeking a chronology of events or other factual details pertaining to Swiss history. The lack of an index is an unfortunate oversight, however. It would also be a shame to confuse this work with the electronically published *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland* from the Swiss Academy of Humanities and the General Swiss Society of Historical Research.[3]

Notes

[1]. Thomas Maissen, *Die Geburt der Republic: Staatsverständnis und Repräsentation in der frühneuzeitlichen Eidgenossenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) rejects any pre-1648 notion of independence or full sovereignty for the Swiss Confederation. Schelbert admits that until 1648 members of the Swiss Confederation still appealed to courts of the empire (p. 259). Therefore, in our opinion, it is inappropriate to argue that there was legally recognized sovereignty before 1648.

[2]. For the Berger Report, see Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland-Second World War, *Switzerland: National Socialism and the Second World War: Final Report of the Independent Commission of Experts* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002); and for Stuart Eizenstat's special briefing, see http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/1998/980602_eizenstat_nazigl

[3]. An electronic version can be found at http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/index.php.

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