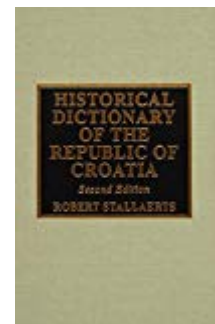


Leopoldina Plut-Pregelj, Carole Rogel. *Historical Dictionary of Slovenia.* Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1996. xxvii + 345 pp. \$78.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8108-3113-1.



Robert Stallaerts, Jeannine Laurens. *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Croatia.* Lanham, Md. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1995. xlii + 341 pp. \$47.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8108-2999-2.



Reviewed by Nicholas Miller

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The editors of these two volumes propose that they will help us to understand Slovenian and Croatian history through the chronologies, entries, and maps they present. Each volume succeeds to a degree, but which Croatia? Which Slovenia? Defined geographically or ethnically? Even though the authors should be applauded for their efforts, each volume founders on the very basic task of defining its subject.

Historical dictionaries do not have theses; they do not make overt arguments; and they ostensibly present their material in dispassionate and expository prose. As a result, it is rather hard to review them in the classic sense. However, even in a dictionary, choices of interpretation have to be made, and Stallaerts and Laurens often

choose contestable ones. For instance, was Stjepan Radic really "won for the Pan-Slavic movement" in 1895, as the authors assert? Did Croats and Serbs really "agree on a common Yugoslav policy" at Rijeka and Zadar in 1905, or did they simply agree to cooperate as a political strategy? Did Slobodan Milosevic really "put into practice a nationalistic memorandum" of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1986, or were those developments unrelated (and are they parts of Croatian history at all) (p. xxiv)? Were the Serbs of Croatia all really originally Vlachs, and is it fair to describe those who lived in Croatia until 1995 as mere "self-declared Serbs" (p. 11)? Was the Nagodba of 1868 really "retrograde," considering the fact that it recognized Croatia's autonomy af-

ter several centuries of full incorporation into neighboring empires (p. 12)?

All these assertions are debatable or simply sloppy. There are also outright errors of fact: for instance, the Independent State of Croatia was not proclaimed on April 10, 1942 (p. xxiii); Stanko Lasic's name is spelled three different ways over an eight-page spread (pp. 136-43). Finally, some formulations are simply perverse: "With his 'tigers,' Arkan fought and killed like a wildcat in eastern Slavonia" (p. 25).

The reader looking for much from Croatia's deep past will be disappointed, since this work is oriented toward more recent events. Entries on "Construction," "Employment Regulations," "Customs System," "Wages," "Pink Zones," and "Jelena Lovric," while all important, might not belong in a "historical" dictionary. Other odd inclusions and exclusions indicate this emphasis on the present: Tadeusz Mazowiecki (a Pole) is in, while Frano Supilo is not. Vladko Macek is out, whereas Marijan Hanzekovic and Peter Galbraith are in. In other cases, the emphasis seems misplaced (but predictable, given the bias towards recent events): contemporaries like Ivo Banac and Krsto Cviic, one a historian, the other a journalist, rate seven lines apiece, whereas August Cesarec merits four and Antun Gustav Matos gets two. Although the title is fair warning that this book is a dictionary of the history of the "Republic of Croatia," which might imply a greater concern with the period since 1991, serious imbalances in content between the past and the very recent past substantially reduce the value of this work.

Plut-Pregelj and Rogel chose a much more typical historical emphasis in their volume on Slovenia. For instance, while in the Croatian volume, intellectual movements in history are all but ignored, "Expressionism," "Realism," "Romanticism," "Enlightenment," and "Postmodernism" are all present here, and it is rare that an ahistorical entry works its way in. Useful and informative general entries on "Education," the "Press," vari-

ous "Constitutions" (Yugoslav and Slovene) are included, as they are in less satisfying form in the Croatian volume.

Subtle differences illustrate why the Slovenian volume is much superior to the Croatian. A comparison of the entries on Francis Joseph in the two volumes is illustrative. Stallaerts and Laurens' coverage of Francis Joseph's reign ends in 1860, and his most important accomplishment was to establish a "strict centralist and absolutist regime" (p. 94); Plut-Pregelj and Rogel describe his reign in broader terms, and more importantly, in the context of Slovene history (p. 110).

An historical dictionary provides the details that a narrative history often leaves out, and so acts as a supplement to a synthetic history of a people or place. Unfortunately, there are no general histories of Croatia or Slovenia in English today for these dictionaries to supplement. Today the English-speaking reader approaching these histories for the first time could be forgiven for not really knowing what Croatia and Slovenia are. Were such a reader to happen upon these books, I fear that confusion rather than clarification would be the result. Neither can provide the necessary context for all of the Habsburg and Yugoslav history that they contain, but they also leave too many unexplained loose ends.

Nonetheless, historical dictionaries perform many useful tasks: they offer ready reference information, time lines, and bibliographies, and these volumes fulfill these tasks well. Each of the books begins with a note on pronunciation followed by a section of abbreviations and acronyms. Then come chronologies, which for each begin in A.D. 395 for the Republic of Croatia, and ca. A.D. 550 for Slovenia. Both include useful maps, although Stallaerts and Laurens' choices are more complex and one has no key (p. 8). Plut-Pregelj and Rogel chose clearer, and thus more useful maps (some of which appear to have been drawn for this book, although there is no attribution). Each volume includes an extensive and use-

ful bibliography of works in English and Croatian or Slovenian.

Both these volumes demonstrate the dangers inherent in relying on only two scholars when constructing an historical dictionary. Because Plut-Pregelj and Rogel are students of history and literature, they were more successful than Stallaerts (an economist) and Laurens (a specialist on ethnic conflict) whose expertise is more limited and more contemporary. The backgrounds of the authors are reflected in their choices of entries, of course, which explains the fact that the historical dictionary of Croatia focuses so much on the past six years.

One good test of a reference work is whether one would direct an inquiring mind to use it: in the case of *Historical Dictionary of Slovenia* I would do so without a second thought; in the case of *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Croatia*, I would do so only with fair warning.

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