

**Cathie Carmichael, ed..** *Croatia*. Oxford and Santa Barbara, Calif.: Clio Press, 1999. Xxv + 194 pp. \$64.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-85109-285-7.



**Reviewed by** Steven Sowards

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This selective, annotated bibliography of publications about Croatia is one of the latest volumes in a series which covers the countries of the world (and even some important regions and cities). Carmichael has compiled and edited one of the stronger entries in this World Bibliographical Series: she has good credentials (a Ph.D. in European Studies) and has lived in the region.

This series is marketed in large part to libraries: while reference librarians are not mentioned as potential users in the cover blurbs, they are likely to suggest such works to students and general readers. These books follow a formula: anyone familiar with other volumes in the series can anticipate what is provided here. Reviews of books in the series also follow a formula: because they are reference books, those reviews most often appear in library-oriented serials like *Choice*[1] and *American Reference Books Annual*. [2]

Beyond the purpose, scope, and organization of specific printed retrospective bibliographies like this one, there are wider issues of interest to reference librarians and hopefully to library

users as well. Given H-Net's diverse membership, HABSBURG is an appropriate forum in which to note them. My intent in doing so is not to attack Dr. Carmichael's performance. In fact, the strengths of this particular work make it a useful starting point for the discussion, because whatever shortcomings the book displays are characteristic of the print bibliography as a form, rather than Carmichael's work. These tools have been a staple of library research for centuries, but the accelerating shift to computer-driven indexes, catalogs, and bibliographies raises serious questions about their role in the future.

To describe the work in hand briefly: in some two hundred pages, this hardcover volume provides complete citations and concise annotations for 775 publications. The overwhelming share are in English, but French, German and Croatian works are included in the absence of suitable English-language materials. A majority of the entries point to books, but there are many citations to articles in scholarly periodicals. Publications cited are as recent as 1998, or as early as 1614: most

pre-twentieth century works are available in re-print editions.

The entries are grouped into thirty four chapters, ranging in length from a single page (on "Food and Drink" or "Transport" with three or four entries each) to sixteen pages ("History" lists more than ninety entries, and many other items of interest to historians appear in the chapters on "Minorities," "Religion," "The National Question," and "The Croatian War of Independence (1990-1995).") Carmichael's stated purpose is "covering all aspects of [Croatia's] history, geography and politics." (Quoted from the back cover) The twelve-page Introduction is an overview of Croatian history, largely since the nineteenth century and especially since 1989. The focus reflects the compiler's background in history, ethnology and the social sciences. Entries about science emphasize the history of science; coverage of the arts is cursory, with an emphasis on literature in translation (because the "series ... is principally designed for the English speaker" including "researchers, scholars, business people and general readers"). (Quoted from p. v and the back cover) One can always quibble over the inclusion or exclusion of specific titles, but the history section includes substantial monographs and scholarly articles. An outline map and author, title and subject indexes complete the volume; some typographical errors have the potential to interfere with use of the indexes, but otherwise the execution testifies to care and attention.

Well-conceived retrospective bibliographies reflect appropriate criteria, in terms of selection and readership. "Students" could have been added to the list of anticipated users: this kind of selective, evaluative, organized list seems better suited to introductory research than the in-depth delving required by scholars and researchers, for whom the limitation to mainly English-language sources will be a problem. The work's scope is something of a moving target: some disciplines are better represented than others, and there is

tension between coverage of Croatia (as stated in the title) and of the Croatians (implicit in the content, which includes a chapter on "Croatsians Abroad"). Carmichael faces a dilemma when important material about Croatia is imbedded in sources about Yugoslavia: the chapter on "Bibliographies" is very narrowly cast, omitting Francine Friedman's *Yugoslavia: A Comprehensive English-Language Bibliography*.<sup>[3]</sup> Readers can of course resort to a 1990 volume on Yugoslavia in the same World Bibliographical Series.<sup>[4]</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, this is a good work of its kind and Carmichael has worked hard to produce it. She brings unusually strong credentials to the project and the result is one of the best volumes in the World Bibliographical Series, especially for historians.

When such books are viewed narrowly as reference acquisitions, such judgements tend to end the discussion. However, it is worth exploring some larger, interesting, and potentially more important points. Baldly stated: Carmichael has done a good job with the task at hand, but is that task still worth doing?

Given that there are more than two hundred volumes in this Clio Press series, and that each one has a chapter on history, relatively few have been reviewed for H-Net. To some extent this reflects a recognition that students, not advanced researchers, are the potential audience. But if these books are intended for use by college students and public library patrons, trends in library research behavior suggest a reconsideration of the whole genre. Anyone who works today with undergraduate students in a modern library sees print research tools neglected in favor of computerized databases like *Proquest Direct*, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe* or *Historical Abstracts*, or Web sites discovered through *Yahoo!* or other search engines.

For these potential users, volumes like *Croatia* are curiosities from another era. Nor do many

bibliographies meet the new generation of "wired" readers halfway. No volume in this series with which I am familiar provides selective evaluative citations and URLs for important Web sites or other online resources, despite the obvious benefits for users who struggle to find worthwhile materials on the World Wide Web. Carmichael's chapter on "Newspapers and Periodicals" mentions the Zagreb satirical weekly *Feral Tribune* but does not identify its Web site.[5] The Catholic newspaper *Glas Concila* also has a Web site, and could have been included.[6] These texts are in Croatian, but if language is a criterion the Croatian Information Center on the Web provides daily English translations of selected news stories; RFE/RL would be another potential source.[7] Of course, there are sound reasons to be wary of Web sites: they come and go, sometimes changing their URL. ABC-Clio may have a set policy against including potentially ephemeral information. On the other hand, many users would find such a feature attractive, and it would be consistent with a stated goal for the series: "to achieve, by use of careful selectivity and critical assessment of the literature, an expression of the country and an appreciation of its nature ..." (p. v) Access is not a mandatory element for such selections: Carmichael cites pamphlets, books and theses that will not be available to most readers, because they are held by only a few North American libraries.[8]

Print bibliographies have trouble with online resources because Web sites change so rapidly that information about them can be out of date before a book leaves the press. This is a failing linked to the medium-- paper--and not to the genre. There is no intellectual reason that bibliographies cannot migrate to HTML and Web publication: the obstacles tend to be economic. This realization has been noted by more than one H-Net reviewer. Reviewing another reference book for H-Albion in 1998, Tim Harris wrote that he "felt there was a certain irony in my reviewing a work like this on the internet: would anyone read-

ing this review ever need to use [such a] bibliography?"[9] Harris also notes that "bibliographies are by definition out of date by the time they are published. Search tools at most libraries and educational institutions are so sophisticated nowadays that students and scholars can easily find references to relevant works in the field via the computer ..." If accuracy, completeness, currency, and speed are important attributes for a valued reference source, then online databases--continuously updated--have the potential to surpass print tools in value.

Users remain ambivalent about online tools; so do librarians, who understand that it is easy to mistake bad online research for good. Reviewing another print bibliography for H-Asia in 1999, Marilyn A. Levine concludes that "having a book to look through brings to our attention work that a word or phrase search might overlook." [10] Certainly a well-organized print bibliography has great browsing potential, but only if the compiler's organizing principle harmonizes with the needs of the browser. The compiler's and the reader's intentions can conflict: disappointed with the organization of another print bibliography, Jeffrey Toland Leigh wrote for HABSURG in 1997 that "thematic chapters and cross-referencing" would still leave some researchers "to dig through the relevant chronologically-defined chapters, page by page" and that "there is no way to index a subject by region ..." [11]

This reviewer endorses the convenience of books for delivering text: they are portable, sturdy, and versatile. Reference bibliographies, on the other hand, really are not about text: they are devices for finding text. If online databases offer greater functionality--complex keyword searching, improved accuracy and speed, the potential for rapid dissemination of new citations--why not use them?

Claire Nolte reviewed the ABC-Clio bibliography on *Prague* for HABSURG in 1998. Despite acknowledging the advantages of computer re-

trieval, she concluded that "there will continue to be a need for annotated bibliographies" of this type, because of the service provided by the editors through selection and evaluation.[12] However, Web-based publications can perform the same critical function: advice to readers based on selection and evaluation. The great obstacle for presses is making the transition to selling information online: they face genuine risks of losing revenue stream while requiring extra resources to implement the change. No one is served if the challenge of new online formats pushes academic presses into bankruptcy. Until that transition is complete, well-done bibliographies (like this one) are still valuable for readers who are willing to use them.

Notes:

[1]. *Choice* (Middletown, Conn.: Association of College and Research Libraries, 1964-present).

[2]. *American Reference Books Annual* (Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1970-present).

[3]. Francine Friedman, *Yugoslavia: A Comprehensive English-Language Bibliography* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1993).

[4]. John J. Horton, *Yugoslavia* (Oxford, England and Santa Barbara, Calif.: Clio Press, 1990).

[5]. *Feral Tribune*. Online. Available: <http://www.feral.hr/> . 29 October 1999.

[6]. *Glas Concila*. Online. Available: <http://jeronim.hbk.hr/GK/gk.htm>. 29 October 1999.

[7]. Croatian Information Center. Online. Available: <http://www.hic.hr/index-en.htm> . 29 October 1999. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Online. Available: <http://www.rferl.org/>. 1 November 1999.

[8]. Holdings data for a sample of titles from OCLC WorldCat database.

[9]. Tim Harris, review of John Wroughton, *The Longman Companion to the Stuart Age 1603-1714*," H-Albion, H-Net Reviews, April, 1998. URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=11835934910011>.

[10]. Marilyn A. Levine, review of Frank Joseph Shulman, *Doctoral Dissertations on China and on Inner Asia, 1976-1990: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies in Western Languages*," H-Asia, H-Net Reviews, February, 1999. URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=13062919707033>.

[11]. Jeffrey Toland Leigh, review of George J. Kovtun, ed., *Czech and Slovak History: An American Bibliography*," HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews, April, 1997. URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=13313870699553>.

[12]. Claire Nolte, review of Susie Lunt, ed., *Prague*," HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews, July, 1998. URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=6357901814029>.

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<https://networks.h-net.org/habsburg>

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