

REVIEWS

GEORGES CASTELLAN, GABRIJELA VIDAN & ANTONIA BERNARD, *HISTOIRE DE LA CROATIE ET DE LA SLOVÉNIE*. CROZON: EDITIONS ARMELINE, 2011, pp. 522.

Reviewed by Veljko Stanić*

The French Armeline publishing house has specialised in recent years in the history of East and South-East Europe. There stand out in their production historical syntheses, among which an important place is occupied by the works of the doyen of French Balkan studies, emeritus professor at the University of Paris III–Sorbonne Nouvelle and prolific historian, Georges Castellan: *Serbes d'Autrefois. Aux origines de la Serbie moderne* (originally published as *La vie quotidienne en Serbie au seuil de l'indépendance*, Paris: Hachette, 1967), *Histoire du peuple roumain, Histoire de l'Albanie et des Albanais, Un pays inconnu. La Macédoine, Histoire de la Bulgarie. Au pays des roses*. This series of his has recently been joined by a new book, *Histoire de la Croatie et de la Slovénie*, this time written jointly with Gabrijela Vidan, professor of French literature at the University of Zagreb, and, now sadly late, Antonia Bernard, professor at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations in Paris.

The book before us is not intended specifically for experts in the history of

South-East Europe or students interested in this region but for a broader reading public. Although meant as an academic overview, it is above all a guide to the history and geography of a complicated region supposed to reduce a considerable gap in the offer of this type of literature in France. The authors are therefore explicit in their wish for the French reader to become more reliably acquainted both with the past of Croatia and Slovenia and with the position and society of the two European countries which now bear these names and which are as yet inadequately known to European publics. Castellan even suggests that the perception of Croatia in France has for a long time been encumbered with the legacy of the Independent State of Croatia (*NDH*), a Second World War entity inspired by the ideology of Nazism.

This is reason enough for this book to contain not only an evenly structured historical overview spanning the centuries from the earliest times and Slavic

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settlement in the Balkans until this day – penned by Castellán – but also overviews of periods of cultural history in the national development of the Croatian and Slovenian peoples written by Vidan and Bernard, respectively. The book also contains an index of personal and geographic names, an index *locorum* in the form of tables, a timeline chart and a glossary of lesser-known terms, as well as two appendices with statistical data relating to the current situation in the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia as regards the political and administrative system, demography and economy. Consequently, the book can also be read as a lexicon of phenomena, events and persons of significance to Croatian and Slovene histories.

It seems quite legitimate, however, to question the concept of combining the histories of Croatia and Slovenia in one book. While acknowledging obvious differences and distinctive characteristics observable in the historical development of the two peoples, Castellán highlights what they share in common: South-Slavic origin, early formation of Slavic polities in the Balkans, Roman Catholicism, belonging to the Habsburg Empire, historical position on the southeast periphery of the Holy Roman Empire, formation of modern national identities in the nineteenth century and Yugoslav experience in the twentieth century, secession from the Yugoslav federation and creation of independent states in the early 1990s. Such a combination would be more justified if we were offered a *histoire croisée* with special reference to differences and similarities in the formation of present-day Slovenia and Croatia, and an analysis of Central-European, Mediterranean and Balkan civilisational components in their development. What we have before us, however, is a conventional chronologically ordered narrative unfolding through a succession of chapters. The need to

squeeze almost fifteen centuries into the limited space of a synthesis inevitably reduces the amount of fact and blurs nuances in assessing historical phenomena.

Another general objection that may be raised to this book is that the level of its interaction with other political and cultural actors in the South-Slavic area, notably Serbian, is lower than the complexity of the area and the history of the *longue durée* require. In this connection, although Castellán sees medieval Bosnia – which, by the way, the relevant Byzantine sources describe as being inhabited by Serbs – as an independent political entity, in one place he misattributes it to the “Croatian space”. Furthermore, even though Castellán acknowledges the “Slavic” nature of the Ragusan (Dubrovnik) Republic, he wrongly includes it in the overview of the Croatian “royaumes indépendents” beginning with the early middle ages. As a result, Ragusan literature is assigned exclusively to the corpus of Croatian literary heritage, without even mentioning the Serbian literary heritage to which it also belongs, and to a much greater extent. Relatively little attention is paid to the history of the Serbian community in Croatia, although Castellán, of course, is aware of their historical role: their distinctive role in defence of the identity of the Croats through Yugoslav collaboration in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and the hardships they have endured at the hands of Croatian extremist parties and movements since the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, in discussing contemporary Croatia, he notices the lack of constitutional provisions regulating the status of the Serbian community, and adds that the Serbian share of 12.2 per cent of the total population of Croatia in 1990 is now reduced to 4.54 per cent, but abstains from calling the Operation Storm, expulsion of more than 200,000 Serbs from Croatia, an “ethnic cleansing”.

Broad-scope books such as this are bound to have some serious factual errors. Let us mention, for the sake of correction, two examples. Gavrilo Princip, the assassin of Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Habsburg throne, was not a member of the “patriotic organisation” known as “Black Hand” (p. 189), but of the revolutionary youth organisation “Young Bosnia” which, inspired by anarchist and democratic ideas common to similar European national movements, included, in the Yugoslav spirit, not only Serb but also other South-Slavic youth. Speaking about the genocide against the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War, Cas-

tellan quotes the Serbian historian Dušan T. Bataković’s *Histoire du peuple serbe* (p. 317), but does it inaccurately. Instead of quoting that the estimated number of Serb victims varied “between 300,000 and 700,000”, Castellan’s top figure is ten times as low as in the quoted original: “between 30,000 and 70,000” (p. 248).

Despite its flaws, the clearly organised *Histoire de la Croatie et de la Slovénie* will likely capitalise on Castellan’s reputation and serve as an introduction to the history of the two countries in French as one more, this time co-authored, in the long line of his books devoted to the history and civilisation of the Balkans.

FRÉDÉRIC LE MOAL, *LA FRANCE ET L’ITALIE DANS LES BALKANS 1914–1919. LE CONTENTIEUX ADRIATIQUE*. PARIS: L’HARMATTAN, 2006, pp. 407
and
LA SERBIE, DU MARTYRE À LA VICTOIRE, 1914–1918. PARIS: 14–18 ÉDITIONS, 2008, pp. 253.

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Frédéric Le Moal, professor at the Lycée militaire de Saint-Cyr and the Catholic University of Paris, is a historian of twentieth-century international relations with special interest in the period of the world wars and the Balkan region. He took his PhD from the University of Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV) under the mentorship of Professor Georges-Henri Soutou, and the first book reviewed here came out of his dissertation. His interest in the history of the Balkans led him to a separate synthesis devoted to Serbia in the First World War, published as the first in the 14–18 éditions series which is edited by Colonel Frédéric Guelton. It is also noteworthy that Le Moal subsequently published the book *Le front yougoslave pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Soteca, 2012), which seems to be enough to make him stand out among younger French histo-

rians as a specialist in the area of military history and the history of international relations.

In the tradition of the French history of international relations, *La France et l’Italie dans les Balkans 1914–1919* looks behind the history of events to grasp the underlying history-shaping geopolitical and cultural forces. Naturally, it takes into consideration not only France and Italy but also the policies of other great powers, notably Russia, as well as major Balkan actors such as Serbia. Basing his analysis on French and Italian national, diplomatic and military source materials, Le Moal produces an exhaustive overview, the first of the kind, of Franco-Italian relations from the beginning of the First World War through the Peace Confer-

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