

Thomas Schreiber. *Enver Hodja. Le sultan rouge*. JC Lattès. Paris. 1994. 269 pp. ISBN 2-7096-1390-5. 129 FRF.

Rarely has one individual been able to determine the fate of an entire country in such an absolute manner as did the late Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha (1908-1985), the man who isolated a whole European nation from Planet Earth for almost half a century. Thomas Schreiber's new biography of the 'Red sultan' is the first non-hagiographical account, to be published in any language, of the life and times of an indisputably fascinating figure of recent Balkan history.

Europe breathed a sigh of relief when Joseph Stalin died in 1953. In Albania, however, incredible as it now seems, even to the Albanians themselves, orthodox Stalinism survived unscathed and unabated until the end of 1990 and left the country with a sub-Saharan economy..

Schreiber delineates Enver Hoxha's personal and political development in seven distinct chapters. The early years (1908-1936) of Hoxha as a 'dandy and scholarship student' trace his non-proletarian family background in Gjirokastrë, his early studies at the French *lycée* in Korçë, and his less than successful university education at Montpellier in southern France. His years in France and Belgium left an indelible mark on the young francophile Hoxha. It was here that the ideals of the French Communist movement of the thirties gave him the crutch he needed for his personal development and identity. Court biographers of socialist Albania did much tongue-twisting at the time to explain away Hoxha's acceptance of a scholarship from the Zogu regime, his failure to graduate from the University of Montpellier with any diploma at all, and his obvious willingness to work for the royal Albanian consulate in Brussels as a devoted representative of the very regime he apparently so detested. Chapter two (1936-1944) chronicles Hoxha's life as a 'school-teacher, bar-keeper, and resistance fighter' after his return to Albania. Not unlike the errant young Adolf Hitler in Munich after his failures in Vienna, Enver Hoxha becomes the right man at the right moment of time in history when Albanian resistance to the Italian occupation of his country crystalizes in a burgeoning Communist movement, created under the tutelage of Yugoslav emissaries Dušan Mugosa (1914-1973) and Miladin Popovic (1910-1945). Chapter three (1944-1948) portrays Hoxha, the 'Titoist', in his skilful and ruthless manoeuvring in the political struggle for absolute power. Chapters four (1948-1961) and five (1961-1978) follow the Albanian dictator in his capacities as a 'Stalinist' and subsequently, after the break with Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), as a 'Maoist', through the sombre and futile years of said socialist development in Albania. Enver Hoxha was by now a bitter man, weakened by diabetes, who staged purge after purge in order to maintain his surrealist hold on the country. The final gruesome years (1978-1985) of Enver Hoxha as 'comrade and patriarch' in chapter seven chronicle the isolation and internecine struggles among and within the ruling families, culminating in the mysterious death of Mehmet Shehu (1913-1981) and in the inevitable demise of the 'omnipotent' himself.

Enver Hoxha now ranks in the annals of European history, together with Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Francisco Franco and Nicolae Ceausescu, as a remarkable and universally detested tyrant with few redeeming features. Much has been written since the fall of the dictatorship in Albania on the grim realities of the 'people's power' and still more remains to be told. Recent publications such as *L'Automne de la peur* (Fayard, Paris 1993) by Bashkim Shehu, son of Mehmet Shehu, *Nën peshën e dhunës* (Progresi, Tiranë 1993) by Todi Lubonja, and *Unë, Ramiz Alia, dëshmoj për historinë* (Zëri, Prishtinë 1992) and *Shpresa dhe zhgënjime* (Dituria, Tiranë 1993) by Ramiz Alia, all of whom had an intimate, first-hand knowledge of life in highest party circles, have thrown much light on the years of the Hoxha dictatorship. Ismail Kadare's much

more subjective autobiographical accounts: *Nga një dhjetor në tjetrin / Printemps albanais* (Fayard, Paris 1991) and *Pesha e kryqit / Le Poids de la croix* (Fayard, Paris 1991) are also useful.

What some critics may find missing in Thomas Schreiber's study is a more in-depth analysis of Enver Hoxha as a human being and as a political figure, based on direct sources. At the present time, there is still no lack of aging figures in Tiranë (many, admittedly, are now in prison) who knew Enver Hoxha personally or worked for him, and who could provide a more detailed account of the dictator's habits and deeds. Schreiber seems to rely exclusively on French and English-language sources for his biography, which are obviously not sufficient. The language barrier is evident throughout the book, in which many of the Albanian names are misprinted: Qemal Stafa appears as Kémal Stafo (p. 77) and as Qemal Stefa (p. 240); Sejfulla Malëshova as Sejfullah Malëshova (p. 88) and as Seifulla Maleshova (p. 100); Koçi Xoxe as Koça Xoxe (p. 113); Liri Belishova as Liri Melishova (p. 120); Fadil Paçrami as Fadil Pacrani (p. 202); Kiço Ngjela as Kiço Mgjela (p. 208); Hysni Kapo as Hysno Kapo (p. 224); *bllok* as *blok* (p. 119); and *Rruga Ismail Qemali* as *Kruga Ismail Qemali* (p. 151). Nonetheless, Thomas Schreiber, journalist and editorialist at Radio France International and author of a number of essays on Albania's political evolution, has good instinct and insight. His study of the Albanian dictator is objective, engaging and well written, illuminating for the Western reader as it does, the once highly secretive world of Tiranë's Red aristocracy.

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