

**Hutchings, Raymond: Historical Dictionary of Albania.** Lanham MD & London: Scarecrow Press 1996. xvi + 277 pp. (European Historical Dictionaries, No. 12).

It has been several years now since Albania found its way back to Europe, or may we say back to Planet Earth, and yet the little Balkan country has remained in many respects the *terra incognita* it always was. As such, an *Historical Dictionary of Albania* is a welcome addition to our store of information. The volume was published, as number 12 in the series *European Historical Dictionaries*, by Raymond Hutchings, who has specialized up to now on the former Soviet Union and, with regard to Albania, on aspects of economic development.

The work comes with three maps of Albania (p. vi-viii), a 'Chronology of Albanian history' (p. xi-xvi), an 'Introduction' with a survey of Albanian history (p. 1-10) and a rudimentary 'Bibliography' (p. 261-275). The main core of the book is the 'Dictionary' itself (p. 11-260), comprising an estimated 450 entries varying in length from two lines to two pages. The volume provides a wealth of useful material on Albania and should prove to be of great service to the interested public at large.

Irritating from the outset, however, is the misleading title. The dictionary is not so much one of Albanian history, as one might expect, but rather a light-hearted lexicon on a broad spectrum of Albanian affairs, including entries on dogs, pigs, bridges, superstition, tobacco and haircutting. It is informative and at times anecdotal in approach, rather than a high-brow work of historiography and scholarship. Specialists interested in a thorough and serious reference book to cast new light onto the sombre and forlorn field of Albanian history will be disappointed from the start.

Even since the fall of the dictatorship, it has not been easy for most foreign-language scholars to see beyond the impervious facade which Communist Albania set up and maintained for the outside world for decades on end. While it is certainly not politically gullible, as was William Bland's Albanian bibliography (Clio Press, Oxford 1988, World Bibliographical Series, Vol. 94), which by the way is currently being amended and revamped for a second edition, one senses in Hutchings' work a lingering concentration on Communist Albania, in particular in his utilization, as a basic source, of the *Fjalor Enciklopedik Shqiptar*, Tirana 1985 (Albanian encyclopaedic dictionary). The latter publication, as voluminous (1,248 pages) as it is scandalous, may have constituted an achievement at the time for a tiny and vastly under-privileged country in the last throes of Stalinism, but, subject as it was to an awesome level of political and ideological censorship, the FESH presented an extremely distorted view not only of matters political, but of every aspect of Albanian history and culture. In the long term, it has proven to be a catastrophe for the Albanian people since there is still no other such work of reference available. Hutchings has certainly used the FESH critically and intelligently, and has not fallen into any embarrassing or politically compromising traps, as did Bland, but the inclusion, for instance, of entries on the 'September 1982 Landing' (p. 204), 'Fier, Movement of' (p. 81) and on partisan heroine 'Berberi, Fato' (p. 42) as well as the debatable usage of the term Liberation ('number of bridges... built up to the Liberation', p. 45) may be regarded by some readers as outdated. The various five-year plans of the Communist period are listed not as one entry, but under 'First...' (p. 83), 'Second...' (p. 201), 'Third...' (p. 226), etc.

But politics aside. The basic shortcoming of the dictionary is its reliance on second-hand and often dubious sources, such as the FESH. The entry on Austrian Albanologist 'Jokl, Norbert' (p. 128-129), for instance, is based on a newspaper article of 17 March 1990 by Xhevat Lloshi in the Communist Party daily *Zëri i Popullit*. Most entries on individuals are devoid of the standard biographical information one expects of a lexicon, such as date of birth, place of birth, educational background, etc. Of Prime Minister 'Meksi, Aleksandër' (p. 158) we learn none of the above, but simply that he is older and shorter than President

Berisha. More satisfactory are the numerous entries on towns and geographical districts, although here again, the author can be anecdotal with his information. In the introductory paragraph on the city of Korçë (p. 136-137), we are informed that the town "might be reached by taxi, but this would normally be prohibitively expensive." A guidebook approach is not necessarily wrong, but it is unusual in an historical dictionary.

Many of the entries might have been better researched. Whether 'Falaschi, Nermin Vlora' (p. 80) is the "niece or granddaughter" of Ismail Qemali could have been solved by a simple phone call to her in Rome. The size of the Albanian minority in the United States (p. 240) is given as "comparatively large." That the village of Vraka (p. 205) near Shkodër "probably no longer exists" will be an unpleasant surprise to its inhabitants. A brief visit to Albania would have provided the author with more exact information on national minorities and on countless other questions. The entry on 'Literature, Albanian' (p. 151), which is noticeably shorter than the one on 'Dogs' (p. 67), is confined to a rather odd remark on the prevalence of poetry in Albanian literature, "because of the possibility of terse expression, so that a lot can be said with few syllables," etc. 'Broadcasts to Albania' (p. 46) informs us of the activities of the BBC, but gives no indication of the existence of other Albanian-language services, such as the Voice of America (Washington) and Deutsche Welle (Cologne), etc.

Without wishing to be picky, the reviewer also ventures, for the sake of accuracy, to point out a number of minor mistakes and oversights. 'Ali Kelmendi' tribe and tribal region (p. 19) should read 'Kelmendi' tribe and tribal region, Ali Kelmendi being a communist revolutionary. The entry 'Bajram Curri' (p. 34) should read 'Curri, Bajram'. 'Barleti, Marin' (p. 36) was not strictly an "Albanian humanist", as Albanian sources often have it, but an Italian humanist from Shkodër. 'Çamaj, Martin' (p. 53) should read 'Camaj, Martin'. Although it is true that the Albanians have been very badly treated in the newly independent Republic of Macedonia (FYROM as the author prefers) and that "official notices are generally published only in Macedonian" (p. 99), the latter is not a language which "Albanians cannot read without special study". All Albanians native to Macedonia willingly understand Macedonian, although it is true that one would rarely find a Macedonian willing to stoop to learn Albanian. The local football club in Himara, "Vetëtima" (p. 117), does not translate as "Own team", but rather "Lightning". The 'Krasnichi' tribe (p. 141) is alive and well in its homeland in the northern Albanian mountains, but is more properly spelt 'Krasniqi', this perhaps being the reason why the author suspects that the "clan no longer lives where it did." The remark that the 'Osum' river (p. 173) is "called the Uzumi above the confluence with the Devoll and Beratinus below" is no doubt a result of one of the many printing mistakes on Albania's infamously inaccurate maps. On 'Tirana' (p. 227), that the indefinite form Tiranë is the one "used in Albania itself" is misleading, since of course both the definite and the indefinite forms are used, depending on syntax.

The above-mentioned mistakes do not, however, detract from the overall informative character of the *Historical Dictionary of Albania*. While one must accept that the book is not a work of in-depth academic research, and perhaps this was not the author's intention, it does offer a good compilation of material on Albania and thus serves its purpose of providing needed information on Europe's last *terra incognita*.

Robert Elsie  
Olzheim / Eifel