

John R. Lampe. *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xx + 421 pp. \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-46705-6; \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-46122-1.



Reviewed by James P. Krokav (DePaul University)

Published on HABSBURG (April, 1997)

Postmortem

Yugoslavia as History is the first general history of Yugoslavia to appear in English since that country's bloody end in 1991. Its author, John R. Lampe, has written or co-authored a number of previous works on Yugoslav and Balkan history, including the prize-winning *Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950*.^[1] A former foreign service officer stationed in Belgrade in the mid-1960s, and an academically trained historian specializing in economic history, he is now Professor of History at the University of Maryland and Director of East European Studies at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. He belongs to the second academic generation of American scholars to study Yugoslavia and the South Slavs, after the pioneering group that includes Charles and Barbara Jelavich, Peter Sugar, Wayne Vucinich, George Hoffman, and Michael Boro Petrovich, all of whom are among those he thanks in his work and to the memory of the last of whom he dedicates this book.

Lampe's background is evident throughout the book. He incorporates into the narrative of internal politics a significant amount of economic and diplomatic history. He also uses and cites the work, often still unpublished,

of very many young American scholars with whom his position at the Wilson Center has undoubtedly brought him into contact.

He brings to this history a decidedly American perspective. It is not just that he builds on the achievements of the pioneer American generation of scholars of Yugoslavia. Throughout the book, he consciously steers between two historical views with their roots in that country. He decidedly rejects the nationalist perspective of both emigre scholars and post-Tito South Slavs within Yugoslavia and its successor states, who portray the country as some sort of "artificial creature whose deformities made collapse inevitable" (p. 4). Yet he also attacks the official Communist view propagated in Titoist Yugoslavia, particularly the historical inevitability of a Yugoslav state as the product of "longer-term forces, and not just the fortunes of war" (p. 4). His discussion of the death toll at the Ustasa's Jasenovac concentration camp is typical of his stance. He rejects postwar Communist historians' politicized claims of over a half million victims of this camp alone in favor of a figure "rightly reduced to slightly less than 100,000 by Croatian schol-

ars.” He also attacks Serbian and Croatian “pseudohistories,” the one inflating, the other deflating, the number of victims (p. 207). His reference here to Croatian scholars shows, though, that like other American students of Yugoslavia he has necessarily relied on the help and the scholarship of many South Slavic historians. He expressly acknowledges the work of five of them, “Janko Pleterski of Ljubljana, Mirjana Gross and Ljubo Boban in Zagreb, Danica Milic and Branko Petranovic in Belgrade” (p. xvi). He reflects an American—or perhaps I should say Anglo-American—perspective of history also in seeing it as a continuous creation of human beings and not the product of a metaphysical or material force before which individuals—and chance—are powerless. Hence, like very many American historians, if not journalists and political scientists, he also decidedly rejects not just the notion of historical inevitability but also the view that the recent disintegration of the country is the result of “the region’s ‘age-old antagonisms’” (p. 4). Anglo-American, as well, is his stress on the role of the individual in history. “Tito’s individual identity counted; others’ did too” (p. 6). And, though acknowledging the temptation to view Yugoslav history through the prism of its bloody recent disintegration, he also insists on understanding the past on its own, not the present’s terms: “... going forward into the past makes for bad history” (p. 2).

As a work of synthesis, if not in all the details of coverage, *Yugoslavia as History* clearly replaces earlier similar general works on Yugoslavia such as those written in English by Stevan Pavlowitch,[2] Fred Singleton,[3] and Phyllis Auty[4] or translated into it like Vladimir Dedijer’s edited work.[5] It is not just a question that most of these books are now twenty or more years old. The spectacular disintegration of the country necessarily raises in an acute way questions about its nature that were not considered by authors writing at a time when Yugoslavia seemed to be politically and economically head and shoulders above its Communist neighbors. Lampe himself acknowledges: “[m]ost scholars who enlisted in the Western army of Yugoslav specialists, the present author included, simply assumed that the country would and should continue to exist” (p. 4). With the exception of Dedijer’s work, which Lampe explicitly criticizes when discussing Yugoslav Communist accounts of an inevitable Yugoslavia, almost all of the other works are by western scholars writing close to and under the influence of what in retrospect seems like the high point of the second Yugoslavia, the mid- to late-sixties.

Lampe’s acknowledgments and introduction, the latter titled “The Search for Viability,” clearly set out for

the reader the goals and limits of the book. He hopes “to connect the two Yugoslavias with their origins, their strengths with their weaknesses, and their bloody demise with that full historical context” for an identified audience that includes not only scholars but also “the interested public and responsible public officials as well as university students. The times call for a book that is accessible as well as authoritative and original” (p. xvi).

Despite his 356 pages of text, he does not aspire to completeness. His focus is “the origins and trials of Yugoslav political unification” (p. 1). And, while recognizing the separate cultures of the South Slavic peoples of the former Yugoslavia, he concentrates not on these separate cultures but “instead on how these peoples mixed and migrated across proximate lands, and where they intersected with one another ...” (p. 6). He explicitly identifies his focus as “the stuff of state-building, that is political culture and legal framework more than ethnic distinctions. We also focus on socioeconomic or religious institutions more than class relations and on warfare or other dealings with near neighbors more than with distant powers” (p. 6). All of this he justifies by reference to the work of Anthony D. Smith, who in his study of nationalism identifies “the three forces crucial to coalescing ethnic identity into enduring national consciousness ... [as] state-building experience, religious organization, and military mobilization” (p. 7).

Lampe argues that a series of political, economic, and military factors, what he calls “state-building rationales” (p. 8) twice promoted the emergence of a Yugoslav state; these were the desire for representative government and the attraction of economic integration, coupled with the Serbian army in 1918 and Tito’s Partisans in 1944. Yet “three romantic nineteenth-century ideas for the creation of a unitary nation-state—Great Serbia, Great Croatia, and a Yugoslavia founded on the assumption that at least Serbs and Croats, and possibly all South Slavs, were one ethnic group” (p. 8) competed with the state-building rationales. The two successive Yugoslavias never developed a sense of “common citizenship” to override the three romantic nationalisms. Yet, according to Lampe, “everyday interaction of peoples” (p. 8) mitigated ethnic separatisms and allowed predominance to the state-building rationales, until external events like the Second World War in 1941 and the collapse of East European Communism in 1989 upset the delicate equilibrium and allowed the romantic nationalisms to triumph. With this position set out in the introduction, Lampe develops his argument through eleven subsequent chapters.

Positing as he does the modern creation of nationalism out of an ethnic substrate, Lampe's work clearly focuses on the twentieth century. The first two chapters cover 1100 years before the twentieth century. They provide cursory overviews but introduce an important theme that he will pick up in his later analysis: a region and ethnic groups fragmented by a mountainous geography that frustrates economic development, commercial ties, and political linkages. The nineteenth century, to which Lampe devotes his entire second chapter, saw the emergence of unifying ideas in the form of Yugoslav, Serbian, and Croatian nationalisms, and the extension of modernizing state systems, the latter actively resisted by the peasant majorities in each area. Yet, despite unifying aspirations, Lampe is clear that "we can find no real prospect for a Yugoslav state or practice of common politics before the twentieth century ..." (p. 39).

The third and fourth chapters take us from 1903 to 1921. While Lampe acknowledges a growing awareness of the possibility of political and economic change in the South Slav lands and a rising call for South Slavic unity before 1914, he clearly and convincingly argues that it was the events of the First World War that made the emergence of a Yugoslav state possible. He posits that "a majority of popular opinion everywhere except Kosovo arguably favored the creation of some sort of Yugoslavia by 1918" (p. 99). Yet in the face of Habsburg collapse and Italian designs on the eastern Adriatic, it was the Serbian army's survival of the First World War that made a large Yugoslav state possible.

The first Yugoslavia from the 1921 Vidovdan Constitution to its disintegration in 1941 takes up the next two chapters (Five and Six), separated at the 1929 imposition of royal dictatorship. For Lampe, the main problem of the 1920s was the dominance of a political leadership shaped by prewar realities, unable to think in other than regional terms, and incompatible in their personalities. After 1929, Alexander's royal dictatorship failed even before his death to eliminate the opposition, but the country did begin to develop a common culture and institutions. While the Sporazum of 1939 that established a distinct Croatian Banovina did not solve interwar's Yugoslavia's regional imbalances, "domestic disagreement over the deal probably would not have destroyed the first Yugoslavia in the absence of the Nazi invasion" (p. 192).

The four years of World War II earn a chapter of their own. More significant than even the First World War for setting the future course of South Slav history, according to Lampe, World War II made Tito's Yugoslavia pos-

sible, not just because of Partisan victory, but also because the Axis occupation cleared the decks for Tito's Communists by destroying most prewar institutions. Yugoslavia's Communists seized power more rapidly than Communists anywhere else in Eastern Europe. Moreover, while Allied aid to Tito was important, it was not crucial to the seizure of power. "The Partisans' heroic survival, multi-ethnic composition, and promised federal program allowed the KPJ to consolidate power even in the absence of Soviet troops. Tito adopted a ruthlessly Stalinist and centralizing set of tactics to seize that chance ..." (p. 222).

This Communist regime established by Tito is the subject of the next three chapters, covering the years 1946-1953, 1954-1967, and 1968-1988. The first period saw the establishment of arbitrary party, police, and army authority, the break with Stalin, and an internal Stalinist period lasting beyond 1948. It culminated in a 1953 constitution that "spoke bravely of decentralization and other departures from Soviet practice, but its specific provisions did not point in that direction" (p. 256). During the second period, "Yugoslavia became a more open and better place to live than anywhere in the nearby bloc" (p. 260). Yet the Party and the nomenklatura remained in charge even after further constitutional tinkering, and Tito's personality and predilections were responsible for both these positive and negative phenomena.

After 1968, "Tito's Yugoslavia descended slowly and then not steadily from its most promising period—the late-1960s ..." (p. 293). Although Tito's death in 1980 did not mean the immediate end of the country, three major "liabilities" that plagued Yugoslavia in the 1980s "were rooted in the Communist leadership's response to opposition from outside and inside the party during the period 1968-71" (p. 294). These liabilities were the 1974 confederal constitution, the 1976 establishment of Basic Organizations of Associated Labor (OOUR) that further reduced enterprise efficiency, and the Yugoslav international debt crisis early in the 1980s. Lampe ends this chapter, and his story of Yugoslav politics, with the unprecedented resignation in December 1988 of Prime Minister Branko Mikulic and his cabinet.

Lampe's eleventh and last chapter, "The End of Yugoslavia," deals primarily with the country's last three years. It is more of a reflection than a sustained argument, focusing on the emergence of ethnic politics into the "post-Tito power vacuum at the federal level" (p. 325). To try to synthesize the flood of work on the breakup, as he has done on the first and second Yu-

goslavia, would have required a book perhaps as long again as this one.

While the general outlines of Lampe's arguments seem sensible and plausible, if not uncontested in every detail, his first two chapters and his penultimate chapter are open to the most criticism, the birth and death of the country, as it were, being even more controversial than its life. In covering so much background material so quickly in the first two chapters, Lampe inevitably risks both leaving the uninitiated confused and making factual errors. For example, although he explicitly identifies religious identification as primary during the pre-modern period and elsewhere talked of the emergence of nationalism as a modern phenomenon, he himself in some places confusingly refers to pre-modern populations by the terms Croat or Serb when Catholic or Orthodox might have been more appropriate.

An example of the type of factual error his early chapters are prone to is his discussion of the late nineteenth century in Croatia. His general picture is in accord with recent scholarship, but he inexplicably has the Independent National Party winning a Sabor election in 1871, even though the party did not exist at that time (p. 61). His chapter that discusses Yugoslavia between 1968 and 1988, leading up to the actual breakup, will also no doubt attract critics. While admirably strong on the economic situation, it seems to lose sight of the intellectual criticism, demystification, and delegitimization of the existing system, such as was described as early as 1988 by Stevan Pavlowitch.[6]

How well does Lampe fulfill his own stated goals of having produced a book that is "accessible ... authoritative and original" (p. xvi)? This book is clearly original and arguably authoritative, but, alas, not really accessible. Covering as it does the whole history of the first two Yugoslavias before the breakup in 1991 and incorporating the recent work of so many other scholars, this book is unlike any other available in English now. Produced by a prominent American authority in the field, it will undoubtedly command respect among scholars. Yet it will hardly satisfy historians writing from either a nationalist or a socialist perspective, arguably the overwhelming majority of those in the former Yugoslav lands. Even among non-South Slav scholars, there will undoubtedly be plenty who will disagree with Lampe's interpretations of many particular events on which he takes a stand. They will not, however, be able to ignore his monumental work.

It is the nonscholars, the students, the public, and the

government officials whom Lampe also wishes to reach who, I fear, will be daunted by the complexity and length of his book. With over 350 pages in his text, the author has sought to make his story inclusive. The complexity of the events of multi-ethnic Yugoslav history, however, makes this a hard story to tell, even with the author's clear organization. I have recently completed teaching an undergraduate class on "The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia" and was dismayed halfway through the quarter to realize that all of the students in the class, even the very best of them, were totally lost in the detail of Lampe's book. If these students had trouble with the complexity of the book, an otherwise very good undergraduate class, all of whom had taken this as an elective because of an interest in the subject, how likely is it to appeal to the journalist on a deadline? Or to the government official, who is probably like the congressmen mentioned by former U.S. Ambassador Warren Zimmerman when he said, "Yugoslavia was too complex to fit into the short attention span of overscheduled politicians"?.[7] Or to a member of the public faced with a choice between Lampe and some book peddling once again "ancient Balkan hatreds," but doing it breezily and quickly? That Lampe has not made Yugoslavia's history accessible is not his problem alone; all of us specializing in the area share in it.

Unfortunately, his publisher did not make his job any easier. The simultaneous appearance of hardbound and paperback editions certainly indicates that Cambridge University Press expected a large demand for this work, so it is a pity that it could not have done a better production job. This book shows too many signs of hasty editing. In the text there appears to be an over-reliance on computer spell-check, which cannot catch bloopers like "Frankish German realism" (p. 28), which should read "Frankish German realm." While there are many maps, a significant number of them would be clearer if they were bigger, and at least one is downright wrong. Map 2.2 (p. 47) shades all Habsburg territories shown as if they were "Habsburg South Slav territories," including Tyrol, Salzburg, and Hungary. Map 11.1 (p. 331) "Ethnic distribution in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo, 1991," while correct, does show, unannounced, some of the Albanian majority areas in Macedonia. Yet when one looks at the map, one immediately wonders why no attempt has been made to shade in the large white spaces in Slovenia, Vojvodina, Serbia proper, Montenegro, and the rest of Macedonia. Ethnic diversity and large compact minority populations were not just restricted to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo. More troubling are the numerous editorial errors, including misspellings of

names of authors and titles in the endnotes. It is precisely the nonspecialists targeted by the author who will be led astray by references to “Wayne S Vicinich” not Vucinich (note 27, p. 367) or David MacKenzie’s *Apis, the Congenital Conspirator ...* (note 4, p. 369, should read “congenial”).

Despite these faults, we are all in John Lampe’s debt for producing such a timely and compelling book.

Notes:

[1]. John R. Lampe and Marvin R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

[2]. Stevan Pavlowitch, *Yugoslavia Nations of the Modern World* (New York: Praeger, 1971).

[3]. Fred Singleton, *Twentieth-Century Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); *idem*, *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples* (Cambridge: Cam-

bridge University Press, 1985).

[4]. Phyllis Auty, *Yugoslavia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965).

[5]. Vladimir Dedijer, *et al*, *A Short History of Yugoslavia* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974)

[6]. Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *The Improbable Survivor: Yugoslavia and Its Problems, 1918-1988*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), pp. 129-142.

[7]. Warren Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe: Yugoslavia and Its Destroyers—America’s Last Ambassador Tells What Happened and Why*. (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 130.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the reviewer and to HABSBURG. For other permission, please contact <reviews@h-net.msu.edu> and <habsburg@ttacs6.ttu.edu>.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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

Citation: James P. Krok. Review of Lampe, John R., *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. April, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=941>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.