

Fuerst-Bjeliš, B. and Glamuzina, N.: The Historical Geography of Croatia: Territorial Change and Cultural Landscapes. Cham, Springer, 2021. 203 p.

Historical geography has become less fashionable in the past couple of decades compared to a general fascination with the historical changes of geographical conditions, which is not independent of the growing concern for the environmental crisis of our time. Research, however, has partly turned to studying the Earth system and increasingly focused on humans as part of environmental processes rather than towards understanding the changes in the physical geographies of certain areas. This led to a well-expressed shift from historical geography towards environmental history.

Another paradigm shift that made historical geography less fashionable was the increasing critique of polities as units of enquiries, and shifting focus to smaller, and non-traditional units of analysis such as social and religious groups, different settlement types, etc., which usually proved to be more alien to historical geography.

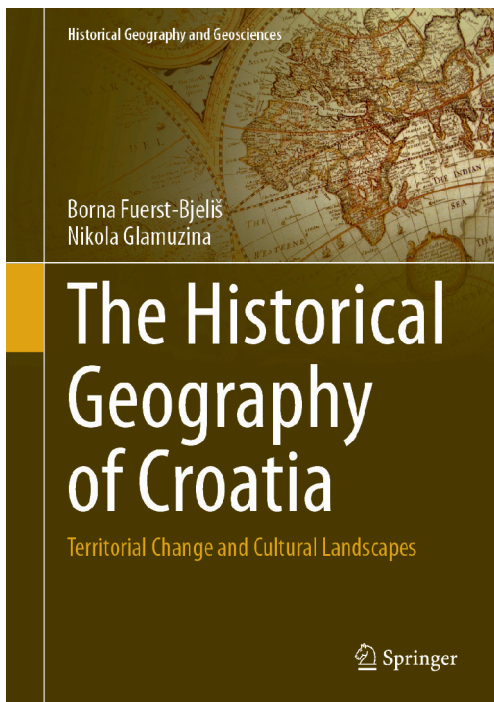
However, the book of two Croatian geographers, Borna FURST-BJELIŠ and Nikola GLAMUZINA, went against both trends in choosing a modern polity, the Republic of Croatia as their unit of analysis, and

focusing on the changes of the geographical conditions of this area in the past millennia. The book was originally published in Croatian (in 2015) mainly for educational purposes before it was translated into English in 2021. On the one hand, the translation is a good one, but due to the original, potentially Croatian-Serbian readership, it goes into details which are very difficult to follow without a deep knowledge of the micro-regions of Croatia. The authors also attach explanatory footnotes to discuss different terms unfamiliar for the average reader.

As historical geography has very different research traditions and approaches, it would have been essential to provide a theoretical basis to the analysis of FURST-BJELIŠ and Nikola GLAMUZINA in the 10 chapters of their book. According to them, “the nature of the discipline, the historical geography of Croatia can be understood as the geography of Croatia’s past. It is primarily the geography of how the space and cultural landscape have been shaped, for every respective period of Croatia’s historical-geographical development.” (p. 3). However, what the authors mean by cultural landscape remains unclear. While in many subchapters the authors point to changes in population and administration of the different provinces, the analysis of the landscape and vegetation changes in the past millennia is not detailed thoroughly. While at some points the authors discuss the importance of stock breeding, wine growing, olive production as well as, of course, crop production, the impact of the different activities on forest cover, soils, erosion, etc., is only vaguely mentioned in the different chapters of the book. This is difficult to understand, as according to the authors’ definition, the historical geography they were to present is the history of the cultural landscape changes in which one can hardly disregard from studying the above listed problems.

Despite the reduced thematic focus there are some remarkable merits of the text. First, it is logically well-structured and easy to read. The recurrence of topics makes comparison easier, such as the maps of similar outcrop. Beside general descriptions, both qualitative and quantitative data are available in the text. Especially well-written are the parts on land ownership-system (including Neolithic, Roman, Medieval, Ottoman etc.), trade, commerce and traffic (the Venetian seashore). The changes of geographical terms (Dalmatia, Slavonia) are also well interpreted.

However, there is certain imbalance within the focus. First there is the territorial aspect: Dalmatia is very professionally written, while in the case of Pannonian Croatia one would expect more, especially if compared to the valuable descriptions and analysis of transformations in Dalmatia. Furthermore, though



the text keeps focusing on cultural landscapes, some elements could have been emphasized better. For instance, there is no map on the changes of land cover and agricultural systems – not even on a small portion of the country.

The fact that in the chapters from the foundation of the Croatian state onwards the work mostly builds on Croatian scholarly literature is no surprise, and the fact that the research results of the last decades are brought to the English-speaking audience is most welcome. However, two tendencies worth to be pointed to in this respect. First, that even while discussing the Roman times, the book predominantly uses Croatian literature, and in most cases not ones written in the past two decades. The other striking omission is scholarship of the neighbouring countries for the last millennium, such as works written in Italian, German, and Hungarian.

One last point before turning to the different chapters of the book, is the usage of maps. Some of the maps significantly contribute to the understanding of the administrative changes, the political units, migratory processes, etc. However, many maps (e.g. Figures 3.1, 5.5, etc.) only represent the actual features within the present boundaries of Croatia that makes it difficult to use. In most cases not only the visualization, but the content of the maps too deserves attention, but some could have been planned better (like the one indicating migration routes or the one that illustrates whole Baranja as part of the medieval Kingdom of Croatia). Original maps, the contemporary and local perceptions of the landscape could also have added more to the general picture. As for cultural elements on landscapes, while routes are indicated professionally, there is no map on castles and fortifications, major churches with data of their (re)construction, mines, etc. These would have been worthy of more attention. The authors also consider the territorial changes of administration as a part of cultural landscape, but while the *župa*-system is clarified well, one would expect more explanation in the beginning when the boundaries of Croatia and their creation is discussed.

After these general points, in the following sections we aim to draw attention to some specific issues in the different chapters. After the general outline and concept of the book (Chapter 1), that we touched upon above, Chapters 2 to 10 give a chronological overview of the development of the land of Croatia from the Palaeolithic to the 2010s.

The general features of Palaeolithic-Neolithic era are described too long (just like the Ottoman structure and its general internal problems before its collapse in Croatia), in comparison to the shorter description of the local specificities. The maps are lacking excavational sites located outer Croatia, which is confusing (the territorial extent of these archaeological cultures is indicated properly). Since the territorial extent of

some cultures is not limited to present-day Croatia it would have been more proper to give the full names of these cultures: the authors use Starčevo culture instead of Starčevo-Körös, or Vučedol culture instead of Vučedol-Zók culture.

After discussing the Palaeolithic and Neolithic settlement processes in the area in Chapter 2, the authors provide a more in-depth analysis of the Roman period, which clearly was a period of fundamental importance in the landscape changes in the past millennia. There is a fascination amongst historians for almost a century on the formation of the landscape of the Mediterranean. Some of the scholars have put the formation of secondary vegetation, the treeless hillslopes and shrubland vegetation to the Roman period in their focus, and attributed it to the intensive timber need of both the military and civil populations. There is virtually no discussion of this in the book (the authors seem to consider the Ottoman period more serious in this respect), and neither of the impact of the Roman agricultural system on the soils in the area, which in the past decades, not independent of the growing importance of geoarchaeology, brought important results in understanding the impact of Romanization all throughout the Mediterranean. There are some misunderstandings and mistakes in this chapter. The Roman *limes* is referred to as a hard border (p. 45), the Ostrogoths as nomadic peoples (p. 49). To illustrate, how important it would have been to use the most recent literature let us point to one further issue. The authors attribute large importance to the plague of 542 A.D. (Justinianic Plague) in the territory of modern Croatia, around which a completely different paradigm has been unfolding in light of more recent research by Lee MORDECHAI, Timothy NEWFIELD, Adam IZDEBSKI, and others.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the changes in the post-Roman period, marked by a strong desurbanisation and decline according to the authors. They point to these processes in the territory of the former province of Pannonia, while in the seaside they suggest a stronger continuity in the “Roman cultural landscape”. The focus of the chapter is early medieval migration processes, most importantly the arrival of the Slavs. The Balkan migratory processes and the Slavic migration within that have been a large field of debate in the past half a century, where fundamentally different views have been presented, including ones that argue against the actual movement of the Croats to their later medieval settlement area, but argue for their local presence from earlier on, and for their identity transformation in the early medieval period. (For a comprehensive overview of the question, see LATOSINSZKY, C. 2017.) It is also in this part that the Byzantine, the Carolingian, and then Ottonian control over the territory are discussed. The Carolingian influence over the region has recently been subject of an important set of analyses (DZINO, D. *et al.* 2018) which

along with other works showed that the region, unlike suggested in the current book, was never under direct influence of Carolingian noble families (pp. 60–61). The authors suggest that the German influence in the tenth century went hand in hand with the development of classical feudalism in the area, which was not even typical in areas north of the Alps in the Holy Roman Empire (p. 59).

Chapter 5 discusses the development in the centuries starting with the political influence of the Árpád dynasty and Hungary over Croatia at the turning of the eleventh century. From that time on, the book refers as Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom to the polity that covers most of what is nowadays Croatia, which is anything but usual in the existing scholarship. This part of the book almost completely disregards the discussion of the changes caused by the Hungarian rule, despite that in the past years, important works discussed the connections of the two polities in the Árpádian period and later (GÁL, J. 2021). This part would have also profited from a thorough review by a historian. In that case the Golden Bull of 1222 would not have been dated to 1242 (p. 67), Pécs would not have been included in Lower Slavonia (p.69), and Genoa would not have been interpreted as an important trading hub in the tenth century (p. 77) when it was only a small fishing village.

In presenting the late medieval transformation in the region not only the political changes – i. e. the appearance of the Ottoman Empire in the area – are discussed (Chapter 6), but also the social and religious crisis are mentioned, partly as attributed to the *pataria* and the Cathars in the area (p. 89) which is difficult to digest in this form. The political crisis is also explained in terms difficult to understand. According to the authors the lower levels of the aristocracy lost much of their status due to the strengthening of mid- and high-level aristocracy (sic!) that went along with disappearance of nearly all noble counties which is a complete misunderstanding (p. 89). The first half of the Ottoman presence is explained in a relatively detailed manner. The new political-administrative system is presented in detail, alongside with religious regulations for the Christians who lived under Ottoman rule. Yet, landscape and geography are almost completely omitted from the discussion. Somewhat surprisingly the Ottoman rule is seen as a heyday for the people, compared to the “Habsburg Monarchy and the Republic of Venice, where Slavs had a secondary role and could not rise high in the state rulership apparatus” (p. 93). The land management system under the Ottoman rule is also explained in positive terms contrasted with the “abusive feudal system,” which is debatable (p. 101).

The map on migrations (p. 106) during the Ottoman era uses the term Burgenland and Slovakia (instead of present-day Slovakia or Upper Hungary), which are anachronisms, and did not emphasize the

Hungarian Kingdom as a refuge area of Croats and Bosnian Catholics (though the text itself mentions this). (Central Bosnia should have been mentioned on the map as a source area of immigrants not only to Croatia, but to the Hungarian towns of Mohács, Pécs, Baja and even Buda in the 17th century. After 1686 the [re]conquering of Buda, Catholic Bosnians [Croats] were allowed to settle in Víziváros and Tabán in the close vicinity of the castle of Buda, because they were trusted loyal subjects.) The abundance of Bosnian Catholics is clearly indicated by the family names ‘Bosnyák’ in Baranja in the *Conscriptio regnicolaris* from 1715 (*Conscriptio regnicolaris*), whereas the frequency of family names ‘Horvát’ in western Upper Hungary underlines the hypothesis that Croatian elements contributed to the birth of the modern Slovakian nation. Texts mention *šokci* and *bunjevci* as resettled elements, but maps did not illustrate them separately. (The directions on this very map could have been labelled with the linguistic terms, which are described in the text, but foreign readers hardly have any idea on the location of Stokavian, Kajkavian, etc.)

While explaining the formation of dialects in the Ottoman period, little space is dedicated to the landscape changes caused by the completely transformed land ownership, which received disproportionately little attention with some but notable exceptions such as the military frontier areas. In Chapter 7, while explaining the Habsburg and Venetian occupation and the recapture of the territory of present-day Croatia, we recurrently read about cultural landscapes being destroyed, but finally with numeric data. When explaining the eighteenth century, the authors address the Venetian dominance over Dalmatia and emphasize the importance of natural resource exploitation such as mining, timber for shipbuilding. One may wonder the long-term landscape heritage of this period, along again with the transformed landownership explained by the authors on page 134. The re-settling of many areas in the aftermath of the Ottoman occupation is presented in a more balanced way. However, while deeply explaining demographic processes and economic changes, less attention is paid to land-use and landscape changes.

Finally, the reader might appreciate some data and maps using the modern censuses executed in the eighteenth century and later. A map on the social structure based on the first census of Emperor Joseph in the 1780s in the Kingdom of Hungary would have been worth further discussion, even if it did not contain data on Dalmatia. Similarly, peasant landholding size and lifestyle could have been supported by BIČANIĆ’S old work (BIČANIĆ, R. 1952). The authors could not know, but in 2020 Hungarian scholars digitized the data on Croatia from the 1786 conscription – which indicates not only the landholding size of smallholders at settlement level, but also

the taxes, days spent with ‘robot’ (work on allodium landsize), and gift to landlord. The census data from 1910 for Croatia without Dalmatia are now available online not only as raw data (*GISta Hungarorum*), but as a series of maps published in an electronic atlas (DEMETER, G. 2019). These could have also enriched the topics discussed and the authors’ statements. Mariann NAGY in her work on Hungarian agriculture in the late nineteenth century compares the situation in Croatia and Hungary at county level with hundreds of maps based on quantifiable statistical data for Slavonia and Croatia (not for Dalmatia) (NAGY, M. 2017).

While using both the most recent economic literature on the development of Croatia (STIPETIĆ, V. for dynamic GDP calculations for the different regions and pp. 156–158) and old literature, sometimes contradictory statements occur. The former speaks about dynamic development, while the traditional historical works emphasize underdevelopment and backwardness, for which they blame Austro-Hungarian economic policies (the same was true for Hungarian Marxist historians in the 1970s). The truth is that the elder generation did not understand the mechanism of liberal capitalism, thus failed to recognize that during the dualistic period after 1868 most of the investments were realized through private enterprises and not by the state (including the railway sector), unlike in the era of absolutism. In the regular form of capitalism state intervention is of secondary importance, thus supposing exclusive role for the state itself in industrialization is a misconception. Therefore, the criticism towards Austria-Hungary’s government for the economic backwardness of Croatia cannot stand fully. It is also worth further emphasis that industrialization in Croatia was largely based on available agrarian surpluses, such as wood and timber – the same role was played by grain (flour) in Hungary, which also fueled the industrialization.

There are also some minor mistakes in the text regarding the modern period. The Salonika railway was not finished by 1874 (p. 152), only the Ottoman parts had been constructed by then. It should also be noted that a railway economically more suitable for Croatia (between Vukovar and Rijeka) was first planned by Lajos Kossuth early in the 1840s, but the Pest-centric approach of count István Széchenyi finally triumphed (p. 151). The original idea was to send grains from Hungary and Slavonia directly to the markets through Fiume/Rijeka, bypassing Budapest. Since the plan was not carried out in this form, Budapest was able to create its enormous milling capacities, the incomes of which served as basis for capital supply for other industrial branches. Though this story highlights the role of politics over economy, in other cases economic interests were of primary importance (of course, these economic interests of the nobility appeared in politics too during the era of railway con-

structions). More information on banking would have been better, as well as some better maps regarding urban development (Rijeka).

Beside these considerations the book is a worthy contribution on the topic, especially for those, who are not experts of the field, but want to get some initial insight into the problems, topics, and structures.

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