

COMMENTARY: SLOVENIA IN THE 1990s

**THE *SLOVENSKI BIOGRAFSKI LEKSIKON* - ONCE AGAIN
FROM THE BEGINNING, BUT HOW?***
Franca Buttolo

Since the Slovene intelligentsia's plan of publishing a Slovene biographical encyclopedia was first formulated, after World War One, two events are most significant in connection with its realization: the publication of the first fascicle of the *Slovene Biographical Lexicon* in 1925; and the publication of the last fascicle, the 15th, and of the index of names, in 1991.

The chronology of the publication of the *Slovene Biographical Lexicon* [SBL] shows that over such a long period of time the editors, the authors, and the publishers underwent many changes. For instance, the contents and the internal structure of the Lexicon were influenced by different views, both ideological and scholarly — not only the views of those who participated in the creation of the SBL, but also those who utilized it or who made its publication financially possible. The original plan for the SBL to include, alongside the creators of culture and scholars in the humanities, also some of the main representatives of other disciplines (law, medicine, the natural sciences, politics, economics) was easy for the editor, Izidor Cankar, to put into effect in the first three fascicles¹ (1925-1928), with the assistance of only three co-editors (Joža Glonar, Francè Kidrič and Janko Šlebinger) and, of course, the assistance of the authors of the articles. But with the fourth fascicle (1932) this kind of approach to editing was already no longer possible. Thereafter, and through the publication of the index of names, the members of the editorial boards worked closely with every single one of the editors: France Ksaver Lukman (fascicles 4, 5, 6 and 8; 1932-

* *Editor's note.* This is a translation of Franca Buttolo's article "Slovenski biografski leksikon - kako še enkrat od začetka?" which appeared in *Delo*, 14 October 1993, in the supplement *Književni listi*. The translation and reprinting is by kind permission of Tit Doberšek, editor of *Delo*. I hereby acknowledge the assistance of Professor Carole Rogel who first brought this article to my attention.

¹ *Translation note:* throughout, *zvezek* is translated as "fascicle" and *knjiga* is translated as "volume."

1952), France Kidrič (fascicle 7; 1949); Alfonz Gspan (fascicles 9, 10, and 11; 1960-1980); Fran Petre (fascicle 12 and 13; 1980-1982) and with Jože Munda (fascicles 13, 14 and 15, and the index of names; 1982-1991).

Until the publication of fascicle 8, even until the inception of the publication of the third volume, i.e., fascicle 9 (1952), the editors paid heed to the original concept. In the 9th fascicle, however, editor Alfonz Gspan brought the contents of the SBL into line with the requirements of modern times and also with contemporary Slovene politics. From that fascicle on, the alphabetized list included "many more living social, cultural and trade workers than previously, for it understands the concept 'national culture' in its broad meaning of the most varied activity; and, e.g., all the more and more rapidly developing disciplines of the natural sciences and modern technology and their application are also certainly a part of the spiritual superstructure," as editor Gspan emphasized in the Introduction to Volume III, in 1971. This kind of concept also required an increasing number of contributors, especially authors of articles, among whom several wrote dozens of articles, including France Adamič, Rudolf Andrejka, Janko Glazer, Jože Glonar, Alfonz Gspan, France Kidrič, France Koblar, Silvo Kranjec, Ljubonir Andrej Lisac, France Ksaver Lukman, Maks Miklavčič, Ivan Pintar, Avgust Pirjevec, Janko Polenc, Stanko Premrl, Viktor Smolej, Marijan Smolik, Viktor Steska, Janko Šlebinger. Of course, much credit for making possible the systematic work of the editors and the authors of articles goes, in particular, to the librarians and archivists who, with numerous instructions and tips with respect to appropriate materials, brought new perspectives on many problems in biographical research to light.

The publication of the SBL in the years 1925 through 1935 only, six fascicles, was assisted by the *Zadružna gospodarska banka* [Co-operative Economic Bank] in Ljubljana.; fascicles 7 through 13, by the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts and the SAZU Center for Scientific Research. The 15th and last fascicle of the SBL, which brings to its conclusion the project which editor Jože Munda noted in the concluding comment to the fourth volume, also concludes the fundamental task of the SBL, which had always been the same: "to describe the life and work of the people who contributed anything at all substantial to knowledge, to culture and to national development from the earliest days until today." At the same time he recognizes that in spite of various changes in the basis, the methodology has been maintained: "to reliably offer the essential biographical and bibliographical facts, the most important literature and, where it is possible, a concise appraisal..."

The SBL is a synonym for the most faultless and reliable encyclopedic handbook in Slovene science. On 3,909 pages (with the name index, 3,335 pages) it comprises 4,997 biographical articles; if we take into account all the persons represented in detail, there are indeed about 6,000 biographies; and all the individuals presented or named amount (as the name index shows) to at least 20,000. In brief, the SBL contains a systematic survey of the names at home and abroad that are important for Slovene and European history, Slovenes and foreigners from the Middle Ages until our own times. This kind of systematicity is made possible in the first instance by the formal structure of the biographic articles with their complete data about each life and work concerned and about the relevant biographical documentation — which is available in the archives and libraries and around the world, both public and private — with provision of data concerning visual materials, legacies and the like.

It is possible to agree completely with the statements of Jože Munda, the last editor, to the effect that, for the scientific and specialist public both at home and abroad, the SBL was “always vigorously noted and esteemed,” and that our own and foreign scientific writers sampled it to their advantage — as was frequently evidenced by the quotations in their papers. Even more frequently, the SBL served as a resource for occasional journalism, “although usually it is not noted as being the writer’s basic or even only source.” And certainly its worth as a lexicon is confirmed by the single fact that in 1976 the first two volumes experienced a quality reprinting abroad (with the Kraus publishing house in Liechtenstein).

Improvements and supplements are required

In spite of all the points of distinction mentioned above, the new edition should be fundamentally improved and supplemented. The editorial approach to the new edition of the Slovene Biographical Lexicon should be based, in comparison with the first edition, upon the contemporary theoretical, systematic and historical points of departure of universal (international) and national, and of generalized and specialized, biographical and lexicographical reference books. The new edition of the SBL, most especially the sections from A through D, should include all Slovene personalities and all personalities who are significant for the Slovene nation or state. It should be prepared in accordance with objective points of departure that are founded upon a general scientific method, and not so that everything therein should “be planned according to a unified scientific method, namely on the bases of historical materialism,” as, unfortunately, was the wish the

late Academician Josip Vidmar in his introductory notes to the *Enciklopedija Slovenije*. The new edition of the SBL should be appropriate for all the levels to which its users aspire, and particularly for study and for research.

A subject of research for the project of a new edition of the SBL should be the biographies of persons which are included, according to well-known criteria, in the SBL's first edition, and should be provided with a name index at the end, as was the first edition. However, in the new edition of the SBL, as a totality — in the shape of entries on the life and work of individual personalities — there should be included precisely all those representatives who were important for the existence, the development and the reputation or the international involvement of the Slovene nation and whom the first edition of the SBL was unable to include because of right-wing or left-wing political pressure or simply because several fields of human activity did not yet exist, at least not here. New and all-inclusive biographical-bibliographical information is necessary, especially in connection with those personalities, and their work, who emerged in recent decades. These are in the first instance natural scientists. The development which their work underwent in basic research and its applications is enormous, thus in biology, physics and chemistry (in which connection, particularly, are included electronics with robotics and automatization and computerization; radio communication technology; the expansion of various kinds of televisual and digital technology in the public communications media; trade; meteorology; information science; military expertise; etc..)

A biographical entry should be presented from the point of view of the totality of current knowledge about the Slovene nation and the knowledge about it alone. This would assure a picture of the individual and of the national collective as of a subject (and also an object) in their historical or spiritual-historical framework. In the new edition of the SBL should be included, throughout the bio-bibliographical entries, all branches of knowledge — from the most general such as those concerning science and research (thus, e.g., in the entry for ADAMIČ ŠTEFAN, his article "Povezava slovenske medicine s svetovnimi zbirkami bibliografskih podatkov," *Raziskovalec* 1979: 60-61, will be cited), information science, cybernetics, library science, lexicography, public communications media, scientific institutions, museums, galleries and so on, to the more specific, as for instance: philosophy, psychology, religion, theology, law, mathematics, applied science (medicine and technology), applied art, music, sport, linguistics, philology, literary science, study of the homeland, geography,

biography, history and so on, which are listed in the system of universal decimal classification.

Above all the new edition of the SBL should aim at surmounting the understandable shortcomings of the *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, which offers only short biographies without any of the details provided by the great universal encyclopedias or biographical lexicons; these give, among other things, also the names of parents, important members of the family, and other family connections. So also the new SBL should avoid the main 'shortcomings' of specialized lexicons (e.g. the Lexicon of Slovene Literature) which are compiled according to the principle of a particular subject area (this is most frequently a specialized one, but may also be a regional or chronological one) and which cast more detailed light on an individual personality above all from one point of view only. The new edition of the SBL will for the majority of its users, especially students and researchers, give consideration in sufficient detail to the important individuals in their entirety, regardless of their diversity, their orientation and/or their activities.

Concern for what is cultural is at the same time concern for what is national

Decisions about the new edition of the SBL should be influenced by other critical concerns, and above all by the duty and obligation of the publishers (SAZU and the Institute for Slovene Literature and Literary Sciences of the Ljubljana ZRC) to assure the new edition of the SBL for the younger generations of its users who can no longer attend to the whole of the first edition; and also the obligation of the publishers towards the research-oriented public in Slovenia, to provide in a timely manner the latest information that may be offered, precisely and from the viewpoint of current research principles or perspectives, by the Slovene biographical and lexicographical profession. For, from the first issue of the SBL this —although, because of ideological lapses, less successfully than it might have otherwise — has ranked us among the European nations which, besides encyclopedias, also have national biographical lexicons, e.g., Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Russia, Switzerland, Great Britain, and the United States (cf. the entry "Biographie" in the *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, Wiesbaden 1987.)

Extremely important, too, is the recognition that in making decisions about the new edition of the SBL we must proceed from the real fact, as it were from the fact that has been tested in the market-place, that many people will, at this historical turning-point, decide to buy new editions of basic national reference-

works, for no longer will the rights to public appearance in Slovene culture and civilization, let alone in the SBL, not be available to all those and to all that which is not in harmony with one-party totalitarianism. Moreover, the biographies will have to be written from the latest specialized viewpoints, for (judging by the experiences of the Yugoslav Lexicographical Institute in Zagreb, especially with respect to the oldest biography) only approximately one-fifth of the data from earlier editions of similar lexicons has not become outdated. Only with unbiased and technically flawless information concerning the whole of past and current events in Slovenia, and those outside of Slovenia that concern it, will the new edition of the SBL also raise cultural consciousness to the level of an essential component of national consciousness. Since both are linked, concern for what is cultural is inseparable from concern for what is national — for where the former is lacking, the latter is transposed into a mirror-image of itself. In this connection we have in mind, especially, Slovenes beyond our borders and in emigration. The unified Slovene cultural space is still being formed, and it is still harmed by former injustices and abuses. The same is true for the Slovenes in the diaspora, to whom their homeland will in some fashion be restored if they are fully included in the new edition of the SBL.

The new edition of the SBL ought not to be withdrawn from the program just for the reason that, among those who will make the decisions, there will be no agreement on the necessity of uncompromisingly correcting, also, these kinds of historical injustice.

Translated by Tom Priestly