
Nova zraka u europskom svjetlu is the first volume in a new series in Croatian of Biblioteka povijest hrvata published by Matica hrvatska and launched in 2015. The series of seven volumes is the latest Croatian narrative of the history of Croatia and the Croatian lands from late Antiquity to the late twentieth century. The first volume is the work of eighteen authors who are among the most prominent scholars of Croatian historiography, art history, legal history, literary history, archaeology, and many other fields. They belong to the younger or middle generation of Croatian historians, and they adopt modern approaches to the study of history, dealing with topics that have been comparatively or entirely neglected according to Zoran Ladić, the editor of the series, and Zrinka Nikolić Jakus, the editor the volume under review. The volume begins with two prefaces, in which the two editors note that the volume aims to follow in the wake of two earlier Croatian projects, Hrvatska i Europa and Povijest Hrvata, and also drew inspiration from the New Cambridge Medieval History in its aspiration to address a wide range of topics, including spiritual life, environmental issues, economy, art history, archaeology, law, written culture, everyday life, society, and the institutions and formation of the state. The volume can be divided into three major parts. The first unit offers a general overview from different perspectives on and approaches to the history of Croatia and the Croatian lands (meaning territories or regions which were not parts of the Medieval Kingdom of Croatia but which belong to the present-day country, such as Istria and Slavonia). The first study, by Hrvoje Graćanin, narrates the history of the lands of present-day Croatia in late Antiquity (pp.3–36). It is followed by Ante Birin’s chapter on the history of Croats in the early Middle Ages (pp.37–72). Neven Budak then discusses the Early Medieval ethnogenesis of the Croats (pp.73–88). In the next two chapters Damir Karbić, analyses the formation of the Croatian state, royal power, society, and cities (pp.89–122, 123–32). Florence S. Fabijanec then examines the economic aspects of Early Medieval Croatia, such as trade, commerce, and agriculture (pp.133–158). In the next chapter, Ante Nazor discusses the Early Medieval Croatian army (pp.159–72), and Trpimir Vedriš summarizes formal practice of baptism, Christianization (he separates the two), and the ecclesiastical life and practice of religion in the Croatian
lands (pp.173–200, 201–36). Damir Karbić and Branka Grbavac present legal life and legal written culture in Croatia (pp.237–54), Mirjana Matijević-Sokol examines literacy in Latin (pp.255–72), and Tomislav Galović presents the literacy in Cyrillic and Glagolitic (pp.273–96). Magdalena Skoblar summarizes the most important aspects of the art history of the region (pp.297–322), and as the final part of this unit, the study by Jakus examines everyday life of Croats (pp.323–42). The second main part of the volume reflects the historical and cultural regionality of Croatia. The first two chapters deal with northwestern and northeastern Croatia separately, and both were written by Hrvoje Gračanin, who was joined by coauthor Silvija Pisk for the first study (pp.345–66, 367–84). In my opinion, probably it would have been preferable not to have divided the two chapters, as they deal with similar topics and territories which belonged together at some point of the period in question. The subsequent chapters, which were written by Maurizio Levak and Ante Birin respectively deal with Istria and the Kvarner Gulf (pp.385–414) and Gorski kotar, Lika, and Krkava (pp.415–26). The narrative of the Early Medieval history of Dalmatia is also divided into two parts according to geographical region. Ivan Basić deals with northern and central Dalmatia (pp.427–62), and Ivan Majnarić and Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar focus on southern Dalmatia (pp.463–78), but unlike the first two chapters, in this case historical circumstances and differences could justify this division. In the final chapter of the second part, Goran Bilogrivić deals with the territory of Bosnia and Hum (pp.479–91). The third unit of the book offers international, geopolitical context, as it deals with the countries and empires that either had close relationships with the Croats or the territories of present-day Croatia or held any parts of these territories. Hrvoje Gračanin provides a short summary on Byzantium (pp.495–516), and Ivan Majnarić then presents the Ottonian, Frankish, and Holy Roman Empire’s role in Croatia (pp.517–32) and the relationships with the Papacy (pp.533–48). Lovorka Ćoralić analyses Venice’s role in Croatia (pp.549–62), and Jakus examines the southern Italian territories and their relationships with Croatia, highlighting the Normans’ activities (pp.563–80). Trpimir Vedriš presents Bulgaria and other Slavic states in the Balkans (pp.581–608), and finally Nikolić Jakus deals with Hungary (pp.609–29). The volume is the first outcome of a huge project, and it is one of the finest modern syntheses in the historiography in Croatian. Apart from some minor, distracting editorial choices, such as the unnecessary division of some territories, the volume presents wide range topics many of which had been largely neglected earlier but now are part of contemporary trends in the study of history. The
emphasis is not on the traditional, political history at all, and the variety of areas of focus makes the volume unique. The importance of the book as a contribution to the existing scholarship lies also in the targeted readership. While the book offers rigorous studies for scholars, it is also useful and accessible to students and the wider public. The volume reflects the regionality of Croatia and highlights the uniqueness and the different social, economic, and political evolution of each territory. The third unit of the book puts Croatian history in international context, which is inevitable, since most of the present-day Croatia was under the rule of another country in some part of the period in question. Its minor shortcomings notwithstanding, the volume is a modern historical synthesis and a motivating example for new projects on the histories of other Central European countries.

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