

Irene Scobbie:

Historical Dictionary of Sweden. (European Historical Dictionaries, No. 7).

Metuchen N.J. & London,
The Scarecrow Press, 1995,
341pp., \$42.50. ISBN 0-
8108-2922-3.

This is the seventh in a series of European historical dictionaries being published by Scarecrow Press under the general editorship of Jan Woronoff, and it is the first to deal with a Scandinavian country - I understand volumes on Denmark and Norway are also in preparation. The volume has been well-produced: being sewn and linen-bound, it feels as if it has the durability that a reference book needs and the print size and clarity are easy on the eye.

Its author, Irene Scobbie, is unlikely to need introduction to readers of the present journal being a past editor as well as having been Reader and Head of Scandinavian Studies in the University of

Aberdeen for many years and latterly, until her retirement in 1991, in the University of Edinburgh. Her familiarity with Sweden is both wide and detailed and she has written a great deal about Swedish life and culture, particularly literature. In the context of the present historical dictionary, however, it is her excellent survey history *Sweden: Nation of the Modern World* (Benn, 1972), now unfortunately out of print, that is most relevant.

The organisation of the dictionary presumably follows the standardised format for the series. It begins with a twelve page chronological table that starts in 12,000 BC and finishes in April 1994. Then there is a twenty-four page 'Overview' that provides a summary geography, economy and history, again bringing the story to 1994. The meat of the volume, the 'Dictionary' of some 220 pages, is arranged alphabetically and the entries range in length from HIERTA, LARS JOHAN with two lines to LITERATURE with four

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pages – very short entries are, however, laudably rare and the author almost invariably manages to find enough space to say something worthwhile rather than simply listing. Also, there is an exemplary use of cross-referencing throughout this section and that does a good deal to overcome the almost inevitable 'bittiness' of encyclopaedic entries. A further bonus from my point of view is the use, with very few exceptions, of the Swedish forms of personal names (Karl XII not Charles XII) and place names (Skåne not Scania – has that latter form ever really been current?) Next comes a 'Selected Bibliography' of some sixty-five pages: it concentrates on works in English and is both well-organised and thorough. Other apparatus in the volume includes a map, a list of abbreviations and lists of rulers and prime ministers. All in all, a useful book – essential, perhaps, for those who do not read Swedish.

With a volume of this kind any individual is

going to have quibbles about what has been included, omitted, given too much space or too little. For the most part, it seems to me that the topics for inclusion in this volume have been carefully chosen from the point of view of the user, and once included the internal balance between the articles is fair. I would have been happy to abbreviate more of the endless Karls and Gustavs of Swedish history and to ditch Desirée, and I'm not convinced that the revivalist preacher Laestadius, fascinating as I find him, is going to be looked up by many people. And if Land Enclosures are covered (an excellent summary), surely the Industrial Revolution or Hydro-electricity should have their slot? But the entries themselves, especially the longer ones, make fair and balanced judgments; only once (the entry on Olof Palme) does a real touch of spleen become visible.

Peter Graves