

# ANNALES

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## THE NATIONALISATION OF HISTORY IN YUGOSLAV AND POST-YUGOSLAV MEDIEVAL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

*Sergej FLERE*

University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts, Koroška cesta 160, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia  
e-mail: sflere6@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*Elementary-school history textbooks dealing with the Middle Ages in Yugoslav (1945–1991) and post-Yugoslav republics were examined, with a focus on the history of each republic or state. The treatment of medieval domestic history was compared both across contexts and over time. Our interest lay in the nationalisation of history, which can also generate contradictions among textbooks. Such contradictions may concern claims to territories, historical figures, peoples and events; however, we did not examine possible portrayals of golden ages. Contradictory claims were already present within socialist Yugoslavia, not only after its dissolution, when the successor states enthusiastically pursued their nation-building projects.*

**Keywords:** history textbooks, Yugoslavia, territorial claims, lineage, nationalisation of history

## LA NAZIONALIZZAZIONE DELLA STORIA NEI MANUALI DI STORIA MEDIEVALE JUGOSLAVI E POST-JUGOSLAVI

### SINTESI

*Il contributo analizza i manuali di storia per la scuola primaria dedicati al Medioevo nelle repubbliche jugoslave (1945–1991) e post-jugoslave, concentrandosi sulla storia di ciascuna repubblica o Stato. Il trattamento della storia medievale nazionale è messo a confronto sia nei diversi contesti sia in prospettiva diacronica. L'interesse principale riguarda la nazionalizzazione della storia, un processo che può generare contraddizioni tra i manuali. Tali contraddizioni possono concernere rivendicazioni territoriali, figure storiche, popoli ed eventi; non sono invece state prese in esame le eventuali rappresentazioni delle età dell'oro. Rivendicazioni contraddittorie erano già presenti all'interno della Jugoslavia socialista, e non soltanto dopo la sua dissoluzione, quando gli Stati successori intrapresero con particolare slancio i propri progetti di costruzione nazionale.*

**Parole chiave:** manuali di storia, Jugoslavia, rivendicazioni territoriali, genealogia, nazionalizzazione della storia

## INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth-century theorist of nationalism Ernest Renan made a seemingly puzzling assertion: “historical error is an essential factor in the creation of a nation and it is for this reason that the progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality” (Renan, 1882, 3). Are errors and falsehoods built not only into the cultural nuclei of nations, but into school textbooks as well? This question is the starting point for our investigation of history textbooks. History textbooks have become an important pillar in the socialisation of younger generations, a “state arm” in education, since, in all the cases examined here, they are controlled by the state. They provide pupils with the official account of the past of the world but, more specifically, of the domestic surroundings in which they live, particularly of their national environment, which may or may not be a nation-state.

Early in the development of socialist-communist Yugoslavia, in 1949, its then propaganda chief, Milovan Djilas, wrote an article calling for the history of Yugoslavia to be presented as a joint enterprise of the Yugoslav nationhoods. Despite these efforts, however, a joint history of modern times could not be produced, because the relevant processes were not shared but separate. As early as 1959, such efforts were abandoned (Petranović, 1980). This was not due primarily to a lack of will on the part of the authors, but to a lack of material on shared historical processes, except, of course, for the Second World War and the struggle under Tito. The issue also had to do with the maturation of the nationhoods in the post-war period.

Our major contention is that, despite the official policy’s outward polish of brotherhood and unity, nationalist nuclei worked to assert their nationhoods in official presentations of history (cf. Režek, 2014; 2016), particularly as articulated by cultural elites (Flere, 2024).

Our study focuses on a set of states that formerly formed part of socialist-communist Yugoslavia. Our topic, the medieval period, requires us to look far back. We examine whether textbooks treating domestic history were affected by the nationalisation of history. We look far back, omitting recent history, which is itself a heated topic and has been studied in depth, although mostly with reference to two of the largest and most mutually confronted republics, whose textbooks have much to say about the other, usually nothing positive (Pavasović-Trošt, 2018a; 2018b).

It is unnecessary to dwell at length on the importance of textbooks in history teaching. They are never private accounts of the past; they are always official. In the cases considered here, there are 14 such settings: six republics in two periods, plus one

autonomous province, now a contested republic. Kosovo was included: it is now a disputed state, while in Yugoslavia it had the status of an autonomous province. The textbooks examined, past and present, follow official curricula, as they are or were endorsed by the competent ministries of education.

Thus, 12–14-year-olds are provided with official accounts of the past, in all cases more or less of the ethnonational past, as all the republics belong to a titular nation, with titularity having been achieved mainly in the socialist period. Bosnia and Herzegovina is the exception in both periods, as it comprises three constituent nationhoods; however, only one (Bosniaks) is of interest in this context, since Serb and Croat children use textbooks from their home republics—and their official histories.

The medieval period was chosen because such a distant period in the history of a nation or ethnies may serve as a basis of legitimacy; its antiquity may strengthen legitimacy in competition with other claimants, if any. In any case, the antiquity of a nation provides stronger historical grounds for claims to territory than, for example, the second half of the nineteenth century, when these nations are often said to have been formed (Malešević, 2016), or when their very existence is still questioned or contested today (Bosniaks, Macedonians).

More precisely, the existence of one’s own group in the medieval period, the size of its polity and its other features may function as forms of legitimacy for the group today. Other circumstances may support this legitimacy, such as struggles for survival, martyrdom and sacrifices, whether true or imagined. We are interested in what official textbooks told, and tell, children, bearing in mind that Yugoslavia was a single state (1943–1991) and that its successor states need to confirm their legitimacy. How is this done, and was it already being done in the socialist period? In particular, were the historical narratives neat, each weaving its own story, or were there appropriations that collided with other narratives? Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo may be of particular interest, but other territories and ethnicities may also emerge.

The nationalisation of history refers to the interpretation of events and processes as national when they may not have been so, or when they were pre-national or not ethnic at all. This usually means reading a present-day component into much earlier entities that were different in nature (Geary, 2002; Fine, 2006). Culture, events and rulers are interpreted in a false context. The nationalisation of history thus extends to the assertion of a national trait—usually an essence—in phenomena that did not possess it. This may legitimise, strengthen and support present-day nationally constituted phenomena such as states, regional entities and even religious groups.

The following sections present the methodology applied and the findings on the presentation of domestic history in textbooks from post-Yugoslav states, before and after the break-up. The final section discusses the findings with a view to determining whether nationalist fabrications, particularly contested appropriations, were presented. In some cases, there was variation within periods as well. Slovenia is omitted, as fabrications of this kind directed towards the east of Slovenia do not appear.

#### METHODOLOGY

Socialist Yugoslavia comprised 8 units: 6 republics and 2 autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina, we are not dealing with the last one, since it made use of Serbian textbooks as to this issue). In the Yugoslav period, schooling, particularly curricula and textbooks, fell within the competence of the republics. Thus, each had its own set of textbooks, approved by the respective ministries of education. We therefore gathered history textbooks from all six republics and Kosovo, from both the socialist period and the new, post-Yugoslav period beginning in 1991–1992, when the republics became independent states (Serbia and Montenegro became independent in 2006).

Under the 1995 Dayton Accords, by which Bosnia and Herzegovina is governed, Bosniak, Croat and Serbian school systems operate separately. After 1995, the Croat and Serbian school systems followed their matrix states in history curricula and textbooks. For this period, we considered only textbooks in the Bosniak system, as the system that followed socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thirty-eight textbooks and readers that served as textbooks are listed at the end of the article (5 from Bosnia and Herzegovina/Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 7 from Croatia, 2 from Kosovo, 2 from Montenegro, 5 from Macedonia/North Macedonia, 11 from Serbia and 6 from Slovenia). These textbooks were content-analysed in detail, line by line, in sections dealing with the domestic Middle Ages. More than 20 other textbooks were consulted; these contained nothing new or significant from the point of view of the subject of our study. The most numerous were from Serbia and the FBiH.

#### FINDINGS

The findings are presented for the seven present-day states, distinguishing between the socialist and post-socialist periods. At the beginning of each section devoted to a present republic, an introductory summary finding is provided in order to make the issue easier to follow.

#### Bosnia and Herzegovina

After a modest textbook by Perić (1962), the book by Omanović (1975) was the first to present a self-confident understanding of the republic. It writes of medieval Bosnia with emphasis on the Bosnian Church, a Pataren group, “which played an important role in the defense of independence of the Bosnian state against Hungary and the Pope. It was closely related to the Bosnian nobility and the Ban” (Omanović, 1975, 52). Tvrtko’s state was large, stable and respected. Upon the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, Islamisation took place. The nobility converted to Islam most frequently, “to retain their estates” (Omanović, 1975, 104). From a confessional point of view, members of the Bosnian Church converted most frequently (Omanović, 1975, 99). Conversion was an instrument for improving one’s position, although at times it was conducted by force. But the “[i]slamized population retained its language and customs” (Omanović, 1975, 99).

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, all textbooks in the FBiH state that medieval Bosnia was a state with a cultural nucleus “located on the border of Catholicism and Orthodoxy” (Hašičić, 2010; Pelidija & Isaković, 1994; Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, 103). That nucleus was the Bosnian Church. “As the Church was no competitor to the nobles, they supported it” (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, 96). The Church also collected no taxes (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, 96). It assisted in the struggle against the Hungarian-Croat and Serbian rulers (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, 96). A religious specificity was also found in tombstones (stećci) (Hašičić, 2010, 113–114; Muminović & Muminović, 2010, 101).

The textbooks state that Bosnia was first mentioned in the tenth century and reached its “full assertion” under Ban Kulin in the twelfth. Kulin Ban “was beloved among the people” (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, 85). Under King Tvrtko, Bosnia became the “largest state in the Balkans” in the fourteenth century (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, 96), and “the mightiest one” (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, 97). Although Catholic, Tvrtko defended all three religious groups (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, 89), whereas in Croat and Serb textbooks he is considered “their own” (Makek, 1995, 38; Lopandić & Petrović, 2001, 126).

Another peak in national self-assertion is found in the textbook by Pelidija and Isaković (1994). The Bosniak nation “was born” through the brilliant defeat of the Austrians by local Muslims/Bosniaks in the Battle of Banja Luka in 1737. The former were beaten, whereas the victorious Ottoman forces were composed almost exclusively of locals, without proper instruction from the Porte (Pelidija & Isaković, 1994, 137). The Bosniak nation was born.

Bosnian authors are likely to consider the transformation into Ottoman society a smooth one, since the “adoption of Islam was voluntary in the majority of cases” and Ottoman authorities were tolerant towards Christians (Pelidija & Isaković, 1994, 137). Nevertheless, they are inclined to regard Bosnia as a land of Bosnians/Bosniaks only, not of the other two national groups composing it today.

There is no doubt that all Bosnian textbooks in the post-socialist period present Bosnia as their own (with additional cultural details), and that they are less than kind to Serbs.

### Croatia

The 1952 textbook by Salzer and Mali was an elaborate work, writing in detail on all Slavs but dividing them into peoples already assumed to have existed in the Early Middle Ages, as they do today. The focus was on “Croats”. An important issue for Croat textbook writers was *Pacta Conventa*, an alleged agreement between the Hungarian King Koloman and the ruling Croat noble families after the defeat of Croat forces by Koloman. It was supposedly entered into in 1102, but the document’s veracity is contested, as only a rescript from 200 years later exists (Engel, 2001, 34–36). It acquired symbolic meaning in relation to whether Croats were militarily subjugated and ceased to be a political agent, or whether a political relationship was established between the Hungarian king and Croat nobles as parties of equal standing, with the latter retaining an autonomous status. Most prominent historians deny the authenticity of the document (Klaić, 1967; Fine, 2006), although some legal instrument may have been established after the military victory of the Hungarian king’s forces.

Neretva Croats were said to have fought in alliance with Croat Prince Domagoj already in the ninth century (Makek et al., 1974, 58). The authors consider Croatia to have existed as an entity throughout the medieval period. They consistently write of Hungarian rulers as “Croat-Hungarian”, thereby strengthening the idea of Croat statehood, and refer to *Pacta Conventa* as a fact that “enabled the Croat Diet to consider state issues in the future” (Makek et al., 1974, 53), although no such institution existed at the time (Šišić, 2004). In 1995, to dispel any doubt, Makek presented pupils with a nineteenth-century picture of the signing of the purported document (Makek, 1995, 40).

The reader by Kampuš and Makek (1974) also contains stories made up of fabricated, “could-be” illustrative narratives in which historical personalities engage in direct speech. The text also allows for empathy towards other peoples of Yugoslavia; for example, “entire Macedonia sorrowed” at the death of

Emperor Samuil (Kampuš & Makek, 1974, 40). Serbs, however, are not accorded such sentiment: when they are depicted as having lost the battle against the Ottomans on the Maritsa river in the fourteenth century, this is attributed to their being drunk and to their having “fought each other” during the battle (Kampuš & Makek, 1974, 66), statements that are entirely uncorroborated (Srejović et al., 1981, 599–600).

In the period after independence, Makek issued a new textbook for the sixth grade, substantially changing the earlier text. He claims not only that medieval Bosnia was a Croat land, but also that Tvrtko sided with Croat nobles against the Hungarian king (Makek, 1995, 38). In Bosnia, Croat ethnic substance is “linguistically documented” by purported ikavian Bosnian medieval speech, an alleged exclusive Croat trait (Makek, 1995, 38). The same claim is found in Makek (1995, 67). This is suspect, as ikavian is spoken today by štokavian Bunjevci (Committee of Experts, 2023). Doclea was also said to have been initially Croat, and its Church to have remained within the Western realm (Makek, 1995, 36–37).

The enthusiastic Makek wrote: “Turks conducted war in Croatia in a particularly atrocious manner, not only against soldiers, but also against unarmed people. Conquests were prepared by Akinci units composed of frontier [Wallachs], unsettled cattle breeders...Akincis intruded into villages unexpectedly, at night, pillaging, killing and setting fire, those captured would be tied to horse tails and thus taken to Turkey”, continuing with picturesque naturalistic descriptions (Makek, 1995, 97). Two pages later he claimed that “their (Wallachs’) priests forced the Croatian population to convert to Orthodoxy” (Makek, 1995, 99), while this “frontier region was illegally extracted from Croatia” (Makek, 1995, 99).

Croatian nobility appears in this textbook in a position of power vis-à-vis the Hungarian king, implying the continued thread of Croat statehood. The authors always refer to the king and the throne as “Croat-Hungarian”.

In Birin et al. (2020), also a current textbook, children learn that the Peace Treaty of Zara of 1358 was “another unification of Croat lands” (Birin et al., 2020, 75), without being told that the treaty was concluded for a thirty-year period. The authors state that falling under Hungarian rule was only a “personal union [...] quite usual at the time” (Birin et al., 2020, 75), although it was a fateful loss of independence and unity (Fine, 2006, 75).

Birin et al. (2020) present the famous Church of St Donatus in Zara, acknowledging its Byzantine style but failing to admit that it was built under Byzantine rule; instead, they attribute it to “Croatian building activity” (Birin et al., 2020, 228). By contrast, Božić captions the picture of the church: “Zadar was under

Byzantine rule in the 9th century and had the means to construct a church of large proportions" (Božić, 1972, 146).

With regard to Bosnia, in contrast to Serbian authors who advance links with Serbia, Birin et al. (2020) do so with regard to Croatia. The Croatian prince Pavao Šubić called himself "Ban of Croats and Ruler of Bosnia" (Birin et al., 2020, 98), a cherry-picked detail in the book. Hence, a few pages later, the authors can write that "Bosnia was closely allied to Croatia" (Birin et al., 2020, 108), although in the thirteenth century Croatia could not be considered a political entity. Whereas Serbian textbooks consider Tvrtko's occupation of parts of "Serbia" to have been agreed with Prince Lazar (an alliance with Serbs), Labor et al. call them outright conquests of Serbia (Birin et al., 2020, 108; Labor et al., 2014, 116), implying an inimical manoeuvre towards Serbs and allowing Bosnia to be understood as "closer to us".

The claim that the Neretva valley "principality" (sometimes Pagania) was a Croat land, inhabited by Croats from the Early Middle Ages onwards, is almost mandatory throughout both periods (Salzer & Mali, 1952, 16, 43; Makek et al., 1974, 29). Makek presents a ninth-century map in which this principality was part of "Red Croatia" (Makek, 1995, 29); textbooks in post-socialism follow this pattern (Brdal et al., 2020, 58; Labor et al., 2014, 35).

### Montenegro

Petrić and Radonjić (1975 and later unchanged printings) authored the only Montenegrin textbook in socialist times, in use from 1975 to 1994. They write of medieval Zeta (Doclea) beginning in the late tenth century (Petrić & Radonjić, 1978, 41), of the rulers Balšići, Vojislavljevići and Crnojevići, and of political constructions on the territory of present-day Montenegro, but they never refer to ethnicity or to Montenegro. The exception is their mention that, "since the 14th century the Doclea/Zeta area was also designated as Montenegro" (Petrić & Radonjić, 1978, 44). They mainly elaborate on power changing hands, on entities becoming part of larger structures and later ceasing to be so. They present Croatia and Serbia as long-lasting entities.

After Montenegrin independence, a discussion flared up in which criticism of the previous textbook prevailed (Perović, 2017). The 2022 history textbook for seventh-graders by Popović and Miranović appeared, taking a new position on the issue in a nation-building spirit. Popović and Miranović (2022, 26) write that the first "Montenegrin state", Doclea, was established in the seventh century, without corroboration. Doclea had to fight to maintain independence from Macedonia and

Byzantium (Popović & Miranović, 2022, 26–27). They concede that Doclea fell under the (Serbian) Nemanyid dynasty, but that "memory of the earlier Kingdom did not vanish" (Popović & Miranović, 2022, 26–27). Autonomy was gained in the littoral cities and throughout Doclea. When Zeta fell under foreign rule, "memory of the old state lived on [...] particularly through the autonomy of the cities" (Popović & Miranović, 2022, 42).

### North Macedonia

Šoptrajanov et al.'s 1960 textbook was the first in socialist Macedonia. It dealt modestly with domestic history. The textbook by Dimevski and Čukarski (1980) marks a turnabout in ethnic identity: it states that Macedonia was inhabited by "Macedonian Slavs" around the ninth century, who were under Byzantine and Bulgarian overlordship, but that "the relationship was weak". Even then, "[Macedonians] conducted their lives autonomously, led by their princes" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, 41). Under the leadership of the sons of Prince Brsjački Nikola, Macedonians liberated themselves. Samuil, one of the sons, became "Macedonian Emperor" and expanded the state. Thus, they "seceded" from Bulgaria in 969. Samuil also disposed a Patriarchate, the highest ecclesiastical office in Orthodoxy. A "Macedonian feudal aristocracy" was also said to have existed, but it ceded Macedonia to Byzantium without a struggle, "in order to preserve its riches and privileges" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, 41). Samuil's state lasted only until 1014, when armed forces composed of "Macedonian soldiers" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, 43) were defeated by the Byzantine forces of Emperor Basil II. This domination caused uprisings, "because the Macedonian people could not bear such a position" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, 48). The Bogomils, a Pataren religious group, were particularly active in the resistance; hence they were "progressive" and "emancipatory" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, 51).

Writing on the Battle on the Maritsa in 1371, the authors refer to the Mrnjavčevići forces (who lost the battle) as "Serbian and Greek forces (but in fact Macedonian) [...] Macedonia extended to Thrace" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, 101, 104). This story remains in all later textbooks.

In current textbooks, the Macedonian national character of Samuil is elaborated to a greater extent. His empire is said to have extended "from rivers Sava and Danube in the North, Adriatic to the West, Black Sea to the East and Mount Olympus to the South and Black Sea to the East" (Naneski & Memeti, 2006, 44). This was contested not only in Serb textbooks (e.g. Todosijević, 2022, 164; Bubalo & Bečanović, 2018, 140, 162), but also by the Bulgarian Government.

Contemporary books include stories on ancient Albanians. An agreement seems to have been reached with the latter. Macedonian history textbooks are particularly contested by the Bulgarian Government, with medieval issues taking centre stage (Nikolov, 2022).

### Serbia

The textbook by Popović, Živković and Čubrilović (1954), the first in Serbia after the Second World War, deals primarily with the three nations recognised before the war. It treats Macedonia and Zeta cautiously. Serb tribes are said to have given the original Neretva polity its identity in the Early Middle Ages (Popović et al., 1954, 123, 135). Zeta, in today's Montenegro, is said to have been inhabited by Slav tribes in conflict with the Rascia nobility (Popović et al., 1954, 147). The former would prevail, but no ethnic designation is offered. "Macedonian Slavs", upon coming to Macedonia, "confronted old settlers [...] who impacted their development" (Popović et al., 1954, 148). The Bogomil faith flourished (*ibidem*). Macedonians as such, however, are not mentioned. Most surprising, there is no discussion of Bosnian history, although the textbook was devoted to the history of the "South Slavs", with the rest dealing with generalities of the medieval period. This undoubtedly indicates the sensitivity of the Bosnian issue.

Nešić's (1966) textbook identifies medieval Serb polities with present-day Serbs, despite a break of more than 400 years during the Ottoman period, when there were no schools in the Serbian language. This is also the case in other textbooks, including in the post-Yugoslav period. Zeta is mentioned, but it is said to have retained tribal organisation until the tenth century, under alien overlordship (Nešić, 1966, 106–108). It is not ethnically defined. "Macedonian South Slavs" are mentioned, labelling them as something less than an identity, but granting that they possessed statehood under Samuil (Nešić, 1966, 148) and fought "Bulgarian oppression" (Nešić, 1966, 151).

Božić also claims that the whole of Doclea, i.e. Zeta, was originally Serbian, describing it as "a special Serbian state in the 10th century" (1972, 155), while allowing for the possibility that the Crnojević period of rule may be understood differently, as it was under Papal and Venetian influence. Later on, Zeta and Bosnia are viewed as independent states. Both Božić and Nešić write of Zeta and Bosnia as entities that evolved into separate ones from the original Serbian Nemanyid entities, although they mention the Bosnian Bogomil church, "a state church in Bosnia" (Božić, 1972, 169) at the time, close to a cultural nucleus. However, before the definitive

Ottoman conquest, the ruling family in 1459 established family relations with the Serb ruling family, allowing for an understanding that "Bosnia is ours" (Nešić, 1966, 145), in contrast to Bosnian authors, who claim its distinctiveness. Such an impression of unity could also be pursued in Božić, when he holds that Tvrtko took Serb parts in alliance with the Serb grandee Nikola Altomanović.

The Mihaljčić (2021) textbook, published by the national textbook publisher both before and after the break-up of Yugoslavia, is celebratory in tone. "Rulers of the Nemanyid dynasty were ascribed divine properties by their contemporaries...during their rule the Serbian state significantly expanded [...] the Byzantine Emperor acquiesced to the loss of territory [...] Serbia was on the way to becoming the leading power in the Balkans" (Mihaljčić, 2021, 89–90). All the achievements of Emperor Stefan Dušan are hailed (Mihaljčić, 2021, 91–93). Only his death prevented his conquest of Constantinople (Mihaljčić, 2021, 93). A celebratory manner of writing can be traced in other current authors as well: one chapter is titled "Serbia was the greatest power in the Balkans", although this fact applies for little more than a decade. The splendour of King Milutin's garments and decorations is commended (Komatina et al., 2022, 101; Lopandić & Petrović, 2001, 101). Food was served with exotic spices in rulers' palaces (Lopandić & Petrović, 2001, 153).

The tone changes when the Ottoman period is discussed: Mihaljčić, Lopandić and Petrović also state that "Serb boys were the most numerous among those taken away under devshirme" (Lopandić & Petrović, 2001, 121). Mihaljčić states offhand that Albanians were the ones who most frequently converted to Islam during Ottoman rule (Mihaljčić, 2021, 157), although there are no precise data on this issue and Pomaks make for a better example (Skutsch, 2005, 947).

Other issues that are at variance with textbooks in other republics are:

The ethnic nature of Doclea-Zeta is mostly regarded as Serbian, without any reservation, in Serb textbooks. Doclea is considered a "Serbian state" already "in the early medieval period, as it was settled by Serbs in the 7th century" (e.g. Mitrović & Vasin, 2020, 53; Mihaljčić, 2021, 48; Todosijević, 2022, 65). However, it is dealt with only in passing.

The nature of Macedonia in the medieval period is not dealt with uniformly: for example, Todosijević (2022, 81) says no more about the identity of Samuil's empire than that it was of "Macedonian Slavs"; Uzelac et al. remain silent on the identity of Samuil's empire (2019, 58), as do Milivojević et al. (2020, 74). Bubalo considers Samuil "Bulgarian" (Bubalo & Bečanović, 2018, 131). Todosijević (2022, 164) considers the Mrnjavčevići rulers of Macedonia

“Serbs” (Serbian authors consider the Mrnjavčević army “Serb”, cf. Lopandić, Bubalo & Bečanović, 2018, 140; Vekić-Kočić et al., 2018, 176; Lopandić & Petrović, 2021, 111).

Bosnia is treated in most current Serbian books: Milivojević et al. (2020, 84) consider it among “Serb lands”, and Mitrović also does so for the Early Middle Ages (Mitrović & Vasin, 2020, 54). The “Bosnian church” is referred to in all textbooks, which would allow for the recognition of cultural variance (e.g. Mihaljčić, 2021, 100; Vekić-Kočić et al., 2018, 176). Todosijević (2022, 65) considers early medieval Bosnia “part of Serbia”. Some textbooks note that King Tvrtko was related to Serbian monarchs and considered himself a Serbian ruler (e.g. Lopandić & Petrović, 2001, 126; Mitrović & Vasin, 2020, 123). On the other hand, “Tvrtko was not influential in Serbia”, state Vekić-Kočić et al. (2018, 149), in an attempt to aggrandise Serbia’s power, although Tvrtko occupied significant Nemanjid territories. “[Bosnian] peasants were mainly of Serbian origin”, writes Mihaljčić (2021, 159), in contrast to Croat and Bosnian authors. Bosniak authors claim that members of the Bosnian Church were the majority (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, 105; Hašičić, 2010, 105), with members of the other two confessions arriving later through Bosnia’s expansion (Hašičić, 2010, 107), which could mean that the originals were the true “owners”. None of the Serbian textbooks mentions that King Tvrtko was Catholic or brought up Catholic; instead, they all state that he was “double crowned” as king of Bosnia and Serbia, with some also mentioning a third coronation as king of Croatia and Dalmatia, thereby creating the impression that Serbia had expanded there—and not vice versa, as transpires from Bosnian authors. Tvrtko was said to have praised his relatives in Serbia, while no mention is made of his Croat mother or of his Catholic identity (Fine, 2006; Klaić, 1970). Vekić-Kočić et al. (2018, 149), Mihaljčić (2021, 101) and Bubalo & Bečanović (2018, 166) consider Tvrtko a “renovator of Serbian kingdom”. This invocation may be read as “Bosnia is ours”. Croatian textbooks note, to the contrary, that he was “King of Bosnia and Croatia”, forging a link. Together with claims by Croatian authors, Tvrtko is thus made to possess a large set of crowns: those of Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia and the Littoral.

As noted, the Mrnjavčevići appear in Macedonian textbooks as Macedonians, although tragic figures; in Serbian ones, they appear as their own. The same applies to the Balšići, who are Montenegrins, Albanians or Serbs, depending on the textbook chosen.

Some regions are claimed as Serbian, while textbooks from other republics counterclaim them as “their own”. This is directly true of the “Neretljani”, a people along the Neretva River near the Adriatic in the Early Middle Ages (Mihaljčić and all others,

using the title “Pagania”; cf. Mihaljčić, 2021, 48; Bubalo & Bečanović, 2018, 135; Mitrović & Vasin, 2020, 53). This appropriation on the part of both is unfounded, as is the claim in Croat textbooks. Klaić (1967) conducted an extensive study and established that the Neretva Valley Dukedom (in the tenth–eleventh centuries) was an “independent state” in the sense of the time; nor can ethnic attributes be ascribed to it. The Neretva Valley (Aertani, Naertani) should be considered a separate people (Fine, 2006; Curta, 2021).

In this way, confabulations are presented to children aged 12–14, reflecting other national and political disputes.

### Slovenia

Slovenia had the first such textbook after the Second World War (Binter, 1947). Binter’s textbook for the sixth grade, titled *History of South Slavs*, dealt with Slovenes, Croats, Macedonians and Serbs, but not with Montenegrins or Bosniaks. Binter went into detail on the alleged ceremonies by which Slovene dukes were enthroned at Krn in Carinthia, even presenting variants of the ritual, which was said to have taken place from the eighth century onwards (Binter, 1947, 50–54). This story was often repeated in later textbooks, along with the “early loss of independence” by misfortune (Metelko, 1974, 107; Božič & Weber, 1984, 45). However, there are no claims on other South Slav territories or personalities.

For the period after Slovenia became independent, no traces of Slovene historical greatness were found in the textbooks, although erroneous statements on medieval Slovene linguistic unity were maintained (Janša-Zorn & Mihelič, 1998, 149; Janša-Zorn et al., 2018, 76).

### Kosovo

Serbian textbooks during the Yugoslav period considered Kosovo their own from the settlement of Serbs in the Balkans onwards (Mihaljčić, 2021, 57; Mitrović & Vasin, 2020, 53); they consider the Serbian nature of the land self-evident. Kosovo textbooks by Albanian authors before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, in the Albanian language, consider it to have been conquered by the forces of Emperor Dušan (Kodra & Gexha, 1987). The textbook in the post-dissolution period deals with Kosovo’s medieval period in a summary manner and does not address the issue of Serb medieval domination in Kosovo at all, referring instead to local Albanian feudal lords and to the independent dukedom of Arberia/Albania under Dhmitry in the thirteenth century, “recognized in Europe” (Rexhepi & Demaj, 2018, 27, 31). It considers the Balšići ruling family

of Doclea to be Albanian (Rexhepi & Demaj, 2018, 5, 33). A standard feudal social structure is noted. Skenderbey's exceptional leadership in opposing the Ottomans is discussed extensively (Rexhepi & Demaj, 2018, 47). However, in the Kosovo Battle of 1389, it is conceded that "the union [of Christian armies] was led by [Serb Prince] Lazar", although Albanian leaders were also said to have been numerous, including a "Milos Kopiliq, from the village of Kopiliq in Drenica" (Rexhepi & Demaj, 2018, 34). This is the same person, Miloš Obilić, who was the much-famed Serbian hero of the battle and who is said to have killed the Ottoman Sultan, a general point in Serb textbooks. Technically, much is still lacking in the Albanian book.

### CONCLUSION

The nationalisation of history is encountered in textbooks from all the republics presented and in both periods, with the exception of Montenegro in the first period and Slovenia in the latter one. It was usually more pronounced in the second period, when the republics were undergoing their state-building projects. Exceptions were Montenegro, where there was no nationalisation of history in the first period, and Slovenia, where it was abandoned in the second.

In post-socialist, "democratic" textbooks, we found claims in the FBiH that Bosnia was the largest medieval state in the Balkans (Pelidija & Isaković, 1994; Muminović & Muminović, 2010, 95), in Macedonian textbooks that it was Macedonia (e.g. Šoptrajanov et al., 1960, 146), and in Serbian ones that it was Serbia (e.g. Milivojević et al., 2020, 147), which was also said to have been "the mightiest" and "the greatest power in the Balkans", as Bubalo and Bečanović title a section (Bubalo & Bečanović, 2018, 134). Even Bodin's Doclea was said to have encompassed an enviable portion of the Balkans, according to the current Montenegrin textbook (Popović and Miranović, 2022, 29). Although such claims do not always refer to the same historical period, they are incompatible. All Croatian books are inclined to consider Croatia a Western European country and insist on Croat national continuity. Some such details may not be individually wrong, but they go beyond cherry-picking of brief periods. They can be interpreted as ideological strategies to aggrandise their nationhoods and possibly to claim certain territories now belonging to other states. Slovene textbooks make no such claim; in fact, newer textbooks do not boast of spatial greatness, although flaws were noted in them too. Finally, Montenegrin post-socialist textbooks, as latecomers to nation-building, mainly content themselves with claiming that medieval structures were "Montenegrin" in national substance, without any grounding in facts.

Another major disagreement concerns the view of Ottoman rule: Serb textbooks consider it an unbearable yoke (Mihaljčić, 2021, 157; Lopandić & Petrović, 2001, 189), Croat ones emphasise that the Orthodox were better off under the Ottomans than Catholics (for example, Labor et al., 2014, 34), whereas Bosnian books regard it as a favourable period (cf. Muminović & Muminović, 2010, 117, 121; Pelidija & Isaković, 1994).

A final conflict needing mention is the ethnic belonging of rulers. King Tvrtko may be Bosnian, Serbian or Croat, depending on the textbook consulted, just as Doclea may be Serbian, Montenegrin or Albanian. Among other contested regions, the Neretva Valley (Neretljani, Naertani) is consistently claimed in Serb textbooks as Serb and in Croat ones as their own, purportedly from the Early Middle Ages onwards. Children taught in this way will grow up with completely different outlooks on where the frontiers of their homelands lay in medieval times, the time of original national appropriation in nationalist ideology, as Geary (2002) holds. There are other such examples of nationalist appropriation.

Throughout this, these authors almost never concede that medieval entities were not identical to present-day nations.

In the introduction to her influential paper, Pavasović-Trošt (2018a, 57) emphasises the need to study "the ascendancy of nationalist ideologies" in order to understand the new states and "the stories they tell". The conclusion of this article is that it is necessary to go further back in these analyses, both in terms of the textbooks studied (into the 1970s, for example) and in terms of the historical periods that textbooks analyse (the medieval period, for example).

This is not to say that Yugoslavia was impossible from the start, but it became ever more difficult to maintain as nationhoods evolved; one could say they matured under Yugoslavia. Harmony did not grow with time, as nationalisms made more headway than Yugoslavia, and certainly more than Yugoslavism. Textbooks followed this trend, being a product of local cultural elites (Flere, 2024).

It was next to impossible to write an integral, interconnected Yugoslav history, as Djilas and the communists had hoped at the inception of the communist period. The authors of history textbooks were all part and parcel of the national cultural elites of the Yugoslav nationhoods (Petranović, 1980), but the historical processes in modern times relating to nationhoods were also distinct.

Thus, it is impossible to say whether socialist nationalist historisation was produced by the weakness of the increasingly thin socialist cultural layer ("brotherhood and unity" transformed into "communitarianism" [zajedništvo]) or by the action of aggressive nationalist cultural elites, as both were part

of the same “system” and situation. As regards the nationalisation of history in textbooks, Montenegro definitely lagged behind, whereas Slovenia dropped out of the discussion, as it was not marked by such contentious issues.

Renan’s “errors” prove functional for drawing one’s frontiers as far as possible in nationalistically narrated history textbooks. Recent theorists of nationalism, especially modernists, have of course added to Renan’s words, while also creating the framework for our findings. There was much caution in writing these texts at the beginning, so Bosnia and Herzegovina was omitted entirely in one early textbook on the medieval history of the “South Slavs” (Popović et al., 1954). Later on, nation-building became ever more apparent.

As is well known, textbooks do not influence youth alone, although they present the official truth, in our case the history of the respective nationhood. Such textbook content is accompanied by media content and public monuments, which are beyond the scope of this paper. The teaching process may either modulate or amplify textbooks, but there are also many other agents of socialisation. Serbian Television Prva announced in October 2023 that Serbian medieval history would be presented in

comic-strip form, “in accordance with the curriculum” (Tomović, 2023). Outdoor monuments should also be mentioned. Skopje is generally known for its “historisation”, with some 200 monuments erected in a short period to assert its antiquity, although the monuments themselves had no particular meaning. In Serbia, urban exteriors have changed drastically in the post-Yugoslav period, possibly most notably with the Belgrade monument to King Stefan Nemanja. It is not only more than nine metres high; inside, there are illustrations of medieval documents intended to prove Serb antiquity and might. The monument is to a king who never entered Belgrade, although the medieval documents are true. Croatia, already under the leadership of Franjo Tuđman, erected an ancient “royal residence” near Zagreb, where there had been none. It is the “Altar to the Homeland” in Medvedgrad, where patriotic manifestations are held (Pavlaković, 2014, 29). Endeavours of lesser magnitude are found elsewhere too. There are also televised series on medieval history on state-owned stations, in Croatia on “Croatian kings”, with little or no relation between them, and in Serbia on the Nemanjids. In both cases, the emphasis is on national glory and fighting, and on acquiring large territories.

## NACIONALIZACIJA ZGODOVINE V JUGOSLOVANSKIH IN POJUGOSLOVANSKIH UČBENIKIH SREDNJEVEŠKE ZGODOVINE

Sergej FLERE

Univerza v Mariboru, Filozofska fakulteta, Koroška cesta 160, 2000 Maribor, Slovenija  
e-mail: sflere6@gmail.com

### POVZETEK

*V članku so obravnavani osnovnošolski učbeniki zgodovine, ki se ukvarjajo s srednjim vekom in so bili objavljeni v jugoslovanskem obdobju (1945–1991) ter v pojugoslovanskih republikah. Posebna pozornost je namenjena obravnavi domače oziroma nacionalne zgodovine. Primerjana je predstavitev srednjeveške zgodovine v različnih republiških oziroma državnih okoljih in v različnih časovnih obdobjih. Osrednje raziskovalno vprašanje zadeva nacionalizacijo zgodovine, ki lahko vodi tudi do protislovij med učbeniki. Ta protislovja se nanašajo predvsem na ozemeljske zahteve, zgodovinske osebnosti, ljudstva in dogodke, medtem ko morebitne predstave o »zlatih dobah« niso predmet analize. Ugotovitve kažejo, da so se nasprotujoče si trditve pojavljale že v socialistični Jugoslaviji, ne le po njenem razpadu, ko so naslednice intenzivneje izvajale svoje projekte izgradnje naroda.*

**Ključne besede:** učbeniki zgodovine, Jugoslavija, ozemeljske zahteve, poreklo, nacionalizacija zgodovine

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