

*Sergej Flere*¹
University of Maribor, Slovenia

Original scientific paper
doi:10.5937/snds25001F

MEDIEVAL GOLDEN AGE IN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS FROM YUGOSLAV REPUBLICS AND THEIR SUCCESSORS

Abstract: Elementary school history textbooks for the grade dealing with the Middle Ages from the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav republics were studied. The focus in each case was on domestic history. Particular focus was on national idealisation, particularly on the fabulation of a golden age. The treatment was both across the environments and time-wise. The patterns of nationalism differed: in Croatia and Serbia, national idealisation was present in both periods, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Northern Macedonia, it appeared during the first period, and grew with time. In Montenegro, it was absent in the first period, but has appeared recently. In Slovenia, upon appearing in the first period, it withdrew in the second period. Kosovo textbooks in both periods were modest in substance and could not be considered to maintain the idea of a golden period. Hence, it was found that nationalism was present in most environments already under socialist Yugoslavia, but the dynamics of rise (and fall) varied. Ethnic essentialism is also present almost everywhere and in both periods. Nationalist fabulation could be expected in the second, nation-building period, after the Yugoslav break-up, but it was thriving already before in most cases, indicating there was space for nationalist proclivities during the Yugoslav period.

Keywords: history textbooks, Yugoslavia, golden age, retrospective nationalist construction, nationalism, lineage

Srednjovekovno zlatno doba u udžbenicima istorije iz jugoslovenskih republika i njihovih naslednica

Apstrakt: Analizirani su udžbenici istorije za osnovne škole, iz jugoslovenskih i postjugoslovenskih republika, za razrede koji obrađuju srednji vek. U svakom slučaju fokus je bio na domaćoj istoriji. Posebna pažnja posvećena je nacionalnoj idealizaciji, naročito stvaranju predstave o Zlatnom dobu. Obrada je vršena kako među različitim sredinama, tako i kroz vreme. Obrasci nacionalizma su se razlikovali: u

1 sflere6@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1000-1413>

Hrvatskoj i Srbiji nacionalna idealizacija bila je prisutna u oba posmatrana perioda; u Bosni i Hercegovini i Severnoj Makedoniji javila se u prvom periodu i vremenom se intenzivirala. U Crnoj Gori je u početku bila odsutna, ali se pojavila u novije vreme. U Sloveniji se, nakon što se javila u prvom periodu, povukla u drugom. Kosovski udžbenici u oba perioda bili su skromni sadržajem i ne može se reći da su održavali ideju o Zlatnom dobu. Na osnovu toga se može zaključiti da je nacionalizam bio prisutan u većini sredina već u vreme socijalističke Jugoslavije, ali da je dinamika njegovog rasta (i opadanja) varirala. Etnički esencijalizam takođe je gotovo svuda bio prisutan i u oba perioda. Nacionalističke fabulacije mogle su se očekivati u drugom, nacionalno-integracionom periodu nakon raspada Jugoslavije, ali su u većini slučajeva bile izražene i ranije, što ukazuje na to da je u jugoslovenskom periodu postojao prostor za jačanje nacionalističkih sklonosti.

Ključne reči: udžbenici istorije, Jugoslavija, zlatno doba, retrospektivna nacionalistička konstrukcija, nacionalizam, poreklo

Introduction

The rise and fall of Yugoslavia have been a focal point of scholarly interest, particularly within the social sciences (Bieber & Galijaš, 2014). Among the most scrutinised aspects of this historical trajectory are the history textbooks of post-Yugoslav states, which have sparked both special interest and sharp criticism (e.g., Stojanović, 2016; Pavasović Trošt, 2018a; Pavasović-Trošt & Mihajlović-Trbovc, 2020). These analyses have predominantly centred on the 20th century, with particular emphasis on World War II and the dissolution of Yugoslavia. A recurring theme in these studies is the role of textbooks as instruments of “nation-building” and “nationalisation”—a process that unfolded both before and after Yugoslavia’s disintegration in 1991.

Within scholarly literature on post-Yugoslav states, Croat and Serb nationalism—and its manifestation in education—have attracted the most attention. The shift in textbook narratives following Yugoslavia’s dissolution is striking: from depictions of relative harmony in socialist Yugoslavia to narratives emphasising deep-seated animosities and atrocities, sometimes with vivid, naturalistic portrayals of these events (Pavasović-Trošt, 2018a). Despite a general pattern of historical revisionism in post-Yugoslav history textbooks during the 1990s, significant variations exist. For instance, Slovenia’s approach to modern national history in the post-dissolution period primarily focused on internal Slovenian matters, minimising interethnic conflicts and downplaying blame (Brodnik, 2019).

This study examines elementary history textbooks covering the Medieval period, a subject introduced to students aged 12–14 (6th or 7th grade). The analysis focuses on the comparison between the socialist and

post-socialist periods, recognising the significant shift in historical narratives. The medieval era is particularly influential in shaping young minds, as it is often depicted through romanticised themes of knights, chivalry, and national heroism. This portrayal can serve as a foundation for ethnic nationalism, especially when knights are depicted as merciless warriors who fought “the other” and when a direct lineage between medieval heroes and the present-day nation is implied. Historians caution against such representations, emphasising that pre-modern ethnic identities and modern nationhood are distinct concepts (Malešević, 2022; Fine, 2006). Geary (2002) critiques European nationalism for treating the medieval period as a time of “primary acquisition of land,” reinforcing notions of uninterrupted national inheritance.

This research explores whether textbooks perpetuate the idea of a “golden age”—a notion that some scholars consider essential to national identity. A.D. Smith (1997) argues that the golden age serves as a touchstone of heroic virtue and national grandeur, while Hobsbawm (1983) contends that such narratives are primarily modern constructs designed for nation-building. Malešević (2022) attempts to reconcile these perspectives, asserting that golden-age narratives were historically employed to transform largely indifferent peasant populations into nationally conscious citizens. Given this, history textbooks represent a powerful medium for intertwining historical narratives with ideological objectives.

During the Yugoslav socialist period, history textbooks ostensibly promoted the ideology of “brotherhood and unity” (Koren, 2012). However, the extent to which they also incorporated national medieval narratives and nationalist undercurrents warrants investigation. Malešević (2002) suggests that Yugoslav socialism operated on two ideological levels: a normative level that emphasised abstract, universalist humanist ideals, and an operational level that devoted significant attention to the distinct histories of individual Yugoslav nationalities. This dual framework may have been reflected in history textbooks, potentially accommodating nationalist narratives alongside the official rhetoric of unity. Furthermore, conflicts within Yugoslavia’s leadership between 1966 and 1991—seemingly suppressed by Tito’s practice of replacing national leaders—fueled cultural elites’ grievances regarding language, historical interpretation, and territorial issues (Flere & Klanjšek, 2019; Wachtel, 1998).

Methodology

Socialist Yugoslavia was composed of six republics, succeeded by the same number of future states (plus Kosovo, which had a province status in Yugoslavia). Thus, each had their own set of textbooks, approved by the

respective Ministries of Education. We gathered history textbooks from all 7 entities, now from during the socialist period and in the new, post-1991-2 period, when the republics became independent states (Serbia and Montenegro became independent in 2006, Kosovo declared independence in 2008). All have disposed of at least one textbook in both periods. The total was 42 textbooks. Sections on the respective Medieval period were content analysed. The part dealing with domestic Medieval history was focused upon.

The establishment of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the 1995 Dayton Accords, for our purposes, needs a further note. The 1995 Dayton Accords, by which it is presently ruled, enabled the establishment of a Bosniak, a Croat and a Serb school system. The Croat and Serb school systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina follow their respective matrix states in the history curricula and textbooks, and they are considered in this paper only within the sections on the respective republics. Only textbooks in the Bosniak system in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity are considered.

Findings

The findings will be presented for the six republics, separating the socialist and post-socialist, independent republics' textbooks in each case. To make the presentation more systematic, one section is devoted to each land, now an independent state (although one remains impugned). The section is then divided into a portion devoted to the socialist period and one to the post-socialist, present one.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the first period, Perić's textbook (1957) was probably the first produced within B&H. It took a cautious approach, presenting Medieval Bosnia, the Bosnian Church, holding that its rulers most of the time had a vassal position vis-à-vis Hungarians and Byzantines (Perić, 1957, pp. 96-97). However, it made no mention of the Bosnian foremost ruler, Tvrtko as if self-consciousness were still lacking.

The book by Omanović (1975) represented a textbook product. It writes of Medieval Bosnia with a stress on the Bosnian Church, "which played an important role in the defence of independence of the Bosnian state against Hungary and the Pope. It was closely related to the Bosnian nobility and the Ban" (Omanović, 1975, p. 52). What she writes of Tvrt-

ko's period adds up to a golden age, possibly as contrast to the present: internal order was solidified, enabling territorial expansion and blooming of external trade (Omanović, 1975, p. 68). Most importantly, "[i]t was the largest South Slav state in Medieval times" (Omanović, 1975, p. 70). Upon the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, Islamization was conducted. Nobility was the one most frequently to convert to Islam, "to retain their estates" (Omanović, 1975, p. 104). On the other hand, it was members of the Bosnian Church who converted most frequently (Omanović, 1975, p. 104). Conversion was an instrument to better one's position, but at times it was conducted by force. But "Islamicized population retained its language and customs" (Omanović, 1975, p. 99).

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, in FB&H, all textbooks hold that Medieval Bosnia was a state with a cultural nucleus, "located on the border of Catholicism and Orthodoxy" (Hasičić, 2010, p. 93; Pelidija & Isaković, 1994, p. 41; Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 103). Again, it was the Bosnian Church that contained the cultural nucleus. "As the Church was no competitor to the nobles, they supported it." (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, p. 96). The Church also collected no taxes (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, p. 93). It assisted in the struggle against the Hungarian-Croat and Serb rulers (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, p. 96). A religious specificity was to be found in tombstones (*stećci*) (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 101; Hasičić, 2010, pp. 113-114). Authors also note the existence of the Catholic and Serb Orthodox Church in Medieval Bosnia (Hasičić, 2010, pp. 106-107).

Post-Yugoslav textbooks write that Bosnia was first mentioned in the 10th century and reached its "full assertion" under Kulin Ban in the 12th century (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 85). Kulin ban "was beloved among the people" (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 85). Under his rule, the first known diplomatic document comes about, among all South Slav peoples (an agreement with Dubrovnik, into a trade agreement with Dubrovnik, "which could only be rendered by a sovereign ruler" (Hasičić, 2010, p. 93; Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 86). Under foreign pressure, Kulin Ban only seemingly rejected the Bosnian Church teaching (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, pp. 86, 89). Under King Tvrtko, Bosnia became the "largest state in the Balkans" (14th century) (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 89) and "the mightiest one" (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, p. 97). Although Catholic, Tvrtko "defended all three religious groups" (Hadžiabdić et al., 2008, p. 89). Having had possessions in Serbia, he was crowned again, as "King of Serbia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Croatia and the Littoral", allowing for a different interpretation than Božić (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 89; Hasičić, 2010, p. 97). It was also a time "of maturity of Bosnian society" (Pelidija & Isaković, 1994, p. 73).

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

All this adds up to a “golden age” reached in Medieval Bosnia (sovereignty, political and economic strength, territorial expansion, cultural uniqueness, rulers loved by the populace). Authors in FB&H are inclined that this age was not to have been severed by the introduction of Ottoman rule. Ottoman rule is pictured almost as a minor change, as Ottoman rule was characterised by “religious tolerance” (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 121), which was to have bloomed even in previous independent Bosnia. However, the lack of a material basis of the Bosnian Church made it facile and voluntary to change to Islam (Muminović & Muminović, 2010, p. 117). It is, nevertheless, conceded that Christians had somewhat greater tax charges under the Ottomans.

Croatia

In the socialist period, the 1952 textbook by Salzer and Mali was an elaborate one, writing in detail on Slavs, not only South Slavs. It divided them into people already as of Early Medieval times. After a mighty Croat state in the 10th century, Croats were to have lost their independence. However, these and most later authors weave in the issue of *Pacta Conventa*, an alleged agreement between Hungarian King Koloman and ruling Croat noble families, after a defeat of Croat forces by Koloman in 1102. Were this true, a Croat political subjectivity would have endured. The document exists in a questionable rescript 200 years later (Engel, 2001, pp. 34-36). Most prominent historians cast doubt on the authenticity of the document (Klaić, 1967; Fine, 2006).

According to Salzer and Mali, an agreement between Koloman and Croat nobles was entered into, granting autonomy to the latter, without naming the document (Salzer & Mali, 1952, pp. 57-58). Salzer and Mali were politically correct, within the terms of the times, granting titular peoples of Yugoslavia separate Medieval histories, except for Montenegrians: they do not establish the existence of a Zeta state before the late 10th century. At that, there is no remark on the ethnic nature of Zeta (Salzer & Mali, 1952, pp. 65-68). The dominant Bosnian Church in Bosnia is considered different from the Catholic and Orthodox ones (Salzer & Mali, 1952, p. 127). Croat bravery is particularly underscored, although ‘domes-

tic traitors' were also to have existed in as early as the 9th century (Makek et al., 1974, p. 33), indicating a statehood against which organised subversion existed.

In the period after gaining independence, Makek issued a new textbook fundamentally changing the earlier text (Makek, 1995). He now claimed Medieval Bosnia was a Croat land, (Makek, 1995, p. 38), "linguistically" corroborating the claim by the alleged presence of ikavian speech in Bosnian Medievality, an alleged Croat trait (Makek, 1995, p. 38). Croatia could be understood as the largest Medieval kingdom. The linguistic corroboration is suspect, as ikavian is spoken today by štokavian Bunjevci in Serbia². Doclea also was to have been so initially Croat and its Church remained within the Western realm (Makek, 1995, pp. 36-7).

A current Croatian textbook continues to present *Pacta Conventa* as a form of continuation of the Croatian golden period. Birin et al. (2020), in a currently used textbook, make no mention of *Pacta Conventa*. But they present the famous St. Donatus Church in Zadar/Zara, acknowledging its Byzantine style, built also under Byzantine rule in the 9th century, but they attribute the construction to "Croat building activity" (Birin et al., 2020, p. 228). This was the period of Slavic and Avar attacks, but Zadar was under Byzantine rule, as reflected in the Church style (Fine, 2006, p. 35).

All this is part of the "golden thread" notion of Croatian history, according to which there were many turnabouts, but Croatia, in one form or another, however imperfect, persisted from the early Medieval times until the present. This is supplemented by a depiction of a pattern of history which was one of initial rise and welfare improvement (in the early Medieval period, of which little is known), whereas after the loss of independence in 1102, the stress is on the role of the higher nobility and its incessant struggle to preserve autonomy. In this manner, Birin et al. state, the golden thread states, "Croats elect a new dynasty" (Birin et al., 2020, p. 274), as if this were an act of universal suffrage in 1527.

As Petrungaro, an Italian historian, notes in his analysis of Croat history textbooks: neoromanticism and selectionism pervade them. This goes for Medievality as well. Neoromanticism is found particularly in depicting the Medieval Croat state, whereas selection is noted in cherry picking of only details, the idea of Croat political continuity (Petrungaro, 2009, pp. 20-25). A "golden age" is to be found already in the Early Middle Ages, but continued through efforts, particularly on the part of the Croat nobility, to uphold Croatian continuity into Modern times.

2 Council of Europe, Fifth Evaluation report on Serbia, <https://rm.coe.int/serbia-ecrml5-en/1680ab8322>

Kosovo

Prior to the Yugoslav dissolution, Serb textbooks considered Kosovo their own as of the settling of Serbs in the Balkans, whereas Kosovo textbooks in Albanian, relating to this period, considered it conquered by Emperor Dušan (Kodra & Gexha, 1987). The latter authors noted that Dušan ruled the Balkans (Kodra & Gexha, 1987, p. 54), but they remain silent on how Albanians/Arbs fared under him. The Albanian textbook in the post-dissolution period does not speak on the issue of Serb Medieval domination in Kosovo at all. It refers to local Albanian feudal lords and the independent dukedom of Arberia/Albania under Dhmitry in the 13th century, “peak in statehood”... “recognised in Europe”. The Balšići/Balsha of Doclea are considered Albanian (Kodra & Gexha, 1987, p. 29), wishful of dominating entire Albania whereas Kosovo is graphically depicted as under Bulgarian influence (Kodra & Gexha, 1987, p. 23).

Already then the land was inhabited by Arbers, previously Illyrians. Their territory had contracted, but the people remained (Kodra & Gexha, 1987, pp. 20-23). The other Albanian ruling families were to have been Topia and Shpata, ruling regions to the South (Kodra & Gexha, 1987, p. 30). In this way, Kosovo itself is sidelined. The peak of Albanian fame came in keeping Ottomans at bay by Skenderbey in the 15th century, which made him “famous in Europe” (Rexhepi & Frasher, 2018, pp. 47-49). Here, again, we encounter a “golden age”.

Montenegro

Montenegro is the smallest of the post-Yugoslav states, its ethnic identity incomplete (Malešević & Uzelac, 2011), hence declaring independence only in 2006.

Prior to the dissolution, Petrić and Radonjić (1975-1994, printings unchanged) covered the entire South Slav Medieval history. They mention Doclea as a polity only as of the 10th century (Petrić & Radonjić, 1978, p. 41). Rulers of the land, now Montenegro, are referred to, but without claiming that these Medieval creations were Montenegrin in nature. In passing, they mention that “since the 14th century, the Doclea/Zeta area was also designated as Montenegro” (Petrić & Radonjić, 1978, p. 44) and continue to write without designation of an ethnicity. They mainly narrate how power changed hands, including its becoming and ceasing to be part of larger structures. They stress the cunning of domestic Prince Vojislav, who made the Byzantine army believe there was a mighty military adversary facing them by the production of sounds (Petrić & Radonjić, 1978, pp. 45-46). They write with respect to Croatia and particularly to Serbia,

referring to them as long-lasting entities. Possibly Petrić's and Radonjić's intention was to impress students by completely another historical entity – Rascia, elaborating the splendour of King Milutin's palace and garments (Petrić & Radonjić, 1978, pp. 59-60).

In the period after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the introduction of new textbooks was preceded by a discussion in which a critique of the previous textbooks prevailed, particularly for national identity not being dealt with (Perović, 2017). The 2021 history textbook for 7th graders by Popović and Miranović holds an opposite position on these issues, but they lack corroboration. Popović and Miranović tell students that the first "Montenegrin state" was established in the 7th century (Perović, 2017, p. 26). Not much is told about it except that it had to fight to maintain independence to Macedonia and Byzantium (Perović, 2017, pp. 26-27). They concede Doclea fell under the (Serb) Nemanjid dynasty, but "memory of the earlier Kingdom did not vanish". Autonomy was gained in littoral cities and in the entire Doclea (Perović, 2017, p. 42). Their King Bodin expanded the state to include "Rascia, Travunia, Zahumlje and Bosnia" (Perović, 2017, p. 29) while he was under Papal protection. During this period, ecclesial development is noted.

North Macedonia

Šoptrajanov's et al. (1960) textbook was the first one in socialist Macedonia. It dealt modestly with domestic history, devoting 5 pages to Emperor Samuil's rise and fall (10th century) (Šoptrajanov et al., 1960, pp. 114-118) and attributing his success mainly to circumstances like dissatisfaction with being exploited. It had not yet held a position on the ethnic nature of Samuil's empire.

The textbook by Dimevski and Čukarski (1980) tells that Macedonia was inhabited by "Macedonian Slavs" about the 9th century, who were technically under Byzantine and Bulgarian overlordship, but "the relationship was weak" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, p. 41). So even then, "[Macedonians] conducted their lives autonomously, led by their princes" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, p. 41). The Macedonian Slavs "seceded" from Bulgaria in 969 and created a "Macedonian state". In this endeavour, they were led by princes David, Moses, Aron and Samuil. Samuil became the "Macedonian Emperor", who expanded his state. He also disposed of a Patriarchate, the highest ecclesial office in Orthodoxy. A "Macedonian feudal aristocracy" was also to have existed (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, p. 46), which would definitely make for the golden period. Unfortunately, aristocrats soon, without a struggle to Byzantium, ceded Macedonia "in order to preserve its riches and privileges" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980,

p. 46). Samuil's state lasted only until 1014, when the armed forces composed of "Macedonian soldiers" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, p. 43) were defeated by Byzantine ones under Emperor Basil II. This was followed by uprisings in the same century, "because the Macedonian people could not bear such a yoke" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, p. 48). The religious group of Bogomils were particularly active in the resistance; hence, authors assess their role as "progressive" and "emancipatory" (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, p. 51).

The text leaves no doubt that there was a Macedonian identity, a Macedonian state, a Macedonian people; the culture is not elaborated, and the Macedonian Orthodox Archbishopric/Patriarchate is referred to. The relationship with Bulgars is clearly defined in adverse terms, as Macedonians suffered "dangers from Bulgaria" already in the 9th century (Dimevski & Čukarski, 1980, p. 41). Fine, however, flatly states: "there was then no Macedonian ethnic awareness" (Fine, 2006, p. 161).

In current times, the post-Yugoslav period, Macedonian history textbooks are contested by the Bulgarian Government, where Medieval issues take centre stage.

Textbook by Naneski and Memeti (2006) may have seemed an innovation, by entry of numerous minor rulers and events, to fit into a consociational order, such as North Macedonia had become. Authors are also cautious not to impose narratives quite at odds with facts, but still to be faithful to their nationhoods, Macedonians and Albanians. Thus, Medieval Macedonians as such are mentioned only on p. 53, in the 11th century, as a people opposing Byzantine oppression. Samuil is not designated expressly as a Macedonian ruler. Macedonian political identity is resolved by entering numerous local feudal lords who were to have been "independent" (Naneski & Memeti, 2006, pp. 85-88). Samuil's empire is considered to have spanned from the Adriatic to the Black Sea (Boškoski et al., 2010, p. 44). In fact, Samuil's empire was titled "Bulgarian" (e.g. see Rossos, 2008, p. XVIII).

Albanians are seen both as a people appearing earlier (the name Arbs was to have appeared in the 6th century, Boškoski et al., 2010, p.32), and being subjugated by the Ottomans later (Skenderbey holding strong against them in the 15th century, Boškoski et al., 2010, p. 104). Besides these two major groups, Wallachs of Macedonia are also accorded attention (93-94). Islamization is assessed basically as a forced event (Boškoski et al., 2010, p. 96). However, "(Macedonians) retained their language and customs" (Boškoski et al., 2010, p. 96).

Stojanov and Bliznakovski, analysing Macedonian history textbooks, may be right that for a country challenged as to its national existence,

such narratives operate as what Marx called “opium of the masses”. “Students are reassured that Macedonia is not something new, that our name belongs to *us* and that *our country* as not always been *small* and *weak* (Stojanov & Bliznakovski, 2017, p. 80). This demonstrates how different the countries we are dealing with are, although Macedonia is not the only one to face such identitarian challenges and contestations.

Serbia

The textbook by Popović, Živković and Čubrilović, probably the first in Serbia after World War II (1954), applied a cautious approach. It accorded a lot of space to the three nations recognised prior to World War II and dealt with caution on Macedonia and Zeta. Among the textbooks from the first period, in Nešić’s and most other textbooks Medieval Serb polities were nationally identified with present day Serbs and Serbia, in spite of a break during the Ottoman period of more than 400 years, when there were no schools in the Serb language (Roudometof, 2001, p. 49). Nešić (1966) and Božić (1972/1984) viewed neighbouring entities similarly. Under title “Serb state under the Nemanjids” Božić wrote (Božić, 1972/1984, p. 163): under Stefan (Nemanja’s son) “Serbia was internationally recognised” (Božić, 1972/1984, p. 159) and goes on to hail the dynasty, as does Nešić (Nešić, 1966, pp. 109-145).

Currently, there are 10 officially approved textbooks for history in the 6th grade (Ministarstvo prosvete, n.d.). The textbook by Mitrović and Vasin (2020), by the national textbook publisher, seems to be an attempt to circumvent the Medieval triumphalism of Serb expansion and assertion. The Serb Medieval Empire is contextualised, with less space attributed to it than in other textbooks; rulers of the Empire parts like Doclea and Macedonia are not directly claimed to be Serb ones (Balšići, Mrnjavčevići, respectively, Mitrović & Vasin, 2020, p. 94).

The Mihaljčić (2021) textbook, published by the same national publisher, continues from the previous period into the present one, devotes a lion’s share of the book to the local history of Serbs and Serbia (Mihaljčić, 2021, pp. 85-140, 155-170). Its tone is also more celebratory. “Rulers of the Nemanjić dynasty were ascribed divine properties by their contemporaries... during their rule, the Serb state had expanded significantly... the Byzantine Emperor acquiesced to the loss of territory... Serbia was on the way to becoming a leading power in the Balkans (Mihaljčić, 2021, pp. 89-90). Finally, all the achievements of Emperor Stefan Dušan are hailed (Mihaljčić, 2021, pp. 91-93). Only his death cut short his conquest of Constantinople (Mihaljčić, 2021, p. 93).

It is discernible that for the period prior to Ottoman domination favourable positions are expressed, whereas under Ottoman domination adverse issues are stressed like Islamization, *devshirme* (never regarded as possibility of social advancement, but only as brutal seizure of boys by merciless Ottomans, “Parents not only hid their children, but also mutilated them...parents ran behind the caravan” (Lopandić & Petrović, 2021 p. 189) and destruction of cities (Lopandić & Petrović, 2021, p. 188).

In the second period, a celebratory manner of writing can be clearly observed: the title of the chapter, “Serbia was the greatest power in the Balkans”, although it related only to a few decades (Bubalo & Bečanović, 2018, p. 134). The splendour of King Milutin’s garments and decorations was envied by foreigners (Komatina et al., 2022, p. 101; Lopandić & Petrović, 2021, p. 101). Food at the court was served with exotic spices (Lopandić & Petrović, p. 135).

The Serb Medieval state did last longer than any of the other considered, and it did achieve large proportions during Emperor Dušan (although Samuil’s and Tvrtko’s may have been larger), but still it was a temporary, unstable Medieval construction. The rupture of almost more than four centuries until the 19th century Serb state was established, casts much doubt whether it is admissible to hold there was only a long break in Serb statehood and in Serb nationhood, after which same Serbdom continued, as would transpire from all Serb textbooks – or whether the modern state and nation were a completely new reality.

Slovenia

Slovenia, once Yugoslavia’s westernmost republic, can claim to have disposed of the first such textbook after World War II (Binter, 1947). Binter’s textbook for the 6th grade was titled *History of South Slavs*, and it dealt with Slovenes, Croats, Macedonians and Serbs, but not with Montenegrins and Bosniaks. Binter went into details of alleged ceremonies of Slovene dukes being enthroned at Krn in Carynthia and even into purported variants of the ritual, which was to have eventuated as of the 8th century (Binter, 1947, pp. 50-54). This story was often repeated in later textbooks, along with the “early loss of independence” by misfortune (Božič & Weber, 1984, p. 45). Rituals of ducal investiture, which the dukedom would soon disappear, seemed like a shooting star in the sky, a golden age to Slovene children.

For the period after Slovenia became independent, no traces of Slovene early Medieval investiture are to be found in textbooks, although erroneous statements on Medieval Slovene linguistic unity were maintained (Janša-Zorn & Mihelič, 1998, p. 149; Janša-Zorn et al., 2018, p. 76), al-

though there was no linguistic standard. The focus is no longer on political history, but urban and rural differences, religious movements (Bregar-Mazzini et al., 2019, pp. 134-147).

Conclusion

The golden age idea was built into most textbooks, with socialist Montenegro and post-socialist Slovenia being stark exceptions. In the first case, it was about nationalism not yet maturing, in the latter, it was rejecting such nationalism (plus a lack of facts to the effect). But, by and large, the idea of a golden age appears prevalently. The idea of a Medieval golden age in domestic history took a more pronounced status in the textbooks in the post-1991 period, as nation-building was more pronounced. Croatia is a special case, as beginning with the 12th century it was subjugated to Hungary. However, most Croat authors try to speak of further achievements, “golden moments” however questionable they may be like Birin et al. who write, beside what is referred above, of “the first university in the area of Croatia was in Zadar/Zara in the 14th century” (Birin et al., 2020, p. 134), although it was only a Dominican college, not using Slav language (Vereš, 1999).

Of course, we always encountered “national” golden ages, not a Yugoslav one, even during the Yugoslav period. So, even then, golden ages were products of national intelligentsias, not of Yugoslav communism.

What Pohl notes (2013) as historiographic would be national legitimations in one century earlier Austria-Hungary, now appears again, although usually stated less deterministically so and now relating to republics, subsequently independent states: we were first to have settled the area (Rexhepi & Frashër, 2018, p. 23), we were there to civilise and Christianise it (Croat and Serb textbooks), our military valour and might shined and prevailed, at least for part of the time (FB&H, Croat, Serb, Macedonian and recent Montenegrin textbooks). The size of our state is added to some greatness formulas. What Pohl noted about ethnic “achievements” is now even more reified with independent states, and Illyrian, Yugoslav and regional identities are out of the question. National identifications were to have been unquestionable in the Middle Ages (except, possibly, in Slovene textbooks). Hence, ideas of Medieval grandeur are related to national exclusiveness or domination of contested regions.

In both periods, we encountered claims in FB&H that Bosnia was the Medieval largest state in the Balkans (Omanović, 1975; Pelidija & Isaković, 1994), in contrast to Mihaljčić (Mihaljčić, 2021, pp. 182, 80), and

Milivojević (Milivojević, Lučić & Stojkovski, 2020, p. 130), whereas Bubalo (Bubalo & Bečanović, 2018, p. 134) and other Serbian authors depict Serbia approximately the same size as today at its Medieval largest, but also the mightiest, “the greatest power in the Balkans” Macedonian authors usually illustrate their respective grandeur by the alleged span of Samuil’s empire from the Adriatic to the Black Sea and from River Sava to Mount Olympus (e.g., Boškoski et al., 2010, p. 44), Croat books are inclined to consider Croatia a Western European country with an enviable military in the 10th century. Most such details need not be individually wrong, but they go beyond cherry picking of some short period spans. They are part of state ideological strategies to claim national greatness and possibly to claim certain territories now belonging to other states. Slovene textbooks make no such claim. Montenegrin post-socialist textbooks, a latecomer in nation-building, satisfy themselves mainly by claiming Medieval structures were “Montenegrin” in national substance, without grounding such claims in facts. The Kosovo Albanian book is a modest example in every way, although it also does not fall short of golden age-type claims. Croat textbooks in the second period make valiant attempts at depicting Croat endurance and continuity, attempting to extend the golden period of “national kings” to later times.

The most important finding is that nationalist proclivities were not absent, in the majority of cases, in the socialist period, where they slowly grew. In fact nationalist idealisations in some form of golden age were present in the late socialist period everywhere, but in Montenegrin ones. The last case is probably directly related with general weak nation building at the time.

Hence, authors insisted on “their” golden ages and other forms of nationalist idealisation during the socialist period or the latter part of the period. This idealisation became even more pronounced in the post-socialist period, where we encounter that Kulin Ban and Tvrtko, Domagoj and Tomislav, Nemanja, Milutin and Dušan, Samuil, and even Skenderbey are treated almost as “paragons of nationalist virtues”, putting such textbooks definitely among celebratory texts. This presence of nationalist proclivities in the first period may come as a surprise to those who hold that Yugoslavia was under the spell of authoritarian socialism and a single narrative of Yugoslav brotherhood was imposed. This means that socialist authorities tolerated, consented to, or even stimulated a certain national romanticism on the part of their intelligentsia (again with the exception of Montenegro), either considering it true or instrumental, or both. Short-lived political Medieval edifices and questionable achievements are celebrated as major national achievements already then. This was part of what

Malešević called operational ideology of the time, in contrast to the high-flown internationalism in the ideology's upper stratum. This is a strong indicator that Yugoslavia was culturally not unified, and cultural elites could produce nationalist meaning and identity far back, before explicit signs of dissolution became evident. We also surmise that cultural elites were very important in the end game. In this sense, this paper is one more pebble of support to the claim that the Yugoslav break-up was no coincidence. The constituents of Yugoslavia, their cultural elites, if not reflecting different realities during the socialist period, certainly constructed them, although at different paces. Other contested issues in textbooks, like the identity of certain historical figures and the identity of certain lands, have been omitted, as not directly relate to "golden age" issues, although they supplement the picture of textbooks being at odds.

Reference List

- Bieber, F., & Galijaš, A. (2014). *Debating the End of Yugoslavia* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315576039>
- Binter, B. (1947). South Slavs in the Middle Ages: a textbook [*Južni Slovani v srednjem veku: učbenik*]. Državna založba Slovenije.
- Birin, A., Deković, D., Šrlija, T., Butorac, Ž., & Blažinović, Ž. (2020). History 6: Textbook for 6th grade of elementary school [*Povijest 6: Udžbenik za 6. razred osnovne škole*]. Alfa.
- Boškovski, M., Ilioski, J., & Dervishi, N. (2010). History for 6th grade [*Istorija za 6 oddelenie*]. Prosvetno delo.
- Božič, B., & Weber, T. (1984). History for sixth grade [*Zgodovina za šesti razred*]. Državna založba Slovenije.
- Božić, I. (1972/1984). History for the first grade of high school [*Istorija za prvi razred gimnazije*]. Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva Srbije.
- Bregar-Mazzini, S., Oblak, M., & Roudi, B. (2019). History 7: History textbook for 7th grade elementary school [*Zgodovina 7: Učbenik za zgodovino v 7. razredu osnovne šole*]. Mladinska knjiga.
- Brodnik, V. (2019). Slovenia. In L. Cajani, S. Lässig, & N. Repoussi (Eds.), *Palgrave Handbook of Conflict and History Education* (pp. 579–589). Palgrave.
- Bubalo, Đ., & Bečanović, B. (2018). History for 6th grade elementary school [*Istorija za 6. razred osnovne škole*]. Klett.
- Council of Europe. (n.d.). *Fifth Evaluation Report on Serbia*. <https://rm.coe.int/serbia-ecrml5-en/1680ab8322>
- Dimevski, J., & Čukarski, B. (1980). History for 6th grade [*Istorija za VI oddelenie*]. Prosvetno delo.
- Engel, P. (2001). *The realm of St. Stephen: History of medieval Hungary*. I.B. Tauris.

- Fine, J. V. A. (2006). *When ethnicity did not matter in the Balkans: A study of identity in pre-nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia in medieval and pre-modern periods*. University of Michigan Press.
- Flere, S. & Klanjšek, R. 2019. *The Rise and Fall of Socialist Yugoslavia: Elite Nationalism and the Collapse of a Federation*. Rowman.
- Geary, P. J. (2002). *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*. Princeton University Press.
- Goldman, J. R. (1985). Consociational authoritarian politics and the Yugoslav 1974 Constitution: A preliminary note. *East European Quarterly*, 19(2), 241–249.
- Hadžiabdić, H., Dervišagić, E., Mulić, A., & Mehić, V. (2008). History: Textbook for 6th grade of elementary school [*Historija: Udžbenik za 6. razred osnovne škole*]. Bosanska knjiga.
- Hasičić, A. (2010). History: Textbook for 7th grade of elementary school [*Historija: Udžbenik za 7. razred osnovne škole*]. Sarajevo Publishing.
- Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Janša-Zorn, O., & Mihelić, D. (1998). Ancient and Middle Ages: History for 6th grade elementary school [*Stari in srednji vek: Zgodovina za 6. razred osnovne šole*]. DZS.
- Janša-Zorn, O., Zorn, M., & Mihelić, D. (2018). Steps Through Time 7: A History Textbook for 7th Grade Elementary School [*Koraki v času 7: Učbenik za zgodovino v 7. razredu osnovne šole*]. DZS.
- Klaić, N. (1967). Overview of sources of Croatian history up to the 12th century [*Pregled izvora hrvatske povijesti do XII stoljeća*]. Sveučilište u Zagrebu.
- Komatina, I., Jevrić, J., Živković, E., Nedović, Lj., & Popović, R. (2022). History 6: Textbook with selected sources for the sixth grade of elementary school [*Istorija 6: Udžbenik sa odabranim izvorima za šesti razred osnovne škole*]. Klett.
- Koren, S. (2012). The Politics of History in Yugoslavia (1945–1960) [*Politika povijesti u Jugoslaviji (1945–1960)*]. Srednja Europa.
- Lopandić, D., & Petrović, I. (2021). History 6: Textbook with selected sources for the sixth grade of elementary school [*Istorija 6: Udžbenik sa odabranim izvorima za šesti razred osnovne škole*]. Logos.
- Makek, I. (1995). History: textbook for 6th grade elementary school [*Povijest: udžbenik za 6. razred osnovne škole*]. Školska knjiga.
- Makek, I., Drašković, B., & Salzer, O. (1974). Peoples in Time and Space 2: History Textbook for Grade 6 [*Narodi u vremenu i prostoru 2: Udžbenik povijesti za VI razred*]. Školska knjiga.
- Malešević, S. (2002). *Ideology, Legitimacy, and the New State: Yugoslavia, Serbia, and Croatia*. Routledge.
- Malešević, S. (2022). Resurrecting national greatness: The changing faces of Golden Age in the Balkans. *Sociological Forum*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12839>

- Malešević, S., & Uzelac, G. (2007). A nation-state without a nation? The trajectories of nation-formation in Montenegro. *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(4), 695–722. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2007.00318.x>
- Mihaljčić, R. (2021). History with selected historical sources for the sixth grade of elementary school [*Istorija sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za šesti razred osnovne škole*]. Zavod za udžbenike.
- Milivojević, U., Lučić, V., & Stojkovski, B. (2020). History 6: Textbook with selected sources for the sixth grade of elementary school [*Istorija 6: Udžbenik sa odabranim izvorima za šesti razred osnovne škole*]. BIGZ.
- Muminović, A., & Muminović, S. (2010). History for the 7th grade of nine-year elementary school [*Historija za 7. razred devetogodišnje osnovne škole*]. Svjetlost.
- Ministarstvo prosvete. (n.d.). Elementary school textbooks [*Udžbenici za osnovnu školu*]. <https://prosveta.gov.rs/prosveta/udzbenici/udzbenici-za-osnovnu-skolu/>
- Mitrović, K., & Vasin, G. (2020). History with selected historical sources for the sixth grade of elementary school [*Istorija sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za šesti razred osnovne škole*]. Zavod za udžbenike.
- Naneski, N., & Memeti, B. (2006). History for 6th grade [*Istorija za VI oddelenie*]. Zvezda.
- Nešić, J. (1966). History for sixth grade elementary school [*Istorija za šesti razred osnovne škole*]. Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika SR Srbije.
- Omanović, E. (1975). History for sixth grade elementary school [*Istorija za 6. razred osmogodišnje škole*]. Svjetlost.
- Pavasović-Trošt, T. (2018a). Ruptures and continuities in nationhood narratives: Reconstructing the nation through history textbooks in Serbia and Croatia. *Nations and Nationalism*, 24(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12433>
- Pavasović-Trošt, T. (2018b). Teaching the national through geography and nature: Banal nationalism in primary schools in Croatia and Serbia. In Polese, A., Seliverstova, O., Pawlusz, E. & Morris, J. (Eds.), *Informal Nationalism After Communism: The Everyday Construction of Post-Socialist Identities* (pp. 57–82). I.B. Tauris. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350986824.ch-003>
- Pavasović-Trošt, T., & Mihajlović-Trbovc, J. (2020). Identity politics in history textbooks in the region of the former Yugoslavia. In Balasz, A. B. & Griessler, C. (Eds.), *The Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans: Framing Regional Identities (Andrassy Studien Zur Europaforschung, 25)*. Nomos.
- Pelidija, E., & Isaković, F. (1994). History – 6th grade of elementary school [*Historija – 6. razred osnovne škole*]. Svjetlost.
- Perić, M. (1957). History for 6th grade elementary school [*Istorija za 6. razred osnovne škole*]. Veselin Masleša.
- Perović, R. (2017). National history in elementary school history textbooks [Nacionalna istorija u udžbenicima istorije za osnovnu školu.] *Matica*, 71/XX-VIII. <http://www.maticacrnogorska.me>
- Petrić, D., & Radonjić, V. (1978). History for 6th grade elementary school [*Istorija za 6. razred osnovne škole*]. Zavod za unapređenje školstva.

- Petrungaro, S. (2009). *Rewriting History: Croatian History Textbooks 1918–2004* [Pisati povijest iznova: Hrvatski udžbenici povijesti 1918.–2004. godine]. Srednja Europa.
- Pohl, W. (2013). National origin narratives in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In Geary, P. J., & Klaniczay, G. (Eds.), *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled history of medievalism in nineteenth-century Europe* (pp. 13–50). Brill.
- Popović, R., & Miranović, D. (2022). *Istorija za sedmi razred osnovne škole*. Podgorica: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva.
- Popović, M., Živković, S., & Čubrilo, Lj. (1954). History for 6th-grade elementary school [Istorija za 6. razred osnovne škole]. Nolit.
- Rossos, A. (2008). *Macedonia and the Macedonians: A history*. Hoover Institution Press.
- Roudometoff, V. (2001). *Nationalism, globalization, and orthodoxy: The social origins of ethnic conflict in the Balkans*. Greenwood.
- Salzer, O., & Mali, K. (1952). History for 6th-grade elementary school [Povijest za 6. razred osnovne škole]. Školska knjiga.
- Rexhepi, F., & Demaj, F. (2018). History 5 [Historia 5]. Libri Shkollor.
- Smith, A. D. (1997). *Nationalism and modernism*. Routledge.
- Stojanov, D., & Bliznakovski, J. (2017). Between history and politics: Understanding Antiquitas myths in Macedonian textbooks. In Lichnofsky, C., Pandelejmoni, E. & Stojanov, D. (Eds.), *Myths and Mythical Spaces* (pp. 77–95). V&R eLibrary. <https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737008112.77>
- Stojanović, D. (2016). The crossed swords of memory: the image of communist Yugoslavia in the textbooks of its successor states. *European Politics and Society*, 18(1), 10–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2016.1269440>
- Šoptrajanov, T., Dimeski, J., & Pangoski, T. (1960). History for 6th grade [Istorija za 6. Oddelenie]. Prosvetno delo.
- Vereš, T. (1999). In search of the oldest Croatian university [U potrazi za najstarijim hrvatskim sveučilištem]. *Prilozi za istraživanje hrvatske filozofske baštine*, 25(1–2, (49–50)), 215–230. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/76605>
- Wachtel, A. 1998. *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*. Stanford University Press.