Is All History Contemporary History? Serbian and Yugoslav Historiography and Presentism in the Longue Durée

Programme Event

International Committee of Historical Sciences | 26–30 August 2026 | Leipzig, Germany

DATE	LOCATION
29 Aug 2026, 09:00 - 11:30	House 1 T1003
THEME	CONFERENCE
C - National and Regional Schools of Historiography	International Committee of Historical Sciences

Overview

By invoking Benedetto Croce’s famous dictum, this panel will contextualize historiographical works and showcase their dependence on contemporary social and political conditions, such as concerns, values, and experiences. In other words, dominant contemporary discourses influenced the perspectives, the choice of topics and periods that were studied, the methods implemented, as well as the interpretations that ensued. This presentism brought about an important characteristic of historiography: it is an ongoing reinterpretation of the past. The assertion that each presentation of the past simultaneously serves as a reflection of the present renders the study of historiography an essential component of the responsibilities undertaken by contemporary historians. The panelists will use various examples from historiography over the past century and a half to exemplify the connection between historiography and historians' contemporaneous perspectives. The presentation Changing Political Discourses and the Historiography of the Middle Ages in Serbia will show how contemporary political discourses shaped how historians have studied, interpreted, and represented the medieval period since the beginnings of scientific historiography. It will reveal assumptions and biases, but also strong points, in the understanding of the Middle Ages. The talk Modernization and Europeanisation in the Historiography of Nineteen-Century Serbia argues that modernization and Europeanisation were prioritized historiographical themes and that this bias survived various regime changes and ideological upheavals. Debating Yugoslavia: A History of the Inevitable Historical Process or a History of Utopia? reflects on the dominant theme of Serbian historiography over the last hundred years, namely the creation, existence and legacy of the Yugoslav state. It outlines the conflicting paradigms and the assumptions that underpins them in what remains to be a highly politically charged debate. Presentation Taboos, Ideology, and Escapism: Serbian Historiography on Socialist Yugoslavia will analyze how Serbian historians have written about post-World War II Yugoslavia. Ideological taboos and biases, as well as the tendency to analyze noncontroversial subjects, will be discussed as crucial factors in influencing Serbian historiography. The final presentation, Yugoslavia as Seen by its Western Neighbor: Italian Historiography and Yugoslavia, analyses of the unique case of the historiography of Yugoslavia produced by Italy, a country that shares not only a vast border area stretching from Austria to Albania but, above all, an often complicated intensely interwoven shared history with Yugoslavia.

Participants

Convenor

- Dragan Baki? (Institute for Balkan Studies)

Panelists

- Marija Vasiljevi? (Institute for Balkan Studies)
- Miloš Vojinovi? (Institute for Balkan Studies)
- Dragan Baki? (Institute for Balkan Studies)
- Arrigo Bonifacio (University of Udine)
- Bogdan Živkovi? (Institute for Balkan Studies)

Papers

Changing Political Discourses and the Historiography of the Middle Ages in Serbia

Marija Vasiljevi? (Institute for Balkan Studies)

Modernization and Europeanisation in the Historiography of Nineteen-Century Serbia

Miloš Vojinovi? (Institute for Balkan Studies)

Debating Yugoslavia: A History of the Inevitable Historical Process or a History of Utopia?

Dragan Baki? (Institute for Balkan Studies)

Yugoslavia as Seen by its Western Neighbor: Italian Historiography and Yugoslavia

Arrigo Bonifacio (University of Udine)

Taboos, Ideology, and Escapism: Serbian Historiography on Socialist Yugoslavia

Bogdan Živkovi? (Institute for Balkan Studies)

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