

RE-THINKING YUGOSLAV ARCHAEOLOGY: Revisiting Knowledge, Practice, Identity and Heritage

Sarajevo, April 15–17, 2027

Plenary Hall of the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bistrik 7, 71000 Sarajevo).

We are inviting speakers to debate and critically reflect on the historical, conceptual, ideological, social, and cultural dimensions of Yugoslav archaeology, as well as on its knowledge production and practice. We welcome scholars from any geographical or academic background to share their views, perceptions, experiences, dilemmas, and insights regarding Yugoslav archaeology.

ORGANIZERS

Department of Archaeology (University of Ljubljana), Centre for Balkan Studies (Academy of Arts and Sciences of the Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo), Department of Archaeology (University of Sarajevo), Department of Archaeology (University of Belgrade), Archaeological Museum Zagreb, Institute of History and Archaeology, Goce Delčev University – Štip.

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Predrag Novaković (University of Ljubljana), Staša Babić (University of Belgrade), Blagoje Govedarica (Center for Balkan Studies / German Archaeological Institute), Adnan Kaljanac (University of Sarajevo), Ana Solter (Archaeological Museum Zagreb), Ljuben Tevdovski (Goce Delčev University – Štip). The organizing committee will also act as the scientific committee of the meeting.

DATES

The symposium is planned for April 15 – 16, 2027; April 17 is reserved for an excursion.

VENUES

Plenary Hall of the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bistrik 7, 71000 Sarajevo).

PAPERS

Papers are limited to 20 minutes. The papers will be published in the meeting's proceedings. Abstracts will be published online in an abstract book. Abstracts should be bilingual, in English and the speaker's native language. Abstracts will be reviewed and confirmed by the scientific committee

DEADLINES

Pre-registration 31 August 2026. (Please, join the mailing list to receive additional information.)

Registration + Abstracts 15 December 2026 (max. 300 words)

Meeting (April 15 – 16, 2027, April 17 excursion) Papers completed for the meeting's proceedings 30 October 2027.

LANGUAGES

Since we expect international attendance, the papers should ideally be delivered (and published) in English.

CONFERENCE FEE: €20

CONTACTS:

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Why Re-Thinking Yugoslav Archaeology?

More than three decades, profound social changes and radical transformations of identities, values, as well as global and regional relations, seem to provide sufficient distance for us to scientifically address and re-analyse certain processes related to the phenomenon of "Yugoslavia" – including in the area we find of particular disciplinary interest, known as Yugoslav archaeology.

However, first we must dare to define this concept, which is complex and ambivalent in many ways. This symposium thus attempts to query whether the concept of Yugoslav archaeology even exists. And if it does, should it be sought in an attempt at a synthesis of national and regional archaeological frameworks and traditions in the former common state? Or should Yugoslav archaeology be considered as simply an episode or a socio-historical context in the development of the various national disciplinary frameworks that developed in the successor states? Should the attempt to create disciplinary homogeneity from heterogeneity be treated merely as centralized overreach, or does its reflection in the development of archaeology within the post-1991 successor states – and, in some respects, within the wider international context – warrant a different type of academic inquiry? Ultimately, critically evaluating and researching the history of Yugoslav archaeology is an essential step in deciding whether the term "Yugoslav archaeology" is appropriate and useful, or if we should view these processes and disciplinary histories through the prism of "archaeology(ies) in Yugoslavia". Furthermore, if the latter approach primarily denotes individual national archaeological frameworks and developments interrelated within the context of a multinational state, is there a parallel, homogeneous development of Yugoslav archaeology worth analysing? Specifically, one that acted as a factor in transforming national frameworks, whether through cooperation or confrontation?

In this context, the symposium opens the floor to a critical historical approach toward the constantly changing Yugoslav archaeological framework. It provides a forum to reevaluate the roots of this phenomenon – from early "Yugoslav ideas" in the region to the first concrete initiatives of modest success in the 1920s and 1930s – and view the developments that emerged after World War II through a new lens, within the novel context of the socialist federation. The constant reimagining of archaeology in these complex political settings can be analysed through the dichotomy of centralization and particularization. On one side was the effort of a group of leading academics in the 1950s who put forward an ambitious plan to modernize archaeological science and practice across all major domains – organization, infrastructure, conceptual framework, education, and heritage – all planned and monitored by a specialized Yugoslav Archaeological Committee. On the other side was the pushback of the mid-1960s, which successfully replaced the centralized system of producing and coordinating archaeology in Yugoslavia with a network of collaborating national archaeologies.

Investigating the legacy of each of these two extremes, as well as their interplay in shaping the identity and development of different national archaeologies, promises to be highly illuminating. Furthermore, another domain of this legacy remains vital not only for researchers but also for policymakers and practitioners of archaeology within various national contexts. Much of the infrastructural and institutional development finds its roots in the post-war renewal of the common federal state. Some fundamental epistemological concepts and tools established in the 1950s and 1960s through the joint efforts of archaeologists across the federation remain widely used today. The coordinated modernization and internationalization efforts launched during these decades granted Yugoslav archaeology equal footing as a partner in the global arena, a positioning that is still reflected in contemporary international archaeological cooperation among the successor states. Last but not least, the social tasks and responsibilities of archaeology, particularly in heritage management – which were systematically laid out by Yugoslav archaeology – continue to have significant ramifications for the position and role of archaeology in today's societal contexts. We do not wish to limit the discussion to purely conceptual or epistemological topics at this inaugural symposium on Yugoslav archaeology. Instead, we invite speakers to contribute work exploring the various aspects and dilemmas related to or impacted by this phenomenon at least since 1918. Our goal is to provide a platform for debating and critically reflecting on the historical, conceptual, ideological, social, and cultural dimensions of Yugoslav archaeology, as well as on its knowledge production and practice. Moreover, Yugoslav archaeology is not merely about ideas; it is about relationships, personal and institutional "biographies", social and cultural trajectories, contingencies, positive and negative outcomes, successes, shortcomings, and failures. We welcome scholars from any geographical background to share their views, perceptions, experiences, dilemmas, and insights regarding Yugoslav archaeology.