

BULGARIA AND YUGOSLAVIA REVISITED

By Mike McPhee

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I will be using the term ‘Yugoslavia’ in this presentation, both for brevity and because that region was Yugoslavia when I was there in 1970. Similarly, the flags of both Bulgaria and Yugoslavia on the title page are those in use at that time; the former has reverted to the traditional tricolour and, of course, there is longer a Yugoslav flag.

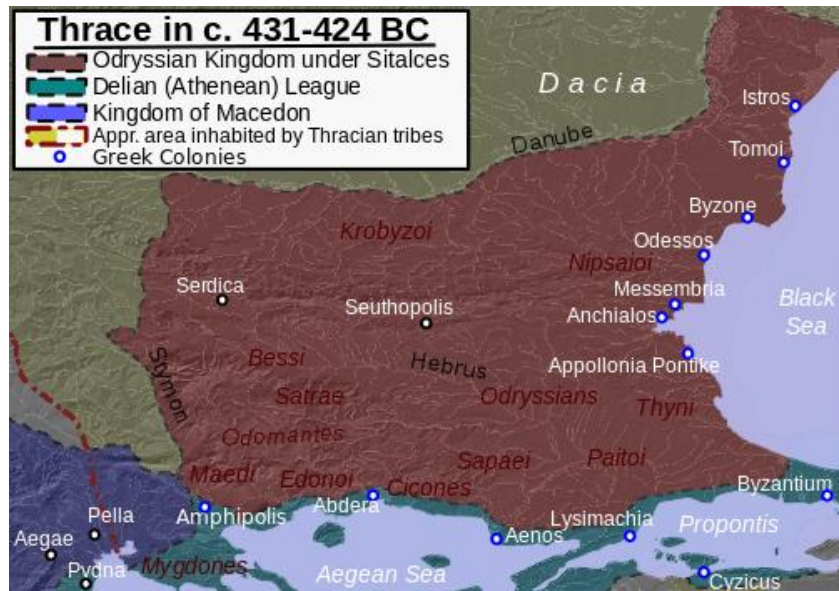


Today, Bulgaria has essentially the same borders as it had for most of its history, but Yugoslavia disintegrated into its six federal republics: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. The small central Kosovo was severed from Serbia after the NATO intervention of 1998/99 and is recognised as a state by only 97 Western nations. I will deal with those states individually once we get past their common history, as they were only parts of Yugoslavia from the end of World War I until 1990.



The term, ‘Balkan Peninsula’, is disputed by modern geographers but those who accept the term regard its northern border as the Danube River and two of its tributaries in northern Serbia. This means that Romania is not a Balkan State and, technically, neither is Slovenia. The two major mountain ranges are the Dinaric Alps parallel to the Adriatic Sea and the Rila-Rhodope Massif that separates Bulgaria from Greece. Most of Bulgaria is the flat North Thracian Plain, while the northeast of Yugoslavia is an extension of the Great Hungarian Plain.

Bulgaria has long been a gateway for various peoples migrating from Asia Minor to Europe and this goes back to early prehistoric times: some of the oldest human fossils, both Neanderthal and Homo Sapiens, have been found in the Balkan Peninsula.



Civilisation arrived early, too, as the oldest gold treasure in the world was found at a burial site on the Black Sea in Bulgaria, dating from 4600 to 4200 BCE. It is generally proposed that some Proto-Indo-European speaking peoples arrived there during the Early Bronze Age (around 1500 BCE) and their intermingling with the locals resulted in the little understood but definitely Indo-European Thracian language. By the 5th Century BCE, there was a Thracian kingdom that comprised the whole of Bulgaria and what are now Greek and Turkish Thrace, Serbia and Macedonia.

The Thracians were not city-builders, preferring to live in villages. Even their capital, Seuthopolis, mostly consisted of government buildings, temples and the royal palace, rather than residences. (The places on the Black Sea were Greek colonies. I'll explain why Serdica is listed shortly.)



The Proto-Indo-Europeans spread further west from Thracia, giving rise to one or more Illyrian languages, of which Albanian is a possible survivor. From the 8th Century BCE, sizable polities formed in the southwest of Yugoslavia and eventually became the Illyrian and Dardanian kingdoms. The former comprised present-day Montenegro, Albania and part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the latter encompassed southern Serbia and part of Macedonia (not to be confused with the Greek kingdom of Macedon). The Illyrian tribes to the northwest were less organised, judging from what little is known of them.



The Romans fought a 10-year war against Illyria in the 3rd Century due to pirates attacking their shipping in the Adriatic Sea but they didn't conquer the kingdom until 168 BCE. By that time, they had conquered much of Greece and also invaded Thracia, subjugating it between 188 and 48 BCE. Rome then conquered the Dardanian kingdom (and presumably the regions to the north) in 39 BCE. The whole of Yugoslavia and Albania became the province of Illyria, which was later renamed Dalmatia, and the north of Thracia became Upper (west) and Lower (east) Moesia.

The capital of Illyria was Scobra, in present-day Albania, and that of Thracia was Sernica, which later became Sofia. Initially, the Romans were primarily concerned with their fortifications and garrisons, leaving local administration to puppet-kings, but Dalmatia later came under direct Roman rule. Both regions became parts of the Eastern Roman Empire (later known as the Byzantine Empire) after the partition in 395 CE and remained so after the Western Empire collapsed in 476 CE.



However, Constantinople's forces were evidently not sufficient to prevent the migration of Slavic tribes into the region in the 6th Century. They were followed by a branch of the Turkic-speaking Bulgars, who had established a sizable territory north of the Black Sea, a century later. They integrated with the Slavs, adopting their language and proceeded to form a unified state that alternately fought and cooperated with the Empire.

From the early 800s, the Bulgarians conquered what is now Romania, parts of Serbia and Hungary, Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro. At its height in the 900s, this First Bulgarian Empire included the rest of Serbia, Turkish Thrace and much of Greece. (As you can see, the Slavic states of Serbia and Croatia had come into being by this time. The Empire was converted to Christianity from 864 and became the centre of Slavic culture, also developing the Cyrillic alphabet. After 1000 CE, the Empire began to disintegrate under attacks from all sides and the Balkans reverted to Byzantine control in 1018.



However, the Bulgarians were often restive and, in 1185, two aristocratic brothers led a major rebellion in the north of the country and one of them was proclaimed Emperor of Bulgaria. They quickly established control over most of the country, whose independence was recognised by Byzantium in 1186. This Second Bulgarian Empire annexed Thrace and parts of Macedonia and Serbia in the early 1200s and went on to exercise control over Albania, northern Greece and southern Romania.

However, in the mid-14th Century, the Empire again came under attack from the Byzantines, Hungarians and Mongols, and it split into three parts in 1371. By this time, the Ottomans had arisen in Asian Turkey and they crossed into Europe in 1354 in an endeavour to surround Constantinople. The Second Bulgarian Empire officially ended in 1396, when the Ottomans captured its capital and defeated an army of Crusaders from a number of Christian countries.

The Ottomans went on to conquer almost all of the Balkan states, only failing to take the northernmost part of Croatia. They also exercised suzerainty over the Romanian principalities from the late 1400s and occupied most of Hungary after 1526. The Ottoman Empire in Europe reached its peak in about 1600 and then receded after Hungary was liberated in about 1700, but their rule over Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece lasted into the 19th Century and their control over Albania and Macedonia only ended in the early 1900s. The impact of Ottoman rule is seen in the fact that 59% of Albanians and 51% of Bosnians are Muslims to this day; moreover, 6% of Bulgaria's population are ethnic Turks.

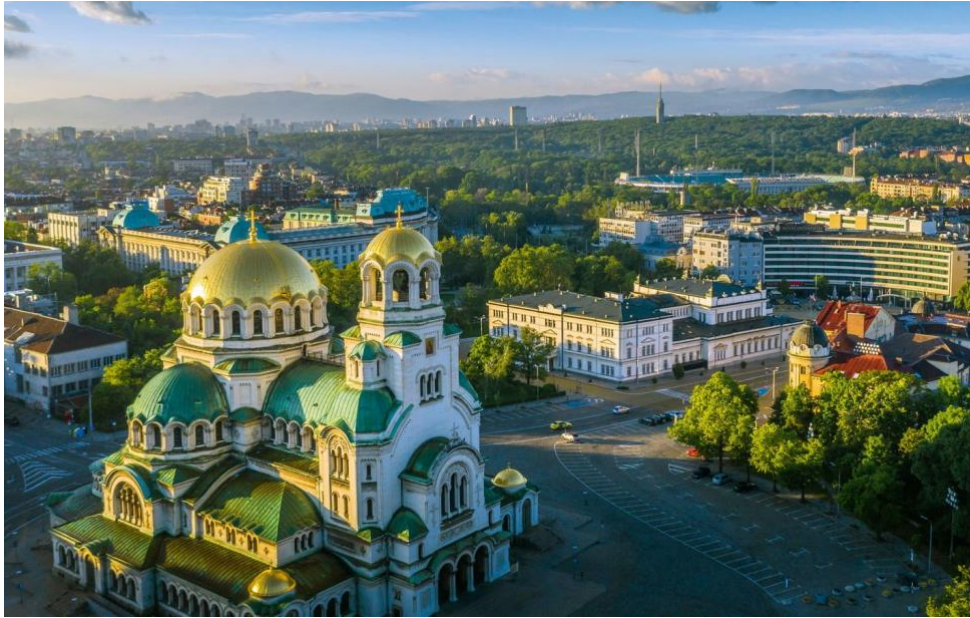


In 1912 the Balkan League was formed by Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia, who then invaded the remaining Ottoman territories partly with a view to expanding their own. This First Balkan War lasted only eight months, during which the Ottomans were driven out of Europe. As a result, Albania became an independent state; Montenegro expanded southward; Greece gained a great deal of territory to its north, including part of Macedonia; and Serbia annexed the northern part of it. (Sorry for the German-language map but it was the best I could find – however, you should be able to recognise recognise the states in question.)

Bulgaria, which had only gained the eastern part of Thrace, was dissatisfied that it had not acquired Macedonia as promised, so it launched the Second Balkan War against its neighbours in 1913. This was a complete disaster and only resulted in Turkey regaining its part of Thrace.



Now we can look at individual countries and their modern histories. Bulgaria is the sixteenth-largest country in Europe and became an independent principality in 1878. Its population of 7.4 million has been declining since the early 1990s as a combined function of emigration and a fertility rate of only 1.6 children per woman. Only the capital, Sofia has a population of over 1 million, followed by Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas and Ruse.



Sofia as a population of 1.3 million and has been the national capital since its foundation. It was originally a Celtic settlement and then became the largest Roman city in the region. It was a major commercial centre for many centuries and served as a provincial capital under the Ottomans. The city only got its present name when the St. Sophia Church was built there in the 14th Century.

The building on the left is the St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral, built between 1882 and 1912 and named after a 13th Century Russian prince in appreciation of the Russian Empire's help in liberating the country. It is the headquarters of the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the largest cathedral in the Balkans, seating 5000 people.



Also in the city centre is the St. George Rotunda, the oldest building still standing and dating from the 4th Century. With some ruins from the same period in front of it, it began as Roman baths but became a baptistry in the early Christian period and then a church. Inside are five layers of frescoes from various periods, the last of which has Islamic motifs from when it was converted to a mosque in the 16th Century.

(It should be added that other Roman ruins have been unearthed in the city centre in our century, including an amphitheatre that was one of the largest in the Eastern Roman Empire. Also, there is one surviving mosque called Banyan Bashi, that was built in 1566 and still functions. Ironically, that name is also a reference to baths because of the natural thermal spa underneath it.)



On the outskirts of the capital is the Vrana Palace, which was the residence of the royal family after Bulgaria upgraded itself to a kingdom in 1908. Bulgaria's three kings in the modern era were from the same German noble family as Prince Albert of the United Kingdom. King Ferdinand I acquired the land in 1898 and built a hunting lodge there followed by the palace, which was constructed between 1909 and 1914.

The last king, Simeon II, was only a child when the Communist government abolished the monarchy in 1946. Interestingly, he later served as the country's prime minister from 2001 to 2005.



Just off the city is Mt. Vitoshka, which is 1275 metres high, 19 km long and 17 km wide. Most of it is a nature reserve, making the mountain a popular site for hiking, mountain climbing and skiing. Inside it is Bulgaria's longest cave, an impressive 18 kilometres of tunnels, galleries, lakes and even waterfalls, due to a branch of the local river flowing through it.



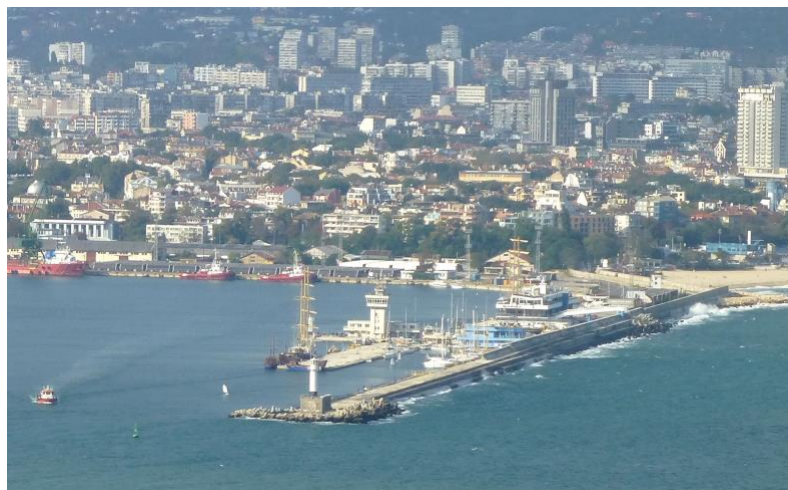
Plovdiv is Bulgaria's second city, with a population of 675,000. Initially a Thracian settlement, it was conquered by the (Greek) Macedonian king, Philip II, in 342 BCE and renamed Philippopolis. It became the capital of the Roman province of Thracia and a nexus of military roads crossing the region. Plovdiv remained an important city throughout its history, getting the name of 'City of Seven Hills' because of its terrain.



The central part of the city still has the remains of a Roman theatre, a stadium, a forum and some aqueducts. Some of these have been restored and the theatre, known as the Odeon, is used for musical performances.

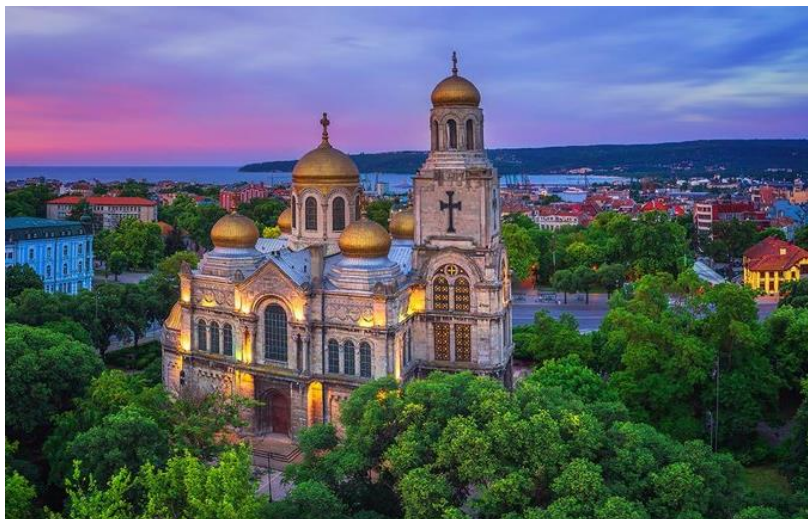


The Old Town is also a historic preservation site, noted for its Bulgarian Renaissance architectural style. It covers the area of the three central hills (and almost every house has its characteristic exterior and interior decoration). There are also stately mansions, museums and cultural centres, mostly dating from the 19th Century



Varna, on the Black Sea, is the third-largest city, with a population of 340,000; also its second-largest seaport and a major tourist centre. Originally known as Odessos, it was a Thracian trading centre from about 1000 BCE, so its population was always a mixture of ethnicities. They were joined by Ionian Greeks in the 6th Century, who set up their own trading post and community.

The city was conquered by Alexander the Great in 335 BCE and later by the Romans. During the Byzantine period, it became a thriving port with the help of Genoese and Venetian merchants. It appears that the present name was adopted during the First Bulgarian Empire, some time after 581 CE. Under Ottoman rule, British and French forces used Varna as a naval base during the Crimean War of the 1850s.



The city was an early Christian centre in Roman times and numerous churches were built there over the centuries. The most famous one today is the Dormition of the Mother of God Cathedral, constructed in the 1880s using stones from the dismantled city walls. It is the third-largest cathedral in the country and the residence of the Bishop of Varna and Preslav. (The latter is a small city well inland of Varna.) Older churches from the 15th and 17th Centuries remain and still function.



Varna has a seafront that extends 20 km to the north and 10 km to the south, consisting of both residential and recreational areas. Most of the coast is beaches with fine white sand that have been frequented by tourists since the Communist era. Near the city is the Sea Garden, the city's largest (9 hectares) and oldest public park. Famous for its landscaping, it has extensive gardens with plants from many parts of Europe; also an aquarium, a planetarium, two museums, an open-air theatre and a zoo.

(I'm going to omit Burgas, further down the coast, because it is mostly a smaller version of Varna with a very similar history.)



Lastly, we come to Ruse, the fifth-largest city with a population of 170,000. Situated on the Danube River, it is Bulgaria's most significant inland port and also important for the Friendship Bridge, which carries road and rail traffic to Romania. The city underwent a great expansion after the country became independent and the styles of those 19th and early 20th Century buildings earned it the name, 'Little Vienna'. (I think the black object in the background is the Monument of Liberty, which dates from about 1908.)

As with the other cities, it was a Thracian settlement and it later became a Roman fortification called Sexaginta Prista, one of many along the northern frontier of the Empire. It was an important city under Ottoman rule but industrialisation really began at the end of that era. More progress was made in the Communist period and continues to this day now that Bulgaria has joined the European Union. The city also became an educational centre when the University of Ruse replaced the existing engineering institute in 1995.



Ruse has some unusual buildings, such as the Holy Trinity Cathedral in the city centre. It was built in 1632 at a time when Ottoman law required any churches to be below ground! That level is 4.5 m deep, 30 m long and 16 m wide, with two rows of seven columns separating the naves. The visible structure was built after independence and has two chapels topped by a 19-metre hexagonal bell tower.



Also worthy of note is the neoclassical Dohodno Zdanje, also in the city centre, built between 1898 and 1902. The name means ‘profitable building’ because its purpose was to raise funds for the education system; thus, it contained a theatre hall, a casino, shops and a library. The building was expanded in the 1920s and an extra storey was added. Restoration work began in 1970 and continued until 2006



It will be best if we deal with each former state of Yugoslavia in turn, so I’ll start with the Republic of Serbia because it is the oldest and largest of those. It has a population of 7.2 million, of whom 1.2 million live in the capital, Belgrade. There are many other cities but they all have populations of less than 300,000. (Note that this map includes the small disputed territory of Kosovo on the Albanian border.)

Serbia’s history is very complicated but it emerged as a principality in the 9th Century and adopted Christianity at about the same time. It became a kingdom in 1217 and established an empire in the 14th Century that covered most of the future Yugoslavia. Serbia was conquered by the Ottomans in 1459 and only became an independent principality again in 1867, when the European powers were driving the invaders out of the Balkans. Serbia became a kingdom again in 1882 and, after World War I, it was instrumental in establishing the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes that became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, which by then included Montenegro and Macedonia. Its first king was Peter I of Serbia



Belgrade has been the capital of Serbia for most of the time since 1284, even under the Ottomans; also the capital of the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of the 20th Century. Located at the junction of the Danube and its tributary, the Sava, its strategic location made it an important Roman fortification, which they called Singidunum, and many battles were fought there over the centuries. It was the largest city in Ottoman Europe but, from 1835, any new buildings were of European architectural styles.

The tall building in the centre of the picture is the Cathedral Church of St. Michael, completed in 1840 on the site of an older church of the same name. It is the second-oldest church (by only five years) in Belgrade but the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church resides in a large administrative building in the same area.



Without doubt, the oldest structure in the city is Belgrade Fortress, also known as the Upper Town because it enclosed the entire settlement for centuries. Built on the highest point in the area, it started as a Celtic citadel in 279 BCE and passed into Roman hands in 46 CE. They expanded the fortification from that time and added stone walls in the 2nd Century.

Further work was done by the Byzantines in 535 CE and by the Serbians after 1402, at which time the Lower Town was built and surrounded by ramparts. Restoration work was needed after the fortress was damaged in World Wars I and II, so now both it and the Lower Town have been preserved for posterity/



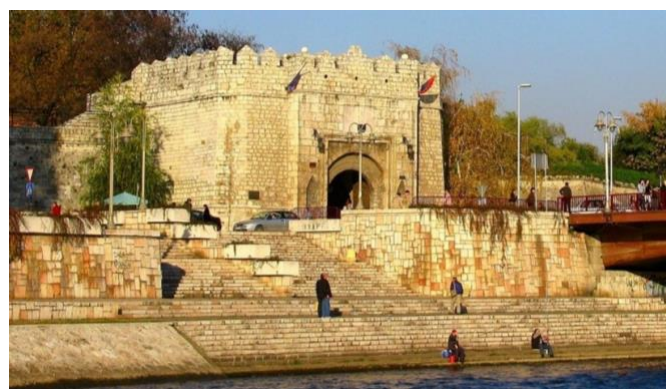
The Royal Palace and the adjacent White Place were built between 1921 and 1929 by King Alexander I. Constructed in what is called Serbo-Byzantine Revival style, they are surrounded by pergolas, park terraces, swimming pool and pavilions. The monarchy was abolished in 1947 and King Peter II went to the UK, where his son, Crown Prince Alexander grew up. He returned to Yugoslavia in 1991 and, in 2001, the royal properties were returned to him and his family. Apparently, there is some sentiment in Serbia for restoring the monarchy.



Lastly, I'll show you the House of the National Assembly, which served as the Parliament of Yugoslavia from its construction in 1936 until the final dissolution in 2006. (By that time, only Serbia and Montenegro were left.) Planning for the building started in 1891 and construction began in 1907, well before the federation was agreed to. Once that happened, there was still time to enlarge the structure to accommodate representatives from the other member states.



Niš is Serbia's third-largest city, after Novi Sad, with a population of 260,000. Located in the south of the country on a tributary of the Danube, it was called Naissus by the Romans after they conquered the Dardanian kingdom in 73 BCE. It was captured from the Byzantines by the Kingdom of Serbia in 1185 and became its capital. The city was freed from the Ottomans in 1878 and served as Serbia's wartime capital during World War I. TO this day, it is the seat of the Serbian Army Command.



The city's most famous building is the Niš Fortress on the right bank of the river, where most of the settlements were over two millennia. Unusually, it was built by the Ottomans in the early 1700s; however, its site had earlier been that of Roman, Byzantine and medieval forts. The fortress was surrounded by a moat but, today, only the part on the north side remains similarly, only two of its four massive gates are still there but it is hoped that the other two will be restored one day.



The Republic of Croatia also has a lengthy history as a state, having become a Slavic dukedom in the 9th Century and a kingdom by 925 CE. It has a population of 3.9 million and Zagreb, its capital, has 1.1 million inhabitants. The next largest cities are Split, Rijeka, Osijek and Zadar, none of which have more than 200,000 people. Since the 16th Century, Croatia was always the most industrialised of the former Yugoslav states.

For most of its time, Croatia was landlocked because most of the Dalmatian coast was controlled by Venice, which had an extensive maritime empire until the 18th Century. The kingdom was in a personal union with Hungary from 1102 until 1527, after which the King of Austria was automatically the Croatian king. However, most of Croatia was conquered by the Ottomans in the 1500s, leaving just the northern portion under Austrian control. The tide was reversed between 1687 and 1791, with Austria also annexing Dalmatia and ruling it as a separate kingdom. That region joined with Croatia and the kingdom joined the future Yugoslavia at the end of World War I.



The capital, Zagreb on the Sava River, was a small settlement near the former Roman town of Andautonia when King Ladislaus I of Hungary (and also of Croatia) made it a diocese in 1094. Initially, the cathedral town of Kaptol and the fortified settlement of Gradec, though only separated by a stream, were separate entities; but those were united under the Zagreb name when it became the capital in 1557.

The tall building is the Cathedral of the Assumption, built in the Gothic style in the mid-13th Century. Unlike the Serbs, most Croats are Roman Catholic and they also use the Roman alphabet, rather than the Cyrillic script. The cathedral was damaged by an earthquake in 1880 and restored between that time and 1906, with the addition of the twin spires that are 104 metres high. The Archbishop's Palace is adjacent to the cathedral and was probably built before the Ottoman conquest.



A truly remarkable building in Zagreb is its Art Pavillion, which was proposed by a prominent Croatian artist for the Millennium Exhibition in Budapest that was held in 1896. Incredibly, its prefabricated iron skeleton was erected there and built over for the event, then dismantled and rebuilt in Zagreb afterward. Since it opened in 1898, the Pavillion has featured over 700 exhibits of artwork from many different periods, styles and countries.



Split, on the Adriatic coast, is Croatia's third-largest city, with a population of 178,000. Despite its location, the city has never been a proper seaport, though it does have a shipbuilding industry. It began as a Greek colony in about 200 BCE but it was conquered by the Romans shortly afterward, who called it Spalatum and made it the capital of the province of Dalmatia. It became one of the largest Roman cities, with a population of 60,000.

After the fall of the Western Empire, Spalatum resisted the arriving Slavs and came under the protection of Venice in 998. The city was taken and re-taken by Hungary-Croatia and Venice between 1141 and 1420, during which time its population became dominantly Slavic, though it remained in Venetian hands until the Austrians and Croats took it over in 1797.



Split's most famous structure is the Diocletian Palace, commissioned by that Roman emperor in about 295 for his retirement (he abdicated in 305). It makes up one-half of the Old City and is mostly in a good state of preservation. The area doubled as a military garrison and its strong walls made it a safe habitation for the community from the 7th to the 14th Century. As a result, the compound now contains medieval houses and a church where the Temple of Jupiter once stood.



Further down the coast is the small (43,000) city of Dubrovnik, one of the most prominent tourist sites in the Mediterranean. Surrounded by 2 kilometres of walls up to 6 metres thick and a system of turrets and towers, the city was never taken by force in its entire history. The city, then known as Ragusa, was founded in the 7th Century after the nearby Roman city of Epidaurum was destroyed in fighting between the Slavs and other invaders. It came under Byzantine protection before Venice took it over from 1205 to 1358.

The Republic of Ragusa became an independent city-state and seaport with a large merchant navy, though it paid tribute to the Ottoman Empire from 1382 to 1804. Over time, Croatian became the main language and the Dubrovnik name became more common. The city became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1815 and part of Croatia in 1918.



The main street in the Old Town is called the Placa, running 300 metres east-west from one old gate to another with a fountain at each end. It is a filled-in canal with limestone paving, lined by historic buildings and monuments, as well as two bell towers.



To the north of Croatia is the Republic of Slovenia, with a population of 2.1 million. It is largely mountainous and forested, but also highly industrialised. Unlike most of the former Yugoslavia, the Slovenes have their own language and their history is quite different. While Slovenia was part of the Roman Empire, the Slavs who arrived later also occupied the south-eastern parts of what would become Austria.

Slovenia was conquered by the Franks under Charlemagne in 803 and in 955 it became part of the Holy Roman Empire. That entity was dominated by Austria by the 14th Century, as was Slovenia except for its small Adriatic coastline, which the Venetians held until 1797. Slovenia joined the future Yugoslavia in 1918.



The capital, Ljubljana, has a population of 284,000, whereas no other city has more than 100,000 people. The high ground in the centre of the picture is the Castle Hill – more about that later. Located in the centre of the country, the Romans called it Emona and built a military stronghold there, which also became an administrative and commercial centre. The city got its Slavic name in the early 12th Century and was conquered along with the other Slovene polities in 1270 by the Bavarians, who were superseded by the Austrians a short time later.

Today, Ljubljana has a mixture of architectural styles, though the more recent large buildings have been kept outside the historic centre. Those buildings range from Baroque through Art Nouveau to modern, though even the last can have Neo-Classical and Art Deco features.



The Castle Hill has been fortified since pre-Roman times and the first actual castle was built there in the 11th Century. That was totally rebuilt in the 1600s with towers and a drawbridge, while more buildings were added over the next two centuries. In the 1800s, it was used as a military barracks and then as a prison. After massive restoration work starting in the late 1960s, the castle became a function centre. Today, it is open to the public, aided by a funicular that was built in 2006.



Bosnia and Herzegovina has a population of 3.5 million, of whom 31% identify themselves as Serbs (i.e., Orthodox), 16% as Croats (Catholics) and 51% as Bosniaks (Muslims). Six of its cities have populations of more than 100,000, including the capital, Sarajevo. Curiously, while it is agreed that Herzegovina is the southern part of the country, few people have troubled to identify its border with Bosnia. Indeed, it is acceptable to refer to the whole country as Bosnia (which I will do)

The region had the usual Illyrian, Roman and Byzantine history, and a Slavic principality emerged in Bosnia proper in the 12th Century. It became a kingdom in 1367, absorbing Herzegovina in the process. That was conquered by the Ottomans in 1463 and remained so until Bosnia was taken over by Austria-Hungary in 1878. It then became part of the future Yugoslavia in 1918.



Sarajevo has a population of 275,000 and was actually founded by the Ottomans in 1461, though there had been some small settlements in the area before that time. The city grew quickly, becoming a provincial capital called Saray, a reference to the governor's mansion – hence, its present name. When Austria-Hungary took over, it was rapidly industrialised – it even had the first tram system in Europe!

The tower in the centre of the picture is the minaret of the Emperor's Mosque, built in the town centre in 1565 to replace a smaller structure from the previous century. Considered to be the most beautiful mosque in the Balkans, it is still in use and its interior decorations were refurbished in the 1980s.



Another impressive building in Sarajevo is the City Hall, built by the Austro-Hungarians in the 1890s to make their stamp on the newly acquired province. It served in that capacity until 1949, when it was given over to the National and University Library.



Just on our way out, we should look at Mostar - while it is only the fifth-largest city in the country, (105,000 people), it is the largest in Herzegovina and its name refers to the bridges that came before it. It appears to have been a Roman settlement on an important trade route to the Adriatic Sea, but all that is really known is that a wooden bridge was there no later than 1454 with towns on either side. The stone bridge you see here was built by the Ottomans in 1466 and, at 28 m long and 20 m high, it was an engineering marvel for its time.



Montenegro is the smallest of the former Yugoslav states, with a population of only 620,000. Its capital, Podgorica, makes up 10% of its total area and holds 30% of the population. From 1042, three Slavic statelets were united to form a kingdom, but that fell under Serbian control in 1186. From about 1400, most of the country was in the Ottoman Empire and a small southern part was controlled by Venice until 1797.

That part then became independent and gradually acquired the rest of the country between 1858 and 1878. Montenegro became a principality in 1860 and a kingdom in 1910. It joined the future Yugoslavia in 1922 and was the last federal republic to leave in 2006.



The capital, Podgorica, with a population of 250,000, was established after the Slavs arrived and became known by that name in 1326. It was already an important trading centre and the Ottomans made it a large fortress after 1497. It became the capital in 1878 and was called Titograd between 1948 and 1992. Most of the city is fairly recent due to heavy bombing in World War II but some important structures from earlier periods still remain. What you see here is the city park but I can't identify the buildings around it.



Lastly, we come to the Republic of North Macedonia, so named to avoid confusion with Greek Macedonia. It has a population of 1.8 million and only its capital, Skopje, has more than 600,000 inhabitants. Originally inhabited by Illyrians and Thracians, it was conquered by the Macedonians of Greece in 356 BCE, followed by the Romans in 146 BCE. It was ruled by the Byzantines until the 14th Century, when it became part of the Serbian Empire before both areas were conquered by the Ottomans.

Serbia annexed Macedonia during the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and brought it into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918. Despite a clear Macedonian language and culture, it became the province of South Serbia when the kingdom became Yugoslavia in 1929. It only became known as the Socialist Republic of Macedonia after World War II.



Skopje was the capital of the Dardanian Kingdom in the 2nd Century BCE, then known as Scupi, after which it was part of the Roman and Byzantine Empires for most of the next thirteen centuries. However, it was the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire from 972 to 992 and the capital of the Serbian Empire for a short time in the 14th Century. The city grew considerably under the Ottomans, becoming a provincial capital.

What you see in the picture is Macedonia Square in the city centre. The building in the background is the National Archeological Museum. The city was badly damaged by an earthquake in 1963, so many of its buildings had to be reconstructed. Massive amounts of international aid were supplied and the results were impressive when I went there in 1970.



We'll finish with a look at the Kale Fortress, which is at the highest point of the city, overlooking the Vadar River. The first structure there is thought to have been built in the 5th Century, which was built over in 10th and 11th Centuries. Further work must have been done in the Ottoman era but details are surprisingly scarce.

As you'll have noticed, I have said as little as possible about the later history of the Yugoslav states. Firstly, there wasn't time and, secondly, it would have been too painful to recount all the fighting and bloodshed that went on after 1990. It certainly would have bene for me, because Yugoslavia was such a unified and happy place when I was there.