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N. 6
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Fascicolo 24. Novembre 2025
Storia Militare Contemporanea (6)



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Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma

Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

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(www.societaitalianastoriamilitare@org)

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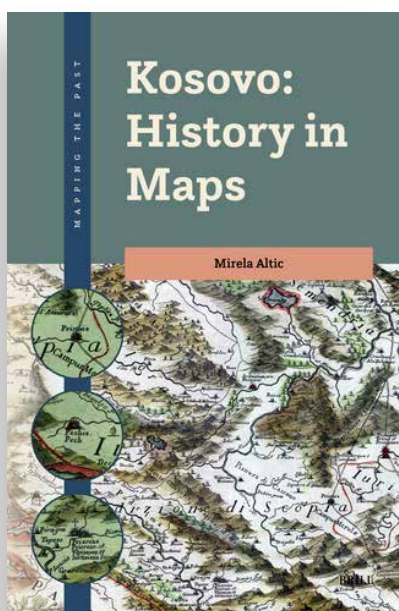


Estandart Reyau d'a Cheneralísma, prencipal bandera carlista d'a primera guerra bordada por María Francisca de Braganza em 1833 Royal Standard of the General in Chief, main Carlist flag of the First War embroidered by Maria Francisca de Braganza in 1833). Wikimedia Commons

MIRELA ALTIC,

Kosovo: History in Maps

Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2025



Kosovo: *History in Maps* (published in the Brill series “Mapping the Past”) invites readers to embark on an engaging journey through the rich history of the region, utilizing a diverse array of maps to narrate its story. From the era of ancient Rome to the period following Kosovo’s declaration of independence, this book provides a clear and captivating exploration of how the area has evolved over the centuries. It goes beyond viewing maps as mere representations of land; instead, it examines them as powerful reflections of politics, culture, and ideology. Drawing on the critical cartography approach developed by David Woodward and Brian Harley, the book underscores that maps

are social constructs: their content reflects the time and place in which they were made, the intentions of their makers, and the needs of their intended audience. As such, they can serve purposes ranging from imperial expansion to the defence of state sovereignty, or even the assertion of local property rights. Altić draws on an impressive range of sources—manuscript maps, printed charts, ethnographic surveys, and military cartography—gathered from numerous European and North American archives. The result is an account that links changes in mapping practices to shifts in power, identity, and territorial organization across more than two millennia.

The opening sections situate Kosovo in the Roman provincial system of Upper Moesia and Dardania. Ptolemy's sources, such as Ptolemy's *Geographia* and the Peutinger Map, are analyzed alongside archaeological and topographical data to reconstruct the area's geography, road networks, and resource base. Mining centres like *Municipium Dardanorum* and Novobërdë, as well as key routes connecting the Adriatic to the interior region's own, have shaped the region's integration into imperial structures. Altić emphasizes that ancient maps, though valuable for reconstructing historical landscapes, were created within specific political and cultural contexts that shaped their content and focus. Building on this idea, the narrative progresses through the various regimes that mapped and governed Kosovo: the Byzantine Empire, the medieval Serbian kingdom, the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy, and, later, the Yugoslav state. Each period brought different cartographic priorities, from the symbolic representation of power to the practical needs of taxation, military logistics, and territorial control. The treatment of the Ottoman–Habsburg frontier is particularly notable, as the author juxtaposes military theatre maps with early modern chorographic and administrative works, showing how the same terrain could be represented in ways that served divergent political agendas.

The book also devotes substantial attention to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when ethnographic and linguistic maps became instruments in the competing national projects of the Balkan states. Here, Altić traces how cartographic choices—selection of toponyms, depiction of population distribution, colour schemes—were used to support territorial claims and mobilize international opinion. The interplay between rapid, wartime mapping and slower, more methodical survey work emerges as a recurring theme, highlighting the different temporalities and purposes of cartography in contexts of political change.

In its coverage of the contemporary period, the study examines Kosovo's maps, which have accompanied Kosovo's political transformations from an autonomous province within socialist Yugoslavia to an internationally recognised state. This includes the use of maps in constitutional arrangements, boundary negotiations, and the delineation of international peacekeeping zones. The author situates these developments within the longer tradition of cartographic engagement with Kosovo, noting both continuities in spatial perception and the emergence of new representational strategies in the post-1999 environment.

Throughout the book, visual analysis is consistently integrated with written documentation, allmaps for a nuanced reading of maps' production, circulation, and reception. The work is organised, with each section placing its cartographic sources in historical context and explaining their significance for understanding both the political and military history of Kosovo. While the primary focus is on the visual record, the discussion makes effective use of supporting archival materials, historiography, and comparative cases from other regions.

Overall, this is a substantial contribution to the study of Kosovo's historical geography. It will be of interest not only to historians of the Balkans but also to scholars concerned with the relationship between cartography, state formation, and conflict. By presenting maps as evidence of changing political realities as well as tools for shaping them, the book offers valuable insights into how geography and power have been intertwined in this strategically important part of Europe.

MATTEO MAZZIOTTI DI CELSO

In the next page:

Map of Kosovo UNMIK Mission
(United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo)
Wikimedia commons





William Balfour Ker (1877-1918), *Knights of Columbus*, 1917 / Poster showing a priest looking heavenward and raising a crucifix, blessing kneeling soldiers. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. Reproduction Number: LC-USZC4-10131
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