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The selection of papers from the Autumn Seminar of  
International Students of History Association  
24-30 September 2012, Zagreb, Croatia



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## **The Image of the Balkan Peninsula in Serbian History Textbooks for Middle School**

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This paper analyzes the image of the Balkan Peninsula in Serbian history textbooks for the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades of primary school. This examination shows that, surprisingly, the era of Balkan history that gets the most space in textbooks is the medieval period. This situation is in fact the same as for the previous generation of Serbian history textbooks. In the new textbooks for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, a national perspective on history remains dominant, but in lesser measure than before. The similar tendency is present in the handbook *Crucial Terms for Purposes of Compulsory Education: History*. Authors of history textbooks, with some exceptions, stress political and military history, thus emphasizing to pupils the conflicts among Balkan states and nations. Textbooks need to offer more topics from social history, economic history, and everyday history, showing the features various parts of the Balkans have in common. Finally, however, it is necessary to point out that historical consciousness and knowledge is not shaped exclusively by school and textbooks.

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scientific discussions about the quality of history textbooks in the Balkan states have been very topical. As a result, several publications have appeared concerning this topic.<sup>1</sup> To this day the image of the Balkans in school history textbooks has held a special place in these disputes. Historians have noticed connections between political conditions and content in textbooks. Because of this phenomenon, studying the teaching materials is very important. However, we must underline that perception about history is not shaped exclusively through textbooks.<sup>2</sup> Mass media, family, and social environment also play significant roles. In this paper

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1 Teaching the History of South Eastern Europe, edited by Christina Koulouri. Thessaloniki: Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, 2001; Pulverfass, Powder Keg, Baril de Poudre?, Südosteuropa im europäischen Geschichtsschulnuch/South Eastern Europe in European History Textbooks, edited by Andreas Helmedach, Hannover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2007.

2 Kalionski, "The Reflection of Balkan History", 56.

the image of the Balkans from the 7<sup>th</sup> century to today will be analyzed in contemporary Serbian history textbooks for the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades. These books are used by 13- to 15-year-old children. For this paper, textbooks from the largest publisher (state-owned) in Serbia, Zavod za udžbenike, and the new private publisher Freska were used. The full set of history textbooks is also published by Klett.

The first information pupils receive about the history of the Balkans is in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school. However, we did not examine books for this level because they present antique history before the arrival of the Slavic population on the Balkan Peninsula. Maria Todorova has pointed out that for the modern-day Balkans their Byzantine and Ottoman heritage up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century is considered to be of utmost importance.<sup>3</sup> That is the main reason why emphasis is mostly placed on textbooks from 6<sup>th</sup> grade. To begin with, the textbook for 6<sup>th</sup> grade by author Rade Mihaljčić (published by Zavod za udžbenike) will be presented.<sup>4</sup> In this book, the Balkans have been given a lot of space – 26.49% of the content. After a general introduction about the Middle Ages, the lessons that follow describe the development of the Byzantine Empire from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup>. Beside political history, students can note the religious and cultural influences of the Eastern Roman Empire.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the chapter in the sequence ‘For the Curious’<sup>6</sup> are small texts concerning Emperor Justinian I (527–565) and Constantinople.<sup>7</sup> The main unit for the history of Balkans in this textbook is titled ‘Serbs and Their Surroundings in the Early Middle Ages’<sup>8</sup> Here the author presents the migrations and settlement of the South Slavs on the Balkan Peninsula and their relations with the native population and neighbouring peoples. Mihaljčić also treats Slavic society, economy, customs, and religion. In separate lessons the history of some Balkan states in the early Middle Ages (Carantanita, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Samuel’s state) is illuminated.<sup>9</sup> The author treats the state of Macedonian Slavs last. New research has rejected this debatable term.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis on unity in the South Slavic region is evident in chapters which

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3 Todorova, *Imaginarni Balkan*, 25–26.

4 Михаљчић, *Истројија за шести разред основене школе*, 140 pages.

5 Михаљчић, *Истројија за шести разред основене школе*, 14–18.

6 In original: *За радознале*

7 Михаљчић, *Истројија за шести разред основене школе*, 32–34.

8 In original: *Срби и њихово окружење у раном средњем веку*

9 Михаљчић, *Истројија за шести разред основене школе*, 38–47.

10 See: Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава*.



illustrate the process of Christianisation and the development of these peoples' culture. Equal space is given for the Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets.<sup>11</sup>

The Balkans appears again in the large section 'Serbian People and Their Neighbours in the Late Middle Ages'. In the framework of two teaching units, the author depicts 'Genesis and Development of the Bosnian State' and the history of 'Ragusa (Dubrovnik) in the Middle Ages'. He especially emphasises the importance of Ragusa for the economy and culture of South Slavs.<sup>12</sup> The last chapter of the textbook, 'Serbian Lands and Their Surroundings at the Time of Ottoman Conquest' is divided into several units. Two of them, 'Penetration of the Turks into the Balkan Peninsula' and 'Resistance to the Ottomans and the Decline of the Christian States' underline common processes in Balkan states during the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

After this brief presentation of the content of the textbook we can conclude that the history of the Serbian state is well contextualised by asserting its connection with the past of the whole Balkan region. It is important that the text follows appropriate historical maps of the Byzantine Empire, the Balkans in the time of Slavic settlement, and the Ottoman conquest, and there are many appealing illustrations of Slavic and Turkish military equipment. Through these maps and illustrations, pupils can easily follow different phases of Balkan history. The emphasis is not only political history, for society, economy, and culture are also represented in some parts. However, in one of the previous versions of the 6<sup>th</sup>-grade textbook by the same author the lessons on the Hungarian kingdom, the Bulgarians, the Albanians, and the Romanians in the late Middle Ages<sup>14</sup> were separated. Surely that is a consequence of reducing the extent of the textbook. Regardless of that fact, Mihaljičić has provided pupils good materials for introducing them to topics about the Balkans.

Another textbook by authors Marko Šuica and Radivoj Radić, published by Freska for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, have a similar concept. One methodological difference from the previous book is the inclusion of additional educational materials for students along with the lessons. Again we can find chapters that cover the history of the early Byzantine Empire, the settlement of South Slavs on the Balkan Peninsula, and the Christianization of Slavs.<sup>15</sup> The idea of things

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11 Михаљчић, *Историја за шести разред*, 51–55.

12 Михаљчић, *Историја за шести разред*, 99–103.

13 Михаљчић, *Историја за шести разред*, 116–117, 124–126.

14 Šuica, "South Eastern Europe", 248.

15 Шуица and Радић, *Историја за шести разред*, 24–27, 52–57, 62–65.

*Balkan* is prominent in this book. That is, units on Serbian history have such titles as ‘Settlement of the Serbs and the Balkan Peninsula until the 11<sup>th</sup> Century’, ‘Serbia and the Balkan Peninsula in the Time of Stefan Nemanja’, and ‘The Serbian State and the Balkan Peninsula in the First half of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century’. It is an appropriate way for students to understand national history in a broader framework.<sup>16</sup> The authors did not pay attention to the history of Ragusa, but they emphasised the development of the late Byzantine Empire.<sup>17</sup> The history of the Bosnian state in the 14<sup>th</sup> century is described separately.<sup>18</sup> The beginning of the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans is presented in the lesson ‘Arrival of the Ottomans in Europe and Serbian Lands.’ The authors wished to stress the importance of this process, not only for the Balkans, but also for the whole continent.<sup>19</sup> Similarly to the first textbooks, the last resistance of the Balkan states against the Ottomans is depicted in a separate unit.<sup>20</sup> Fine historical maps complete the educational materials. The authors showed a clear intention to set Serbian history into the broader framework of Balkan and European history. Byzantine history is given almost equal space to monarchy in Western Europe in the Middle Ages, underlining its importance. That is a significant quality of this book. Finally, we can say that Šuica and Radić have given Balkan history adequate space in their textbooks. Regardless of which of the two textbooks they are using, pupils can acquire a similar picture of Balkan history.

All these questions must be reviewed in light of the handbook *Crucial Terms for Purposes of Compulsory Education: History*.<sup>21</sup> Among the concepts regarding the Middle Ages are a large number relating to the Balkans. This section of the document identifies important concepts which students are required to understand in order to understand necessary aspects of the Balkans in the Middle Ages. Those concepts include almost all of the peoples and medieval states in the Balkans, the migration and settlement of South Slavs, Slavic alphabets, Christianization, and such eminent persons as Emperor Justinian I, Ottoman rulers Murad I and Mehmed II the Conqueror, prince

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16 Шуица and Радић, *Историја за шести разред*, 58–61, 106–113.

17 Шуица and Радић, *Историја за шести разред*, 85–87.

18 Шуица and Радић, *Историја за шести разред*, 128–130.

19 Шуица and Радић, *Историја за шести разред*, 142–145.

20 Шуица and Радић, *Историја за шести разред*, 154–157.

21 Ферјанчић et al., *Кључни појмови за крај основног образовања. Историја. Приручник за наставнике*. This handbook was written to establish crucial terms which should stimulate pupils to understand the contemporary world and to accept universal values and principles of contemporary civilization.

of Wallachia Vlad Tepes Dracula, and Albanian nobleman George Kastrioti Skanderbeg.<sup>22</sup>

The situation changes when we move on to textbooks for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school. First for consideration is the book by Dušan Bataković, published by Zavod za udžbenike. Subjects concerning the history of the Balkans occupy around 9% of the book. The general view on the Balkans first appears in the chapter ‘Predominance of the Ottomans on the Balkans: Ottoman State and Society (16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)’. On several pages the author considers the territorial spread of the Ottoman Empire, its type of government, social layers, military organisation and religious occasions.<sup>23</sup> In the next chapter Bataković treats the position of Serbian people within the Ottoman Empire. The cultural and economic importance of the Republic of Ragusa is underlined in this unit, which can create confusion among students.<sup>24</sup> The identity of Ragusa citizens is a complex topic and should not be connected with the idea of a nation from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, pupils will not find information about the institutions and culture of other Balkan peoples who lived in the Ottoman state and the Habsburg Monarchy. The revolution movement of 1848 to 1849 is presented almost exclusively from a Serbian and European perspective.<sup>25</sup> For example, revolutionary events among the Croats and their connection with Serbian rebels in the Habsburg Monarchy are marked with only a few sentences. Also, the Illyrian Movement, which aimed to create a common state of South Slavs, is mentioned in only one sentence.<sup>26</sup> The next section dedicated to the Balkans is titled ‘The Great Powers and the Eastern Question’. The author primarily explains the term ‘Eastern Question’, which is a synonymous for the efforts of the Ottoman Empire to retain control of the Balkans. National revolutions of Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, and Albanians against Ottoman rule from 1804 to 1878 are described in a separate subsection. The aforementioned unit finishes with a survey of the Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878) that ended with the Congress of Berlin. This conference decided to accept the independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania.<sup>27</sup> The formation of the Balkan League during 1866 and 1867, which was initiated by Serbian prince Mihailo, is shown in a framework of national

22 Ферјанчић et al., *Кључни појмови*, 27–32.

23 Батаковић, *Историја за седми разред*, 47–53.

24 Батаковић, *Историја за седми разред*, 58.

25 Батаковић, *Историја за седми разред*, 108–111, 166–167.

26 Батаковић, *Историја за седми разред*, 166.

27 Батаковић, *Историја за седми разред*, 119–123.

history.<sup>28</sup> Regional context again is not visible enough, which is needed for a better understanding of this episode. The content presented in this textbook is dominated by political themes and lacks topics related to the cultural and economic history of the Balkans. At the same time, it is strange that the author does not mention any prominent person from Bulgaria, Greece, or Romania. The author particularly neglected the area of the future Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Therefore, the Balkans clearly exists as region in this textbook, but their common characteristics are underemphasized, especially in the sphere of social life. It is necessary to underline, however, that the author wrote this textbook with balance and without stereotypes.

Another textbook for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, by author Radoš Ljušić and published by Freska, has a similar concept to that of the previous textbook, but the Balkan region is less visible. In fact, the word 'Balkans' (or 'Balkan Peninsula') cannot be found in the title of any chapter or unit. Instead of the name 'Ottoman Empire', the author often uses the term 'the Turkish state'. Ljušić takes a closer look at Ottoman politics, statehood, and society from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to 1878. He writes the same way about the Habsburg Monarchy, but without regional Balkan context.<sup>29</sup> Because of this, similarly to the earlier textbook by the same author, the history of the Balkans is integrated into and entangled with the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy and in particular with that of the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians. The region exists, but it is hidden, used only as a background for other historical problems, primarily from the perspective of Serbian national history.<sup>30</sup> We can append that in this book there is no chapter or unit which concerns itself with the Eastern Question and the Great Eastern Crisis. Political history dominates the content of this textbook. That is one of the reasons why the Balkan Peninsula has such a modest place, because almost the entire region was being controlled by the Ottoman Empire from the second part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. In the aforementioned handbook *The Crucial Terms*, for the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to 1878 we meet many terms connected with Balkan history. The author, Suzana Rajić, places primary emphasis on the Balkan states and their statehood. However among the terms are no events or persons from their history (except for the Greek Revolution of 1821).<sup>31</sup> As a result, pupils cannot get a complete picture of the Balkan Peninsula in modern history.

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28 Батаковић, *Историја за седми разред*, 148.

29 Љушић, *Историја за седми разред*, 34–43, 120–125.

30 Šuica, "South Eastern Europe", 249–251.

31 Ферјанчић et al., *Кључни појмови*, 38–44.

Commonly, textbooks for 8<sup>th</sup> grade provoke much discussion, because they cover contemporary history. Often these books reflect the influence of current political events and social movements. That was especially visible in the former Communist states on the Balkan Peninsula after 1989.<sup>32</sup> In this part of the paper we will present the textbook by Đorđe Đurić and Momčilo Pavlović (published by Zavod za udžbenike in 2011). They have extended the coverage of Balkan history to around 9% of the book. First, in a chapter called ‘The Great Powers and the Balkan states (1878–1912)’ the authors present the policies of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy toward the Balkans and the situation of the Ottoman provinces in Europe. Also, this unit contains a general overview of the history of Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania. Mainly, students will find information about struggles for independence and territorial expansion. This unit includes a historical map of the Balkan Peninsula after the Congress of Berlin in 1878.<sup>33</sup> A special lesson is devoted to the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). The first part of this unit is concerned with the difficult position of Christians in European provinces of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Balkan League. Đurić and Pavlović emphasise the question of Macedonia, where Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece have strived to gain influence. A description of the struggles of the First Balkan War follows. As a cause of the Second Balkan War, the authors point out the inability of the Balkan states to agree on how to divide the conquered territories. They stress that Serbia had a right to retain territory in Vardar Macedonia, which the Serbian army occupied without Bulgarian assistance. After the description of the Second Balkan War, the consequences of the Balkan Wars are marked primarily from the perspective of the territorial enlargement of the Balkan states. At the end of the unit one map illustrates territorial changes on the Balkan Peninsula after the Balkan Wars.<sup>34</sup> The next section with a regional perspective is situated in the unit ‘The World and Europe after the First World War – New States, New Borders’, in which the authors note changes of population and territory in the Balkan states.<sup>35</sup> The establishment of the dictatorship of Yugoslavian king Alexander I is set in the context of other dictatorships in the Balkan region.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting that on page 116 they offer facts about the level of literacy in the Balkan states

32 Stojanović, “Konstrukcija prošlosti”, 33.; Koren and Najbar-Agičić, “Slika naroda”, 131–132.; Kalionski, “The Reflection of Balkan History”, 55.

33 Ђурић and Павловић, *Историја за осми разред*, 15–19.

34 Ђурић and Павловић, *Историја за осми разред*, 46–51.

35 Ђурић and Павловић, *Историја за осми разред*, 85.

36 Ђурић and Павловић, *Историја за осми разред*, 109.

before the Second World War.<sup>37</sup> Events of World War II which concern the Balkans are presented from the perspective of Yugoslavia.<sup>38</sup> The Balkan states are mentioned two more times in this textbook, with special emphasis on information regarding the foreign policy of Yugoslavia. Here students can find data on the rise and fall of the Communist regime in Eastern Europe.<sup>39</sup> Political and military histories obviously prevail in the Balkan segments of this textbook. Such an approach elevates the conflicts and misunderstanding among the Balkan states, while periods of accord and collaboration are relegated to the shadows. Further, common processes for many Balkan states, like the development of socialist economies, were insufficiently highlighted. Therefore we conclude that the book neglects many essential aspects of Balkan history, but it represents progress in comparison with the previous textbook by this publisher.<sup>40</sup> Textbooks on contemporary history have special importance because they treat events and persons that remain vivid in people's collective memory. Therefore, the obligation of the education system must be to take a critical approach to history, which is not a feature of tradition and mass media.

Practically the same organization of content is presented in another textbook for 8<sup>th</sup> grade by authors Radoš Ljušić and Ljubodrag Dimić (published by Freska). Unfortunately, the author of this paper did not have access to the whole text of the book, and therefore we can mention only the titles of some chapters and units in which the word 'Balkan' appears. The book begins with the chapter 'The World, Europe, and the Balkans (1878–1914)'. Within this chapter is the unit 'The Balkans' Peoples and States'.<sup>41</sup> As expected one chapter is 'The Balkan Wars'.<sup>42</sup> In accordance with the proposition from 2008, pupils should adopt the following terms for contemporary history of the Balkans: the Balkan Wars; the Treaty of Bucharest (1913); the Battles of Kumanovo, Bitolj, and Bregalnica (1912–1913); the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878); the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1908); the Balkan League (1912); monarchy as the form of government in all Balkan states; emperor Franz Joseph (1848–1916); the Hohenzollern dynasty (ruling family in Prussia and Romania); the Salonika front of World War I; democratic changes in Eastern Europe; Franz Ferdinand; and Georgi Dimitrov (Bulgarian politician).<sup>43</sup> As

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37 Ђурић and Павловић, *Историја за осми разред*, 116.

38 Ђурић and Павловић, *Историја за осми разред*, 135–139.

39 Ђурић and Павловић, *Историја за осми разред*, 159, 166.

40 Šuica, "South Eastern Europe", 251–253.

41 Љушић and Димић, *Историја за осми разред*, 5, 17–21.

42 Љушић and Димић, *Историја за осми разред*, 68–71.

43 Ферјанчић et al., *Кључни појмови*, 39–64.

we see, these are concepts from political and military history. Once again we note the absence of many important processes and persons, as well as concepts regarding economy and culture, with the exception of general terms like 'socialistic economy', 'Marxism', and so forth.

For the purposes of this article we have analyzed the Balkan Peninsula as a historical region. Particularly important is the question of how the people of former Yugoslavia and the process of disintegration are presented in textbooks.<sup>44</sup> Generally speaking, we can say that the last generation of Serbian textbooks has a more balanced approach to that sensitive issue than before. Authors have used mainly scientific vocabulary and avoided stereotypes about nations. However, the principal problem is the lack of information about peoples of Yugoslavia (except, of course, Serbs) before 1918.

On the preceding pages we have already addressed the advantages and disadvantages of each textbook in its presentation of Balkan history. Now we will try to summarise our results. Surprisingly the history of the Balkan Peninsula got the most space in textbooks about the medieval period. We need to underline that this is similar to the previous generation of Serbian textbooks.<sup>45</sup> The share of Balkan history increased in new textbooks for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, but still many events and processes are observed from the perspective of national history. The same problem has been detected around the year 2000 in Bulgarian and Greek history textbooks.<sup>46</sup> Textbooks stress struggles and quarrels among Balkan states and nations because of the prevalence of political and military history. That is the main reason why changes are needed in curriculum and indirectly in textbooks. Introducing more topics from social history, economic history, and everyday history could bring a better understanding of the past and a rational attitude toward it. In this way it would become obvious that people of the Balkans have much more in common than not.<sup>47</sup> Once again, it is necessary to point out that historical consciousness and knowledge is not shaped only by school and textbooks,<sup>48</sup> but historians have a specific responsibility in this complex process.

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44 In this place, we can mention analysis of some textbooks from Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are published after 2000: Koren and Najbar-Agičić, "Slika naroda", 131–150.; Ристић, "Српско-хрватски односи", 141–148.; Radojević, "Raspad Jugoslavije", 211–221.

45 Šuica, "South Eastern Europe", 247–261.; That was case and in Albania textbooks: Duka, "The History of Albanians", 51–52.

46 Kalionski, "The Reflection of Balkan History", 56–57; Dragonas and Frangoudaki, "The Peristance", 40.

47 Stojanović, "History Textbooks". 30, 32.

48 Kalionski, "The Reflection of Balkan History," 56. ; Radojević, "Raspad Jugoslavije", 211.

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