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## Section 1. History and archaeology

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### HISTORICAL SOURCES: TYPES AND ANALYSIS

**Abstract.** The paper discusses historical sources and their importance for the study of the history of human society. The introduction indicates what the historical sources are. Then, the most important types of sources were listed by historical era with a basic division into the remains of material culture, written sources and sources characteristic of the modern era. The second part of the paper refers to the analysis of historical sources as one of the key steps in the historians' work.

**Keywords:** historical sources, material remains, written sources, acoustic sources, source analysis, internal criticism, external criticism, primary sources, secondary sources.

Historical sources include any type of evidence that people have left behind through their past activities – the written word, landscape form and material artefact, fine art, photography and film. Of all the humanities and social sciences, only history uses so many different sources, and each of them requires special knowledge.

It can be said that history encompasses the human experience of every place and every period. No part of the past can be skipped under the pretense that it does not belong to the proper domain of historical knowledge. The historian usually relies on the conclusions of archaeologists and art historians, and feels himself able to draw conclusions from a wide range of material evidence. Over the last thirty years, the range of sources that historians consider themselves sufficiently professional, has grown. These include place names, types of landscapes, movies, etc. The fact remains that the study of history has almost always been based on what the historian can read in documents or hear from his reporters.

However, most historians do their research in libraries and archives<sup>1</sup>. In this paper, we will deal with exactly that topic – historical sources, that is, what is it that can serve as a relevant and authentic source of data for the historian in order to reconstruct an event from the past or to learn about a certain historical process.

Each historical epoch is characterized by different types of historical sources, and here we will point out some more important types of sources, going from the modern era to the more distant past. For the study of modern history, the sources created by the inclusion of modern technical means in communication between people occupy an important place, and they are usually called acoustic sources. These acoustic sources contain important testimonies about certain events (recordings of various sessions, congresses, parliaments, demonstrations, speeches, etc.), and when using this type of source, the historian must carry out a strict verification of authenticity, i.e. check whether it is original or reworked sound document. Photography, as a historical source, captures detail, revives the atmosphere and significance of a historical event or person. Photography helps the historian to get to know historical monuments, works of art and subject monuments from various parts of the world. It is known that photomontage, retouching and other techniques can be used to falsify reality, so all this requires the historian to act critically when using photography as a source and to apply all technical and other means to establish its originality. Film recordings are also important sources for history, and as is known, they are more recent as a historical source, and were created at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, we have a lot of valuable film material that helps the historian to get more accurate and comprehensive information about what happened. After the Second World War, in addition to film, television also became a very important source. The problem for the historian is that the critical use of film material is more complicated than when using written sources<sup>2</sup>.

Written sources are the most numerous and most important type of source in historical research. There are preserved sources of this type from the history of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor that tell

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<sup>1</sup> Mirjana Gross. *Historical sciences* (Zagreb: SNL, 1980); Veronik Sal. *Historians* (Belgrade: Clio, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Miomir Dašić. *Introduction to history with the basics of auxiliary historical sciences* (Titograd: NIO "University word"; University "Veljko Vlahović", 1988). – P. 58–60.

about the past of these countries. The oldest written sources from the Greco-Roman world are various types of inscriptions on hard material, and epigraphy deals with this type of source. Various philosophical and scientific texts are preserved on papyri, and acts are the most significant type of source for this period. For the history of Attica, tile inscriptions called ostraca are an important type of source. Analysts are of great importance for Roman history, and then Roman historiography<sup>1</sup>.

The oldest medieval sources of narrative character are annals. The exposition in the annals is scanty and dry, the events are arranged in chronological order without any systematicity. A related genus of annals is the medieval chronicle, in which the presentation is connected and the scope of the story is much wider. Hagiographies (biographies of saints) are an important part of medieval narrative sources. For medieval history, the most important sources are acts and charters, which are written testimonies of business or legal content created during the activities of individuals or state institutions. Registers have been kept in some countries since the Middle Ages, and they contain data of a certain type: about taxes, issued instructions or orders, gifts, income and expenses, etc. More important written sources include laws and other legislative texts (ordinances, orders, decrees, etc.). Written sources also include various types of maps, plans, sketches and drawings<sup>2</sup>.

Newspapers and magazines are an invaluable resource for many purposes. They can be used to search for interesting political cases, to follow their development, and to find concrete data and views<sup>3</sup>.

A special type of material and literature are published and unpublished memoirs, which represent memories written by authors on their own initiative and inspired by major historical events, and are most often written by persons who played a significant role in history during their lifetime or some part of it. They were written in the form of diaries, memoirs and autobiographies. In the diary, the author recorded facts from daily events, most often during his activities during important historical events. Memoirs are subsequently written memories of some events and personalities. An autobiography is a biography compiled by

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<sup>1</sup> Miomir Dašić. Introduction to History with the Basics of Auxiliary Historical Sciences, – 60 p.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. – P. 61–63.

<sup>3</sup> Knut Ćelstali. The past is not what it used to be (Belgrade: Geopoetics, 2004). – 186 p.

the author himself and contains important dates and events from his life and the life of his family<sup>1</sup>.

Literature, too, has its importance as a historical source, of course, novels and dramatic texts cannot be treated as factual data. However, all literary works offer us an insight into the social and intellectual environment in which the author himself lived, and often vivid descriptions of the physical properties of that environment<sup>2</sup>.

Material remains appear in the form of objects, so we call them object sources, and they are most often used to supplement the picture we create with the help of written sources. Their use requires special knowledge and methods that are different from those used in working with written sources. Such sources are most often found by excavation, and the science that deals with this is called archaeology. This type of source also includes villages, towns, bridges, fortresses, moats, towers, trenches. Secular and church buildings also belong to them<sup>3</sup>. Oral sources or oral tradition have a certain importance for historical science. Oral sources can be divided into memories, which are memories of one's own experiences, and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation<sup>4</sup>. Primary sources are usually considered to be those that are closest in time to the studied period or come from it, and secondary sources are those that were created later. That distinction, however, can sometimes be quite unclear. Whether some sources will be primary or secondary for a historical researcher depends on the type of approach and the nature of the analysis and research that the historian performs<sup>5</sup>.

Under historical methods, Thucydides found chronology, a neutral point of view and the world around him as a result of the actions of human beings. Thus, in a way, he separated history from Greek pagan polytheism and gave it a scientific-materialistic character. Historical sources and their impartial and objective analysis are very important for neutrality in the observation of history, because without historical

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<sup>1</sup> Zdravko Deletić. The craft of the historian, Methodology of historiography. (Kosovska Mitrovica: Faculty of Philosophy in Pristina with temporary headquarters in Kosovska Mitrovica; Historical archive of Kraljevo, 2019). – P. 115–117.

<sup>2</sup> John Tosh. In looking for History. (Belgrade: Clio, 2008). – 95 p.

<sup>3</sup> Miomir Dašić. Introduction to History with the Basics of Auxiliary Historical Sciences. – P. 68–69.

<sup>4</sup> Knut Čelstali. The past is not what it used to be. – 172 p.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Black, Donald M. McReild. Studying History. (Beograd: Clio, 2007). – 112 p.

sources there is no history as an exact science<sup>1</sup>. At the very beginning of researching a problem, the basic question arises, how to find the sources? As a rule, the first indications for searching for sources come from the professional literature that we use to develop the topic. A review of some of the cited sources in the appendices and footnotes can be very useful. When it comes to printed sources, they can be accessed quite easily through a library. Sometimes it can be determined that they contain many details, which have not been thematized yet, so that further research could be started on their basis. Historical lexicons, as well as atlases, especially those specialized in certain narrow specialties, certainly represent a great help. Further help in searching for sources is provided by bibliographies and source science. It must be noted here that no list of books or science of sources can be said to be comprehensive because new editions of sources are published<sup>2</sup>. The central place of the historical method is the criticism of sources. It implies evaluation, the skill of evaluation, reasoning, distinguishing what is good and valuable from what is bad and weak in science. From the point of view of historical science, criticizing sources means searching for falsifications and untruths and determining the degree of credibility and originality of the source, and essentially goes down to answers to the questions: when was the source created, in what time or other circumstances (who is the author of the document) and in to what extent we can rely on that source or type of source. If we start from the fact that what is the goal of source criticism, then we can distinguish text criticism or external criticism (erudite or lower criticism) and statement criticism or internal criticism (hermeneutic or higher criticism of historical sources)<sup>3</sup>.

From the mentioned stages in the analysis of the source, it is clearly concluded that the first step is to examine the credibility of the source,

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<sup>1</sup> Đorđe Stanković, Ljubodrag Dimić. *Historiography Under Supervision I*. (Belgrade: Gazzete FRY, 1996). – 169 p.

<sup>2</sup> Dalibor Elezović. "Methodological challenges of the research of historical sources of the early modern period" in *Methodological challenges of historical science: thematic collection of international importance / edited by Zdravko Deletić, Dalibor Elezović*. Kosovska Mitrovica: Faculty of Philosophy, 2018. – 143 p; Ralf-Peter Fuchs. *Technik: Die Arbeit mit den Quellen, Frühe Neuzeit*, A. Völker-Rasor. (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006). – 258 p.

<sup>3</sup> Miomir Dašić. *Introduction to history with the basics of auxiliary historical sciences*. – P. 105–106.

that is, to determine whether the author, place and date of creation of the written text correspond to what has been stated. These issues are particularly important in the case of legal documents, such as charters, wills and agreements. It is known that people have forged a large number of such documents at various times. The second phase, which represents the interpretation of the content of the text, is much more demanding. In addition to knowing the language, the historian must also know the historical context that will indicate what the words used refer to. Old words fall out of use over time and have different meanings at different times, so old words should not be given a modern meaning. When reconstructing the content of a document, the historian asks a much more important question: is what the source tells us reliable? This question goes beyond the range of auxiliary techniques and requires knowledge of the historical context and human nature, and it can be said that this is the terrain of the historian. The credibility of the source is most influenced by the intention and prejudices of the author<sup>1</sup>.

The bottom line about source analysis is that historical research is not about finding one reliable source to extract all that it has to offer. As much evidence as possible should be collected from a large number of sources, preferably from all sources related to the research topic. Each type of source has both flaws and virtues for research, but when they are used together and compared with each other, there is a possibility to illuminate the real facts and to discover and reconstruct an event that is very close to the truth. For this reason, it is important to master and compare different sources. In using sources, the historian is far from being just a passive observer. He must be resourceful and gifted to make full use of a historical source<sup>2</sup>.

From the point of view of scientific criticism, historical sources can be divided in several ways: according to the relation to the events they talk about, they are usually divided into “first-hand” sources (first-rate) and “second-hand” sources (second-rate); according to the relationship between the source and the researcher, they can be divided into primary or immediate and secondary or indirect. Well-known methodologist J. Topolski spoke about direct and indirect sources, where direct sources would be those that are only the remains of historical reality,

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<sup>1</sup> John Tosh. In looking for History. – P. 122–127.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. – P. 133–140.

while indirect sources would be those that testify to historical facts by means of signs such as writing and language<sup>1</sup>.

Knowledge about the past of human society is not possible without remains from that past, which are called historical sources. We have different historical sources from different periods of the history of human society, that's why knowledge of historical sources by era is necessary for a historian. They can be the remains of material culture, written sources, and modern times bring us new types of sources such as acoustic sources. The analysis of historical sources is the basis of the historian's work and it consists of several stages. The most important are the internal and external criticism of the source, which includes the determination of the authenticity of the source itself and the determination of the facts that the source communicates to us, and in order to obtain as true a picture as possible of the event from the past, which is being attempted to be reconstructed, it is necessary to analyze as many sources as possible about the given event. Apart from clear methodological instructions, a significant part of the work in working with historical sources also depends on the personal abilities of the historian himself, his perspicacity and experience.

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