

**Secondary Written Sources
and
The Teaching of Non-
European History**

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RumeliYA

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Kitap adı / Book title
Secondary Written Sources and The Teaching of Non-European History

APA
Potocnik, D. (2024). *Secondary Written Sources and The Teaching of Non-European History*. Kırklareli: RumeliYA.

Grafiker: RumeliYA
Kapak tasarım: Selen Gül ŞENTÜRK
Redaksiyon: Yakup YILMAZ

Yayın dili / Publication language: İngilizce / English
Yayın no / Publication number: 40

ISBN
RumeliYA: 978-625-94407-2-9
Yayın tarihi / Date published: 2024

Baskı yeri / Printing house
Bizim Dijital Matbaacılık A.Ş.
Ostim Serhat Mahallesi, Uzayçağı Cad, 1128. Sk. No:6, Yenimahalle /
Ankara PK:06374 / Kızılbey V.D. 1780801145 / **Sertifika No:** 41356
bilgi@bizimdijital.com
4449296 / 05531073053 / 05531073048

Adres / Address
RumeliYA Yayıncılık ψ Publishing
Karacaibrahim Mh. Nüzhet Somay Cd., No. 49 B Merkez, Kırklareli,
Türkiye
Sertifika / Certificate No 48218
web: www.rumeliya.com
e-mail: editor@rumeliya.com

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Dragan Potočnik



Dragan Potocnik was born in Maribor, Slovenia. He went to school there and in 1998 obtained his PhD in cultural history at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, where he now works as an associate professor of history.

Dragan is a Founding member and President of Vagant society, which organises cutting edge talks and discussions on cultural, social and travel related topics. He is widely considered to be the leading expert in Asian History in Slovenia, and is Director of the Centre for Intecultural collaboration with Asian, African and Latin American countries at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. In that role, he has organised and participated in a number of international conferences and symposia on the topic of intercultural dialogue.

Dragan's interest in both academic and applied history and philosophy of Asian and African cultures led him to extended travels, which he started as a student and has continued with throughout his life. His unique amalgamation of academic knowledge and practical, lived experience is evident in many travel reports, essays and research studies.

In addition to Dragan's extended research and travel writings, he is a prolific writer of poetry and prose, that are inspired by travels and cultural, personal, and political historical events. This has resulted in two published collections of poems, *Sebil* and *Sahrah*, and a collection of short stories with a title *Stories from African and Asian Backyards*.

Some of Dragan's best-selling novels are *Poems for Sinin Jan*, *Mountain, sing to Me* and *Heaveny Rain*.

He is also the author of the following monographs:

Cultural Life in Maribor in the years 1918 – 1941;

Asia between the Past and the Present;

Historical Context of the Activities of General Rudolf Maister in Styria, Carinthia and Prekmurje;

History, the Teacher of Life;

Sources in the Teaching of History;

Students from Primorska at the Classical Grammar School in Maribor;

Iran, the Country between Persia and Islam;

History of Islamic Civilization;

The Art and Science of the Islamic World.

Dragan Potocnik is a co-author of several history textbooks, such as the textbooks for the second year of secondary schools, and years seven and eighth of primary school.

As an Academic leader in the field of the history of non-European nations and Dragan has written a number of research and review papers on Slovenian and non-European history. This highly esteemed academic work resulted in Dragan being the first Slovenian Academic to be

invited as a guest Professor at the University of Esfahan in Iran, and other Universities in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Turkey.

You can follow the work, activities and travels of Dragan Potočnik on

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I. HISTORICAL SOURCES AND HISTORY

Historical science is based on historical sources, critical discussion, comparison, reliability, and synthesis. For this reason, this fact must be taken into account in the teaching of history, and historic resources must be placed in the first place among all learning sources¹.

It should also be emphasized that historical sources provide a suitable material basis for a proper understanding of historical facts and phenomena. Only historical sources not only expand the historical synthesis already given in textbooks but also deepen it, which makes the material more understandable to students and the teaching of history more vital.²

We know several types of historical sources. Among those suitable for history lessons in both primary and secondary school are:

- material resources: archaeological finds (ruins of castles, towns, various monuments, dwellings, old objects, coins, clothes, and others),
- written sources: history lessons include a variety of written messages (documents, chronicles, memoirs, newspaper articles, statistical reviews, and others).
- oral sources: folk tradition, folk songs, fairy tales, customs and habits, stories,
- pictorial sources (works of painting, sculpture, and architecture),
- literature as a historical source,
- photography as a historical source,
- postcard as a historical source,

¹ Tomaž Weber, *Zgodovinski viri (pisni, materialni in statistični podatki) pri pouku zgodovine*, *Sodobna pedagogika*, letnik 38, št. 7-8, Ljubljana 1987, str. 381.

² Tomaž Weber, *Teorija in praksa pouk zgodovine v osnovni šoli*, DZS, Ljubljana 1981, str. 64, 65.

- caricature as a historical source,
- poster, - historical maps,
- diagrams and statistics,
- modern media (audio and video sources),
- information and communication technology in history lessons (internet, e-materials).

Importance of resources:

- resources allow students to come into direct contact with historical connections,
- are original statements of the past,
 - the ethos of historical science is built with resources; knowledge is reliable if resources support it,
- working with resources promotes students' independence,
- analysis of resources leads to scientific methods and to building competencies in working with documents,
- working with resources enables research learning,
- encourages questions.

For successful work with historical sources in history lessons, it is necessary to provide some necessary conditions:

- intelligibility of sources or language. It is also a good idea to show students an example of a written source so that they can see the writing, the way they seal or keep historical sources,
- the appropriate selection of the relevant part or excerpt of the historical source. It is essential to choose only that part of the whole that we believe will best perform its gear and cognitive task,
- presentation of all terms, units, and quantities. It is also vital to present terms, units, and quantities in today's understandable representative elements to evaluate the source and its comprehensibility. If we do not, there cannot be proper performances. This applies to measures for the number of substances, measures of length, the value of monetary units, size of holdings, and others,

- choice of methods. The choice of methods is also crucial for working with historical sources, which must be graded according to the easiest to the most challenging principle.³

In addition to providing the stated conditions, it is also necessary to provide didactic conditions for practical implementation. These conditions are:

- the objectivity of resources,
- learning-target orientation,
- didactic adequacy of resources to learning objectives and the level of development and individual characteristics of students,
- availability of a variety of historical sources (texts, images, maps, charts, historical films, tables, ethnographic objects, memorials, living testimonies, and others),
- the aesthetic and experiential value of the resource.⁴

Historical sources can be used in four ways:

- illustrative method,
- method of proof,
- analytical-synthetic method,
- problem method or method of working with a source as a means of problem treatment.⁵

³ Tomaž Weber, *Zgodovinski viri (pisni, materialni in statistični podatki) pri pouku zgodovine*, *Sodobna pedagogika*, letnik 38, št. 7-8, Ljubljana 1987, str. 381.

⁴ Pavla Karba, *Raziskovalno učenje pri pouku zgodovine v osnovni in srednji šoli*, *Zgodovina v šoli*, 12, št. 1, Ljubljana 2003, str. 11-14.

⁵ Dragan Potočnik, *Zgodovina, učiteljica življenja*, Založba Pivec, Maribor 2009, str. 105-110.