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# THE HISTORIAN AND 'THE END OF HISTORY': SCIENTIFIC REFLECTIONS OF MILORAD EKMEČIĆ ON THE PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL METHODOLOGY IN THE ERA OF THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

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*Abstract.* This study is a part of a doctoral research project entitled *Life and Work of Milorad Ekmečić (1928–2015)*, during which we realized that this distinguished Yugoslavian and Serbian historian in the late stage of his scientific career had shown particular interest in the problems of modern methodology of history. Studying his methodological work, which was very significant in the sense of quality if not volume, we came to the conclusion that he managed to achieve considerable results in that field, applying particular multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach. With his intellectual calmness, but also with experiential concern, he observed the world around him and the new problems faced by historiography at the turn of the century. He detected them on several levels: matter of periodization of contemporary history; philosophy and the sense of history after finalization of the Cold War conflict; the consumer society as a syntagm for contemporary history; the lack of auxiliary historical sciences which would study reports of contemporary media; the alteration of the nature of historical sources; the need to strengthen the outer and inner criticism; and the censorship and auto-censorship phenomena. In this context, he tried to offer authentical answers to numerous challenges of contemporary methodology and open new horizons for further research of this demanding scientific matter.

Milorad Ekmečić can be considered one of the greatest names of historiography of Balkans of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He left a rich historiographical work throughout his six-decade long experience, testified by over 300 bibliographical units. Owing to his extraordinary effort and rarely seen enthusiasm, he was committed to remove decades of accumulated dust from extremely important sources for the history of South-Eastern and Central Europe giving them appropriate shape and interpretation. From the very beginning of his scientific career, until the end of his worldly life, he actively studied various topics such as the role of certain historical figures in Bosnian Uprising 1875–1878, the genesis of national movements of South Slovenes, the nature of authoritarian regimes in the Interwar Europe, Balkan migrations, the politics of great forces in the Eastern matter, and the history of Serbs in Yugoslavia, considering the causes and consequences of its breakup. In the final phase of his scientific work, he showed particular interest in problems of contemporary historical methodology. Going into detail of this matter, he gave a particular interest to the subject of its roots, role models, flows, and unresolved questions.

Based on the insight into Milorad Ekmečić's biography, we found three titles where the author presented a specific intention to research a problem regarding the methodology of history between the two millennia, and these are: *Reflections on the Methodology of Contemporary History* (orig. *Размишљања о методологији савремене историје*), *Contemporary History and Politics* (orig. *Савремена историја и политика*), *In Search of Slobodan Jovanović's Philosophy of History* (orig. *У поштрази за филозофијом историје Слободана Јовановића*). However, he never showed any pretensions to become a methodologist in the narrowest sense of this word. Nevertheless, based on the analysis of his works concerning the topic of contemporary historical methodology, but also on the basis of his classical oeuvre, we are free to say that he made a significant contribution in that field as well. With his greatly scattered, but always meaningful research of various topics from the domain of general and national history, he exemplarily showed the ways to reach reliable scientific knowledge. Although he used established and proven elements of the historical method, he did not hesitate to leave his personal stamp on its future application. Thus, for example,

during the writing of *Creation of Yugoslavia 1–2* (orig. *Стварање Југославије 1–2*) (Екмечић, 1989), in the case of unpublished material, in the footnotes he first presented information about the document, and only then the data about the archive unit, although usually information about the archive is given first and then about the source. His methodology was related to a good knowledge of archivists, which he insisted on throughout his career.

He devoted the first part of the article *Reflections on the Methodology of Contemporary History* (orig. *Размишљања о методологији савремене историје*) to issues of periodization, which, according to his view, should not mark a new calendar time, but the inner content of the epoch that distinguishes it from past periods. In the second part of the same work, Ekmečić spoke about the transformation of societies, culture, and politics that make up that content. In the third part, he mostly discussed the method of source processing. There, he expressed the opinion that the old methodology can serve as a support and an incentive, but it must be adapted to the new situation. He established that the classification of sources into ancient remnants and tradition in contemporary history was moving in favour of the tradition. He noticed that new auxiliary historical sciences are missing—for a new way of writing documents, for photo analysis, for film and tape recorder tapes, for the new sources not to have a discipline, such as diplomacy was for medieval charters, for the new auxiliary historical sciences not to have standardized names (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 331).

Regarding the notion of ‘contemporary history’ itself, Ekmečić said that it existed from the early beginnings of history writing, bringing in the example of Herodotus, who claimed to be a semi-contemporary historian, since he described events not older than a century. In his article *Contemporary History and Politics* (orig. *Савремена историја и политика*), he offered a definition of history as being a “constant dialogue of the past with the present” (Екмечић, 1997, p. 17). One of the main features of contemporary history in his evaluation is the data research based on interviews, which was the characteristic of any ‘contemporary history’, starting with Thucydides. He recognized that this procedure already deserved to be considered something particular, which was not real research but rather a recollection of the past, based on the evaluation of Pausanias from the second century AC that “there are books by the writers who have no reputation of historians, and these books we call memoirs” (Паусанија, 1994). Citing this renowned Antic historian, “courtiers should write history to please the king” (Паусанија, 1994, p. 72, 75), Ekmečić added that “this suspicion will remain for almost two millennia of duration of that craft” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 331–332).

Analysing further the notion of ‘contemporary history’, he came to the conclusion that it had a two-fold meaning; on one side, this was the closest past, which always existed from the beginning of the science of history as a period separated from the older periods; while on the other side, it had a character of

one special period, which still did not get its appropriate name. Ekmečić highlighted the fact that various intellectuals used various terms for the notion of contemporary history; Sorel referred to it as ‘anecdote history’, Jacob Burckhardt called it ‘current history’, various American scientists called it ‘a direct history’, ‘a history of the current moment’ or ‘the instant history’. Ekmečić highlighted that the famous French author Kami referred to journalists as historians of the current moment, evaluating that he was not wrong neither for giving it such a name, nor for the main actor of such kind of writing in the world today (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 331–332).

On such grounds and following Voltaire’s example who after three centuries called the history of the 15th and 16th centuries the Renaissance, he found that also in the future “a learned priest would come to name our time with appropriate name” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 332–333). He saw its essential difference from other times in the structural changes of social relations and culture, which acquired the character of a special period of capitalism and its transformation, which in turn separated it from earlier forms (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 332–333).

The importance Ekmečić gave to understanding of contemporary history was best depicted by the sentence he took from Leopold von Ranke that “the knowledge of the past is incomplete without the knowledge of the present, as well as there can be no understanding of the present without the knowledge of the past times”. “One is giving hand to another; one cannot exist or be complete without the other” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 333).

Considering the issues of contemporary history, he concluded that it was easier to write than to make a concept of its methodology. He highlighted that no one was successful thus far in creating a valuable periodization of contemporary history, which would provide a solid ground for processing. In this manner, Ekmečić presented the idea that there was no contemporary period that can be singled out as a subject on its own, nor can a separate methodology be built for it, except in cases where there were no legal documents to represent the base of the science of the human past. The processing without documented evidence is just a chronicle, where the facts are not interrelated in a total and a unique sense. Referring to Benedetto Croce, Ekmečić said that a chronicle differed from history exactly by the fact that it aligned individual facts but did not place them in general sense of a scene (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 335).

He dedicated a particular space to manners of its periodization in his research of the methodology of contemporary history. In *Contemporary History and Politics* (orig. *Савремена историја и политика*), he presented the notion that all attempts to establish appropriate historical periodization up until that time carried within something theological, something emerging already from the Christian Prophecy of Daniel, which read that after four monarchies the fifth one shall arrive, the Christian one, or the Empire of God on Earth (Екмечић, 1997, p. 20).

His scientific premise relied on the conviction that the peak of calendar division of history in particular periods arrived with the theories that one basic measuring cell should be established for historical times. According to Ekmečić's interpretation, from this Marxist periodization was born (slavery – feudalism – capitalism – socialism – communism), which was never standardized but became generally accepted, but individual historians made such divisions for themselves. He points out that Leopold Ranke divided history in nine centuries; the eight related to the 'times of revolutions', which he witnessed in his youth. Using one scientific study by Ernest Troeltsch, Ekmečić alleged that the last, ninth period was defined as the 'era of constitutionality', which brings creation of new nations and economic expansion.

It should be mentioned that Ekmečić found the roots of Marxist periodization in the sociological type of periodization, which was created by Sen-Simon and Auguste Comte. Special part in this periodization is played by revolutions as milestones in development. Ekmečić said that Carl Marx can be considered a promoter of their science in that regard. In relation to this, he stated the fact that today the science of history accepted the theory that the development of production means was the factor developing the history from lower to higher forms and that before Marx, all renowned historians of civilizations took this as a starting point, but that they differed from him in the level of importance of religion and politics they gave it as being the moving factors (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 338).

Continuing his considerations in that direction, he established that the type of sociological periodization of history was not over with Marx. In his research, modern science did not match his ideas entirely, because of introducing sub-periods and accepting thesis that instead of linear progress of humanity, there might be also a spiral progress. Therefore, the old typology onto ideological and sociological periodization was enriched with new factors. He underlined the fact that a renowned Polish historian Jerzy Topolski, in his *Methodology of History* (1976), divided this typology in three parts: cycle periodization, which relied on the thesis of spiral development; direction periodization, which focused onto one bright goal in the future; irregular periodization, which allowed for grouping of shorter periods into particular units, but did not apply equally on economic, political, cultural, and other kinds of history (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 339).

After the collapse of the East-European Socialism in 1989, the famous theory of 'the end of history' appeared. The attitude of Ekmečić on this thesis showed that the expert of the theoretical analysis from the American Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fransis Fukuyama (1992), in fact did not express anything new, nor particularly original, but that he applied Hegel's concept, that the goal of history was achievement of liberty, onto the collapse of socialism. His judgment was that by doing this, an image of the world of future under the American rule was created, therefore united through a single model of capitalist society and states organized as parliamentary democracies with a clear objective to

create one world of unified civilization. “This was, obviously, a revenge against the Marxists who were bragging with the idea that the socialism is the end of history. Marcuse wrote that the left wing was the hope which will lead to the end of the time” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 340).

Led by such understanding, he established that the collapse of the Eastern Block at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s was not only the collapse of one socio-economic system, but also the crack of ideological postulates on which it was based (Екмечић, 1997, p. 21).

He considered that the foundation for more sustainable periodization of contemporary history of today must be brave exclusion of the theological concept “about arrival of the kingdom of happiness to the Earth”, because “money, military state and contemporary free market develop the economy and draw a shape of any society the way it never existed in history before” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 341–342). His research experience showed that for any historian, contemporary history was one special age framed by the national experience of its society. Referring to the theoretical explanations of the historian Valsecchi, he reported that, for example, in Italy the period after the unification in 1871 was considered modern history because, according to the causal sequence of events, that period had an internal logic to be rounded into a whole, and on the other hand, it had open archives for certain years, without which the treatment could not have a scientific character (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 342).

From this, he developed a thesis that the upper boundary of contemporary history always had to be made applying the *scala mobile* system, in order to allow it to move to some other important date in history, from which the historical period of the next contemporary history created new logic of events, which would enable it for such division. As an example, for such kind of methodological boundary in case of national history, he mentioned the year of 1918, when agrarian societies based on the principle of free small peasants ceased to exist, and when the creation of new industrial communities began and the “abyss of tragical experience of national unity” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 342, 343) opened. This was a period when, according to his well-known attitude, the combat for a small land stopped being the basic motive of social progress, and began the race towards the cities, “after the culture of two-bedroom apartments” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 343).

Екмечић represented the viewpoint that the basic characteristic of modern history was “acceleration, mundialization and democratization”, where he relied on considerations of the French historian Pierre Nora (Екмечић, 1997, p. 18). The notion ‘acceleration’ means the speeding up of the historical development. He stated that the eminent historiographers Langlois and Seignobos in 1897 wrote that the “evolution of civilized societies for the period of one hundred years developed to the point that the understanding of its state today is derived from the fact that during these one hundred years it has developed more

than during the previous ten centuries” (Langlois & Seignobos, 1905, p. 278). Ekmečić supported the above statements explaining that compared to the old days, European capitalism of today seemed almost like a socialism and that it was this what made it special era in general capitalism history. He highlighted that the era after the year of 1918 would be referred to as the era of consumer society, since that was its important feature, which disappeared during general acceleration of historical development. On the trail of such reasoning, he mentioned an unusual fact that it was calculated that a common citizen of the most developed countries spends more of various goods, than the pope of Rome in the past, “who was, during the Middle Ages, considered the luckiest person living the best way possible in the world” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 344–345).

Ekmečić recognized another characteristic of the history of which we are contemporaries in the crisis of religiosity in the European and North American world and the related unequal demographic development of religious communities. He wrote that today only Islam and some other American sects were in expansion, highlighting that the traditional Christianity was losing its believers, and turned his belief into his private life calling that was not under public scrutiny. These facts clearly indicated his attitude that the main research task of contemporary history was of economic and demographic nature. He evaluated that the old instructions for historical methodologies were based on the teachings of the English methodologist Edward Augustus Freeman, were overcome and that they were suppressed one century ago, when the representatives of historical materialism appeared. What we refer to today as *nouvelle histoire*—with a notion that it needed to review the long-term processes, the total history, the daily life and particularly Braudel’s conceptions of historical time—Ekmečić already found in the magazine *Annales d’Histoire Économique et Sociale*, which was founded by Lisien Favre and Marc Blok in 1929 in Strasbourg. In their intention to “bring historical science out of routine and ghettoization” he found a kind of scientific legacy, which is the basic subject of contemporary history research (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 347).

In his research on the historical methodology of contemporary history, he was faced with a question whether the democratization was truly one of the three important ingredients of contemporary history. The essence of this process, in his opinion, was not determined by the people who participated in it, but the consequences which emerged later. As an example, he highlighted the case of historical sense of American sexual revolution in modern times, where he did not see the liberation of eros in a captive personality, nor the expression of modern capitalism in which man had everything in abundance. He detected the historical sense of the sexual revolution in the belief that this was a nest of one new global epidemic which jeopardizes manhood. Similarly, he did not recognize the historical sense of Eastern European communist states in 20<sup>th</sup> century in the fact that they created an “ideal model of a just society of the



future”, but in the fact that within “such an ideology, the industrial revolution of the old agrarian communities was performed” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 352).

According to the Екмечић’s analysis, for the consumer society to be justified as a syntagm of contemporary history and to be singled out from the frames of the history of the new age in its special part, it had to have its inner dynamics and features.<sup>2</sup> This means that contemporary history in the world has not received yet the timeframes which would allow for taking out particular development cones. Therefore, he established that the research of contemporary events cannot turn into a ‘great science’. The existing methodology of history was built on the experience of the older periods, and it was not easily applicable on the experience of contemporary history. Having this in mind, Екмечић highlighted a quote by the famous François Guizot, who said that it was not only the problem of overburdening with sources, but also in the endless chain and complexity of events, which was why a historian might feel insecure in identifying the subject of their interest (Guizot, 2018). Therefore, the research methods and conclusions of historians were “as different as the conclusions of detectives and judges at courts”, Екмечић concluded, using the words of an unnamed American scientist (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 352–353).

Екмечић specialized in modern historical methodology and the study of the philosophy of history on the example of Slobodan Jovanović. Reading the written legacy of this great intellectual, he got the same impression that usually all those dealing with it get—that it was about a scientific text which was presented in a literary, artistic manner. Analysing the methodological approach of Slobodan Jovanović, he highlighted that it was not sufficient to point out certain elements of his philosophy of history, such as opposing determinism, the role of an individual in history and observations of the past as a drama of contemporary occurrences, but also alterations of his scientific assessments and judgments—what appeared as a role model in a certain moment, in another came as a source for repeated analysis and suspicion. In this regard, Екмечић presented a statement that Slobodan Jovanović both respected and criticized his teachers and role models on equal basis. In accordance with his reputation as a critical thinker, everybody distanced themselves from his judgements, just as there were also those whom he considered opponents without discovering any virtues in them (Екмечић, 1998, p. 80).

Therefore, Екмечић believed that any search for philosophy of history of Slobodan Jovanović would have to be sought in that circle of scientists and thinkers of earlier times, who were opposed to deterministic instructions in

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<sup>2</sup> Consumer society is, according to Cambridge Dictionary, a type modern society in which people often buy new goods, especially goods that they do not need, and in which a high value is placed on owning many things. More about this type of society in: Jameson, 2018; Stanić, 2013; Tomić, 2008; Džejmson, 2015; Kalanj, 2004; Липовецки, 2008; Džejmson, 2019.

historical science. He thought it were particular type of rebellions against the theories of 'an automat man', as a blind captive of invisible forces of the past. He recognized the French philosopher Alfred Fouillet as the founder of that school, from whom Jovanović borrowed the 'idea-force' scheme as the main motive for the development of modern Serbian history. In short, Ekmečić advocated the position that Slobodan Jovanović was in Serbian culture what Hyppolite Taine was in French—a Renaissance personality who combined literature, history, law, and sociology in his work. Although according to his basic philosophical concepts, he placed him in the circle of Alfred Fouillée, Hyppolite Taine, Thomas Carlyle, Thomas Macaulay and Karl Ludwig Michelet, he claimed that Slobodan Jovanović maintained an attitude of sober prudence towards their philosophical concepts. For example, he stated that the leader of the French Revolution later corrected his own superficiality in some assessments, when he received a testimony of deeper research that disproved his old convictions (Екмечић, 1998, p. 94).

Studying methodological principles of Slobodan Jovanović, he established that he was showing repulsion towards the floods of dogmatic interpretation, which were returning the entire culture to the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He revealed that Slobodan Jovanović tried to present Marx's teachings from all sides, without denying that there are also interpretations opposed to his views. Ekmečić considered that Jovanović, although he was not close to the left wing, still accepted the impact of productive forces onto social development from Marxism, as well as the independence of spiritual art, application of Hegel dialectic theory of thesis, antithesis, synthesis onto the class struggle. By doing this, once more he revealed and proved that above all, he was a scientist, a man who was capable of stepping out from his own beliefs and accepting theses of those whom he never agreed with ideologically (Екмечић, 1998, p. 95).

Analysing in depth the texts written by Jovanović, Ekmečić concluded that the search for the philosophy of history by Slobodan Jovanović was, however, finalized with a negative outcome. The conviction that he did not have one philosophy of history was proven by the fact that Jovanović did not write it, even though it was difficult to find a contemporary historian so well read and widely educated. Ekmečić found a great contribution of Slobodan Jovanović in his resistance to diminish the significance of human spirit as the driving force in history. He said that he, similarly as his teacher Alfred Fouillée, aspired to a teaching that "never separates reality and reason, life and light" (Екмечић, 1998, p. 95, 96). Bringing light into science and life is what Langlois and Señobos considered the main task of the historian. In this efforts, Slobodan Jovanović also left convincing traces. Enmity towards dogmas was the basis of his science, not determinism and anti-Marxism (Екмечић, 1998, p. 96).

Many challenge the methods of obtaining historical facts to obtain knowledge. They believe that it is only a procedure of good sense and clear mind. Ekmečić found that historians belonging to this group are Edward Hallett Carr,

Paul Veyne and Georges Lefebvre. He reminded that Langlois and Seignobos gave a definition of history long ago as being nothing else than processing of documents. The attitude that derived from this was that it depended on coincidental circumstances in where the documents were being saved or lost. Therefore, in establishment of the history, the main role, in the opinion of Ekmečić, belonged to hazard. Based on this, he offered a new reasoning of the definition of contemporary history as being “nothing more than processing of available documents. It depends on coincidental circumstances that a small number of documents is available, that some are prohibited to be published and that some documents are deliberately getting lost. This is why in the establishment of truth; the main role is played by hazard. This is because the documents cannot be gathered on time at once, and writers of contemporary history must formulate their conclusions with due attention” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 352–353).

The uniqueness of his methodological teachings, according to contemporary history, provides opportunities for various research. As the time and the subject of the research are not the same, as with the standard history, they also cannot undergo the identical methodological processes. They, according to Ekmečić’s beliefs, must be harmonized with the reality which the historian meets through his performance. In the first place, this means that the modern historian is more politically, ideologically, and religiously engaged than his ancestors. This is what increases the responsibility towards their own time. He noticed that ‘ascetic types’ of classic historians were becoming rarer. He remembered that in communist times, many historians, fleeing from ideological pressure, ‘fled’ to antiquity and medieval studies. He particularly detected this in Soviet scientists, who, regardless of the topic they were writing about, devoted the introductions of their works to quoting the classics of Marxism on that topic (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 354).

He had a special attitude towards historians of religions and churches, for whom he said were guided by an enlarged finger of consciousness that is warning them constantly. In this respect, this is the most characteristic of those writers of religious history, who are professionally and otherwise connected to the church. He stated that the churches tend to construct “their own truths”, while “with the Roman Catholic Church, this is a rule of conduct” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 354–355). He thus believed that church historians had a more responsible task especially when the church leadership could not be held responsible at the time. In support of this, he cited the example of the French historian Duchesne and his *History of Early Church*. Referring to the writings of the eminent English historian George Peabody Gooch (1962) he stated that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Duchesne was considered the greatest living Catholic historian, who received all the accolades for his great learning, who was selected for the best universities and who was praised by Pope Pius X, until some cardinals discovered that he was “dangerous and sometimes deadly”

(Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 354–355). This is when Duchesne's isolation begun, and his works were banned (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 354–355).

In relation to the Yugoslav case, Ekmečić said that in a sense of censorship, most attention was given to national politics in the country. Of all censorships, he highlighted an instance of self-censorship, which he characterized as the greatest enemy of every historian. He pointed out that the basic precondition for any processing of contemporary history was the writer's citizen right to independent thinking. He compared an occupied historian, who wrote for religious, political, and personal reasons, with a lawyer in court, whose methodology was enriched with the experience of defending in the courtroom. From this derives his attitude that the basic task of such historians was to suppress the truth and advise wrongly, but not to narrate how it really happened. The well-known principle by Ranke remained the foundation of Ekmečić's scientific beliefs. Therefore, following Voltaire's example, he underlined that "we must constantly take into account Aristotle's maxim that doubt is the basis of all wisdom" (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 355).

He focused on the Yugoslav example in the article *Contemporary History and Politics* (orig. *Савремена историја и њолиџика*). He offered two rational answers to the question of why politics played such an important role in contemporary Yugoslav history. Firstly, because the socialist system between 1945 and 1990 had its ideological conception of historical development which penetrated into all pores of society and culture, causing gradual seizure of disharmony between increasingly free economic and social development and the growing politization of culture, education, and public activities. Secondly, because in modern history of Southern Slavs, nationalism was the basic motive of spiritual and cultural development (Екмечић, 1997, p. 25).

Examining the complex issues of the methodology of contemporary history, he established that it was placed on the same level where the entire historiography was at the middle of the last century and that still it did not gain the status of a science. According to ancient principles, science was considered only that which had its own laws and methods, such as logic, physics, and mathematics. Conveying the thoughts of the famous Johann Gustav Droysen, Ekmečić reminded that for a long time, history was considered some kind of literature or art, until the laws of the development of society itself were revealed, which history was tasked with describing (Droysen, 1897). Despite several classical works on contemporary historical methodology, he believed that until present time there was no agreement as to whether one methodology was justified. He believed that "modern theory did not create one general methodology, which would be sufficiently convincing to justify such efforts" (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 356).

The minimum methodological procedures that all authors must include:

- Selection of the research topic;
- Collection of sources (heuristics);

- External and internal criticism of sources;
- Data processing (systematization into groups);
- Narration (formulating a synthesis) (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 355; Екмечић, 1997, p. 26).

Even though he considered them mandatory, he highlighted that modern science tended to neglect a list of necessary actions, mostly because they were performed unconsciously. He characteristically emphasized that professional historians never stuck to those lists of repetitive actions, but they never failed to perform any of them either, similarly as an experienced craftsman taps a cauldron, while his apprentice must take care not to skip any consecutive step. Therefore, he assessed that such a list of methodological actions has to exist, regardless of whether this would be approached only with a good sense, logic, and criticism (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 358).

Reflecting on the problems of the methodology of modern history, he analysed in detail all five phases in achieving scientific knowledge. Regarding the first one, he established that the selection of a research topic in contemporary history was more significant than in the standard disciplines because the determination and the objective of the writer depended on it. He held the famous attitude that only a work with scientific tendency and methodology can be considered scientific. Otherwise, if a researcher decided on a topic to prove that “his political party, his homeland and his church are better than the others, this book will not belong to science” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 358). He stated that contemporary history had a plethora of such books, and therefore the entire literature and scientific genre were suspected as less serious writing (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 358).

In the heuristic research phase of contemporary history, he found one more change compared to the standard one. The reason for that was seen in the change of the nature of the historic sources. It is the fact that classical auxiliary historical sciences are practically useless to contemporary history. It is known that ‘acta’ type of sources which dominated from the Renaissance times, has given way to another kind of sources. In that regard, Екмечић relayed a famous saying by Slobodan Jovanović that the telephone was the greatest enemy of the science of history because important decisions were made over the telephone and left without any written proof. He believed that it was the fault of contemporary history for never trying to build auxiliary sciences for itself. He found that there had been attempts that apply classical operations of internal and external source criticism to photography, but there was no proper name for it. He was of the opinion that the word ‘pictology’ would be the most adequate, as the examination of film strips was already beginning to be called ‘cinemology’. Another aggravating circumstance for a researcher in the heuristics phase was recognized in the fact that the most significant material was considered confidential. He highlighted that in Russian historiography, there was a notion ‘на

*вечное хранение*, which related to the documents which were not shown to anyone. Therefore, among other, Ekmečić said that historians of contemporary history in this domain were in a more difficult position, than, say, medievalists, because they were faced with numerous obstacles, “false theories, stereotypes, cultural clinches and collective prejudices” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 360).

However, when it comes to certain ways of processing data for a long-term storage and preservation, processes of social transformation over a long period of time, Ekmečić said that researchers of contemporary history have an advantage over historians of older eras. In support of that claim, he gave an example of the use of modern written sources; while the early history of European cities had to be studied using individual data collections from birth, death, and marriage registers, today a modern historian had at their disposal organized statistics that the administration used for its own purposes (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 363–364).

Regarding the external and internal criticism in contemporary history, it is worth pointing out that Ekmečić noticed that there was more tradition than remnants in the classification of sources. He got the impression that Droysen's old definition of a source as any memory that is not externally fixed narrowed the first-hand value in this case. Examining attempts to apply external and internal criticism to photography and film, he came to the understanding that they had only yielded initial successes. Referring to the works of Stevan Jovičić (Јовичић, 1977, p. 39) and Andrej Mitrović (Mitrović, 1978, pp. 7–13) he recommended that internal criticism, which examined the credibility of documents, when applied to photography, must be reduced to technical expertise. He noted that photographs showing Soviet leaders together were always carefully analysed, due to possible editing and retouching. He supported the thesis about the exceptional importance of the studious analysis of the photo as a source with the fact that it was proved that the American President Kennedy was shot by two assassins in 1963 based on procedures described in a book, and not just one as the court established. Therefore, he concluded that in the case of photography as a source, external criticism was more important than internal (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 362).

Although a secondary source, Ekmečić believed memoirs were still irreplaceable in contemporary history. He assigned special importance to their analysis, citing the example of the authenticity of Hitler's (alleged) diary that was discovered in 1989. He wondered who could prove the existence of gas chambers in the Holocaust against the Jews after 1941 just by analysing the primary sources if there were no autobiographical sources. He recalled that only one written document had been preserved, a certification of a spare part, and a note on telephone conversations about missing trains in Berlin, from which nothing terrible could be concluded. That was why written human testimonies were a valuable historical source for understanding modern history (Gooch, 1916).

Examining the phase of narration and synthesis in the processing of contemporary history, Ekmečić came to the conclusion that they were more significant than in the older eras. From the experience of various contemporaries, he learned that modern historical science depended more and more on verified data, statistical evidence and that less attention was given to the stylistic embellishment of synthesis and conclusion. He considered it wrong. He attached great importance to the style and manner of presentation in a scientific work. In support of this, he cited the example of Slobodan Jovanović, who “made many radical mistakes” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 364) in describing certain events, personalities, or phenomena, but because of his refined style, his works received the status of cultural classics. Therefore, he predicted that the books by Slobodan Jovanović, as well as those of Karl Ludwig Michelet and Thomas Carlyle, would become less and less science for the West, and more and more “signposts about the civilizational rise of their peoples” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 364).

Searching for an answer of how to create synthesis of contemporary history, he again returned to what, according to his view, was the remedy for many of its problems—the creation of new auxiliary historical sciences. Instead of diplomacy, he proposed a creation of a new discipline, which would deal with new types of written sources. Of course, he was aware of the fact that a modern historian cannot critically check secret or encrypted data on their own, but it could be achieved with the help of some new auxiliary sciences. He believed that modern historians would necessarily have to turn into sociologists of the past. Experience has shown him that classical historians have an advantage over classical sociologists in that case, because they have a scheme of standard methodology as a proven means of application. As a limiting factor in such types of research, he recognized the objective fear of falling into the quicksand of ‘conspiracy theories’ (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 365–366).

As for the way of communicating the results of scientific research of contemporary history, Ekmečić believed that it was best to respect the old rule that in each individual case success would be equally divided between the historian’s professional ability to deal with modern history and their innate abilities to do so. For him, the best manual of historical methodology was the work of a great historian on history itself. In this way, he represented a proven scientific point of view that was founded by the aforementioned Hippolyte Taine at the beginning of the 20th century.

His attitude remained that the basis of progress in the methodology of contemporary history must be ‘doubt’. No matter how advanced modern technology was, he believed that every historiographer must come to terms that in the study of history, especially modern history, every conclusion was a perishable commodity. Especially if it is based on the means of modern communication. In this regard, he predicted that the criticism of television news would require a special auxiliary science (Екмечић, 1997, pp. 27–28). Analysing this type of

contemporary historical sources, he reasoned that the image was a remnant and the speech was a tradition that was intrusively interpreted as a remnant in the wrong direction. He stated that contemporary history was passed on to society as a *fait accompli* and that was why every truth must be late. "Standing on the border between the past that moves along a barely visible system and the reality that seems to be easily changed by the contemporary, the historian behaves like the learned local chronicler in the novel *The Bridge on the Drina* (orig. *Na Drini Čuprija*), as he grows older, he values himself and his chronicle more and more and the events around him less and less" (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 358–367).

Through a studious examination of this issue, he gradually reached a conclusion that one should re-examine the idea that contemporary history stood between journalism and anthropology, for a historian who examined contemporary society was something more than a classical researcher who performed manual tasks in archives. According to Ekmečić, a contemporary historian was a kind of interpreter of reality with a predisposition to know the past. Among the first writers of the history of some contemporary events, he counted journalists, who were on the spot due to their duty to report on them, citing the case of ten October days in 1917 in Russia. Regarding this, he underlined the paradigmatic example of Leon Trotsky, who with his history of the Russian revolution was also a participant while writing and a historian while completing the work. (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 367–368).

He saw the natural human hunger for knowledge (*libido sciendi*) as endangered by his own desire for emotion (*libido sentiendi*) and the weight of power (*libido dominandi*). Based on years of research of the past, he noticed that it was almost a rule that the desire for knowledge can be easily suppressed by some stronger urge. Therefore, Ekmečić said that the methodology of contemporary history had to satisfy both Cicero's conditions, "[t]he first law of history is not to be able to say anything wrong, and the second is to be able to say everything that is true" (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 368).

He noticed that some scientists were inclined to divide modern history into periods according to the means of information that made it—the 'years of the big press' from the end of the last century, as well as the era of radio and then television. He noted that the period of television was particularly difficult for scientific analysis, because it had a more suggestive effect on the viewer and very easily turned into an instrument of untruth. He explained this attitude by the fact that the viewer was informed in the first place by the reporter's report, where the image was not there only to confirm, but also to highlight whatever the aim of the media was, and therefore the montage becomes an interpretation of history. In support of his claim, he cited an example of Western global media coverage of the war in the former Yugoslavia, namely the Markale case, where the cameramen went out into the street before a staged explosion (Екмечић, 1995–1996, p. 368). The fact that modern history is most often written by



journalists, its creators and participants, prompted him to characterize it as a craft without historians (Екмечић, 1997, pp. 27–28).

What is noticeable in his approach to this topic is the openness of his attitude. Екмечић did not hesitate to point out that large information systems were, at present, almost as a rule under the control of financial lobbies. Thus, according to his interpretation, not only was the information controlled, but history itself was made, because it had been proven that governments made decisions based on the news. Thus, the media becomes a tool for making history *in vitro*. However, he emphasized that the rebellion against history was not new, but that the new rebellion is through television, which was unfolding before our eyes. He reminded that the famous German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in his 1874 essay *On the Benefits and Harms of History for Life* condemned history as ‘eternal female’. He believed that only rebels against history had the right to ‘correct’ it, following the example of the ancient Hellenes, who rebelled against “the chaos of the Orient which had conquered them, with a flood of Semitic, Babylonian, Lydian, and Egyptian influences” (Ђурић, 1992, p. 1992).

Referring to the old thought of Nietzsche’s, Екмечић, in the manner of a concerned philosopher of history, concluded that modern means of information, as a weapon “in the rebellion against the eternal feminine and the eunuch, who are the only ones who do not build history, become the darkness of a nightmare that can be repeated, as it has been repeated between the two world wars” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 369–370). He gloomily stated that modern history, as “a science without historians, which journalists do not write but create, is becoming a new evil that is taking control of the mind” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 369–370). In accordance with his pessimistic attitude towards the age of postmodernity, he emphasized that man “really unconsciously creates history as his own tragedy, because the worst creator of history is the one who writes” (Екмечић, 1995–1996, pp. 369–370). Hence, he predicted for the future generations of historians an angry struggle to create a new scientific methodology, based on the old, proven, classical foundations, embodied in Ranke’s approach to the past—to write as it really was.

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Јован Ј. АЛЕКСИЋ

Универзитет у Приштини са привременим седиштем у Косовској Митровици  
 Филозофски факултет  
 Катедра за историју

Истџоричар и „крај историје“: научна промишљања  
 Милорада Екмечића о проблемима историјске  
 методологије у ери потрошачког друштва

Резиме

Изучавајући научни опус Милорада Екмечића установили смо да је овај еми-  
 нентни југословенски и српски истџоричар у позној фази свог стваралаштва  
 показивао специфично интересовање за проблеме историјске методологије

на прелому XX и XXI века. На основу проучавања његовог, обимом невеликог, али квалитетом значајног методолошког опуса, закључили смо да је карактеристичним мултидисциплинарним и интердисциплинарним приступом остварио запажене резултате и на том пољу.

Екмечић је веровао да основа напретка историјске методологије у времену потрошачког друштва, мора, пре свега, да буде – сумња. Колико год савремена технологија напредовала, сматрао је да се сваки историограф мора помирити са судбином да је у изучавању историје, а посебно савремене историје, сваки преурањен закључак „брзо кварљива роба“. Са зебњом је пратио како супермодерна техника и технологија полако постају главни субјект историје, док се човекова личност полако потискује на маргину. Одбијао је тезе које су говориле да се човечанство на прелому миленијума суочава са „крајем историје“ и веровао да се ради о привременом затишју пред буру.

У процесу проучавања корена методолошких проблема историјске науке крајем XX и почетком XXI века, Екмечић није трагао за лаким путевима и једноставним одговорима. Трудио се да разуме и дешифрује све оно што их је узроковало, да открије њихове потенцијалне законитости, како би кроз њихово објашњење понудио адекватна решења. Имајући у виду бројна искушења која са собом носи ера потрошачког друштва, „посленицима музе Клио“ предвиђао је љуту борбу за стварање нове научне методологије засноване на старим, провереним, класичним темељима.

*Кључне речи:* Милорад Екмечић; историјска методологија; потрошачко друштво; „крај историје“; историја историографије.



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