

Slobodan Mandić

Computerization and Historiography 1995-2005

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Preface

The end of 80s and beginning of 90s of XX century is marked by the political changes of great importance for observing the world being known today.

However, with the fragments from political sphere, played revolutionary overturn in area of technological achievements, equally important and significant. Expansion of the Internet, personal computers, digital revolution, information society, all of these are entries equally important for observing the modern times as the end of Bipolar World System or fall of the Berlin Wall.

This book represents an attempt to answer on series of issues related to the abilities to implement modern technology achievements in Historical Science, as well as, whether and to what extent Computerization of Science trend impacted on the Methodology of Historical Research, on the first using Information & Communication Technologies.

Maybe we can begin this presentation on Computerization and Historiography, pointing out to a detail from famous French historian Fernand Braudel life.

Already selected the subject for his thesis – work devoted to the Phillip II, Spain and Mediterranean, in summer 1927, that time 25 year old historian started his researches in Archives of the City of Simancas in Spain. Remembering those days, almost half a century later, Braudel wrote: “On that occasion I had incredible lucky: while I was preparing to buy an ordinary photograph camera (microfilm was funded after the war), one American film worker offered me an old camera for reducing the film scene and proved me it was an excellent tool for recording documents. I have caused envy and admiration of archivists in Simancas making, daily, two or three thousand shots on 30m long tape. I used a lot that camera in Spain and Italy. Thanks to creative film maker, no doubt, I was the first one who used real microfilm which I developed by myself and then read for days under the light of simple projector”.¹

Although this event happened in, we can say, Stone – Age of computer era, far from the first appearance of computers, this event almost announced historians overcoming the traditional way of work, influenced by technological innovations in the near future. If the meeting of young Braudel and film worker was a coincidence, for leading form of computer implementation in historian’s researches all gathered in French School of Historiography *The Annales* we cannot say.

Since the very beginning of Information Science, during the 60s and 70s of XX century, with new enthusiasm of quantitative methods in studies on Economic History and Demography, they were among the first to recognize and jet to use advantages of work with computers.

In this way, a special discipline, in domain of Methodology of Historical Science, has slowly developed, but historians around the world are trying to figure possibilities and lack of using computers in work, which, accelerated development of technology in the second half of the XX century, put on agenda.

¹ Fernand Braudel, *Spisi o istoriji*, Belgrade, 1992, pp. 15,16.

The first problem we faced writing this research, is regarded to defining the subject itself and in close conjunction with the use of terminology.

Regardless of the different terms, for example in English: *History and Computing* and *Historical Information Science*, in German: *historische Faschinformatik*, in Russian: *историческая информатика*, or *geschiedenis en informatica* and *historische informationkunde* in Dutch,² we decided to use the term *Computerization and Historiography*, having on mind a few things.

At first, it was important to indicate that it is about Historical Science, not History, actually past and computerization, and impact of computers on society.

There is a special domain of historical research dealing with History of Computerization within the History of Technology, Science and Mathematics.³

On the other hand, computerization and especially computer influence on modern world after the World Wide Web was being discovered and the Internet being commercialized on the very beginning of 90s in the XX century, has changed the technical use of computers and made a great influence on, not just science, but all the other areas of human acting.

Thus, understanding of phenomenon of computerization itself is necessary also, for understanding of any other part of World's history after the Cold War.

Related to it, is another kind of dilemma, linked with the conception of this work. Making a choice, whether to process only few questions which new wave of information revolution brought, related to the use of computers in Historical Science, or to give a new meaning to this work, related to the phenomenon of general computerization in modern world, the solution imposed itself.

Actually, it turned out that is necessary to give a brief review on some of the most important characteristics of Information Age, for example: how does the Internet functions, or what are the consequences of unthinkable speed of traffic on information – communication highway in the XXI century, to make us easy to understand in what domain of work in Historiography, we can expect to find abilities to use information technologies, and also not to get back to some general questions.

It was incomparably less of a problem to determine chronological frame, we'll observe within it, phenomenon of computerization in Historiography. Since 1995, we can say there has been an assumption of implementation of different Internet services in Historical Science.

The number of Internet users has reached the level which requires the need of historians to be "cached" in the network. Somewhere in that time, in the world, was noted a

² See in: Onno Boonstra, Leen Breure and Peter Doorn, *Past, present and future of historical information science*, Amsterdam 2004, p. 18, 2 July 2004, <http://www.niwi.knaw.nl/en/geschiedenis/medewerkers/peter_doorn_home_page/new_0_copy1/past_present_future_of_historical_informationscience/new/> (26 March 2005).

³ See in: Department of Computer Science – Warwick, The History of Computing Research Group, 15 October 2005, <<http://www.dcs.warwick.ac.uk/research/history/>>(05 December 2005).

problem of the “millennium bug”, but 1995 appeared a manifest of Digital Age - a book *Being Digital* written by Nicholas Negroponte.

On the other hand, less than a decade later, borders of the Internet exploitation moving a head became evident, primarily after the appearance of the Web services which enabled more dynamic and personal method of communication creating social groups and the other forms of global interaction.

New tendency of “network around the world” development, got it’s appropriate expression in the term “Web 2.0” , which was introduced into use in 2004.⁴

However, it is important to accent that, although the work is chronologically limited to period between 1995 and 2005, this work contains brief, retrospective overview of the main events related to the implementation of computers in Historical Science ‘till 1995, including pioneering attempts in using new technologies, with the beginning of the 90’s.

The book consists of three parts. The first one, titled Post - Information Age, represents the frame to discuss in it about the problem of Computerization and Historiography, as the title of the second part is. Except the brief preview of history of the Internet, the first part represents attempt to be explained the reason of the computers, being so important for understanding of the Modern Age.

Already mentioned chronological preview of computers implementation in Historiography until 1995 is on the very beginning of the second part. After, main tendencies of development in this domain within the chronological frame being pointed, thematic parts needed to be formed.

As the real life develops faster than scientific works and theories, we have set ourselves the task to investigate, in what domain of researching and in what way, computers found special use in Historiography.

During the research itself, a several topics imposed, which we consider the best indicator of abilities and problems of using computers in Historical Science in the past decade.

Being noted that the themes are related to each other, we choose the following partition:

- Communication
- Internet as informational service
 - Digitization of archival records
 - Electronic historical sources
 - Presentation of scientific results, information on different domain of research
- Information researching techniques – hybrid catalogues for historians
- Citation of electronic sources problem
- Critical review on using materials downloaded from the Internet
- Teaching History and new technologies

⁴ Iris Miljković, “Evolucija Interneta: ‘ Web 2.0 ‘” See in: Svet kompjutera, No. 265, October 2006, p. 47. More about that: O’Reilly, *What Is Web 2.0*, 30 September 2005, <<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>> (24 November 2006).

It must be indicated to the fact that using so-called Information & Communication Technologies is being accented, but participation of computers in data processing, which was its primary purpose in Historical Science until the very beginning of the 90's, put aside. Since this subject couldn't be discussed too, it has been enough to accent that, even the Internet services as e-mail or World Wide Web, have already found its place in researching within the Historiography. Historians still use computers for processing a large quantity of data.⁵

Beside the methodological implication of Computerization on Historical Science, as well as observing those influences within the history of Historiography, special dimension represents the impact of computers and new technologies on currents of Modern History.⁶

In the first part of this work some problems related to this subject will be treated, for example: Historical context within, discovery of the Internet as one of the biggest Wonder of the Modern World happened; or, significant of Internet being commercialized, or discovery of World Wide Web.

Literature being used in the part discussing about Information Age includes great work titled *Tyranny of The Moment* written by Norway, social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen and already mentioned book *Being Digital*, Nicholas Negroponte. Primary sources being used: daily press, the program of conferences devoted to the subjects discussing the relation between the Historiography and new technologies, as well as numbering of Web presentations, which can be classified as historical sources, rather than literature.

As some kind of methodological waypoint for palpating the pulse of Historiography in meeting new technologies served Mirjana Gross and Knut Celstali's works. Professional literature being used, related to this subject is: Book *Past, Present and Future of Historical Science* written by O. Boonstra, L. Breure and P. Doorn, and works published in magazine of American Association for History and Computing. The fact is that the most of the material and literature downloaded from the Internet, had extra involvement in discussing the subject of the Internet implementation in historical research. Beside, using of CD-ROM, for example archives of Weekly Press *Vreme*, or Encyclopedia *Britannica*, made easy finding of wanted information.⁷

As the problem of electronic sources citation represents the primary point of stumbling in using electronic information, primarily information from the Internet, it was necessary for us to dedicate to it.

⁵ See in: Matthew Woollard, *New Windows on London's Past: Information Technology and the Transformation of Metropolitan History*, Association for History and Computing (UK), Glasgow 2000, AHC UK, 22 March 2005, <<http://www.gla.ac.uk/centres/hca/ahc/docs/New%20Windows202000.pdf>> (23 November 2005).

⁶ See: Frank Cain, *Computers and the Cold War: United States Restrictions on the Export Computers to the Soviet Union and Communist China*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, No 1, 131 – 147, 2005, <<http://jch.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/40/1/131.pdf>> (23 September 2005).

⁷ Complete preview of used sources, literature and illustrations is at the end of the book.

It is important to mention, it was given up on simple recital of differences and similarities between some of the most important guides for electronic sources citation, but to give the other solution for solving this problem. As outset in thinking in what way we should cite electronic sources helped the historian Maurice Crouse manual on *Citing Electronic Information in Historical Papers*, but important participation also had the fact, that writing this book implied citing of downloaded electronic information several times.

The question of implementation of new technologies in teaching History, has been discussed, at first, with attention to give answers on finding the way to increase interest of students within the Internet and new technologies, and to remove stereotypes and negative attitude on History. The issue of implementation of new technologies in teaching History has a special place in every evaluation of future of the Historical Science rating in the XXI century.

Methodological part of this work includes a several number of Web addresses being used as examples. Addresses are given mostly in footnotes, but the third part contains Web Directory with variety of Web sites. Related to the Web addresses contained in the text, let's mention its influence on the book form itself. In fact, depending on that, if it's going to be read, in printed or electronic form with the Internet connection, its size will vary between hundreds or several thousand of pages.