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Historiography Between the Lines: The Ottoman Image in Macedonian History Books

by Shener Bilalli,
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Book Review by:
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Historiography Between the Lines: The Ottoman Image in Macedonian History Books is a systematic analysis of the image of the Ottoman Empire as it appears in Western Balkan Countries' history schoolbooks. There is an interesting critique presented on contemporary narratives that have shaped the identities and inter-ethnic relations in the Balkan region. The author presents important historical figures and events. This book analyzes both the positive and negative aspects of school texts and books related to the Ottoman image. One of the book's most compelling merits is its way of providing structure to the issues regarding the Ottoman image and its presence in Balkan Countries' history. The author's division of the study into subordinate parts includes a description of the consequences of the absence of suffi-

cient history books. This clear structure of the book helps readers easily understand general historical narratives and their impact on society.

The author Shener Bilalli delves into the intricate relationship between history and identity, and in this groundbreaking study he explores how the portrayal of the Ottoman Empire in educational materials has shaped perceptions in the Republic of North Macedonia. This comprehensive research reveals the layers of historical narratives that have influenced generations, shedding light on the enduring impact of the Ottoman legacy on contemporary Macedonian society.

The study begins with an outline of the research's objectives, significance, and methodology. Bilalli meticulously examines the historical context and the role that history books have played in crafting an "Ottoman Image." By analyzing the narratives presented in these texts, the research uncovers how historical education shapes collective memory and identity, bridging the past with the present.

In the subsequent sections, Bilalli provides critical insights into how the Ottoman Empire is depicted within Macedonian educational materials. This analysis is not merely an academic exercise; it resonates with the lived experiences of communities today. The study articulates the ways in which elements of Ottoman culture and history continue to influence social dynamics, identity formation, and interethnic relationships in Macedonia.

The research delves into the complexities of how different ethnic groups in Macedonia—Albanian, Macedonian, Serbian, and Turkish—interpret the Ottoman era. It highlights a troubling trend: the portrayal of the Ottoman Empire as an "external enemy," which has emerged from a historical narrative built around common grievances against a shared past. This perspective has often led to an oversimplified and polarized view of history, limiting opportunities for reconciliation and mutual understanding.

One of the key highlights of this research is its exploration of the duality of the Ottoman image. On one hand, it acknowledges the historical complexities and the often contentious narratives surrounding Ottoman rule; on the other, it emphasizes the elements of coexistence and cultural exchange that emerged during that period. This nuanced understanding is essential for fostering dialogue and promoting a sense of shared history among diverse groups in Macedonia.

In the concluding sections of the research, the author not only summarizes the findings but also provides valuable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and historians. By advocating for a more balanced and inclusive approach to histor-

ical education, the study encourages the re-examination of how history is taught, ultimately aiming to enrich the cultural fabric of Macedonian society.

The book appeals to a more inclusive view of history, highlighting the need for unity and respect among different ethnic groups in North Macedonia and beyond. This review highlights the book's positive aspects and suggests areas for future research, encouraging further exploration of how history, as a science, is presented and understood in different communities.