R E V I E W

by Prof. Vera Boneva, DSc (History), DSc (Culturology)
on dissertation for obtaining of the academic degree "Doctor of Sciences"
on the topic "Urbanization of the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule
during the 19th century (until 1878)" by Ventsislav Evtimov Muchinov

Information about the candidate and the procedure

Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Muchinov, PhD, obtained bachelor's and master's degrees in History at the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2009, he defended his PhD dissertation on the topic "Demographic development of the Sanjak of Plovdiv in the 19th century (until 1878)". From 2010 to 2013, V. Muchinov was the chief assistant in the Department of Demography of the Institute for Population and Human Studies (IPHS) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. From 2013 to the present, he holds the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the IPHS-BAS.

Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Muchinov, PhD, is the author of one individual and two collective monographs, created and published according to the strict academic rules of the humanities. 53 articles and studies are included in his scientific portfolio, 7 of which are in English. On the topic of the present dissertation, he has presented a list and full texts of 11 published scientific articles devoted to various aspects of the urbanization of the Bulgarian lands during the 19th century. He has participated in 8 scientific conferences with reports on the topic of the dissertation. He was a part of the scientific teams of 8 projects, some of which are related to the problems discussed in the dissertation. He is currently a team member on a project funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund and is the head of a project

funded by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He also presented 12 citations from other scientists of his researches on the topic of the dissertation. The reference of realization of the minimum requirements of the BAS for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" is correct and detailed. It is a reason to assume that V. Muchinov meets all the formal requirements for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences".

After my election as a member of the scientific jury, I got acquainted with the administrative documents for the current procedure. They give me reason to assume that all legal requirements for presentation and discussion of work in the scientific unit have been met. The relevant decisions are formulated in precise administrative acts, and the set of documents and materials, which I received as a reviewer, is complete and neatly organized. In the context of the mentioned circumstances, I declare that I have no joint scientific research and/or other form of joint academic activity with the candidate, which would give rise to a conflict of interest.

General information about the dissertation work

The dissertation consists of 285 pages. It consists of an introduction, an introductory part, two main parts with a total of seven chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography of the sources used, a list of abbreviations. The main text is illustrated with 12 tables and one diagram. The scientific apparatus is displayed below the line and below the tables with statistical information. Citations are punctual and references to archival, statistical and narrative sources are correct and comprehensive. The quantitative data used are comparable and convincingly placed in specific locations and periods, since in the demographic history the statistical information is subject to partial refractions dictated by the used methods of their collection and extrapolation.

The dissertation is also precise from a terminological point of view. The concepts of *urbanization, city and urban population* are already defined in the Introduction. The chronological parameters of the analysis are clearly defined - from the beginning of the 19th century until the restoration of Bulgarian statehood in 1878 in the territorial and political-administrative scope of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. In order to avoid ambiguities, the author has made the explicit stipulation that "the research will concentrate on the development in the 19th century of the settlements with urban status, located on the territories, that after 1878 y. became part of the two Bulgarian state entities" (p. 25). Useful from a methodological point of view is also the stipulation, that those settlements, which during the considered period are centers of explicitly listed administrative units, are accepted as cities in the study. Thus, the range of studied social phenomena acquires comprehensiveness and measurability - two circumstances, that are particularly important in the context of the historical demography. And also in the system of humanities as a whole.

Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Muchinov, PhD makes a detailed review of the *historical literature on the subject*. The contributions of the Bulgarian and the foreign authors, who worked on problems, related to urbanization, are highlighted in the dissertation. A special emphasis is placed on local lore studies and local histories, which contributed significantly to revealing important details in the historical development of the respective settlements. It has rightly been summarized, that the availability of numerous studies on individual aspects of urbanization has so far not been compensated by the lack of a complete historiographical narrative on the subject. This is also the motive of the author to choose it as the object of his academic interest and to create the present dissertation.

The historical sources used in the creation of the work, are varied and adequate to the subject. In the foreground are the Ottoman Turkish sources of a quantitative nature, which make it possible to trace the movement of the population in the urbanized areas. The role of the official documents of the Ottoman administration, containing information about the policies regarding the urban population and urban-type settlements, is also highlighted. Among the Bulgarian and Greek sources, priority is given to the periodical press and to the memoir texts. Russian sources were also not neglected, especially those created during the periods of two important for our national history Russo-Turkish wars of 1828-1829 and 1877-1878.

The aims and objectives of the research are briefly, but convincingly formulated, with two axes of the research being set: 1. Analyzing the influence of the Tanzimat reforms on urbanization in the Bulgarian-populated provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century; 2. Study of the policies of the Ottoman authorities in the sphere of urbanization during the Tanzimat era. Regardless of the formal emphasis of these two thematic directions on the active role of the Ottoman state in dynamizing the urban processes, objectively the content of the study goes beyond the framework of the outlined plot, affecting other important elements of the nation's public existence, such as the relations with the other nationalities in our ethnic territory, the changes in the economic and social behavior of the generations, that inhabited our lands in the 19th century, the impact of the "big players" in the Eastern Question - Russia and its Western opponents, on the course of the studied processes.

Analysis of the main text

The introductory part of the dissertation is essentially a chapter dedicated to the urbanization of the Bulgarian lands in the turning point,

which remained in our history with the name given by Academician Vera Mutafchieva *"Kirdzhali time"* - the last decades of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. Following the traces of the Kirdzhalian riots and the Ayan separatisms in Danube Bulgaria, in Thrace and in Macedonia, the author skilfully highlights the upheavals experienced by the cities and the urban population, as well as the changes in the demographics of the urban network that occurred during and as a result of the deep disintegration of statehood and the army, which during the mentioned period literally dispersed the Ottoman power over the Bulgarian lands. The conclusions, that the Kirdzhalian period led to an increase in the population in the urban centers of our lands, to the dynamization of migration movements, that is, to more intense urbanization, are well founded (p. 39-40).

With the necessary completeness and thoroughness, Assoc. Prof. V. Muchinov traces the role of *the Russo-Turkish wars of the first decades of the 19th century* for the development of urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under the Ottoman rule (pp. 41-57). The destruction of some border fortress cities and the involvement of the population in a wave of migration north of the Danube River are the two circumstances, that have the greatest impact on the demographic processes on both sides of the Stara Planina (Balkan Mountain). Recalling the dramatic dimensions of the local history, related to the Russo-Turkish wars (1806-1812 and 1828-1829), of cities such as Svishtov, Nikopol, Varna, Sliven, Yambol, Vidin, Mesemvria, Anchialo, etc., the author motivatedly proves, that as a result of the mentioned military operations, "a significant blow was inflicted on the urbanization in Danube Bulgaria and in the eastern part of Thrace, which was gradually overcome in the 1830s and 1840s as a result of the socio-

economic upsurge, which occurred in the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat era" (p. 56).

The multifaceted analysis of *the changes in the administrative-territorial division in the Ottoman Empire*, which had an impact on the development of the cities on the territory of today's Bulgaria, is distinguished by respectable concreteness. Not only the main geographic scopes and public-legal powers of the local administrative units are outlined, but also the gradual growth of the role of individual cities, which became centers in the course of the Tanzimat reforms - Plovdiv, Sliven, Sofia, Tarnovo, Stara Zagora, Bitola, Kyustendil and others, is revealed. As a direct and indirect result of the administrative policy of the Ottoman government, the examples of highlighting the urban appearance of smaller settlements with a predominantly Bulgarian population - Gabrovo, Tryavna, Dryanovo, Kilifarevo, Elena, Bebrovo, Orhanie (now Botevgrad) and others, are indicated.

The judgments, regarding the impact of economic prosperity, particularly significant until the 1860s, on the increase in population in most of the cities in the Bulgarian lands during the Tanzimat era, are well motivated. In addition, it is also shown, how the studied settlements are established as economic, commercial and cultural-educational centers for the settlements in their surroundings. The urbanization in the Stara Planina region, the Sub-Balkan fields and Sredna Gora is very well characterized and illustrated. In the logic of this process, the role of the local settlements (Gabrovo, Kotel, Karlovo, Koprivshtitsa, Panagyurishte, etc.) as leading centers of proto-industrial production in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and of our national movement during the Revival as a whole, is fundamental.

The construction of railways, the expansion and modernization of the road network, the improvement of port centers and the introduction of the telegraph are all understood as key circumstances that influenced urbanization at national and local levels. This thesis is developed on the basis of rich primary and secondary source material and is illustrated with examples from the modernization processes in cities, such as Varna, Ruse, Shumen, Veles, etc. The case with the emergence of the town of Kaspichan, literally from a roadside market, in the process of the construction of the railway line between Ruse and Varna, is indicative in the mentioned direction.

A separate chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the impact of the Ottoman authorities' purposeful efforts to limit the spread of *epidemic diseases* in the empire (especially plague and cholera) on the urbanization processes in our lands. It has been proven, that the establishment of a complete quarantine system in the empire and the creation of modern (mainly military) hospitals on the European model are important factors for the development of public health care in the Bulgarian-populated provinces of the empire; that is, to reduce the morbidity and mortality of urban and rural inhabitants and to improve sanitation in cities.

Significant scientific contributions are contained in the two chapters dedicated to *the urbanization policy of the Ottoman authorities* and its impact on the processes in Bulgarian society. This policy acquired clear outlines in the 1850s and early 1860s, but its results were most visible in the last decade before the Liberation. The efforts of the authorities have been concentrated in two lines - measures for improvement and sanitation of cities; policies to increase the number of cities through the formation of new urban centers in the studied space (pp. 180-181). The first line is illustrated with convincing examples from the social history of Ruse, Sofia,

Varna, Stara Zagora. The second line is provided with factual material relating to a change in the status of a number of settlements that flourished during the mentioned period - Gabrovo, Troyan, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Pirdop, Breznik, Panagyurishte, Koprivshtitsa, Klisura, Sopot, Kalofer, Adzhar (now Svezhen). As a result of this policy, new urban centers appeared on our lands, built on the basis of modern urban development plans - Kula, Orhanie (now Botevgrad), etc. Useful evidentiary material on this issue is contained in Table No. 8 of the second part of the dissertation, which systematizes data on the number of the population in the settlements recognized as cities in today's Bulgarian lands at the end of the 1860s and the beginning of the 1870s. (pp. 223-224).

The conclusion of the dissertation has not only a summarizing, but also a upgradeable character in relation to the main text. Unequivocal numerical values, showing the dynamics of the growth of the urban population in the Bulgarian lands during the studied period, are indicated (p. 229). Comparisons of urbanization trends with other European countries were made in tabular and analytical order (p. 233), a precise identification of the number and size of cities in the outlined geographical area was made (p. 236), and it was established that the number of cities on the eve of the Liberation on the future territories of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was 75 with a total population of 566 800 inhabitants. Of special interest are the sections made by Assist. Prof. V. Muchinov, of separate parts of our ethnic territory, showing the different dynamics of urbanization, as well as their different saturation with urban centers. They give reason to the author to ascertain specifics in the character of the urban network in the areas on both sides of the Stara Planina and to summarize: "In the Danube Vilayet, small towns with a population of up to 5 000 inhabitants predominate, in contrast to the situation in the lands south of

the Balkan Mountain, especially in the Sanjak of Plovdiv, where medium-sized and large towns predominate." (pp. 244-245).

Assessment of Contributions and Critical Notes

Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Muchinov has systematized in the self-reference for his contributions ten circumstances, that give the dissertation the character of a novelty in science and enrich the knowledge about the Bulgarian XIX century, as well as the ideas about the historical development of the European Southeast during the specified century. I accept all of them as valid, allowing myself to highlight three of the contributions that I personally find the most essential.

1. The skilful combination of narrative historiography and demography working with quantitative methods has led to a productive and adequate reconstruction of historical realities. Moreover, trends and regularities unfolding in the lives of four or five generations of the urban population, which are present in the dissertation text not only as a passive background of social statuses and changes, but also as local communities with their own specificities, livelihoods and habits, are revealed.

2. The systematic study of the Ottoman urbanization policy in the Bulgarian lands in the 19th century (until 1878) creates new knowledge in Bulgarian historiography. The thesis that this policy contributes significantly to the activation of urbanization in the Bulgarian lands on the eve of the Liberation, is motivated in detail and clearly formulated.

3. An important, in my opinion, second plan of judgments and interpretations is available in the work, which concerns the relationship between urbanization and the cultural development of the nation during the pre-liberation part of the XIX century. With numerous examples embedded in the main text or in the context, it is shown that the studied

process gives a significant boost not only to the economic and social modernization of the Bulgarian society, but also provides space for the formation of the intelligentsia, for investing funds in education, church building , painting, theater, music - spheres with a seemingly ethereal presence in the urban space, but in many ways more permanent than all other aspects of our collective being.

As an academic contribution, I also highlight the systematic exposition, combined with a thoughtful structure and with a thorough reading of all primary and secondary sources. The work with the statistical data, as well as their arrangement in tables and diagrams, is neat. The language of the dissertation is strictly academic and distanced from the analyzed facts and circumstances. Nevertheless, the author's assessments are not devoid of positive or negative inventions, which are presented intelligently and sparingly.

My main *critical note* regarding the thesis concerns the fact, that in many places in the exposition the author does not honor his express agreement (cited at the beginning of this review), that he will stick to discussing only settlements that are located within the geographical boundaries of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia at the time of their establishment in 1878. There are numerous examples of settlements from the region of Niš and Pirot, Northern Dobrudja and Macedonia, which after the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, and even after that were not part of the delineated territory. This discrepancy does not constitute a substantial basis for disputing the quality of the work. On the contrary, it shows the indivisibility of urbanization processes in our ethnic territory during the Revival. Including in those settlements, that after 1878 will become parts of other Balkan states or will remain on the territory of

the Ottoman Empire until the turning events related to the Balkan Wars and the First World War.

Not so much as a remark, but as an open topic for reasoning, I also pose the question of the role of the church-administrative system of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople until 1870 and the Bulgarian Exarchate - after 1870, in the urbanization processes. As is known, the structure of the dioceses in our lands was formed on a historical principle, but it also follows the changes in the urban network. On the other hand, the church generally relied on income from regular taxes and extraordinary receipts, which (naturally) were greatest in the urban centers, performing a co-ordinating role in the collection of taxes in relation to the surrounding villages as well. Thus, objectively, urbanization and church organization are mutually related. I expect more details and regularities in the mentioned direction to be revealed in the future researches of Assoc. Prof. Muchinov.

Regarding the preparation for the publication of the dissertation as a monograph, I suggest making common pagination of the tables and diagrams, displaying a separate list of them at the end, so that it can be used more conveniently by the readers. I also recommend that the monograph be illustrated with photographic, graphic and other visual material, such as is definitely available in the source database used by Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Muchinov, PhD. Perhaps for the wider readership, an appendix with the changes in the names of the settlements - where they exist - would be useful.

Conclusion

The dissertation presented by Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Muchinov, PhD, meets all the requirements for obtaining the academic degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the professional field "History and Archaeology". The text is

carefully, intelligently, and competently written. Significant scientific contributions are available. The review of the manuscripts and printed sources are thorough and convincing. The candidate demonstrates intellectual courage, diligence and analytical skills. I propose that the work be published as a monograph by the publishing house of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. I also recommend that the monograph be translated into English and published, with the logistical and financial support of the BAS, in an internationally recognized scientific publishing house.

In view of everything written in this review, I declare that I vote **YES** on the procedure for acquiring the academic degree "Doctor of Sciences" by Assoc. Prof. Ventsislav Evtimov Muchinov, PhD, in professional direction 2.2. "History and Archeology", scientific specialty "History of Bulgaria", with a dissertation on the topic "Urbanization of the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule during the XIX century (until 1878)".

Sofia,
10.11.2023 Prof. Vera Boneva, DSc (History), DSc (Culturology)