ASSESSMENT REVIEW

by Prof Shteliyan D. Shterionov, Dr of Historical Sciences

for the scientific work of Assoc. prof. Dr. Vencislav E. Muchinov

„URBANIZATION IN BULGARIAN LANDS UNDER OTTOMAN RULE DURING THE 19TH CENTURY (UNTIL 1878)",

dissertation for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Historical Sciences"

The raising and development of questions related to the territorial distribution and number of the population inhabiting our lands during the past eras has been carried out since the progenitors of Bulgarian historiography. One of the fundamental problems in this part of our history is revealing the degree of urbanization of the Bulgarian lands. In view of its development, a number of materials are published. However, the comprehensive study of urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule in the 19th century (until 1878) has not been the subject of independent research until now. This is one of the circumstances that provoked Assoc. prof. Dr. Vencislav Evtimov Muchinov to turn the problem into the topic of his work, which he presented to us as a dissertation for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor of Historical Sciences".

Following the imposed conceptual model, Assoc. prof. Muchinov defines as the main *goal* of this work the disclosure of the nature, features and trends in the development of urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule in the 19th century (until the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878). For the realization of this goal, Ventsislav Muchinov has identified the following main *tasks*:

1. Tracing the development of urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule at the end of the 18th and the first decades of the 19th century;

2. Clarifying the influence of the Tanzimat reforms on urbanization in the Bulgarian-populated provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century;

3. Study of the policies of the Ottoman rulers in the field of urbanization during the Tanzimat era.

In formulating the main goal of the study and the tasks to be performed in its realization, Assoc. prof. Muchinov is based on the *achievements in the specific scientific field*, demonstrating

enviable knowledge. With due respect, he refers to the results of all our authors who have created research texts on the issues that interest him. At the same time, it shows a deep insight into the foreign language literature interpreting the problem. The systematization and critical interpretation of the available historiography become one of the main prerequisites for the broad aspect of the analysis carried out in the study.

The *source base* of the study represents a symbiosis between objectively interpreted and critically analyzed archival and published material and reveals the author's aspiration for maximum representativeness of the data available on the studied issue. The use of various types of sources, which mutually complement and correct each other, guarantees the necessary objectivity of the judgments carried out by Assoc. prof. Muchinov. The balance between the individual groups of sources has been measured, and in view of the nature of the research, the preponderance of statistical sources is logical.

In the process of work, Ventsislav Evtimov Muchinov follows the *methodological model* imposed in developments of this kind. At the same time, with the use of quantitative (quantitative) methods in the present work, it complements and builds on this model, expanding the field of its application. A circumstance whose combination with the appropriate use of various analytical tools increases the quality of the results achieved.

The *selected structure* of the exposition - preface, introduction, two parts - with four and three chapters, respectively, conclusion, bibliography and list of abbreviations with a total volume of 284 pages, corresponds to the specific content of the work and turns out to be extremely productive.

The *preface* is structured in such a way that it successfully fulfills its textual and content functions.

In the *Introduction* "Urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule at the border of two eras (the end of the 18th - the first decades of the 19th century)" the author traces the impact of prolonged anarchy, wars, uprisings and the active migration movements caused by them on urbanization at that time on our lands. The general finding is that they influence the studied process in different directions. On the one hand, they lead to a delayed development of urbanization in the studied area, but especially in Danube Bulgaria - a circumstance whose consequences were visible even in the third quarter of the 19th century. On the other hand, they became a favorable base for the further development of urbanization in the Bulgarian-populated provinces of the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat era.

Part one **"Influence of Tanzimat reforms on urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule in the 19th century"** consists of four chapters, which sequentially trace

the impact on the process of researching the administrative-territorial organization of the Ottoman Empire, its economic development, the modernization of transport and communications and measures related to limiting the spread of epidemics and improving health care in the studied geographic space. The exposition presented in this part allows to establish the chronological dynamics of the commentary impacts on urbanization and to outline the specifics of their manifestation in the individual areas of the commentary geographical range. There is such an in-depth analysis of the factual material, allowing a detailed formulation of both the factors that led to the established state and the consequences of the realization of the specific event. The generalization of construction in this part of conclusions allows the conclusion that, in general, the changes that have occurred have a positive impact on the urbanization of the Bulgarian lands. At the same time, the urban way of life and the urban culture are gradually penetrating the rural areas from the exterior of the Bulgarian lands, selections for starting a change in the appearance of a number of settlements. However, most of the changes taking place in this regard have a long-term effect that goes beyond the scope of chronological range studies.

In the *second part*, **"Urbanization policy of the Ottoman power in the Bulgarian lands during the Tanzimat era"**, the main goals and directions in the urbanization policy of the Ottoman power in the Bulgarian lands during the reform era are outlined and the results achieved as a result of its implementation are analyzed. This is carried out in three thematically separated chapters sequentially tracing the formation of the modern Ottoman urbanization policy during the Tanzimat era and its first manifestations in the Bulgarian-populated provinces of the Ottoman Empire (until the vilayet reform of 1864), the policy of the Ottoman power for modernization and improvement of the cities in the Bulgarian lands in the 60s and 70s of the 19th century and the policy to increase the number of cities during this period in the studied space. From the analysis of the source material used in this part, it becomes clear that during the studied era, the Ottoman government implemented a policy in the Bulgarian lands, thanks to which the process of urbanization was activated in this vast part of the Ottoman possessions in the Balkans. At the same time, it is explicitly emphasized that the implementation of this policy faces various difficulties both of an administrative and financial nature. However, the successes achieved in this area are not few and in general provide very good opportunities for economic and social progress of our lands.

In the *conclusion* (marked in the paper as "Instead of a conclusion"), the pan-European dimensions and regional specifics of the urbanization of the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule on the eve of the Liberation are presented. When comparing the urbanization in our lands with the development of this process in other European countries in the 19th century, it is necessary to

state that the urbanization of the studied area during the studied period is gradually coming into sync with the general European trends. The analysis of the regional dimensions in the urbanization of the studied space allows to establish that, regardless of the differences in the regional levels, this process takes place in all areas of our country.

The material attached to the text - mainly in the form of tables and diagrams, enriches the idea of the outlined picture. It not only supports the perception of the verbal material, but can also be successfully used in another type of study of the considered process.

The scientific apparatus of the work is presented in a form corresponding to the established literary norm. The list of used literature is designed according to the requirements and is respectfully detailed.

Summarizing the review of the presented dissertation allows the finding that it contains a number of **contributions** that can be divided into the following main groups:

The first group of contributions is related to the *theoretical justification* of the problem set. The exceptional precision and depth of knowledge demonstrated by V. Muchinov in justifying the terms used in the work is impressive. The generalized presentation of the conceptual apparatus specific to the specific thematic area can become a reliable basis for any research dedicated to this type of problem.

The second group of contributions has a pronounced *methodological aspect* and is mostly reduced to the use by Assoc. prof. Muchinov in developing the topic of quantitative methods. His efforts in this direction make an impression against the background of the mass absence from the methodological arsenal of native historians of these specific methods, even in cases where the nature of the research necessarily requires it. It is about that part of the native historiographic class, which, behind the statement about the "abstractness of numbers and the results obtained from their analysis", tries to hide the ignorance of this specific research method and the positives of its application. Using part of the possibilities of quantitative methods, both in terms of the absolute values at his disposal and in relation to the calculated relative shares, Vencislav Muchinov increases the quality of the achieved results, reaching conclusions that would be difficult to formulate only on the basis of the analysis of the "qualitative signs" of the studied processes.

The third group of contributions is of an *empirical nature*. Here we have to refer:

1. The discovery and introduction into scientific circulation of a significant amount of unknown and little-known to native researchers archival and journalistic sources relating to research problems, available in our and foreign archives.

2. Summarizing all the available information, allowing the clarification of the nature and specificity of the urbanization taking place on the Bulgarian lands during the studied period.

The fourth group of contributions is *research*. They can be divided into several directions:

1. Posing problems that have not been worked out by Bulgarian historians, whose detailed study is yet to come:

- relating to establishing the orientation of the trend in the dynamics of urbanization in today's Bulgarian lands during the period from the beginning of the 19th century to the 1970s;

- related to revealing the pan-European and Balkan dimensions of urbanization in the studied space during the studied era;

- about the relationship between urbanization and the demographic development of the region during the studied period.

2. Detailed study of problems that, although raised earlier in native historiography, remain unexplored:

- about the stages in the urbanization of the Bulgarian lands during the studied era;

- about regional specifics in the level of urbanization in today's Bulgarian lands in the 19th century;

- about the nature of the urban network existing at that time in our lands and about its impact on the development of the entire studied space.

At the same time, I would like to make the following **recommendations** to the presented dissertation:

Regarding the *preparation of the paper for publication* as a monograph:

- in view of the purpose of the printed product for the mass reader, I recommend that the text be accompanied by a dictionary of obsolete and foreign words and a geographical index, which will facilitate the use of the presented material;

- supplementing the appendices to the text with map and photo material, which will further enrich the reader's understanding of the investigated processes and phenomena.

Regarding *future research* on the issues raised in the dissertation. In order to establish the general imperial parameters of the studied processes, it would be useful to compare the ones studied in the present work with identical ones taking place in other regions of the empire. This will allow to outline the role of our lands in the development of the then Ottoman Empire.

In conclusion, I would like to state that the *dissertation abstract* faithfully reproduces the main components of the exposition, convincingly systematizes the findings and conclusions, and highlights its most significant contributions.

With regard to the textological parameters of the work, I must emphasize that the exposition is in accordance with the linguistic and stylistic rules inherent in the normatively established Bulgarian language. The text is logically coherent and complete, and the style allows for easy comprehension.

On the subject of the dissertation, Assoc. Prof. Dr. V. Muchinov participated with reports in eight national and international *scientific forums*, prepared eleven *publications*, which were *cited* in fourteen monographs, studies and articles. Indicators that convince us that he fulfilled the *minimum requirements* approved by the BAS for acquiring the scientific degree "Doctor of Historical Sciences".

Dear colleagues, I am convinced that the research presented for discussion by Assoc. prof. Dr. Vencislav Evtimov Muchinov "Urbanization in the Bulgarian lands under Ottoman rule in the 19th century (until 1878)" has the qualities of a successful dissertation on the history of the Bulgarian lands during the Renaissance. The work is distinguished by an original concept, quality implementation and indisputable methodological and research contributions. The tasks indicated in the topic have been solved. The conclusions and conclusions made are successfully integrated into the modern knowledge of the history of Bulgaria, and the appropriate use of some of them would support the making of adequate management decisions related to the processes related to the territorial distribution of the country's population. The procedure for the preparation of the doctoral student meets the requirements of the RSARB and the Regulations for its implementation. The approved provisions in the Regulations for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" and the scientific degree "doctor of sciences" and the Rules for the work of scientific juries in the Institute of Higher Education at the BAS have been observed. In my capacity as a member of the Scientific Jury under the current procedure, I will confidently vote **"YES"** for the awarding of Assoc. prof. Dr. Vencislav Evtimov Muchinov the scientific degree "Doctor of Historical Sciences".

Sofia,
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