

Supervisor's Report

Author: Dušan Ljuboja

Master thesis: Town, canal, and region. The impact of drainage processes on the urban centrality of Sombor in the first half of the Nineteenth century

To be sure, I am not an urban historian. My field of research is rather South-Eastern European history of the 20th century. Therefore, my remarks and comments to Dušan's thesis are formulated from more general perspective.

The submitted Master thesis is erudite and documents pretty well that its author has managed to master the skills of historical inquiry. From heuristic point of view, he went through and perused a respectable number of archival materials, found in both Sombor's and Budapest's archives, and studied great amount of secondary literature. He summarized all the important that was written on subject in regional historiography as well as in literature on urban and overall developments in Hungarian kingdom. The theoretical framework leans on studies of such authors as Max Weber, Jan De Vries, Fernand Braudel, Christopher R. Friedrichs etc. In one word: the sources and relevant literature used by the author is a solid basis for analysis of the given topic and for the successful fulfilment of theoretical goals set up by him.

During Dušan's research stay and time he spent in Prague, I was, first, not so much convinced about the aims he wants to pursue in his work. I had an impression that Dušan has immersed himself too much in local history and paid only a very limited attention to broader contexts. Especially, I tried to persuade him to take physiocratic thoughts and general economic state policies into consideration. Finally, Dušan chose the urban centrality concept as a central notion of his approach. It enabled him to interpret the regional story of negotiations and conflicts on drainage endeavour and building of the canal in a broader perspective which shed more light on his topic. Yet, I have still some doubts, whether the urban centrality concept is the appropriate conceptual tool to explain the nature of the opposing attitudes of different agents in Sombor region. I believe that the town's representatives on one side and the nobility represented by the County on the other side were acting only with respect to their proper interests. There were only the state bodies which were aware of a long-term vision that could bring benefits to all sides. Hence, I assume that the role played by the town in this overall process was rather impeding. It behaved according to the patterns of feudal system. So, the incentive force for a progressive change was neither the town and its "bourgeois" elite, or the processes "from below" caused by the activity of the local urban community, but by centralizing state. Therefore, I am asking myself, whether one should start with analysing the governmental state bodies and its representatives. To support this doubt, it could be possible to inspect other secondary sources, most notably the works of Charles Tilly or Stein Rokkan on the building of nation-states.

The structure of the thesis is rational and coherent. In the introduction and the chapter on theoretical background, the author clearly explains his approach and defines his goals which are examined and solved in a logical order in the following chapters. Maybe, the way how the partial problems are traced in subchapters could be linked more explicitly to the central

questions of the thesis. In some subchapters, like in the last one on the role of experts, the description of the facts is linked very loosely to the main theme.

I do not dare to evaluate the English orthographical and stylistic quality. It seems to me that Dušan is able to write in a cultivated academic style, even though I would prefer to use shorter sentences. I do not have any objections regarding the terminology. It was only surprising to me that the transcriptions of Serbian titles are adapted phonetically according to English pronunciation. I have never seen it before in English academic writings. At the same time, the Serbian topography in Latin script is used.

To conclude, Master thesis of Dušan Ljuboja is a valuable contribution to the research concerning the urban development and drainage processes in Southern Hungary, nowadays Serbian Vojvodina. Especially, it is valuable within the context of regional history, but it also helps us to understand more clearly the processes of economic modernization, rationalization, agricultural cultivation and urbanization as well. As I have remarked above, the concept of urban centrality seems to me not to be a very useful conceptually, but on the other hand it makes still the structure of the thesis quite coherent. The thesis is a result of patient research and evidences author's historical skills.

Therefore, I can fully recommend the thesis for defence and I propose to classify it with the mark "excellent" (Czech grade "one", Hungarian grade "Five").

Prague, 17 June 2017.

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