

OPINION

for the dissertation

Swimming against the tide:

Bulgarian textile crafts and their growth into a factory industry, 1800-1912

**of Martin Ivanov, PhD for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science",
Professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Sociology)**

from

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Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", member of the scientific jury approved by the Rector
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The dissertation is rare and without exaggeration, exceptional in its genre, because it presents both an analysis of the problem - that of the one-century transformation of textile crafts into an industry at the transition of two political periods in Bulgarian lands (19-20 century), but also direct access to the processed and systematized primary data on which the analysis is based. A reflection of this atypical approach of the presented work can be found in the structure of the content, which is balanced between the presented analysis, spread over about two hundred pages and the many annexes with processed primary data and cited sources and literature presented on about three hundred pages. This thorough approach to data is an illustration of the author's academic commitment to quantitative methods, and their application is on the basis of many of the contributions of the presented dissertation.

The merits of the presented research are many, but from a sociological point of view, the developed methodological approach seems to me to be the most significant. Here I will mention mainly the three pillars on which it is built. First of all, this is the successful attempt to make sense of the processes taking place in the Bulgarian lands in the 19th century not through the prism of political, ecclesiastical and educational struggles, but by analysing the economic processes, focusing on the most complex, heterogeneous, economic and socially the most significant group of textile-related crafts. In this way, the state of craftsmanship, its adaptability to external economic and political processes and its internal structure are shown simultaneously by its transformation from a "custom craft" into a "commodity-producing craft" (Hadjiiski 1995), by the demise of handicraft practices and / or the emergence of new

models and their coexistence with inherited ones. The period, known in historiography as the 'Bulgarian Revival', became recognizable through the economic and labor processes that took place in that time. In this way, the presented work represents a serious critique of the dominant conceptualisation of the 'Bulgarian Revival' in the mainstream historical literature.

The second aspect of the approach suggest to consider the development of crafts not as a direct consequence of political processes, but as having their own internal logic, as an autonomous and independent sphere of public life. These two aspects of the methodological approach allow Assoc. Prof. Ivanov to formulate a clear and well-defended thesis in the dissertation, namely that the first wave of modernization of crafts *"is not only longer (ends somewhere around the First World War, not with the Liberation) , but at the same time contradictory, hiding many "dark sides", underwater reefs and risks. "(p. 6).*

The author does not enter into a discussion of the concepts of modernity and modernization, which he uses repeatedly, but the justification of the methodological approach through the secularization of economic and labor activities on the example of crafts and their emancipation as an independent sphere in public life, aside from political processes argue convincingly the use of both concepts.

The third pillar of the approach is based on the analysis of craftsmanship not as an isolated, local and "internal" case, but as inscribed in global processes taking place in Europe and beyond. The author refers to the thesis of "de-industrialization" (pp. 6-7), which in the Far East - the object of colonization - leads to the decline of textile crafts that fail to industrialize, but fall under the pressure of imported industrial goods. M. Ivanov claims that in the Bulgarian lands there is a non-linear process describing a U-shaped curve, in which de-industrialization is temporary and partial, and in addition there is a clear process of industrialization and subsequent of re-industrialization of the textile crafts. In the historiography dedicated to textile crafts in the Bulgarian lands in the 19th century, the thesis that crafts did not die after the end of the Russo-Turkish War is not new. It has been formulated by Iv. Hadjiiski (1995: 145-190), although without referring to the concept of de-industrialization, still undeveloped at the time he wrote and without exploring the transformation of crafts into an industry. However, M. Ivanov did not enter into a dialogue with Hadjiiski, which would only be in favor of the dissertation to show the upgrading and development of this thesis, with its focus on the re-industrialization of crafts. Thus, the fifth contribution of the dissertation (Abstract, p. 45), related to the thesis of nonlinearity, would sound even more convincing.

The concept of de-industrialization was introduced by understanding it as a decline in the labor force in artisanal and industrial production (p. 7), but so it is detached from the context in which it was originally elaborated – the colonization. However, the comparison of crafts in the colonial context with the context of the Ottoman Empire in its last century and the foundation of the new Bulgarian state, precisely through the prism of de-industrialization, is missing. Thus, the chance was missed to upgrade and further develop this concept in order to become not just an indicator to measure the fluctuations of the employed workforce, but an useful explanatory model. In this sense, the third pillar of the methodological model in the dissertation is very important because it "de-provincializes" the subject of research and opens doors for both significant theoretical reconstructions and comparative studies of crafts in different political contexts. However, it remains largely undeveloped. This remark should not be construed as a critique because it refers to the stated but unfulfilled ambition of the study, which, however, does not impair the coherent relationship between stated objectives, recorded data and analysis. The note should be understood as an invitation to supplement in the future this remaining element of the methodological model.

The conducted analysis, based mainly on the first two pillars of the model, is completely coherent and actually manages to show the differentiation of crafts as an independent social sphere, having its own logic of development. To this end, Chapter One focuses on the emancipation of crafts as an independent economic sphere, following its internal logic of development, but also beginning to influence the socio-economic processes on the territory. The second chapter focuses on the so-called "depression" in which textile crafts fall, which is affected not only by the political changes that have taken place, but also by the degree of development of the crafts themselves. However, the "depression" turned out to be only a step backwards, not an end to the development of textile crafts. It seems to pave the way for the transformation of crafts into industry - a process that Assoc. Prof. Ivanov calls re-industrialization. These two chapters fully follow the methodological model stated in the Introduction and are an example of research sensitivity and rigor. I would define the third chapter as the most sociological one, because it gives social density to the processes described in the first two chapters, speaks the language of the actors, enters their biographies, carefully searched and systematized, based on numerous sources. This gives me reason to fully support the contribution of the dissertation presented under number 8 (Abstract, p. 46). It seems to me that this chapter makes the study genuinely interdisciplinary, situated at the crossroads between history, sociology and economics.

At the same time, the dissertation would only gain sociological density if the key concepts in it such as a-synchronicity (replaced by the successful metaphor of "swimming against the tide"), de-industrialization and others, were further developed, linked in a common conceptual model reflecting different aspects of the studied processes. This would allow researchers to cite this work in order to refer not only to the presented rich empirical material and the stated theses, but also to its conceptual tools.

In conclusion, I fully support and vote in favor of the award of the degree of Doctor of Science in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Martin Ivanov.

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