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Assessment of the Population of Medium and Small Towns of Europe in the Last Quarter of the 19th Century in the Works by Professor Alexander Georg Supan

Abstract: This article highlights the results of an assessment of population dynamics in medium and small towns in Europe in the years 1875, 1880, 1890, and 1904. These data were presented by Alexander Georg Supan (1847–1920) in his “Lehrbuch der Geographie nach den Principien der neueren Wissenschaft für österreichische Mittelschulen und verwandte Lehranstalten sowie zum Selbstunterrichte” (“Textbook of Geography for Austrian Middle Schools and Related Institutions, as Well as Self-Instruction”), published in the second (1875), fourth (1880), seventh (1890), and eleventh (1904) editions. Particular emphasis is placed on the fact that over the last quarter of the 19th century, the number of medium-populated towns exceeded a fifth of all European cities while small towns comprised a tenth. The article presents the population dynamics of 131 medium-sized towns in Europe in 1875, 1880, 1890, and 1904. It also establishes that medium towns were more typical of Austria-Hungary and Germany than other European countries.

Key words: Alexander Georg Supan; population, medium and small towns of Europe; 1875–1904

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INTRODUCTION

A prominent European scholar-geographer of Slovenian origin, Alexander Georg Supan (1847–1920), was born in Innigen (San Candido) (Tyrol, Austria, now the municipality of Bolzano/Bocen, Italy). He studied in Graz, Vienna, Halle, and Leipzig. From 1877, he worked in Chernivtsi as a high school teacher and private associate professor, and from 1880 to 1884 he was a professor of geography at Chernivtsi University. After 1909, Supan was a professor at the University of Wrocław, where the 50th anniversary of his doctorate was celebrated on 4 February 1920 (Dem ordentlichen Professor..., 1920). He died in July 1920 and was buried in Wrocław.

Professor Alexander Supan was the author of numerous famous works in the fields of physics, economics, political geography, geology, climatology, geomorphology, oceanology, geographical country studies, and school and university geography. According to Cigale and Ogrin, in the first five years of Alexander Supan's work as editor-in-chief of the prestigious world journal "Dr. A. Petermanns Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes' geographischer Anstalt," from 1884 to 1889, he published individually about 2,000 abstracts in this journal, and 100 to 120 abstracts per year thereafter (Cigale & Ogrin, 2016: 146). The most famous works of the scientist, developed at the University of Chernivtsi, include: "Grundzüge der physischen Erdkunde" ("Basics of Physical Geography") (Supan, 1884); "Leitlinien der allgemeinen politischen geographie. Naturlehre des Staates" ("Guidelines of General Political Geography. Natural Philosophy of States") (Supan, 1918); "Österreich-Ungarn. Länderkunde von Europa" ("Austria-Hungary. Regional Geography of Europe") (Supan, 1889); and "Die Territoriale Entwicklung der europäischen Kolonien" ("The Territorial Development of European Colonies") (Supan, 1906).

Supan's legacy in the field of geography has been studied by Wagner (1920), Beck (1972), Dietrich (1921), Melik (1935, 1936), Kranjec (1963, 1971), Ilešič (1928, 1969), Hwang (2011), Cigale and Ogrin (2016), Rudenko and Bilous (2022), and others.

The scientist's works in the fields of geography and pedagogy are also very significant. These are primarily geography textbooks, which the scholar worked on writing and improving throughout his entire life (Supan, 1874, 1875, 1878, 1880, 1883, etc.). Undoubtedly, the most important among them is the "Lehrbuch der Geographie nach den Principien der neueren Wissenschaft für österreichische Mittelschulen" ("Textbook of Geography According to the Principles of Modern Science for Austrian Secondary Schools," referred to below simply as "Textbook of Geography"), which was first published in Ljubljana (Laibach) in 1874 (Supan, 1874). Between its first publication and 1904, this textbook went through 11 editions, incorporating additions and improvements by the author. According to WorldCat (the world's largest bibliographic database), it was published 19 times during this period (WorldCat, 2022). In 1911 and 1913, together with Rothaug, Supan published the 12th completely revised edition of the textbook in accordance with the requirements of the new school curriculum (Supan & Rothaug, 1911, 1913). Thus, Supan's Textbook of Geography was written and progressively developed over the course of 40 years of his professional life.

During this lifetime, Supan was recognised as a leading geographer and educator. He was elected as a Member of the German Academic Society Leopoldina, was awarded honorary membership of geographical societies in Munich, Hamburg, Vienna, Amsterdam, Rome and London, and was a member of geographical societies in Paris and Leipzig. In 1904 he was awarded a Cothenius-Medaille, and in 1906 he received a Franz von Hauer-Medaille (Kopke, 2012, p. 51).

Among numerous geographical issues of contemporary relevance that were discussed by Supan in his published works are the development of urban populations around the world, and the density, place and significance of these populations in national and continental economies. Supan paid particular attention to European cities, especially medium-populated and small towns.

Consequently, *the main objective of this study* is to analyse the population dynamics of medium and small towns in Europe in the period 1875 to 1904 based on Supan's materials as presented in the various editions of his Textbook of Geography. It should be noted that, since the textbook was intended to teach geography to "lower" school

classes, Supan did not assign a task to familiarise school students with historical or existing theories of the development of cities and their various types. Instead, the evolution of cities through pre-industrial, industrial, and modern stages – through, for example, the phases of ancient city, medieval city, “ideal city” of the Renaissance, industrial city, and modern city – were raised only fleetingly and partially. Although not directly and systematically addressed by Supan, these evolutionary stages are nonetheless discernible from the content of the Textbook of Geography.

METHODS

The analysis in this paper of the population dynamics of medium and small European towns in the last quarter of the 19th century draws on historical, geographical, and statistical methods of research. It relies primarily on the materials of Supan that are presented in the second (1875), fourth (1880), seventh (1890), and eleventh (1904) editions of his Textbook of Geography (Supan, 1875, 1880, 1890, 1904).

A thorough perusal of this work reveals that Supan investigated 315 European cities in the 1875 edition, 285 cities in the fourth edition in 1880, 311 cities in the seventh edition in 1890, and 220 cities in the eleventh edition in 1904. It is important to recognise that he did not study all cities consistently and systematically throughout the entire 30-year period of our assessment. Lesser-known cities, which did not play an important role in the social development of European countries, often fell outside of Supan’s scope. This was largely due to rapid population growth and ongoing variation in the number of settlements classified as cities, large cities, and largest cities. The numbers of medium and small towns assessed by him were significantly reduced for the same reasons (for more details, see Marschalck, 1984; Reulecke, 1985; Lefebvre, 1972, and others).

From a methodological point of view, it is crucial to consider the approach taken to classification of cities by researchers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time, there was no generally accepted typological classification of cities by population size among scholars. Let us consider the approaches generally applied by those involved. One approach is exemplified by the likes of Teuteberg, Krabbe, and Lampard when analysing the development of cities in the late 19th and early 20th century. These scholars classified large cities as those with more than 100,000 residents (Teuteberg, 1991; Krabbe, 1989; Lampard, 2017). Pokrovsky referred to settlements with a population of one million residents or more as large cities (Pokrovskiy, 1897: 4), while Voeikov considered a population of 20,000 people to be the general minimum for “real cities” (Voyeikov, 1906). For the purposes of our analysis, we have used the typology proposed by Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky in the early 20th century, who distinguished between (Semyonov-Tian-Shanskiy, 1910: 195–201):

1. settlements – 1,000 to 5,000 residents;
2. small towns – 5,000 to 10,000 residents;
3. medium towns – 10,000 to 40,000 residents;
4. cities – 40,000 to 100,000 residents;
5. large cities – 100,000 to 1 million residents;
6. capital cities – over 1 million residents.

Korduba (Korduba, 1912) and the authors of “Andrees Allgemeiner Handatlas” (1899) adopted similar approaches to that taken by Semyonov-Tian-Shanskiy. We have

thus applied the following classification in our analysis of the population dynamics of European cities in the last quarter of the 19th century (based on Supan's studies):

1. small towns – up to 20,000 residents;
2. medium towns – 20,000 to 40,000 residents;
3. cities – 40,000 to 100,000 residents;
4. large cities – 100,000 to 500,000 residents;
5. largest cities – 500,000 to 1 million residents;
6. capital cities – over 1 million residents.

OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSION

Each of the categories of European cities explored by Supan in the various editions of his Textbook of Geography (Supan, 1875, 1880, 1890, 1904) certainly warrants thorough analysis and synthesis. A significant place among those studied was occupied by small cities with populations of up to 20,000, and medium cities with between 20,000 and 40,000 inhabitants. For example, of the 315 European towns assessed by Supan in the second edition of 1875, 75 (23.8%) were regarded as medium in terms of their population size, and 54 (17.1%) were classified as small (see Table 1). In the 1880 edition, 84 (29.5%) of the 285 towns described were medium, and 26 (9.1%) were small. Due primarily to extensive development of industry in cities and large cities, the proportion of medium and small towns declined alongside the growth of the total urban population. In 1890, medium and small towns comprised 21.5% and 11.3% respectively, declining to 14.1% and 9.5% respectively by 1904 (see Table 1). Overall, in the last quarter of the 19th century, the proportion of medium towns in Europe exceeded 22.7%, and small cities comprised approximately 12.0 % (see Table 2).

Table 1. Percentage of medium and small towns of Europe in terms of their population size among all the cities studied by A. Supan in the last quarter of the 19th century

Group (category) of cities	Years, the share by the number of cities is the numerator, and the population of cities is the denominator, %				1904 p. compared to 1875 p., %
	1875	1880	1890	1904	
Small		$\frac{9.1}{0.9}$	$\frac{11.3}{1.3}$	$\frac{9.5}{0.6}$	$\frac{55.6}{25.0}$
Midsized	$\frac{23.8}{6.2}$	$\frac{29.5}{7.8}$	$\frac{21.5}{5.1}$	$\frac{14.1}{1.9}$	$\frac{59.2}{30.6}$
Total	$\frac{40.9}{8.5}$	$\frac{38.6}{8.7}$	$\frac{32.8}{6.4}$	$\frac{23.6}{2.5}$	$\frac{57.7}{29.4}$

Source: own calculation

It is also informative to consider how many people lived in medium and small towns in Europe. According to Supan's 1875 edition, about 1.91 million people lived in medium-sized European towns, and 0.73 million lived in small ones. Thereafter, the relative size of the populations of medium and small towns declined. This was primarily due to the fact that small and medium towns grew at a rapid pace, shifting many settlements into the category of cities and large cities. According to Supan, 16 small towns moved into

the category of medium towns during the period between 1875 and 1904, and two small towns became cities (Przemysl, Moravian Ostrava). During the same period, 41 medium towns joined the category of cities, and three medium towns – Mannheim, Zurich, and Basel – entered the group of large cities (over 100,000 people). In all, population growth altered the classificatory status of almost one-third of small and medium European towns in the last quarter of the 19th century.

In conclusion, taking population figures in 1875 as the baseline, the population of small and medium towns in Europe collectively increased to 105% between 1875 and 1880, and then declined to 92% and 45% in 1890 and 1904 respectively (see Table 2).

Table 2. Total population numbers in medium (20,000–40,000 residents) and small (up to 20,000 residents) towns of Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century, as assessed by A. Supan

Group (category) of cities	Years, the share by the number of cities is the numerator, and the population of cities is the denominator, %				1904 p. compared to 1875 p., %
	1875	1880	1890	1904	
Small		$\frac{9.1}{0.9}$	$\frac{11.3}{1.3}$	$\frac{9.5}{0.6}$	$\frac{55.6}{25.0}$
Midsized	$\frac{23.8}{6.2}$	$\frac{29.5}{7.8}$	$\frac{21.5}{5.1}$	$\frac{14.1}{1.9}$	$\frac{59.2}{30.6}$
Total	$\frac{40.9}{8.5}$	$\frac{38.6}{8.7}$	$\frac{32.8}{6.4}$	$\frac{23.6}{2.5}$	$\frac{57.7}{29.4}$

Source: own calculation

Supan's assessment of the development of population size in certain towns in the period between 1875 and 1904 is of significance for present-day researchers with an interest in the population dynamics of medium-sized European towns. Figures are provided in Table 3. In our view, diagrams or diagrammatic maps are ill-suited to displaying these figures due to their tendency to generalise data. Presentation of the data in a simple matrix format, as we have done in Table 3, preserves their precision and ensures their availability in the original form for future historical and geographical studies of population dynamics.

The Table includes all European towns whose population ranged from 20,000 to 40,000 in at least one of the selected time periods (1875, 1880, 1890, or 1904). Settlements with a larger or smaller population size were excluded from the analysis as these did not meet the population criteria for classification as "medium towns." With these qualifications in mind, Supan's work identified 131 medium towns in Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century with populations of 20,000 to 40,000 thousand people. Certain significant changes can be deduced from the figures in Tables 2 and 3. The number of medium towns in Europe initially increased from 75 settlements with a total of 1.91 million inhabitants in 1875 to 84 such towns with a total population of 2.48 million in 1880. Thereafter, the number of medium towns began to decline, with only 67 medium towns inhabited by 1.95 million people in 1890, and only 31 towns with 0.91 million inhabitants in 1904. It is interesting to note that in the period studied by Supan, the category of "medium towns" included what are now such well-known capital cities as Sofia, Belgrade, Athens, Bern, Laibach (Ljubljana), Agram (Zagreb), and Sarajevo.

Table 3. Population size of medium (20,000–40,000 residents) towns of Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century, as assessed by A. Supan (Supan, 1875, 1880, 1890, 1904)

No	City	Years, urban population (thousand people)			
		1875	1880	1890	1904
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Sofia	–	–	30,0	–
2	Philippopol (Plovdiv, Bulgaria)	–	–	33,0	–
3	Belgrade	–	–	33,0	–
4	Athens	44,0	40,0	85,0	110,0
5	Parma	45,0	40,0	–	–
6	Pisa	50,0	40,0	–	–
7	Porto	43,0	40,0	–	–
8	Nizhny Novgorod	40,0	40,0	70,0	–
9	Voronezh	41,0	40,0	60,0	–
10	Elbing (Elbbag, Poland)	33,0	30,0	38,0	–
11	Tilsit (Sovetsk, Russia)	20,0	–	–	–
12	Bromberg (Bydgoszcz, Poland)	27,0	30,0	36,0	–
13	Rottweil (Germany)	21,0	–	–	–
14	Spandau	20,0	30,0	32,0	65,0
15	Potsdam	44,0	40,0	51,0	60,0
16	Brandenburg	26,0	30,0	33,0	–
17	Guben	21,0	–	–	–
18	Stralsund	26,0	30,0	–	–
19	Neisse (Nusa, Poland)	20,0	–	–	–
20	Köningshütte (Chorzow, Poland)	–	–	32,0	–
21	Liegnitz (Legnica, Poland)	26,0	30,0	43,0	–
22	Halberstadt	25,0	30,0	34,0	–
23	Nordhausen	21,0	–	–	–
24	Kiel	21,0	40,0	52,0	122,0
25	Hildesheim	20,0	–	–	–
26	Osnabrück	23,0	30,0	36,0	–
27	Münster	24,0	30,0	44,0	64,0
28	Bielefeld	21,0	30,0	35,0	63,0
29	Hagen	–	–	30,0	67,0
30	Bochum	21,0	30,0	41,0	66,0
31	Hanau	20,0	–	–	–
32	Wiesbaden	35,0	40,0	55,0	86,0
33	Duisburg	30,0	40,0	48,0	93,0
34	Reimscheid	22,0	30,0	34,0	–
35	Koblenz	33,0	30,0	32,0	–
36	Bonn	26,0	30,0	36,0	–
37	Trier	21,0	30,0	–	–
38	Gladbach	26,0	30,0	44,0	–
39	Glauchau	22,0	–	–	–
40	Zwickau	27,0	30,0	39,0	–
41	Plauen	23,0	30,0	43,0	74,0
42	Freiberg	21,0	–	–	–

43	Gotha	20,0	-	34,0	-
44	Altenburg	20,0	-	-	-
45	Schwerin	26,0	30,0	32,0	-
46	Rostock	31,0	30,0	39,0	-
47	Lübeck	40,0	40,0	55,0	82,0
48	Darmstadt	39,0	40,0	43,0	72,0
49	Offenbach am Main	22,0	30,0	32,0	-
50	<i>Regensburg</i>	36,0	30,0	36,0	-
51	<i>Bamberg</i>	25,0	30,0	32,0	-
52	Würzburg	40,0	40,0	55,0	75,0
53	Fürth	24,0	30,0	35,0	-
54	Kaiserslautern	-	-	31,0	-
55	Freiburg	24,0	30,0	41,0	62,0
56	Karlsruhe	36,0	40,0	61,0	97,0
57	<i>Heidelberg</i>	21,0	-	-	-
58	Mannheim	39,0	50,0	61,0	141,0
59	Colmar (France)	23,0	-	-	-
60	Leiden (Netherlands)	40,0	40,0	40,0	-
61	<i>Arnhem</i>	-	40,0	48,0	-
62	<i>Groningen</i>	-	40,0	53,0	-
63	Tourcoing (France)	43,0	40,0	60,0	-
64	Caen	41,0	-	40,0	-
65	<i>Dijon</i>	42,0	40,0	60,0	-
66	Besançon	49,0	40,0	60,0	-
67	Troyes	-	40,0	50,0	-
68	Bourges	-	-	40,0	-
69	Zürich	-	20,0	30,0	151,0
70	Basel	44,0	40,0	70,0	110,0
71	Bern	-	40,0	50,0	65,0
72	Lausanne	-	-	30,0	-
73	St. Gallen	-	-	20,0	-
74	<i>Wiener Neustadt</i>	19,0	20,0	24,0	29,0
75	Linz	33,0	30,0	45,0	69,0
76	Salzburg	20,0	20,0	27,0	33,0
77	<i>Marburg</i>	13,0	10,0	18,0	25,0
78	<i>Klagenfurt</i>	15,0	15,0	19,0	24,0
79	Laibach (Ljubljana, Slovenia)	-	-	28,0	37,0
80	Innsbruck	23,0	20,0	32,0	47,0
81	Trient (Trento, Italy)	17,0	20,0	20,0	14,0
82	Gorz (Gorizia, Italy)	16,0	15,0	21,0	25,0
83	Pola (Pula, Croatia)	10,0	10,0	25,0	36,0
84	Budweis (Česke Budějovice, Czechia)	17,0	20,0	24,0	39,0
85	Pilsen	23,0	20,0	48,0	68,0
86	Eger (Hungary)	13,0	10,0	16,0	21,0
87	Teplitz	11,0	10,0	17,0	24,0
88	Auffach (Austria)	10,0	10,0	16,0	29,0
89	Warnsdorf (Czechia)	13,0	10,0	15,0	21,0

90	Reichenberg	22,0	20,0	31,0	34,0
91	Prosnitz (Prostejov, Czechia)	15,0	15,0	18,0	24,0
92	<i>Iglau</i>	20,0	20,0	23,0	24,0
93	Olmütz (Olomouc, Czechia)	15,0	15,0	20,0	22,0
94	Troppau (Opava, Czechia)	20,0	20,0	22,0	34,0
95	Bielitz (Bielsko-Biala, Poland)	10,0	10,0	13,0	25,0
96	Tarnau (Tarnow, Poland)	22,0	20,0	25,0	32,0
97	Przemyśl	15,0	15,0	22,0	46,0
98	Jaroslau	11,0	10,0	12,0	23,0
99	Drohobych	17,0	20,0	16,0	19,0
100	Stanisławów (Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine)	14,0	10,0	19,0	30,0
101	Stryi	–	–	–	23,0
102	Kolomyia	17,0	20,0	23,0	34,0
103	Tarnopol	20,0	20,0	29,0	30,0
104	Brody	18,0	20,0	20,0	17,0
105	Chernivtsi	34,0	30,0	52,0	68,0
106	<i>Oldenburg (Germany)</i>	21,0	20,0	23,0	–
107	Raab (Austria)	20,0	20,0	21,0	–
108	Weißenburg	22,0	20,0	26,0	30,0
109	Fünfkirchen (Pecs, Hungary)	23,0	20,0	29,0	42,0
110	Czegled (Cegled, Hungary)	22,0	20,0	25,0	–
111	Nagy-Koros	20,0	–	–	–
112	Kecskemét	41,0	40,0	45,0	57,0
113	Zombor (Sombor, Serbia)	24,0	20,0	25,0	–
114	Neusaess (Germany)	19,0	–	21,0	–
115	Zenta (Serbia)	20,0	–	21,0	–
116	Kaschau (Kosice, Slovakia)	21,0	20,0	26,0	36,0
117	Mischkolz	21,0	20,0	24,0	41,0
118	Nyíregyháza	–	–	–	32,0
119	<i>Erlau (Germany)</i>	19,0	20,0	21,0	–
120	Oradea (Romania)	28,0	30,0	31,0	47,0
121	Arad (Romania)	32,0	30,0	36,0	54,0
122	Csaba (Bekescsaba, Hungary)	30,0	–	–	37,0
123	Timișoara	32,0	30,0	34,0	50,0
124	<i>Werschetz (Vrsac, Serbia)</i>	21,0	20,0	22,0	–
125	Hermannstadt (Sibiu, Romania)	–	20,0	19,0	–
126	Kronstadt (Brasov, Romania)	–	30,0	30,0	35,0
127	Klausenburg (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)	26,0	30,0	30,0	47,0
128	<i>Agram (Zagreb, Croatia)</i>	20,0	20,0	28,0	58,0
129	Fiume (Rijeka, Croatia)	13,0	10,0	21,0	38,0
130	Osijek (Croatia)	17,0	20,0	18,0	23,0
131	Sarajevo	–	50,0	26,0	42,0

Source: own calculation

From economic and geographical points of view, it is important to trace changes in the population size of medium towns in certain European countries. As can be seen from Table 4, in the last quarter of the 19th century, medium towns (20,000 to 40,000

people) were most typical in Austria-Hungary. The total number of medium towns in Austria-Hungary constituted more than a third of all European medium-sized towns in 1875, about 40% of such towns in 1880, and more than half in 1890. By 1904, all European medium towns were concentrated in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Noteworthy also is that a significant proportion of Europe's medium towns – or approximately 40% – were also concentrated in Germany between 1875–1904.

Table 4. Total amount of population in medium (20,000–40,000 residents) towns of the European states in the last quarter of the 19th century (Supan, 1875, 1880, 1890, 1904)

	Years, number of cities (units) - numerator, population of cities (thousands of people) - denominator				
	1875	1880	1890	1904	1875–1904 average
Germany	$\frac{46}{1188.0}$	$\frac{33}{1070.0}$	$\frac{21}{718.0}$	-	$\frac{25}{744.0}$
France	-	$\frac{4}{160.0}$	$\frac{2}{80.0}$	-	$\frac{2}{60.0}$
Switzerland	-	$\frac{3}{100.0}$	$\frac{3}{80.0}$	-	$\frac{2}{45.0}$
Austro-Hungary	$\frac{27}{640.0}$	$\frac{35}{790.0}$	$\frac{37}{936.0}$	$\frac{31}{909.0}$	$\frac{33}{818.8}$
Other states	$\frac{2}{80.0}$	$\frac{9}{360.0}$	$\frac{4}{136.0}$	-	$\frac{4}{144.0}$
Total	$\frac{75}{1908.0}$	$\frac{84}{2480.0}$	$\frac{67}{1950.0}$	$\frac{31}{909.0}$	$\frac{64}{1811.08}$

Source: own calculation

The comprehensive data presented here is drawn directly and solely from the meticulous work of Supan, who has undoubtedly enriched geographical education and science through his comprehensive assessment of the population dynamics of medium and small towns in Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century.

CONCLUSIONS

Alexander Georg Supan's geographical and pedagogical legacy warrants comprehensive scholarly investigation by contemporary scientists and educators.

Supan's assessment of population change in small and medium towns in Europe, as reflected in the four editions of his Textbook published between 1875 and 1904, clearly shows a decrease in both the number and population size of such settlements in the last quarter of the 19th century. He identified 131 medium-sized European towns with populations of between 20,000 and 40,000 residents in at least one of the four time periods he studied (1875, 1880, 1890, or 1904). Austria-Hungary and Germany had larger numbers of medium cities than any other territories.

Supan's scrupulous and extensive work on the populations of medium and small towns in Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century provides an excellent basis for efforts by present-day scientists to continue the tradition of historic-geographical urban studies at a pan-European level, which would, in turn, reveal new patterns of urban settlement in this part of the world.

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