

Artículo de investigación

## Russian power and the colonists-mennonites in the second half of the eighteenth century: colonization policy and practices

El poder ruso y los colonistas-mennonitas en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII: política de colonización y prácticas

Poder do russo e os colonistas-mennonitas na segunda metade do século XVIII: política e práticas de colonização

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### Abstract

The relevance of a studied problem is caused by the need of researching the realization of the colonization policy of the government in the second half of the 18th century that gives the opportunity to define the contribution of various ethnic - confessional groups to the land development of the Russian Empire. The article is devoted to the history of the invitation of the colonists (Mennonites) to Russia for the settlement in the Ekaterinoslav's vicegerency. The article presents the main directions of the colonization policy of Catherine II, shows the colonizing activities of G. Potemkin in the Ekaterinoslav's vicegerency reflects the implementation of the colonization policy towards Mennonite society. The authors showed that the activity of the Mennonites in the promotion of their claims to the most advantageous conditions of their arrangement in Russia led to the adoption of a decree that sanctioned special privileges and privileges for them. The article defines the importance of meeting the Russian Empress and Mennonite deputies, which led to a serious result – the announcement made by the Russian government to the Mennonite society in Danzig at the end of December 1787. This document authorized the arrival of the Mennonites to Russia, it determined the conditions for their invitation. Thus, the authors showed that an important factor in the

### Resumen

La relevancia de un problema estudiado se debe a la necesidad de investigar la realización de la política de colonización del gobierno en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII, que brinda la oportunidad de definir la contribución de varios grupos etno - confesionales al desarrollo de la tierra del país Imperio. El artículo está dedicado a la historia de la invitación de los colonos (menonitas) a Rusia para el asentamiento en la vicegerencia de Ekaterinoslavsk. El artículo presenta las principales direcciones de la política de colonización de Catalina II, muestra las actividades de colonización de G. Potemkin en la vicegerencia de Ekaterinoslavsk refleja la implementación de la política de colonización hacia la sociedad menonita. Los autores demostraron que la actividad de los menonitas en la promoción de sus reclamos a las condiciones más ventajosas de su arreglo en Rusia condujo a la adopción de un decreto que les sancionó privilegios y privilegios especiales. El artículo define la importancia de conocer a la emperatriz rusa y los diputados menonitas, lo que condujo a un resultado serio: el anuncio hecho por el gobierno ruso a la sociedad menonita en Danzig a fines de diciembre de 1787. Este documento autoriza la llegada de los menonitas a Rusia, determinó las condiciones para su invitación. Por lo tanto, los autores demostraron que un factor importante en la

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arrival of the Mennonite colonists in Russia was their communication with the Russian authorities.

**Keywords:** colonists, settlers, colonization policy, Mennonites, Mennonite community, land development, Ekaterinoslav's vicegerency.

Llegada de los colonos menonitas en Rusia fue su comunicación con las autoridades rusas.

**Palabras claves:** Colonos, colonos, política de colonización, menonitas, comunidad menonita, desarrollo de tierras, vicegerencia de Ekaterinoslavsk.

## Resumo

A relevância de um problema estudado é a necessidade de investigar a realização da política de colonização do governo na segunda metade do século XVIII, que brinda a oportunidade de definir a contribuição de vários grupos etno - confessionales al desarrollo de la tierra del país Imperio. O artigo é dedicado à história da invitación dos colonos (menonitas) a Rússia para o asentamiento na vitória de Ekaterinoslavsk. O artigo apresenta as direções principais da política de colonização de Catalina II, realiza as actividades de colonização de G. Potemkin na vitória de Ekaterinoslavsk, ajuda a implementar a política de colonização da sociedade civil. Los autores demostraron que a atividade de menonitas na promoção de suas respostas às condições mais ventajosas de su arreglo em Rusia condujo a adoption de un decreto que les sancionó privilegios y privilegios especiales. El artículo define a importância de se comunicar com a polícia sobre a mulher e os homens hospitalizados, ao contrário de um ano consecutivo: o anuncio foi introduzido pelo governo ruso à sociedade civilizada em Danzig às multas de dezembro de 1787. Este documento autoriza la llegada de los menonitas a Rusia, determinó as condições para sua invitación. Por favor, los autores demostraron that un factor important en la llegada de los colonos menonitas en Rusia fue su comunicación con las procedens rusas.

**Palavras-chave:** Colonos, colonos, política de colonização, menonitas, comunidad menonita, desarrollo de tierras, vicegerencia de Ekaterinoslavsk.

## Introduction

The article is devoted to the history of the interaction of the colonists (Mennonites) who were invited to Russia by Empress Catherine II during her stay in Crimea in 1787. The subject under the consideration of the article is the arrival of Mennonites to Russia who managed to enter into the dialogue with the authorities in order to utter the best conditions of their stay in Russia unlike the other colonists. The article deals with the interaction of the empress Catherine II with the deputies from the Mennonite colonists who handed the Russian authorities the terms of their settlement.

## Materials and Methods

Studying of the history of the arrival of Mennonites to Russia caused the appeal to a complex of acts-legislative materials. These are the decrees reflecting the stages of the development of the colonization policy of Catherine II published in Complete collection of laws of the Russian Empire. The common thing of these sources is the establishment of the historical conditions of their creation.

Considering the chosen problem, it was found out that the office work documentation turned out to be the most informative source, particularly the official correspondence of G. A. Potemkin with various statesmen. His correspondence with the state-secretary of A. A. Bezborodko testifies to the priorities that were put by the government and vicegerent of the Yekaterinoslav vicegerency in the solution of the affairs concerning the invited colonists. Among the sources of this type petitions are considered to be the most important documents, namely pleading articles of Mennonites, in which they formulated the conditions of their arrival to Russia. Consideration of the pleading articles of Mennonites also allowed to define the Russian government's attitude to them. This complex of sources was preserved in the Russian state archive of ancient acts.

Studying of the interaction of the colonists (Mennonites) who were invited to Russia and the Russian government in the person of the empress Catherine II and the deputy G. A. Potemkin defined the application of a comparative method.

The historical-genetic method gave the chance to open the evolution of the government policy for colonists in the second half of the 18th century.

## Results

Accession of the new territories in the 1770s and in the beginning of the 1780s as well as the colonization of the lands of New Russia set the tasks for the government to develop the new territories. It was Ekaterinoslav vicegerent G. A. Potemkin who was asked to fulfill the task. Potemkin's actions in the involvement of colonists to the land conversion were part of the development of the policy of Catherine II which she began to carry out from the very beginning of her reign.

On the 4th of December in 1762 a Manifesto was published which allowed all foreigners except Jews to settle down in Russia. Moreover, the fugitives who wanted to come back to the country could receive forgiveness. On the 22th of July in 1763 was created "The office of guardianship of foreigners" which was led by G. G. Orlov. Persons who were interested in settling in the Russian Empire could receive money for journey in the Russian Embassies which were situated abroad. In Russia they were guaranteed the freedom of worship, release from taxes on 30 years and from the military service for a period of 10 years. Also they were allowed to preserve self-government and their local customs.

A characteristic feature of the colonization policy of Catherine II was the list of new settlers ((about the concept "colonization" see (Ibneeva & Popov, 2014)). These were mostly people who were engaged in agricultural work. Thus, the colonists were important for the Russian government not only because they would bring economic, but also because they would show advantages of free work and they could become an example of high culture of agricultural production (Kamenskii, 1999).

With annexation of the Crimea settling of huge desert territories became the most important activity of Potemkin. On the 2th of February in 1784 Catherine II signed the decree on formation of the Taurian region which entered into the Ekaterinoslavsk vicegerency of G. A. Potemkin.

During the campaign which was held by Potemkin the Empress published several manifestos which represented privileges to the colonists. For example, they were released from the taxes for 10 years, they could have free distribution of the cattle and tools for husbandry in addition they were permitted to take up winemaking. The efficiency and the scope, in the way the campaign was carried out, is really astonishing. Hundreds of thousands of families moved to the new lands (Sebag-Montefiore, 2003). The Ekaterinoslavsk vicegerent developed fundamentals of the resettlement policy which were based on the principle of the separate resettlement of people with different religious and cultural background. Thus, immigrants could occupy only the empty lands to create new cities. So, there was a steady principle of settling of the peninsula which complicated the conflicts between different peoples who happened to be hostile to each other (Vodarsky et al, 2003).

It is known that in 1787 Catherine II made a trip to the Southern Russia during which she had an opportunity to be convinced of the great success in development of the New Russia region and the Crimea.

Among those who wanted to develop the new lands were Mennonites. The Mennonites are Christian groups belonging to the church communities of Anabaptist denominations named after Menno Simons (1496–1561) of Friesland (which today is a province of the Netherlands). Through his writings, Simons articulated and formalized the teachings of earlier Swiss founders. The early teachings of the Mennonites were founded on the belief in both the mission and ministry of Jesus. Rather than fight, the majority of these followers survived by fleeing to neighboring states where ruling families were tolerant of their radical belief in believer's baptism. They believed that the church should be completely removed from government (the proto-free church tradition), and that individuals should join only when willing to publicly acknowledge belief in Jesus and the desire to live in accordance with his teachings. The church communities of Christians, where church offices were elected, became the ideal for Mennonites (Evseev, 2016).

Stay of the Empress in New Russia highlights the plot of the attraction to Russia the representatives of this community. Danzig, where lived Mennonites after the first partition

of Poland, fell into a difficult situation. Without having achieved accession of Danzig, the Prussian government took a number of measures which were forced to undermine both commercial and political value of the city. High customs duties on the bread exported from Danzig led to the fall of grain trade. However, even in new conditions Mennonites aimed to hold the farms up to the mark. For newly arrived members of the community (by a natural increase) new land areas were purchased that was promoted by their close unity and prosperity. It is obvious that such expansion of the areas led to the conflict of interests between Mennonites and local indigenous people. Probably, the resolution of the Danzig magistrate which were taken in the 80-s of the 18th century that prohibited Mennonites to purchase lands in the Gdansk region is explained by it. In addition to this economic oppression, Mennonites were afraid of the probability of transfer of Danzig under the Prussian domination. Their brothers in faith who passed under the power of Prussia after to the first partition of Poland underwent to restrictions of their rights. For these reasons they began to think of emigration to any country which government would agree to grant them some rights and privileges. In 1786 the assessor George Trapp arrived to Danzig. Prince Potemkin instructed him to take colonists for the New Russia region. His arrival appeared to be very useful for Mennonites (Pisarevsky, 1909).

Mennonites fitted into a modernization paradigm of Catherine II whose manifestos clearly enough reflected her vision of the power on future reforming of the Russian state. As N. Wenger notes, she expected from new citizens both economic and social activity. Mennonites as a closed confessional group with their inclusiveness and corporate spirit were able to come up with exactly what the Empress required. (Wenger, 2008).

The behavior of this community confirms these judgments. It should be noted that Mennonites didn't agree to move to Russia on general conditions with other colonists and required exclusive rights and benefits. They wanted to receive information on those lands which would be allocated for them beforehand. On the other hand, realization of resettlement policy in many respects depended on governors and vicegerents. As Yu. N. Smirnov shows, various approaches of heads on places, their administrative practice could influence significantly on the process of development of

these lands and position of colonists (Smirnov, 2013). In this regard G. A. Potemkin realized a liberal course of colonization policy of Catherine II and was open for the dialogue with colonists.

In 1786 Mennonites elected three deputies who were forced to examine future lands and hand to the Russian government the condition of their settlement. Among the deputies were Jacob von Kampen, Johann Bartsch, Jacob Hoppner. By that moment 200 families had already shown willingness to move. Representatives of the Mennonite community went to New Russia and chose to themselves the island of Tawan lying against the city of Berislavl washed by the river Horse waters; the length of the territory which was located on the right side of the Horse waters was 5 versts (about 5 kilometers), representing "meadows and hayfields"; the land which was located "one verst (kilometer) from the main road to Cherninkaya". The deputies proved the choice that favorable location of the land made it an important point of trade routes where they could realize future distribution of products of their agricultural industry (Brandes, 1993).

The deputies stated the wishes concerning arrangement in Russia (on April 22, 1787) in 20 pleading articles. On May 2, 1787 in Kremenchuk Johann Bartsh and Jacob Hoppner were presented to Catherine II by the vicegerent G. A. Potemkin. The deputies were warmly welcomed by the Empress, and they were given assurances about "imperial protection and favor "for themselves [deputies] and all families of Mennonites of Danzig, who were interested in moving to Russia (RGVIA, I. 6). Thus, the Empress authorized their arrival to Russia and, in fact, accelerated Potemkin's resolution.

On 5 July, 1787 immediately after the departure of the crowned person followed the answers of the deputy to the "pleading articles" of Mennonites. These articles reflected their desire to use the decree on 22 July, 1763 on all its points: religious freedom, exemption from military service, ten years' release from taxes, issuing of the travelling expenses. Future colonists asked for a fishing permit and issue of seeds for sowing, also they asked to send a skillful land surveyor who was good at German (RGADA, I. 97–101). Potemkin answered in the affirmative on all the points. However, Highness Prince limited their land claims a little: on the request to allocate them lands which they had chosen Potemkin put the following resolution: "From this island (Tawan) only some part of land

can be allocated to them because of the bridge under construction over the Dnieper ... a considerable part ... has to remain in state department" (RGADA, I. 97–101).

On 11 August, 1787 Mennonites submitted the application to Catherine II. On September 7, 1787 the personalized decree of the Empress which authorized the benefits and privileges offered Mennonites by Potemkin followed. They were granted charter "by a signature of Her Imperial Majesty's own hand and with the appending of the public seal" (Pisarevsky, 1909). Thereby the Empress gave to the pleading articles of Mennonites the status of the law. Thus, the Mennonite migration to Russia was recognized as a business of the state importance.

### Discussion

At first sight, this situation wasn't exclusive. It is known that through the manifesto of 1763 the government declared possibility of the dialogue with future immigrants and were determined to discuss questions of privileges for those who were eager to receive them. However, not all of them managed to seize the similar opportunity. The active immigration position, ability to self-organization, self-sustainment of the appropriate living conditions for them allowed Mennonites to realize rights granted by the Manifesto of 1763 (Wenger, 2008).

As it was already noted, at the end of December, 1787 the Russian government made the announcement to the society of Mennonites living in Danzig. This document declared that the Empress granted 65 tithes of the land of "the most beautiful places" for each family, various privileges including money benefits, and it was emphasized that for the last 25 years of reign such "favor" had never been granted to foreigners. Mennonites interested in moving to Russia were offered to be on January 19, 1788 at 10 o'clock in morning to the palace of the Russian envoy in Danzig to examine the "imperial" resolution in the original (Pisarevsky, 1909).

From March to November in 1788 1333 Mennonites and Lutherans left Danzig for Riga. Mennonites constituted 228 families. In the spring of 1789 transportation of colonists to New Russia region was made. The government refused to settle Mennonites on the lands which had been uttered by them, and allocated them for the settlement the natural boundary of Hortitsa with the island of the same name on the right coast of the Dnieper. Here they founded 8

colonies: Chortiza, Rosenthal, island Chortiza, Eynlage, Kronsveyde, Neyenburg, Neyendof and Shengorst. Subsequently they formed the Chortiza Mennonite district. In 1800 about 120 thousand tithes of the land on the river Molochna were provided to Mennonites (The Melitopol County of the Taurian region), where the colonies Galbshtadt, Mintau, Orlov, Shenau and others appeared, which formed subsequently the Molotschna Mennonite district. By 1820 the number of Mennonite colonies in Chortiza and Molotschna settlements increased, bringing the total to 18 and 20. Since 1819 entry to Russia of foreign settlers was carried out only with special permission of the authorities. Colonies of Mennonites continued to exist throughout all the XIX – the first decades of the 20th centuries (Evseev, 2016).

### Conclusion

Thus, interaction of the government with the representatives of the Mennonite community led to the adoption of the decree which authorized privileges and benefits to the coming to Russia Mennonites. It was promoted much by an active public mode of a Mennonite community. Having experience of negotiations with the authorities, Mennonites managed to achieve legislative confirmation of the Manifesto and to procure the broadest set of social, economic rights, economic opportunities for the community.

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