Abstract

The study of regional aspects of crime in the pre-revolutionary period allows us to form a holistic view on the development of such socially dangerous criminal phenomenon as professional crime in Russia. Recent changes in Russian criminal law (2019–20), that are to protect the
society from professional crime, have made studying the issue more significant. There is a gap in scientific knowledge of regional aspects of professional crime of the past. The scholarship either addresses the issue on the large scale (that of Russia as a whole), or focuses on big cities (Moscow, St. Petersburg). The article presents an analysis of the formation and development of professional crime based on the materials from the State Archive of the Kursk Region (fond 32 of the Kursk district court), reflecting the development of ordinary crime in the Kursk gubernia in the second half of the 19th – early 20th century. The choice of territorial framework is due to the fact that the Kursk gubernia was a typical region of the European part of Russia in the specified time period. There is little research on the topic, and most archival materials have been studied and introduced into scientific use for the first time. A whole complex of criminal cases considered by the Kursk district court (criminal division) in the second half of the 19th – early 20th century has been identified and analyzed. Methodological basis of the research is analysis and generalization of special literature and scientific publications; study of archival materials using historical-comparative, historical-genetic, and historical- systematic methods. It has been concluded that professional crime in the Kursk gubernia in the second half of the 19th – early 20th century was focused on agriculture, since the region's economy had a pronounced agricultural specificity. The most popular criminal craft was horse theft; it was pursued in organized groups, where all roles were distributed among the gang robbers. Often they were assisted by horsedealers who were their only channel for selling stolen horses. There also were cases of counterfeiting, theft of hand luggage and clothing, and group theft in form of robbery (pickpocketing and brigandage were less common). Pickpockets had in their stock in trade for committing theft. They had special knowledge and practice-oriented skills for stealing money and other values from hand luggage or clothing of their victims and for avoiding criminal prosecution. The authors’ conclusions broaden our knowledge on the issue and are of interest to historians, lawyers, and sociologists.

Keywords

Historical sources, crime, professional crime, criminal professionalism, horse stealing, pickpocketing, counterfeiting, robbery.

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