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Peasant Legal Sense in the Archival Documents of the 18th – First Half of the 19th Century

Abstract

The article discusses the main issues of peasant identity in the European North of Russia. The significance of studying this question is can be attributed to some issues of peasant legal sense remaining little studied, even though the matter itself has been a subject of detailed discussions among philosophers, as well as among historians since the mid-19th century. There developed two approaches to explaining the its origin: one saw in the emergence of peasant legal sense a result of religious influence, another considered it a product of the lifestyle of obshchina (rural community) and patriarchal family. Particular relevance of this work stems from the fact that up to date there have been no studies examining archival documents, peasant petitions in particular, as a historical source on the history of peasant legal sense. The main purpose of this article is to study archival documents and examine how peasant legal sense manifested in solution of various issues: issues of land ownership and land use, fiscal, administrative and other. To achieve this purpose the author draws on historical sources relating to the history of

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the Komi region (Yarensky and Ustsisolsky uezds). Choice of territorial and time frameworks arise from the fact that the Komi region was a part of the Russian European North, which was inhabited by state peasants, and processes occurring there were typical for this population stratum of the Russian Empire. Drawing on archival documents, both published and unpublished, the author comes to the conclusion that it was the peasants' ideas of truth (or justice), based on a acknowledgment of labor ownership, good neighbourliness, recognition of power and wisdom of the peasant "mir" (obshchina), that permeated the peasants' legal sense. According to the author, the peasant idea of truth was one of the core notions in archetypal complex of peasant beliefs. It was on this idea that peasants of the European North and of the Komi region based their notion of justice, their interactions with supernatural forces, and their contacts with officials, factory owners, merchants, who were less familiar and more incomprehensible to them. Even after disappearance of the prikaz correspondence and appearance the collegiate one, petition remained the ultimate document of the peasant class.



Keywords

Sources, archival sources, obshchina, state peasants, volost, legal sense.

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You can read completely article in the russian historic-archival magazine “The Herald of an Archivist”. Read more about terms of subscription [here](#) .

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