THE STUDY OF BIOGRAPHIES AND THE PROSOPOGRAPHICAL METHOD AS A PROMISING DIRECTION OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important research areas in the history of the Russian penal system is the study of little-known biographical data of those few honest tsarist officials, former military officers, who combatted internal crime, including the revolutionary movement of the early 20th century.

The prosopographical method had been used until the end of the 19th century but was banned in 1917. All the studies were ordered and controlled by public authorities, i.e. the Soviet Union proclaimed a collectivist worldview and did not acknowledge the role of individuals in historical processes.

These studies have not been conducted in Russia until now. The prosopographical method ("several sources - one persona") used in relation to this issue demonstrates its effectiveness.

A historiographic review covering one of the most promising areas of historical informatics (prosopographic databases) will be useful for history theorists and historiographers, as well as scholars studying biographies. This overview allows to:

- Solve the problems that have arisen;
- Adjust work for a more complete and comprehensive study of sources;
- Improve research methods aimed at achieving greater adequacy to the object and subject of research, finding and synthesizing philosophical and historical concepts that expand and deepen the study of the Russian historical process.

Prosopography has proved its "stability" within the framework of rigid philosophical and theoretical concepts, the complete absence of controlled concepts and even mixing different approaches and concepts. In the 21st century, prosopography becomes one of the most popular areas of studying the historical past. Prosopographical research opens little-studied or unknown pages of history through the discovery and study of formalized details from biographies of some individuals and entire social groups.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

Prosopography is a special historical discipline (from the Greek "prosopo" - "face, personality" and "grapho" - "I write") studying the biographies of historical persons having certain social, political and ethnic characteristics, and bearing the imprint of official, estate or sociocultural affiliation.

In this study, we used the most laborious of prosopographical methods: "several sources - one persona". The distinctive features of this method are as follows:

Firstly, the need to master the traditional methods of source analysis in terms of selection, assessment and verification of information contained in various sources;
Secondly, the creation of a new "virtual metasource" into which the selected information is kept for further analysis;

Thirdly, the preservation of all "initial" data for the subsequent probable use (the implementation of a "source-oriented" approach to creating a database).

Until this article, there have been no scientific attempts on studying stored initial data. Such data are neglected by both authors and their followers elaborating similar topics. This disregard of processed information can be explained by a large array of sources that were not studied from the scientific viewpoint. In addition, there are no developed and tested methods for re-examining the documents previously studied. Scholars do not think that these materials might contain new and important information which can radically change the conclusions already drawn.

The main method of collecting information was the analysis of available sources. They can be classified into:

- Archival documents (RGVIA, n.d.);
- Reference books (SPISOK GRAZHDANSKIM CHINAM CHETVERTOGO KLASSA, 1900, 1902);
- Press materials (MAKSIMOVSKY, A.M. (NEKROLOG), 1907; ZINOVIEV, 1907; K UBIISTVU A.M. MAKSIMOVSKOGO, 1907; POKHORONY A.M. MAKSIMOVSKOGO, 1907; UBIISTVO NACHALNIKA GLAVNOGO TYUREMNOGO UPRAVLENIYA, 1907);

Finally, the research of the higher bureaucracy in Russia (KISELEV; MIRONENKO, 1986; BONDARENKO; KLIMOV, 2012; STARKOV, 2006).

While working with archives and historical studies of other sources, press publications and reference data officially published in the pre-revolutionary era, it is impossible to single out more or less significant sources. The synthesis of these sources within the framework of the method "several sources - one persona" allows obtaining the results presented at the end of the article.

Prosopography as a method of historical research revived in Russia in the 1970s. Then prosopographical approaches began to be used to study periods in modern and recent history. Based on various sources, computer databases are being created on a specific topic and period. The prosopographical method is understood as the study of historical processes:

- By creating collective biographies through the identification and study of sources describing the life of a person or a certain group of people;
- By asking the same type of questions about the time of birth and death, marriage, family, social origin and status, confession, place of residence, education, occupation, etc.

The prosopographical method aims at determining certain socio-historical types that can serve as a basis for drawing large-scale and well-grounded conclusions about the essence of the socio-historical processes that occurred in society. We agree with the definition of prosopography as studies of biographical information about people and groups of people, regardless of: a) affiliation with political or professional groups; b) "dynamic features" in these studies; c) formalizing the study results not in the form of a static "image" that characterizes a given group of people at a particular moment but a "collective biography" that traces changes in the life of this group of people over a certain period. (YUMASHEVA, 2005, p. 95).

We focused on such an aspect of the biography of Russian officials as their special position which led to their assassination by adherents of "revolutionary" terror.
As follows from the very definition of prosopography, this method is exclusively historical since it studies the main character of history - a person (people). In addition, it provides a prime example of interdisciplinary approaches combining:

- The research methods developed by historians for studying mass sources;
- The procedures for studying society adopted from sociology;
- Statistical methods of analytical research;
- The database technology created by mathematicians and programmers.

The studies conducted within the framework of prosopographical databases managed to overcome the "crisis of historical science" expressed in the limitation of the object of historical cognition inherent in both Marxist and non-Marxist methodologies. For the first time in research practice, we could synthesize the philosophical approaches that existed in two polar philosophical and historical traditions: to preserve the objective and natural due to the mass character of historical development (the Marxist approach to history) and to demonstrate its individual and unique, accidental and spontaneous, evolutionary and traditional components (the non-Marxist approach to history). Over the past 10 years, these features have made the method of prosopographical databases one of the most popular and demanded among Russian scholars. The post-Soviet historians successfully use the "images" or "collective biographies" obtained due to the development and study of biographical information in databases for solving both narrow tasks of clarifying special features in "someone's image in a particular historical period" and general issues of studying social, political and cultural phenomena and trends throughout the historical process (GARSKOVA, 1996; p. 123; SOKOLOV, BONYUSHKINA, MYAKUSHEV, 1996, p. 18).

At the same time, prosopography-based research (for example, concrete historical studies) is devoid of the "crisis" imprint and has sufficient scientific "resistance" to any changes in philosophical paradigms and theoretical concepts, clearly demonstrating the possibility of a new (different) vision of the past. We believe that the phenomenon of prosopography (a successfully realized experience of overcoming crisis phenomena in historical studies) needs thorough consideration and analysis. In our opinion, it is necessary to answer the following questions: how prosopography was formed and developed; how views on its possibilities changed over time; what sources can be used in research; what questions can be raised; what topics can be studied; which philosophical ideas and theoretical approaches are most adequate in terms of their ability to show and explain real events and their causes. Prosopography helps to answer all these questions and allows to create a "collective biography" of mass scientific research to reveal general and special components inherent in such studies, as well as to trace the development of this scientific direction. To comprehend the topic under consideration, a database was created to analyze publications of the Russian scholars using the method of prosopography or similar methods over the past 40 years.

RESULTS

The leading Russian historians have addressed the topic of "humanizing history" as the opposite of sociological schemes forcibly introduced by public authorities, regardless of methodological problems. Thus, the historian Veselovskii (1963, p. 97) studying the Russian Middle Ages wrote,

> The fantasy of arbitrary psychological characteristics is often replaced by the fantasy of general phrases, just as unconvincing and not obligatory for anyone [...] Everyone is really tired of arbitrary psychological characteristics but is it right to refuse them outright and set the goal of writing history without the living of people?

The following generations of Russian historians inherited and further elaborated this idea.

> The historian’s task is not only to explain what happened but also to find out what exactly happened. After all, people have an impersonal interest in history. They need to know how people of the past lived, what relationships
they had with each other, what goals they fought for, what clothes they wore and what food they ate, how they loved each other, what made them happy and what saddened them. If this interests us solely to create a logically verified concept, then history as a humanitarian science (from Latin homo – man) and the science of man will cease to exist and turn into the sociology of the past. A person is the main subject and object of the historical process. Humanless history is a consequence of the Stalinist idea of a person as a cog in a system, replacing the actions and interests of people with the actions and interests of abstract “masses”. Since history is a science about people, historians have no right to be indifferent to people of the past. They cannot but feel sympathy for them. Here we face one more problem that probably does not have an unambiguous solution: historians and morality…. (KOBRIN, 1992, p. 216).

An attempt to solve important historical challenges using the prosopographical method was undertaken by scholars in the late Roman Empire (260-641). The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (PLRE) is considered a full-fledged application of prosopographical techniques and research principles. Published by the University of Cambridge, a three-volume edition under the same title includes biographies of all ancient Roman senators, equestrians, comites and officials up to provincial governors and tribunes, prefects and prepositions of military units, civil servants, praetorian prefects, prefects of the city of Rome, military magistrates, magistrates’ advisers, lawyers, doctors, rhetoricians, grammarians and poets, as well as philosophers. Ordinary soldiers, junior officers and decurions, as well as Christians (for example, some famous Christians who did not hold significant posts or were not rhetoricians or philosophers) were left outside the scope of the study (PETROVA, 2004).

Within the framework of the above-mentioned method, there are many opportunities to study the life and activity of outstanding and somehow remarkable personalities from various perspectives, which sheds light on both the specific circumstances of historical events and social conditions in which they took place. As a result, we can draw conclusions and make generalizations.

Being of the utmost interest, prosopography is currently concerned with the study of biographies of historical figures, as well as formalized aspects of their political, official, social and creative activities. Despite some attempts, prosopography has not become a popular method of creating mass sources and using large-scale databases.

For example, one of our authors created a new mass source while working on his Doctor’s Degree thesis (KURKOV, 2005). It implies the selection of personalities based on a formalized approach. The careful registration of enterprise owners in the Russian Empire helped study the socio-economic adaptation of the Russian nobility to the new socio-economic realities that changed after 1861. This allowed recording the changes that took place in the composition of the nobility (the owners of factories and enterprises) and the branches of production controlled by them.

Similarly, we can explore the theory and history of criminal punishment in Russia, referring to both individual examples and mass indicators. It is necessary to consider the biographies of the heads of the pre-revolutionary prison service which, like the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and other “power” structures of that time, protected law and order, and were destroyed by the tragic events of the early 20th century.

DISCUSSION

Like many Russian officials of the early 20th century, two chiefs of the main prison service of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Empire Nikolay Modestovich Bogdanevich (the former Governor of Ufa) and Alexander Mikhailovich Maksimovsky (was killed in the line of duty) died at the hands of political criminals. Their life and work, as well as the preparation and execution of attempts on their lives, are an integral part of the history of the Russian penal system.

Let us dwell on the biography of A.M. Maksimovsky. His father was Mikhail Semenovich Bogdanevich, the General of the Infantry born to the noble family of Saint Petersburg province on September 6, 1832. He married the daughter of a state councilor Anna Mikhailovna.
Anikanova and together they had three children: son Alexander (born on August 30, 1861), daughters Varvara and Nadezhda (RSMA). Alexander Mikhailovich Maksimovsky graduated from the Law Faculty of Kharkiv University. He was an assistant to the Secretary of State of the State Council and a member of the Advisory Board under the Ministry of Justice. Serving from January 23, 1884, he was granted the rank of Active State Councillor on January 1, 1899 (SPISOK GRAZHDANSKIM CHINAM CHETVERTOGO KLASA, 1900) and later promoted to Privy Councilor, which he had preserved until the tragic death. His only award was a medal "In memory of the reign of Emperor Alexander III" (SPISOK GRAZHDANSKIM CHINAM CHETVERTOGO KLASA, 1902). In 1902, A.M. Maksimovsky was appointed a head assistant of the main prison service. In 1906, he himself became the head of the main prison service of the Ministry of Justice.

After taking the helm of the department, A.M. Maksimovsky “focused on its dependence on the local authorities and stated that it was harmful. The new head put forward a prison reform project to separate the prison service from the administrative authorities”. He also contributed to

the economic regulation of prisons, especially the construction business, which A.M. Maksimovsky tried to keep within the budget and did not cause unnecessary expenses. He promoted education among prisoners to keep them busy. For this purpose, two prison factories were built in Warsaw and Yaroslavl that produced [...] paper and cloth. (MAKSIMOVSKY, (NEKROLOG), 1907, p. 2).

As a person, the head of the main prison service was characterized by exceptional gentleness, humanity and philanthropy. He really cared for people under his supervision. A.M. Maksimovsky was interested in "possible improvements and alleviations for prisoners permitted by the relevant law". "The spiritual qualities expressed in his activity [...] will preserve his blessed memory", wrote the capital governor A. Zinoviev (1907, p. 4) who knew the assassinated man. A.M. Maksimovsky was a true believer and participated in the creation of the first Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

He was very modest and even went to work using a horse tram rather than a carriage. The man helped homeless children and treated prisoners with dignity, repeating: "They are also people!". Sofya Aleksandrovna Savinkova, the mother of one of the main Russian terrorists, spoke with A.M. Maksimovsky and called him "a very good person". (FILATEV, 2017, p. 312).

In the fall of 1907, the fruitful and noble work of A.M. Maksimovsky was interrupted by a terrorist Socialist Revolutionary woman, whose "criminal hand took the life of one of the most enlightened and humane figures in the prison service" (MAKSIMOVSKY, NEKROLOG, 1907, p. 2).

On October 15, 1907, a young woman joined petitioners in the premises of the main prison service at about 5 p.m. Calling herself a relative of one of the arrested (the robber Novosyolov), she came to ask to deliver home meals to him instead of state food. When told that her request was illegal, the woman announced that she needed to speak to the head of the department. Having met with A.M. Maksimovsky, the terrorist approached him and shot him in the face with her Browning. The bullet hit the head, pierced the skull and went right through. The cold-blooded criminal left the small reception room and walked into the hall, where the head of the Mother of God prison and the guardians seized and disarmed her. They found a second Browning with a full set of cartridges and some kind of bag with laces running into the pocket of her dress on the chest. When asked where these laces came from and for what purpose, she laughed and offered to pull them. "Then you will find out the secret", she added. Under the killer’s dress, they saw an oval-shaped bag of gray thin rubber material filled with an elastic substance that gave off the smell of almonds and ether. "When the sack was opened, it turned out to be filled with extra dynamite [...] 13 pounds were enough to kill not only all those present but also destroy the very premises of the main prison service". (UBIISTVO NACHALNIKA GLAVNOGO TYUREMNOGO UPRAVLENIYA, 1907, p. 2).
Newspapers reported that the arrested woman was constantly in high spirits. "When put in a single confinement cell, Ragozinnikova began to sing revolutionary songs" (UBIISTVU, MAKSIMOVSKOGO, 1907, p. 2).

Being seriously wounded, A.M. Maksimovsky was sent to the clinic named after the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna and died at 6.30 p.m. without regaining consciousness (UBIISTVO NACHALNIKA GLAVNOGO TYUREMNOGO UPRAVLENIYA, 1907). The shooter, E.P. Ragozinnikova, turned out to be a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary "Flying Combat Detachment of the Northern Region", which sentenced A.M. Maksimovsky to death simply as "the main jailer of the country". A blow to this worthy figure of the Russian penal system was inflicted treacherously from behind as the victim

[…] did not receive any threatening letters or the verdict of revolutionary parties... However, A.M. Maksimovsky had some strange premonition of imminent death. Shortly before October 15, the deceased warned his sister that when he died, his funeral should be the most modest: no flowers, no wreaths, simple drogues with a pair of horses and nothing more. (K UBIISTVU A.M. MAKSIMOVSKOGO, 1907, p. 2).

On October 18, 1907, he was buried at the Volkovo cemetery in the presence of a huge number of people, ministers and senators, the capital’s authorities and officials from the department. Four malefactors preparing a terrorist attack were seized right in the cemetery, one of whom was detained and taken to the Security Department (POKHORONY A.M. MAKSIMOVSKOGO, 1907).

Contemporaries who mourned the tragic death of A.M. Maksimovsky had to pay some attention to his murderer. Aggravated by the fact that she was a young woman who aroused "not so much indignation as disgust", they asked themselves a question: "What a putrid environment and brutal influence could transform a woman into a dull, cruel, soulless creature?" “This trap set for A.M. Maksimovsky […] was treacherously calculated for his best human feelings, obviously known to the villains” (ZINOVIEV, 1907, p. 4). When the insidious plan of the terrorists succeeded, the killer laughed! After hearing the verdict, Ragozinnikova bowed to the judges and laughed again (UBIISTVU; MAKSIMOVSKOGO, 1907), revealing an equally "terrible perversion of moral feelings" (ZINOVIEV, 1907, p. 4). The signs of emotional stupidity, inertia and ignorant fanaticism, which marked the face of the criminal, were supplemented by painful moral licentiousness, expressed in loud laughter, with which she answered the questions addressed to her and accepted her sentence.

CONCLUSION


KISELEV, I.N.; MIRONENKO, S.V. Sotsialnyi portret vysshei byurokratii Rossii pervoi treti XIX v. Kolichestvennyi analiz [The social profile of Russia’s higher bureaucracy in the first third of the 19th century. Quantitative research]. In: Kompleksnye metody v izuchenii istorii s drevneishikh...


POKHORONY A.M. MAKSIMOVSKOGO [A.M. Maksimovsky’s funeral]. Novoe Vremya, No. 11352, October 19 (November 1), 1907. p. 4.


SPISOK GRAZHITSA SEMI CHETVERTOGO KLASSA. Ispr. po 1 fevralya 1902 [The List of civil servants, the 4th class. As revised on February 1, 1902]. St. Petersburg: Tip. Pravitel’stvuyushcheho senata, 1902, p. 1528.

SPISOK GRAZHITSA SEMI CHETVERTOGO KLASSA. Ispr. po 1 iyunya 1900 g [The List of civil servants, the 4th class. As revised on June 1, 1900]. St. Petersburg: Tip. Pravitel’stvuyushcheho senata, 1900, p. 1624.


The prosopographical method will be of great interest not only for historians but also for scholars concerned with modern phenomena and processes that have a large impact on today’s life.


We effectively used the prosopographical method in relation to high-ranking officials of the penal system, i.e. victims of the “revolutionary” terror. The prosopographical analysis of terrorists and other political criminals (the so-called revolutionaries) will help better understand the events that took place in this social environment.


The study of biographies and the prosopographical method as a promising direction of historical studies

O estudo das biografias e do método prosopográfico como direção promissora dos estudos históricos

El estudio de las biografías y el método prosopográfico como dirección prometedora de los estudios históricos

Resumo

O artigo aborda o estudo de processos históricos através dos dados biográficos de chefes do serviço penitenciário russo entre o final do século XIX e início do século XX. O método prosopográfico permite demonstrar o fenômeno sociocultural da percepção paradoxal da realidade pela sociedade russa no início do século XX. Os slogans dos representantes do movimento revolucionário pedindo justiça se transformaram em atos terroristas brutais. O estudo compreende documentos de arquivo e materiais de periódicos pré-revolucionários.


Abstract

The article addresses the study of historical processes through the biographical data of heads of the Russian prison service between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The prosopographical method allows demonstrating the sociocultural phenomenon of paradoxical perception of reality by the Russian society at the beginning of the 20th century. The slogans of representatives of the revolutionary movement calling for justice turned into brutal terrorist acts. The study comprises archival documents and materials from pre-revolutionary periodicals.

Keywords: Prosopographical studies. Terrorism. Penal and correctional system. Revolutionary movement. Immorality.

Resumen

El artículo aborda el estudio de los procesos históricos a través de los datos biográficos de los jefes del servicio penitenciario ruso entre finales del siglo 19 y principios del siglo 20. El método prosopográfico permite demostrar el fenómeno sociocultural de la percepción paradójica de la realidad por parte de la sociedad rusa a principios del siglo 20. Las consignas de los representantes del movimiento revolucionario que pedían justicia se convirtieron en brutales actos terroristas. El estudio comprende documentos de archivo y materiales de publicaciones periódicas prerrevolucionarias.