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**REBELLION OF PEASANTS IN RUSSIA IN 19TH CENTURY IN**  
**THE VOLGA REGION**

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### Abstract

In this material, the authors tried to reveal the reasons for the mass peasant uprisings in the first half of the 19th, to investigate their causes and show the measures that the authorities took to suppress and suppress them. The first half of the 19th century was a time when Russia was experiencing an all-embracing crisis of feudal relations, and serfdom, which was finally established in Russia at the end of the 16th – first half of the 17th centuries, impeded the country's development in every possible way. After the victorious wars waged by Russia in alliance with other European countries against the Napoleonic expansion, the Russian peasants, who had borne the brunt of the war on their shoulders, hoped for an early liberation. However, the landowners continued not only to maintain their power over the forced peasants but also tried to strengthen it in every possible way, using all kinds of means, not only the force of law but also methods that humiliate human dignity. Massively used measures of physical pressure arranged sophisticated punishments for the guilty. This led to numerous facts of the flight of peasants, mass disobedience to the landowners, and in some cases even to bloody uprisings, arson, and murder of landowners. In the fight against peasant uprisings, which were equated with the gravest crimes against the state, the central and local authorities actively used police persecution and mobilized all the might of the repressive apparatus: the army, courts, investigative bodies.

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## 1. Introduction

After the end of the victorious series of Napoleonic Wars in Europe, a series of bourgeois revolutions unfolded, which in 1818–1848 took place in Austria, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and other European countries. Russia, for objective reasons, stayed away from these spontaneous, largely violent modernizations, although it can be safely asserted that by the end of the 1820s, a revolutionary situation had developed and intensified in Russia, as evidenced by the uprising of the “Decembrists in St. Petersburg in December 1825, as well as numerous and widespread peasant uprisings.

The uprisings were indeed widespread, often characterized by all sorts of bloody excesses, dozens and sometimes even hundreds of people took part in them. Fierceness reached such a scale that troops had to be used to suppress them.

We also tried to figure out why the local uprisings of the peasants did not lead to a massive uprising of the peasantry and the urban masses, which became the driving forces of European revolutions in the first half of the 19th century. Also, our research interest was aroused by the actions of the law enforcement agencies of the Russian state – the police, the prosecutor's office, gendarme officials, and the judicial system, whose activities made it possible to suppress these performances, preventing their widespread growth.

*Study of the topic.* The problems associated with the causes of peasant uprisings were actively studied by many researchers both in the pre-revolutionary period (until 1917), Soviet times (from 1918 to 1991), as well as in modern Russian historiography. And the researchers of each named period had their interpretations of the reasons for the peasant uprisings of the actions of government forces to suppress them.

The pre-revolutionary authors for the most part defended serfdom, believed that the landowners generally treated the peasants humanely, but the peasants showed laziness. Reluctance to work, which forced landowners to use corporal punishment (Semevsky, 1877). However, other authors, without criticizing the feudal order, believed that the root cause of the peasant uprisings was, after all, the atrocities committed by the landowners. These include such researchers as Zyryanov (1879), Slavutinsky, who, being the leader of the Ryazan nobility, considered the fundamental principle of peasant uprisings of the excesses of the landowners and gave specific examples that where landowners and the peasants lived like one family, and such, in his opinion, there were most of the estates, the peasants did not even think of any performances (Slavutinsky, 1878). And Leonid Trefolev (1877) in his publication believed that the bitterness of the peasants reached extreme limits and that the reasons for their discontent lay, nevertheless, the serf system, which had to be urgently changed. However, even in pre-revolutionary times, some daredevils saw the main reason for peasant uprisings, firstly, in the cruel exploitation of the peasants by the landowners, and secondly, in the atrocities that the rural noblemen committed against forced laborers. The most prominent representative of this approach is Puparev (1872).

In Soviet times, the authors reduced all the diversity of relations between peasants and landowners to exploitation and abuse, and the only way to keep the peasants in obedience was military punitive operations, as well as judicial and police arbitrariness (Alexandrov, 1984; Zainchkovsky, 1968).

Studies of the post-Soviet period began to be distinguished by greater objectivity, reliance on documents, and a desire to understand. Recently, a lot of works have been published, the authors of which

touch on these problems, but they were all a general nature and the questions of the causes of peasant uprisings, their prevention and suppression were mainly related to indirectly (Korotkova & Chukanov, 2015; Shevchenko, 1981; Tarasov, 2011). The problem remains largely unexplored.

The main sources of research were archival documents that shed light on the events of those years. In the course of work in the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), the State Archives of the Ulyanovsk Region (GAUO), the State Archives of the Saratov Region (GARSO), the National Archives of the Republic of Tatarstan (NART), we turned to the materials of criminal cases related to accusations of peasants of rebellion and disobedience to the landowners, we were of considerable interest to the reports on the crimes committed in the provinces, presented to the governors, the minutes of the meetings of the county courts, at which the cases on the charges of the peasants were considered. Were also used the annual reports of chiefs of police and captain-police officers, zemstvo judges, who lay down on the table of the governors. Also used were statistical documents, address-calendars on the situation in the provinces, published annually. We also used periodicals of those years, where on the pages of such magazines as *Ancient and New Russia*, *Russian Archive*, *Russian Starina*, detailed materials about peasant uprisings were published. We also used the memoirs of the gendarme officers, in particular, the memoirs of Lomachevsky, who took an active part in the suppression of peasant uprisings (Lomachevsky, 1880).

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the fact that the authors were able to identify and generalize the main reasons for specific peasant uprisings, the mechanism of the origin (emergence) and growth of peasant discontent, which grew into a revolt. Show the negative role of the nobility, which, with their anti-human antics, severe corporal punishment and bullying, pushed the peasants to rebellion. We also tried to show the dire economic and social situation of the peasantry, which was also one of the prerequisites for peasant unrest. We have also shown the main forms and methods of preventing and suppressing peasant uprisings and the role of the law enforcement agencies of the then Russia in maintaining law and order in the villages, ways of appeasing the peasants without the use of punitive measures.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The object of study was peasant uprisings and protests from their landlords and the policy of the authorities – unrest, disobedience to landowners and local authorities, pogroms, and uprisings, which were considered grave crimes of anti-state orientation.

Among the main objectives of the study, we identified the following:

- to investigate the socio-economic and subjective reasons for peasant uprisings;
- study the varieties and forms of peasant protests, show their cause-and-effect relationship;
- to reveal the activities of law enforcement agencies to investigate peasant actions.

The chronological framework of the study is 1802 when ministries were established in the Russian Empire and the reform of the law enforcement system was carried out. The study ends in 1860 when the investigating apparatus was removed from the General Police and the Gendarme Corps and transferred to the District Courts.

### **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the study was the reasons and prerequisites leading to peasant uprisings, their main forms, as well as the actions of the authorities to prevent them, suppress and organize investigative work carried out by the general police, the ranks of the Gendarme Corps, judicial decisions after their suppression, activities to eliminate the causes that led to their appearance.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this article is, based on previously unknown archival documents, first introduced into scientific circulation, to reveal the causes of peasant uprisings and uprisings, to show the demands put forward by dissatisfied peasants, to reveal their objective and subjective reasons.

### **5. Research Methods**

The main principles that guided us were the principles of historicism, the dialectical approach. This helped us to study the subject of the study comprehensively, objectively, considering all the factors affecting it. The principle of a concrete historical approach allowed us to look at the features of the historical period under consideration, considering the socio-historical conditions of life of the peasants in the first half of the 19th century, to understand the features of their mentality and was, as well as all the intricacies of the relationship between them and the landowners. The article also gives an analysis the process of changing the forms and methods of investigating *peasant crimes*, identified the peculiarities of conducting investigative actions, investigated the forms and methods of leading investigative commissions carried out by more experienced and theoretically trained members of the political police – officers of the Gendarme Corps. The system-functional approach allowed a comprehensive approach to the study of the problem.

### **6. Findings**

During the period under review, cruel treatment of the landowners, and especially their managers with the peasants, was the norm. This could be explained by the fact that in the second half of the 18th century, the state, with its normative acts, not only humiliated the peasants to a completely subordinate state but at the same time granted the landowner unprecedented rights to punish the peasants in all possible ways. So, during the reign of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna in 1760, the landowners were given the right to expel recalcitrant peasants to settle in remote areas of the country to *re-educate*, and under the *enlightened* Empress Catherine II, the landowners received the right by their decision, without trial and investigation, even for insignificant misdemeanors send peasants to hard labor. The absolute lack of rights of the peasants led to the fact that the landlords, believing in their impunity, began to believe that they can do whatever they like with their peasants, moreover, one must also remember that the government of Catherine II forbade serfs to complain about their masters (Beliavsky, 1965; Bondarevskaja, 1967).

Taking advantage of impunity, the noble landowners tortured the peasants in an unbearable corvee, mocked them in every possible way, flogged them with whips and rods in the stables (Mavrodin, 1964). Landowners massively used all sorts of objects to reduce theft, for example, at the mill they put round wooden blocks on peasant's necks so that workers could not eat a handful of grain, iron slingshots with pins were put on field workers so that they could not lie down in the field to rest. In Kursk province, peasants and peasant women constantly wore on their necks non-removable, *tightly* fixed, horse collars so that they could be harnessed to a plow or cart instead of horses (Tarasov, 2011). Since 1773, a tsarist decree was adopted, which allowed landowners to sell peasants at auction, and even earlier, in 1763, another imperial decree was signed stating that if the peasants raised an uprising against the landowners and brought them any losses, then they were sued exacted in favor of the landlords from the peasants (Tarasov, 2011).

One of the nobles, who saw all these atrocities, submitted a note addressed to Emperor Nicholas I, in which he described the then nobility:

*... most of this excellent title in Russia is immersed in ignorance, inactivity, and luxury. Having all the means at the expense of a poor person to be satiated and satisfy whims, he more and more indulges in indolence and absent-mindedness.* (Shubibsky, 1869, p. 46)

The atrocities committed by the Ryazan landowner retired general Izmailov. Escape was considered the worst *crime*. The fate of a captured fugitive or fugitive was unenviable. First, the heaviest iron slingshot was put on the neck, then, after a while, the person sat in a *chair*, which was a wooden block weighing up to 2–3 pounds, into which an iron pin was driven, to the other end of which a long chain was attached. Its end was attached to a massive iron collar. A fugitive or a fugitive had to constantly drag this deck along the village, in the field to work. However, in the long list of the retired general's crimes, the most significant was, nevertheless, the content of a kind of "harem" in the manor house. The fanatical house was a squat two-story building, to which two wings were attached on each side. In one of them, there were workshops and a prison, where prisoners were shackled by their necks to damp walls and were given only bread and water. In the master's prison, at least 30 people, both men, and women were constantly kept for months on bread and water. The room was swarming with all kinds of insects and it was cold (Shubibsky, 1869).

In addition to slingshots, wooden blocks were also worn on the necks of the prisoners, in which they were also forced to work (Slavutinsky, 1985). The former inhabitant of the harem, a peasant Akulina Gorokhova, worked for six months in a slingshot at a potash factory, and then was transferred to a brick factory (Slavutinsky, 1985). To keep in subjection and mock such a mass of forced people, Izmailov created and supported a whole "army" of the so-called *cossacks*. These were the most powerful peasants from the household. There were from 30 to 50 people. They ate well, lived in good houses, and despised their fellow villagers. They were ready to fulfill any whim of their master since they knew that for any oversight they could be chained in a slingshot and sent to a brick factory. They were dressed in special costumes, had whips and whips, and pranced on fast horses. They especially tried when searching for fugitives, whom they quickly found and brought to the host for reprisal (Shubibsky, 1869).

In the Middle Volga provinces, on the example of which our research was carried out, during the investigation conducted by the police and gendarmes, many similar examples were also revealed. A peasant serf girl from the village of Karachary, Kurmysh district, Simbirsk province, in April 1800, was detained by a forest patrol in the forest, several miles from the village in neck and hand shackles, when she tried to run away from her landowner Nagatkin, unable to bear his harassment and bullying. It was the mockery of the peasants, after the landowner Kindyakov forced his peasants in the village of Baryatino to work in the fields in iron shackles and slingshots, that led in 1821 to their rebellion and collective insubordination to the tyrant. The manager of another landowner, Krasnoperov, forced peasant women during field work to move from place to place in the field wooden blocks (chairs) chained to their collars. In the Buinsky district, the landowner Evsinov also forced his serfs to work in chains. The Buinsky district court considered the complaint of the fugitive peasant woman Emelyanova, whose landowner was Sinbukhina. She chained her by the collar to a loom and constantly beat and punished her. This list can be continued. As a rule, in all these cases, the Kurmysh and Buinsky district courts of the Simbirsk province rendered *censure* to the landowners and severely punished the peasants for disobedience. For example, the peasants of the village of Baryatino received from 50 to 200 lashes each for insubordination to the landowner.

The question arises: did the representatives of local authorities, law enforcement agencies know about the deeds that the landowners did concerning their peasants? If you knew, how did you react to them? If such examples became public, then the noble society, especially after the coming to power of Emperor Nicholas I, who categorically forbade the landowners to punish the peasants with iron objects, to mock them, could make a petition to the governor to establish in court *custody* such an estate. Such cases were started up constantly, but they, as a rule, arose after the peasant uprisings that had taken place. Evidence of this can be called the case initiated by officials of the Gendarme Corps in the Simbirsk province, which was investigated from January 4 to September 19, 1850. It was called *On the indignation of the peasants against their landlords and the cruel treatment of their owners*. However, the case ended only with the establishment of guardianship over the landlord owners, for which a special commission was formed by the governor's decree. That is, we can confidently conclude that the investigation was carried out only on facts that were impossible or extremely difficult to hide.

If the fanatical landowners got off with tutelage over their estate, as the Lieutenant General Izmailov, then peasants – participants in unrest, uprisings according to the system of punishments adopted by the *Code on Punishments* of 1845, by decision of the police, landowners, officials associated with the management of specific peasants, zemstvo and district courts, were subject to mandatory punishment with gauges, whips or rods.

Ulyanovsk researcher Romanov, who studied the problem of investigating peasant uprisings for a long time, in his book, placed data on the number of peasants who died in Russia as a result of the cruel treatment of landowners and estate managers only for the period from 1843 to 1847 (Table 01).

**Table 1.** The number of peasants killed as a result of the cruel treatment of landlords and estate managers in 1843– 847 (Romanov, 2008)

Year	Types of negative consequences			Social status of persons convicted of cruel treatment and accused of death sentences		
	Death	The birth of a dead baby	Driving to suicide	Landlords	Incl. peasants accused of capital punishment	Rural foremen, clerks, managers
1843	40	10	-	-	-	-
1844	80	18	-	27	14	59
1845	89	34	-	-	24	70
1846	80	19	8	18	20	67
1847	59	17	5	22	16	67

The central and local authorities understood that the concealment of crimes committed by the landowners against their peasants often became the trigger for peasant unrest and uprisings, therefore, especially after the accession of Emperor Nicholas I and the suppression of the Decembrist uprising, they were especially thoroughly investigated. The emperor demanded constant reports on peasant uprisings and measures to suppress them. The fact that the problem was acute is evidenced by the reports that periodically fell on the emperor's table. Only in 1827–1828, the emperor was informed about the riot of peasants in the estates of the landowner Kamenskaya and the possession of the nobleman Tatishchev, about the indignation of the specific peasants of the Vyatka province, about the facts of collective disobedience of the peasants in the estates of the landowners of the second-major Sorochinskaya, Satin, about the uprising of the specific peasants in the Perm province.

Let us turn again to the materials collected by Romanov. The seriousness of the problem of peasant uprisings is indicated by the figures reflecting the number of landowners killed by the peasants, as well as the number of attempts on their lives that occurred in the period from 1839 to 1847 (Table 02).

**Table 2.** The number of murders and attempts on the life of landlords and estate managers carried out by peasants in 1839–1847 (Romanov, 2008)

Year	Killed			Attempted life			Total	grand total
	landlords	managers	Total	landlords	managers	Total		
1836								10
1839	8	1	9					9
1840	17	3	20	3		3		23
1842	13	2	15	6		6		21
1843	13	15	28					28
1844	17	13	30					30
1845	8	9	17			12		29
1846	16	6	22	10				32
1847	20	10	30	14	15*	39		69

Could the actions of the authorities have prevented peasant uprisings? Yes, it is possible, when the authorities became aware of a possible protest, they warned the landowners about this, arrested the peasants who were preparing a protest action, gathered peasants to gatherings and warned them about the possible consequences, and placed military teams in peasant houses. But there were very few cases describing preventive measures to prevent a peasant uprising. Among them, the case *On the adoption of measures to prevent disorder in the estate of the landowner Raevskaya* in November 1860 is known.

Calm in this and other similar cases was established by the conviction of the local authorities and police officers.

If the peasants rebelled, then in this case the authorities acted harshly and mercilessly because the uprising rarely limited the territory of one village, several villages rebelled at once, and the nobles remembered the *Pugachevism*. In 1843, dozens of villages in the Kazan, Simbirsk, and Samara provinces revolted, and the peasants, having plundered the landowners' names, seized firearms. The rebels were joined by the dismissed lower army ranks. Military teams that arrived on the instructions of the governors to suppress the rebellion were fired upon. During the shootings, 13 people were killed, and there were losses among the punishers. In 1844, military teams were forced to use weapons 7 times, and in 1846 – 9 times (Sidorova & Shcherbakova, 2006).

Concerning the nobles, through whose fault the peasants rebelled, the courts in most cases showed little understandable leniency. The police and the courts tried in every possible way to remove the landowner who had committed an obvious crime against his peasants from criminal responsibility. Consider how such cases were resolved. As soon as such a case became known to the authorities, the county police captain immediately opened an investigation, informed the governor and the local branch of the Gendarme Corps, who took the investigation under their control. The above-mentioned case of the landowner Stakhov was investigated by Filippov, a private bailiff of the Kazan city polices who arrived from Kazan, with the assistance of a local police captain. Unfortunately, the investigation into the landowner Stakhov, as well as the other Kazan landowner Butlerov, ended in nothing. In both cases, bailiff Filippov issued an investigative report that “the rumors were not confirmed”.

The case of the Kazan landowner Pavlova, who flogged to death in the summer of 1841, the boy Nikiforov, was very indicative. Although the investigative actions carried out by the local police proved the landowner's involvement in the child's death and the case reached the Kazan Chamber of the Criminal Court, however, at the court session, the landowner was acquitted, and his death was recognized as the result of the police ordering him to be flogged with rods for alleged theft at the local tailor Lobin. The case ended as well as the cases related to the charges of the landowners, nothing. Moreover, the old Constantine district police captain who investigated the case and brought him to trial for *poor performance of his official duties* was dismissed from service.

The above analysis of the conditions of the preliminary investigation, its results, and the court decision led to the conclusion that in the case of a high official and social status of the accused, purposeful actions were taken objectively to terminate the proceedings at the stage of a formal investigation, and if this failed, then to acquit the accused at the stage of legal proceedings.

We have at our disposal many facts confirming the reluctance of the state, not in words, but in deeds to fight at least for the minimum human rights of peasants, among which the main is the right to life. Even in cases when investigations were carried out, the perpetrators were exposed, it is not a fact that at the trial the case ended with a fair verdict and the landowners-murderers would receive well-deserved punishment. The case was either subjected to many months, and in some cases, many years of red tape, or the courts passed acquittals, or even the case did not reach the court at all, and the authorities limited themselves to *suggestions*. Here are examples of this approach. The Kazan Chamber of the Criminal Court did not *find corpus delicti* in the actions of the manager of the estate, an important provincial dignitary Sakharov, a certain Zaurikh, who ordered the peasant to be flogged with 500 blows with rods,

after which he died. The judges did not find a *causal relationship* between the actions of the manager and the death of the peasant .

The attempt of the Samara civilian governor to transfer in 1860, on the eve of the abolition of serfdom, to court the case of the nobleman Dashkova, who organized mass public beatings of peasants with whips and rods on a *wooden mare* specially made for these purposes.

There were examples of another approach. When in 1827 the courtyard peasants wrote to Emperor Nicholas, I am complaining about the cruel treatment of them by General Izmailov, upon learning of this he turned to the governor of the Ryazan province to investigate to deal with his serfs, who, in his opinion, allegedly conspired and prepared a mutiny. The governor sent 3 officials of his administration, accompanied by a company of soldiers. General searches of the peasants, interrogations with "predilection", slashing and torture began. Believing in his infallibility, Izmailov gave a bribe to the members of the provincial government so that the matter was resolved in the *right direction*. However, on May 11, 1827, Colonel of the Gendarme Corps Shamin appeared at the estate. He removed the provincial commission of inquiry from the investigation and personally conducted an inquiry with his comrades, presenting through Benckendorff materials to the emperor. The case dragged on until 1830, when the emperor, by his decree, established guardianship over Izmailov's estates, and he was exiled to the city of Tula for a permanent residence (Shubibsky, 1869).

Concerning the peasants who took a direct part in the uprising, or somehow involved in its preparation or other indirect participation, even verbal support of the insurgents, the police and the courts acted harshly, uncompromisingly, and mercilessly. Beginning in 1837, the ranks of the gendarmerie department began to be involved in the investigation of peasant uprisings, which was reflected in the *Order to Civil Governors*. Although the investigations were carried out by the provincial police authorities, however, the gendarme officers completely controlled his ho, as was the case in the investigation in 1855 of the murder of the Penza landowner Martynov and the Nizhny Novgorod landowner Bazhanova by peasants.

When investigating crimes related to the actions of peasants, the authorities used such forms of activity as operational-search and then preliminary investigation. During rampant interrogations, accompanied by flogging of suspects, as well as the use of denunciations of other peasants, the perpetrators of crimes were quickly identified. Special attention was paid to the search and arrest of the ringleaders. In several cases, offsite sessions of the military court were held, the composition of which was determined by the governor-general. The judges quickly got acquainted with the circumstances of the case, heard witnesses to the commission of this crime, indictments prepared by members of investigative commissions, which usually included either private bailiffs sent from the province, or local police captains, officials of the provincial government and gendarme officers. Immediately, in the presence of the peasants, sentences were passed. Here, in the village, in the presence of peasants, death sentences were carried out in relation to the instigators and those directly responsible for the murder. Other active participants were sentenced to long terms of hard labor, and those found less guilty, that is, ordinary participants in the rebellion, were sentenced to lashes (Sidorova & Shcherbakova, 2006).

Peasant escapes, if they were not accompanied by arson, were considered by the police officers, and if it was a mass escape, then by the police officers. They carried out investigative actions, organized the slip of the fugitives. Cases of peasants escaping from landowners were considered, as a rule, by

district courts. The captured fugitives were returned to the landowner by a court decision, sentencing him to a certain number of lashes or rods. The landowners who sheltered the fugitive peasants were subject to serious liability in the form of large fines. So, in 1829, a large fine was paid by the court decision by the leader of the nobility of the Kazan province, Prince Gruzinsky, in whose estate fugitive peasants were found.

## 7. Conclusion

The general crisis of feudal relations in the first half of the 19th century exposed the full severity of social relations between the nobles and forced peasants who were on their property, exposed the imperfection of the legislation that consolidates these relations, as well as the general negative situation in the state, which formed an unsuitable practice of covering up the criminal acts of landowners' cruel treatment of their peasants and the impotence of the judicial and law enforcement system, unable to put an end to this.

During the period under review, none of the cases we studied, brought against landowners for cruel treatment of serfs, ended in a conviction. Cases were either dragged along and "fell apart" in the courts, or they were acquitted, and the officials who initiated them during the investigation were often harassed.

External incitement to a mutiny of the peasants against the landlords took place, but extremely rarely, and the discontent and actions of the peasants themselves had, as a rule, internal reasons.

The main reasons for the mass discontent of the peasants, which led to popular uprisings, were, firstly, their difficult economic situation, when the landowners tried to enrich themselves as much as possible at the expense of the peasants, increasing the size of the quitrent and the number of days allocated for corvée. The peasants were especially angry at the facts of the cruel treatment of them by the landowners, which reached not only fanaticism but even the death of the peasants. When suppressing peasant uprisings, state authorities, law enforcement agencies and courts acted quickly, efficiently and as harshly as possible.

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