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## The Study of Public Assistance Boards in Domestic Historiography

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*In this article the works in Russian historical literature dedicated to the activities of public assistance boards in sovereign Russia have been analysed. Several stages in the development of historical thought caused by the change of research paradigms and generations of historians have been singled out. The paper should give the reader a general idea of particular historical works and scientific achievements in the field of studies of public assistance boards, assess the results achieved and provide the basis for new research prospects.*

*Keywords: historiography, public assistance board, public assistance, social guardianship.*

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### Introduction

The use of achievements of the past generations of scientists, the knowledge they have accumulated, the research methods they have worked out are important conditions of an effective development of modern historical science.

This article is aimed to analyse the basic directions and some of the peculiar features of research on the issues of the chosen topic.

It should be reminded that public assistance boards resulted from the reforms in the provinces in 1775 and were founded to assist the population of provincial capital cities and towns in receipt of small loans, education management<sup>1</sup>, medicine and social guardianship. The analysis of historic experience of these institutions makes it possible to determine their place and role in the system of social and loan institutions in pre-reform Russia.

It is also very important for understanding of functioning principles of modern regional social care institutions that represent a connecting link between population and state agencies.

Three different stages can be distinguished in the studies of public assistance boards. These stages have distinctive contents and their own time limits: 1) pre-Soviet period (the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century); 2) Soviet period (1917 – the late 1980s); 3) post-Soviet period (the early 1990s – the present time).

### Pre-soviet historical literature dedicated to public assistance boards

The foundation of public assistance boards was not a single-stage process. It had lasted for several years. In several provinces they were

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founded only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which predetermined the rise of historiographical tradition of their studies in Russia.

The general condition of historical science at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> – the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also served as an important factor. It was then that the universities (as well as the Academy of Science) were not the leading centres of historical studies of the country. According to V. P. Kozlov, the academic historical science could not satisfy the practical need for historical knowledge that became acute in connection with particular governmental measures in the domestic and foreign policy spheres taken by the authorised agencies. The need of departments for knowledge of the past manifested itself in organisation of a whole system of “sectional historiographers”, highly qualified specialists in a correspondent area, as a rule, who received access to archival materials (Kozlov, 1989. P. 214). Due to the official functions of historical works their authors could not use their opportunities to their fullest extent. The research works of “sectional historiographers” have included a wide range of facts and have been written by the first-hand participants and witnesses of events.

The first work of such type by A. D. Stog can be considered as historical study on formation and development of public assistance in Russia (Stog, 1818–1831) performed under the aegis of two ministries – the Ministry of Police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs<sup>2</sup>. The upper official singled out the basic stages of development of the Russian system of support and care of the destitute and bound them with the activities of the state and its institutions, including public assistance boards. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Stog’s classification was reconsidered. A number of authors (Maksimov, 1894; Guerrier, 1897; Jacobi, 1894) suggested the national

assistance system should not be considered only according to the principle of total subordination to state regulation, but also take into account the formed realities (forms of assistance, pandemic factors).

For some time the public assistance boards had not been studied purposefully. The increase of research interest to these institutions was connected with the reforms of the 1860s that touched various spheres of social life and the tendency, occurred in the governmental circles, to liquidate public assistance boards taking into account possible changes in banking. Thus, in his large work on the history of Ministry of Internal Affairs Doctor of Law and Philosophy N. V. Varadinov showed the development of public assistance boards from the moment of their subordination to the mentioned institution (1802) until the time he witnessed himself (Varadinov, 1858–1862). The author brought in a lot of documents, mostly from the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, thus asserting that fullness and accuracy became the starting point of their work (Varadinov, 1863). Nevertheless, a large number of problems involved in the research inevitably resulted in the loss of some facts. For instance, the opening of Yenisseysk Board of Public Assistance in 1823 did not occupy the author’s attention. But in the work there occurred the names of prominent benefactors and key legislative acts. For some objective reasons Varadinov paid great attention to the activities of the ministers of internal affairs. It should be mentioned that while elucidating the work of public assistance boards until 1818 Varadinov mostly bases on the facts from A. D. Stog.

In 1862 the head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> department of the economic department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs K. A. Mushinskiy wrote a large article on the problems of the system of public assistance in Russia. The article was based on the archives and

documents of the department. Its value consists in the statistics of the condition and capital flow in public assistance boards, quantity of charitable organisations and number of people cared for. The evaluative comments from the official about the negative experience of the system of hospital councils and extremely unsatisfactory condition of a number of institutions under the jurisdiction of public assistance boards are also worth paying attention to (Mushinskiy, 1862).

The publications enumerated above for sure contributed to the accumulation of the source study materials and became prominent in historiographical tradition of the subject. However their authors were not aimed at scientific analysis of phenomena or revelation of historical premises and essential consequences.

The officials were also attracted by the problem of the domination of these or those tasks, imposed on public assistance boards. Thus, Yenisseyk governor A. P. Stepanov, the author of an important research “Yenisseyk Province”, said: “What are public assistance boards? Are they mints? Banks? Assemblies of manufactures? The social care for poor unfortunate brothers is the only responsibility of these organizations. Not collecting of funds, but asylum and shelter – they are the direct aim... As the boards work, they should have care (but not acquirement) as their main purpose. The soul is first.

Still I am talking about the board that already represents something whole, mature, that can work independently, energetically” (Stepanov, 1835).

Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the activity of public assistance boards was considered within the limits of charity and arrangement of public assistance in Russia (Deryuzhinskiy, 1897; Maksimov, 1894; Sokolovskiy, 1902) as well as in connection with the staging of other issues: the history of bank (Lamanskiy, 1854;

Guryev, 1904), the reforms of local government in the period of Catherine II (Grigoryev, 1910) and was characterised ambiguously. According to one of the points of view, they “as theoretically philanthropic institutions turned into the biggest banks of villeinage Russia” (Pokrovskiy, [no date]. P. 222–223). Vice versa, a statesman and financier E. I. Lamanskiy supposed that public assistance boards took a secondary position in spreading of loan, since they were concentrated on charity as the main purpose of their activity (Lamanskiy, 1854). Quite an important remark was made by a famous Russian scientist and lawyer V. F. Deryuzhinskiy about a wide range of tasks given to public assistance boards regarding the lack and low qualification of their staff (Deryuzhinskiy, 1897).

An important place in historiography of public assistance boards is occupied by E. D. Maksimov’s article “Public Assistance Boards: Their Past and Present” published in 1901. As an active benefactor, the author of numerous works on the problems of history, organisation and modern condition of public assistance and charity in Russia and abroad, Maksimov revealed red tape, petty regulation of affairs and formalities of functioning as characteristic features of public assistance boards. He connected these phenomena with the influence of people at the helm of the state and administration (Maksimov, 1901). In his early work while evaluating the functioning of public assistance boards Maksimov wrote that “the majority” of the population was “beyond” their care (Maksimov, 1895).

Thus, before the Revolution historians did not carry out any special research dedicated to comprehension of functioning experience of public assistance boards, except for a little article by E. D. Maksimov published only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Still they published quite a number of works that had indirect relation to the problems of the topic in question.

### **Research on the topic from 1917 until the end of the 1980s**

After the October Revolution of 1917, in connection with the formation of new social and political system, the charity, both public and private, was reduced to social maintenance and became exclusively state affair. The life put forward the problems of elaboration and formation of new social institutions. At the same time the emphasis was made on the study of achievements of social policy of the Soviet State.

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Soviet historic science there established the understanding of history based on Marxist theory postulates of formational and class nature. Conventional social policy of autocratic state was considered to reflect the interests of the ruling classes. Owing to this, the creation of some effective system of social assistance was not among the tasks. Consequently, public and private charity was considered as an alternative to such system and was not studied thoroughly enough, but through the prism of negative skeptical attitude. All this resulted in the loss of continuity in the research of the problem in question.

The separate aspects of functioning of public assistance boards were under study from the middle of the 1950s and until the end of the 1980s, but only as assistant means in elaboration of the other scientific tasks. A quite vague record of these institutions appears in the monograph by S. Y. Borovoy dedicated to the development of banking in pre-reform Russia. The author presented estimation of the basic – serfdom – direction of economic and loan policy of tsarism during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Borovoy, 1958). It was very concordant with the statements made by banking historians at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century about support of nobility estates as a top aim of public assistance boards (Big Encyclopaedia, 1900). The point of view of a prominent Soviet historian N. P. Yeroshkin is

remarkable in this case. He studied functioning of central and local institutions of the Russian Empire in details and described public assistance boards the following way, “A grand face of tsar’s charity, demagogically publicised as “help to people”, concealed “the real objects of this charity, these are economic support to landed noblemen and financing of villeinage autocracy” (Yeroshkin, 1981). At the same time academic N. M. Druzhinin depicted public assistance boards as institutions “affected by the ideas of Enlightenment” (Druzhinin, 1964).

A little different approach to the analysis of important problems of the state institutions in Russia of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was presented by D. Orlovsky. In the 1960s – 1970s he worked on probation in Moscow State University under the direction of professor P. A. Zayonchkovskiy famous for his striving for the fact that during the reconstruction of a historic event the source should “speak for itself” (Bolshakova, 2008). While studying the contents, structure, production and the way of functioning of the Ministry of Internal Affairs during 1802 – 1881, the American scientist established an increase of structural crisis in the Ministry, namely incapability to cope with the current tasks, unproductiveness and *ungovernability* of work on the basis of the existing laws and administrative means (Orlovsky, 1981). This conclusion is important in evaluation of functional efficiency of public assistance boards under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

### **Studies of the topic in post-soviet historiography**

From the beginning of the 1990s there started a reevaluation of the experience of understanding of domestic history. It was connected with the disavowal from Marxist and Leninist conceptual approaches as the only possible methods of its study. In the new socio-economic conditions

for development of Russian society, domestic scientists got the opportunity to go beyond the limits of former political and ideological doctrines and enlarge the informational space. The conditions of crisis in the system of social care at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century caused new forms of assistance to socially vulnerable members of the population and predetermined the scientific interest to the history of social work and charity. Therefore historiographical situation around the public assistance boards have also changed. The social direction of their functioning received the most intensive studies.

The Ph. D. thesis by N. V. Chernetsov can be considered the first work in this field where he reviewed public assistance boards within the bounds of genesis and evolution of public assistance in Russia. The research possesses a wide chronological coverage and aspires to no less wide generalisations owing to which it is not so profound. Studying the nature of institutions and funds of public assistance boards the author has made the following conclusion: Catherine II initiated a well-structured organisation intended to help the poor and if possible provide governmental support to cover large expenses on their maintenance. However, possessing wide powers to use the finances for mostly commercial operations, the boards lost their charitable character and directed their funds to affairs that had nothing to do with care. Chernetsov supposes that if the boards had had small loans, for instance, for development of crafts among the indigent population, the credit operations would have had much more in common with assistance to the poor (Chernetsov, 1996). We can reproach the author with overestimation of loan opportunities of public assistance boards. He did not adequately take into consideration the absence of a wide net of private banks, lack of development of commercial lending in Russia,

the reasons for which were hidden in paucity of bourgeoisie, lack of free funds, weakness of consumer market and others.

Much later, in 2004, V. V. Morozan analysed the loan business of public assistance boards and proved that these activities of theirs at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were weak and emerging. Unlike national banks, public assistance boards suffered “much bigger difficulties with efficient use of inner and outside funds” (Morozan, 2004). Their active operations were greatly influenced by local social and economic factors. As the author himself acknowledges, he did not manage “to form any idea about the social position of the investors of province banks” (Morozan, 2004). After a detailed coverage of functioning of Russian banks in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> – the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the author has come to the conclusion that in conditions of the villeinage Russia the main users of the bank funds could be the state and landowners. Morozan estimates the “shift” to the nobility in the loan policy of the Russian government as a wish of the authorities “to adjust state loan institutions to socio-economic realities of the country” (Morozan, 2004).

Doctoral thesis by M. V. Firsov on the history of social work in Russia also concerns the functioning of public assistance boards (Firsov, 1997). It reveals the way the institutions in question increased their funds at the expense of bank operations, private donations, and independent economical activities. As the author puts it, “the public assistance boards carried out the work on support of the indigent, they could not satisfy the main needs of the populations, and not only because they did not have enough finances or because their administrative-economic system was not perfect”; it was also fueled by the “ill fame of the pre-reform institutions of public assistance” and inconstancy of meetings (Firsov, 1997).

The material, accumulated during the previous time and newly detected, has resulted in a generalising work by E. V. Dupliy on the history of public assistance boards (Dupliy, 2004). The contents of her PhD thesis includes a statement of premises, conditions, process of establishing and development of the institution of public assistance boards as regional structures to help and support socially vulnerable groups of the population. The researcher concentrates her attention on formation of the legal status of these organisations. The methods of facts processing and their systematisation in diagrams point at a rather professional source study preparation of the author. Here a new phenomenon in the historiography of the problem occurs – the periodisation offered by Dupliy. This chart is based on the principle of changes of the institution of assistance in accordance with the issued acts and governmental actions. But, as we have already mentioned above, this principle was questioned at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It should be marked that in the thesis the author mainly speaks about public assistance boards of 23 Central and Western provinces of European part of Russia. That is why with regard to some regions, such as Siberia, separate points stated by the author need determination and further elaboration. Thus, paucity of nobility and merchant estates in Siberian region predetermined the fact that the head staff of public assistance boards was appointed, but not elective. The peculiarity of the region as the destination of criminal and politic exile determined the presence of “loan capital of exiled settlers of Eastern Siberia” in Yenisseysk Public Assistance Board. It seems that the time limits of functioning of public assistance boards in the region must be prolonged until 1895, i.e. the beginning of reforms of provincial government in Siberia and transfer of the boards into the structure of medical administration. But

this date still needs to be confirmed, because according to I. P. Pavlova in 1907 state care through public assistance boards was preserved in 17 provinces, including Siberian provinces (Pavlova, 2004. P. 108).

It is worth paying attention to the confusion that occurred in the monograph by U.N. Maleka. While talking about the system of state administration of care in the 18<sup>th</sup> century he writes, “At first public assistance boards existed in Arkhangelsk and Astrakhan Provinces, in 9 Baltic Provinces of the western part, in Stavropol, Tobolsk, Tomsk, Yenisseysk and Irkutsk provinces and in the area of Don Cossack troops of Don Cossack troops...” (Maleka, 2003). Initially, none of the boards enumerated ever possessed a priority in their sphere of activity. Novgorod Public Assistance Board was the first to open in 1776, then there appeared Tver and Yaroslavl Boards in 1778, a year later – Vladimir, Kursk and Pskov Boards, whereas Tomsk and Yenisseysk Boards of Public Assistance were founded in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Second, the source to which Maleka refers (Encyclopedia by F. A. Brokgaus and I.A. Efron (1898) tells about public assistance boards that continued their work after 1864. The value of the monographic research is also reduced by the fact that statistics is often given without any points to the source of borrowing, as in the article “Administration of Public Care at the 19<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries” that describes children’s death rate in founding hospitals, quantity of hospitals and hospital beds, quantity of pupils in medical assistant schools, expenses on maintenance in penitentiaries, etc.

According to Doctor of Historical Sciences A. R. Sokolov, frequent mistakes and faults of some researchers are caused by one reason – “almost total absence of generalising works that would cover the whole history of charity and public care, following the logic of development of

these social systems during a long period of time” (Sokolov, 2006).

There exist particular difficulties in work that are connected with limited opportunities of provincial researchers to work in the capital archives that keep materials on public assistance boards. Regional archives have borne irreplaceable losses during the last years. Wars, fires, rooms maladjusted for keeping documents, work of the institutions themselves that increased the number of the annihilable materials have caused disappearance of the documents. The necessity of thorough search for documents, considerable territorial scattering of public assistance boards have formed an individual approach of researchers to elaboration of the topic. In our opinion, the latter circumstance is not the least important reason for actual errors and disputable statements.

Over the last decade public assistance boards have been studied in several aspects:

- for understanding of public assistance based on materials of Yenisseysk Province (Katsina, 2001; 2002), Zabaykalsk Province (Nagaytseva, 2002), Western Siberia (Degaltseva, 2002), the Urals (Zadvornova, 2001), Arkhangelsk Province (Kolebyakina, 2002), Vladimir Province (Myagtina, 2006);
- for generalisation of the familiar historical material within the bounds of Central and Western provinces of the European part of Russia, as well as within chronological limits: 1775–1864 (Dupliy, 2004);
- within the limits of formation of Russian state loan institutions and their functioning before the banking reform of 1860 (Morozan, 2004).

At the same time the results of the latest studies of the issue are included into a wider context of history of social care and charity

(Maleka, 2003; Sokolov, 2006; Uliyanova, 2006).

The functioning of public assistance boards is reflected not only in the aspect of scientific understanding, but also in the aspect of revelation, use and interpreting of the sources (Anthology of Social Work, 1995; Banking and Loan Institutions in Yenisseysk Province, 2006; Charity and Social Care in Yenisseysk Province (1822-1917), 2009).

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of the literature shows that since the middle of the 1990s the researchers started collecting the fundamental amount of facts already developed by pre-revolutionary historiography and introducing it into science. The idea-content has been formed by the theses by Chernetsov, Firsov, Maleka, Dupliy and worked over in Russian State Social University (former Moscow State Social University). The scientists of Uralo-Siberian Region have shown an evident interest to the topic.

Most works include questions of organisational, legal and financial aspects of activity of public assistance boards, functioning of the dependent institutions (orphan’s homes, founding hospitals, hospitals, mental hospitals, alms-houses, workhouses). Still public assistance boards remain an object of historical reconstruction and creation of a wider context that would allow us to represent a general picture of social reforms in Russia.

We think that divergence of estimations of the main function of public assistance boards that exists among the researchers is connected with the prism they are studied through: the history of banking or charity institutions. Consequently, in some cases public assistance boards are associated with “provincial banks”, in other cases – with “institutions of care” or “imperial

charity institutions”, etc. It seems that to get a clear idea of public assistance boards we should estimate the level of development of social and banking and loan institutions in pre-reform Russia and answer the question what hampered the formation of their activity.

In general, notwithstanding the elaboration of a number of basic points, the topic of public assistance boards has not yet found a systematic and deep study and is still “open” for special researches on the All-Russian level as well as on the regional level.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1782 public education was withdrawn from under the jurisdiction of public assistance boards and delegated to the committee of foundation of public colleges.

<sup>2</sup> At first public assistance boards were under the supreme powers embodied by the monarch and the governing Senate. As the ministries were formed, in 1802 the boards passed under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Internal Affairs and in 1810 – under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Police. Since 1819 as a result of the amalgamation of the mentioned ministries, the affairs of the public assistance boards were concentrated in the 2nd and the 3rd departments of the Economic Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

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## **Изучение приказов общественного призрения в отечественной историографии**

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*В статье анализируется комплекс российской исторической литературы, посвященной деятельности приказов общественного призрения самодержавной России. Выделяются этапы развития исторической мысли, обусловленные сменой исследовательских парадигм и поколений историков. Работа призвана ознакомить читателя с конкретно-историческими трудами и достижениями ученых в плане изучения приказов общественного призрения, оценить достигнутые результаты и, отталкиваясь от них, наметить новые исследовательские горизонты.*

*Ключевые слова: историография, приказ общественного призрения, общественное призрение, социальное попечение.*

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