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**Handicraft Industry Development of Prerevolutionary Russia: An Investigation on Germanic Russianists of the Early 20th Century**

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**Abstract**

Germanic Russian studies of the first third of the twentieth century had a certain interest in the development of handicraft industry in Russia at the turn of the 19-20th centuries. The researchers focused on the economic aspects of small-scale industry situation, some possible prospects of its further operation. Less attention was paid to social aspects, including the situation of direct producers. At the same time in the early twentieth century German experts in Russia did not deal directly with the functioning of the Russian non-censorship industry as a rule. This problem was analyzed in the work by A. Bargon, who was in Russian captivity during the First World War, and worked in the system of handicraft production in Russia for some time. However, it should be taken into account that the work by A.V. Bargon was published in 1933, in the conditions of the already emerging Nazi dictatorship, and the author was not a professional historian, or an economist. All this left an indelible imprint on his work, which is of a journalistic nature. It is of some source significance and interesting, on the one hand, as the eyewitness evidence of the Russian small industry position during the First World War, and on the other - as a product of Germanic Russian studies during the early-Nazi times. Therefore, a special attention was given to it, also due to the specialized focus of A.V. Bargon's work and the consonance of its assessments to the judgments of some historians from the second half of the 20th century.

**Keywords:** Russia, Handicraft industry, Germanic Russian studies, Competition.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction to the problem**

The industrial development of pre-revolutionary Russia is one of the most studied and debated topics in both domestic and foreign historiography. At that, both pay a certain attention to the development of artisanal production in the country at the turn of the 19-20th centuries. The foreign publicists and researchers paid attention to this problem at the beginning of the 20th century. This also applies to the German experts of Russia. Subsequently, in 1933, the thesis by A.V. Bargon was devoted to the situation of handicraft enterprises in Russia of that period, after which a long break concerning the study of the problem took place in the German "Rossica". The work by A.V. Bargon, like the works of German experts in Russia of the preceding decades, has a certain source knowledge - the authors of the relevant publications visited Russia and had the opportunity to observe artisan production in it. Within the framework of the proposed article it seems advisable to provide the analysis of Russian handicraft industry development interpretation by German researchers and publicists of the first third of the twentieth century.

### **1.2 Problem relevance**

The importance of historical experience study concerning the interaction between large and small industry under the conditions of Russian capitalist industrialization is indisputable. The question of the chances and the prospects of small business in the context of large industry progressive development are directly related with this issue. Thus, the evidences of foreign observers concerning small-scale industry operation in the conditions of industrialization are valuable and interesting - these evidences show the problem of small business adaptation to new realities, allow to imagine better the difficulties of this adaptation and possible prospects for it, as well as the chances of handicraftsmen concerning the integration into bourgeois society. Needless to say, a critical analysis, the consideration of the possible bias of observers, the comparison of their judgments and the estimates with the testimonies of other sources are required. Nevertheless, the assessments of foreigners are important for a more complete representation of the ambiguous picture of small-scale production state and probable prospects and those employed in it within capitalist industrialization conditions.

### **1.3. Problem study**

Despite the abundance of literature on the development of Russian small-scale industry at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, a special study of foreign historiography concerning this topic leaves much to be desired. The historiographical aspects of the problem were covered in the relevant sections of a number of special works (Tarnovsky, 1995; Naumova, 1998). The thorough historiographical study by I. V. Potkina analyzed the study of handicraft industry development in the Russian Empire by the Anglo-American historiography of the second half of the 20th century in detail. The author paid an essential attention to the concept by O. Krisp; It was especially noted that in the 1980-ies English-speaking Russian studies had the tendency to consider the development of Russian small-scale industry as a typical variant of the European "proto-industrialization" (Potkina, 1994. pp. 101, 108-110). The very concept of "proto-industrialization", reflected in the German "Rossiks" of the end of the last century (Gestwa, 1998) was considered (based on the material of Russia and Sweden) in the article by N.B. Selunskaya (2000, pp. 4-17). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the focus of domestic historians, who turned to the historiography of the issue, is the analysis of its study state in the domestic and English-language literature; at that, mainly the works published in the second half of the 20th century are considered in the latter case. The critical review of foreign publications of an earlier period is almost absent. This is particularly evident in the case of Germanic Russian studies. At the beginning of the 21st century the issues of the small industry

development problems in pre-revolutionary Russia were analyzed by the author of this article (Dorozhkin, 2005. pp. 130-143). But up to now, they did not consider the review of knowledge state concerning the issues of Russian small scale industry development at the turn of the 19-20th centuries by German scientists of the first third of the last century as an independent subject of research in Russia. This circumstance determined the choice of the topic of the article.

#### **1.4 Hypotheses**

The study of the Russian handicraft production interpretation in the pre-revolutionary period by German studies of Russia in the first half of the twentieth century will make it possible to imagine better the general state of problem and the position of the non-censorship industry in Russia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, and also to trace the development of the concepts that influenced the subsequent historiography of the issue.

#### **2. Methods**

The basis for the methodology to study the interpretation of handicraft industry development in pre-revolutionary Russia by Germanic Russia studies is represented by the postulates of intellectual history trend. At that, they analyze the scientific works related to this problematic and essays issued in Germany in the 20th century within the context of the proposed work. This will provide a holistic picture of Russian small-scale industry development issues in German Russian studies, and will note the relationship between research and popular science components.

When they examine the study of the problem coverage by German Russian scholars of the first third of the last century, the authors apply the scientific principles of historicism, objectivity, and comprehensiveness. The work is based on the following general scientific and general historical methods: ideographic, expressed in the description of approaches and the concepts of individual experts in Russia; the method of periodization, according to which the study of historiography is carried out within a specific period, systemic, historical-comparative and historical-genetic methods.

#### **3. Discussion**

The situation of the handicraft industry attracted the attention of German (as well as domestic) researchers to a much lesser degree than the development of Russian large industry during the era of modernization. The growth of interest in this topic was noted in 60-90-ies of the 20th century after a long break. During this period, with the "resuscitation" of a pessimistic view on the state and the prospects of artisanal production in Russia during the pre-revolutionary period, noticeable in the works by J. Notzold (1966, pp. 101, 114-117) and, to a lesser extent, in the works by H. Haumann (1980, pp. 31, 194) and M. Spaeth, another approach appeared presented by H.D. Leve and especially by K. Gestwa (*Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, 1981, pp. 229-230; Gestwa, 1999). This approach, as will become clear below, partly signified the gap between the ideas that existed in the first third of the twentieth century in German Russian studies and partly restored another tradition. It should be said that in the first third of the last century, both interpretations of the state and possible prospects for the development of Russian handicraft industry during the pre-revolutionary period were already noticeable in the German "Rossica". M.L. Schlesinger gave a weighted description of this state and probable prospects. He noted the presence of handicrafts in the central provinces of Russia and the Urals by his general work. He indicated the production increase of metal and leather goods, utensils, icons, as well as lace weaving in a number of provinces of the country center, noted the development of the lapidary business in the Urals. Schlesinger recognized both successes and difficulties in handicraft production organization. The German publicist considered the growth of the

tendency to the division of labor among handicraftsmen in the Vladimir province as the achievement, for example, in the first years of the twentieth century there were entire villages specializing in the performance of certain operations necessary for icon painting. At the same time, on the whole, the organization of small-scale industry left much to be desired. Thus, for example, the Vologda lace crafts made by handicraft were considerably more expensive when they were delivered to the main outlet point - St. Petersburg (Schlesinger, 1908, pp. 60-61, 64, 118).

Some attention was paid to crafts by O. Hatch, the prominent German historian and the expert in Russia of the first half of the 20th century. He stressed that the short duration of the vegetative period in Russia is especially favorable for their spread among the agricultural population. A close relation between the craft and agriculture existed in the western provinces of the empire; for the most part the urban craft arose through the perception of foreign experience, synthesizing ordered works and market production. For the Russian peasantry, handicrafts are one of the most important sources of income; they give farmers up to 500 million rubles per year, and on the basis of homework they can develop the industrial production of a modern type. Hatch noted the connection of Russian small industry with the world market - some products made by handicrafts are exported and demanded abroad (Hoetzsch, 1917, pp. 142-146). This conclusion by O. Hatch fully agrees with the results of the studies by domestic historians B.V. Ananyich (1975, p. 57), K.N. Tarnovsky (1995, pp. 57, 98, 102, 163) and G.R. Naumova (1998, p. 201).

Among the works written in the first third of the twentieth century, a relatively small work by A.V. Bargon is devoted directly to the handicraft industry. It deserves a special consideration - its conclusions are quite in tune with the "pessimistic" attitude of such German scholars of the second half of the century as J. Notzold, H. Haumann and M. Spaeth. Formally, this work is a doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Cologne in 1933. The author himself is one of the leaders of the "Steel Helmet" in Magdeburg, an extremely nationalist German military organization, which later merged with the Nazi storm troops. The work is characterized by an extremely low level, a very tendentious use of sources; as was already mentioned, the author's personal observations represent a certain value.

Having noted the wide spread of handicrafts in the northern and central provinces of Russia and the Urals, A.V. Bargon stressed that the rapid growth of large industry in the last third of the 19th century negatively affected the state of small-scale industry. Railways facilitated the supply of local markets with cheap factory products, which gradually created an increasingly serious competition to the traditional sector. A particularly negative impact was the development of large-scale industry into small cotton and silk enterprises of the country center; by the end of the 19th century large factories almost replaced small producers here. A similar process took place in metalworking: Pavlovsky handicraftsmen, for example, had to limit production sharply under the influence of factory competition. The blacksmiths of the Tver province - the producers of nails - were forced to look for another job under the pressure from the same factor. All this reflected the situation in the whole country - A.V. Bargon refers here to the data by M.I. Tugan-Baranovsky. The same situation was observed in the woodworking industry. Only very few managed to improve their businesses; Pavlovsk handicraftsmen, for example, were able to withstand via the efforts of the entire artel and to transform their production into machine one (Bargon, 1933, p. 45).

It should be said that the idea that the development of large-scale industry contributed to the decline of small-scale production objectively was also encountered in Soviet historiography. I.F. Gindin believed that the growth of large-scale production combined with feudal remnants prevented the progressive development of small industry in Russia (Gindin, 1970, p. 51). But this point of view, partly consonant with A.V. Bargon's opinion, was refuted by V.I. Bovykin. On the basis of statistical data, the latter showed that the process of production concentration in Russia by no means meant the complete ousting of small enterprises from the industrial sector of the economy (Bovykin, 1984, pp. 102-103). Already at the end of the twentieth century A.V. Bargon's compatriot, K. Gestwa, showed, using the Pavlov example, that there

was no fatal inevitability of "proto-industrial" artisan production transformation into a factory one - he considered the Pavlov variant as a classic example of handicraft enterprise stability. Moreover, factory production in Russia did not eliminate small industry, but, on the contrary, contributed to its further development until the beginning of the 20th century. According to the researcher, Pavlov example fits perfectly into the general context of European small-scale industry development as a typical case. Like the Russian craft village, "co-operative capitalism" that was formed in Pavlov during the period of pre-revolutionary industrialization (or "handicraft alternative" - both terms belong to K. Gestwa), took place in a number of Western European countries. Cooperative associations and exemplary craft workshops created as the reaction to the growth of factory production were common everywhere and were also aimed to raise the level of home-based production and product competitiveness, as well as to help the solution of production and marketing problems (Gestwa, 1999, pp. 147-149, 195-200).

According to A.V. Bargon, the competition from large-scale production was supplemented by the negative impact of raw material price increase in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the lack of a cheap loan, the dependence of a small producer on a buyer. Bargon also noted a poor availability of cheap raw materials for small enterprises in a number of areas with the presence of handicrafts (Bargon, 1933, pp. 46-52), as well as the plight of the employed. With the aggregate income of 120 million rubles among small producers in 1900, the average daily earnings of a handicraftsman were only 25 kopecks (Bargon, 1933, p. 60). However, the author refrains from bringing the data to a later period, which reduces the credibility of his conclusions about the permanent deterioration of producer position. Depicting the state of Russian handicrafts in tragic tones, A. Bargon recognizes, however, that the First World War contributed to their revitalization.

The government did not show interest in artisanal production for a long time; the situation has changed only by the end of the 19th century. Thus, it was decided to maintain and expand the network of instructor schools and training workshops, to take measures to preserve the handicraft museum, to arrange exhibitions and produce popular literature, to provide small producers with raw materials, to support them with state orders, to create agencies for their product marketing in large trading centers and provide the assistance to all individuals and organizations working for the benefit of the handicraft industry. They also mentioned the need for handicraftsman support via lending (Bargon, 1933, pp. 57-58). It should be noted that this list of tasks assigned to the Main Directorate of Land Management and Agriculture in terms of small producer support is far from complete. Thus, Bargon did not mention the conduct of handicraft statistical and economic surveys, the promotion of specialized artel organization and the provision of technical assistance to them. A.V. Bargon omitted the item of a special "artisan Russian branch" organization at foreign exhibitions and on the awarding of small producers who had achieved special success. It was also planned to conduct research on various types of raw materials and experiments for the use of these species in handicrafts. Travel agents should be established not only in "large shopping centers", but also in remote regions of Russia to familiarize the population with handicrafts and promote their sale. Besides, the Main Directorate of Land Management and Agriculture was ordered to take care of "handicraft improvement and development on the outskirts" of the country (Review ..., 1913, pp. 4-5).

The effectiveness of newly adopted measures is estimated by A.V. Bargon as extremely low. Small producers did not have the necessary capital for the organization of exhibitions and museums. The author, however, did not take into account the state assistance to these measures, as well as a very wide range of tasks of the Handicraft Museum in St. Petersburg, and it was to promote "the distribution of new drawings, samples, schemes, models and improved tools." According to A.V. Bargon, the aspiration of small producers to sell their products faster, made the institution of traveling agents useless (given the very wide range of tasks assigned to them, one can hardly agree with such a categorical statement). A high level of illiteracy among small producers devalued the importance of special technical manual production and the

instructions for various industries. But A.V. Bargon also "forgets" to provide the data on the decrease of illiterate handicraftsmen number in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. The selection of information that characterizes the financial assistance of the government to small industry in Russia is tendentious. According to the data given to him, the corresponding expenses amounted to 35 thousand rubles in 1884, and 100 thousand rubles in 1900. This was absolutely not enough to save Russian handicraft industry. However, the author did not take into account that in 1902-1908 the annual allocations of the treasury for the needs of the handicraft industry increased to 160 thousand rubles, and their rapid growth followed from 1909 (in 1912 - up to 1531884 rubles). Thus, one can't justify A.V. Bargon's statement about the indifferent attitude of the authorities to handicraftsmen and their crafts and the concentration of the tsarist government attention exclusively to the needs of the large industry, to the detriment of the small producer (Bargon, 1933, 58; Review..., 1913, pp. 2-5). It should be said that this erroneous conclusion, regardless of A.V. Bargon's work, was also present in the works of the already mentioned German historians - "pessimists" of the second half of the 20th century.

It should be noted that A.V. Bargon exaggerated the importance of the factory industry as a competitor to Russian handicraftsmen. Meanwhile, a thorough study by A.A. Rybnikov shows that the factory occupied a significant place in the production of semi-finished products, and not finished products produced by handicraftsmen. In other cases, the products of factory and artisan production differed in quality: machine technologies, for example, could produce nails of medium, rather than large size (ship type nails) - the competition from metalworking plants could take place hardly. K.N. Tarnovsky notes that the ship nails, produced by the handicraft enterprises of the Perm province at the turn of the 19-20th centuries were greatly demanded in the cities of the Volga region, where river vessels were built (Rybnikov, 1913; Tarnovsky, 1995, p.64). A.V. Bargon's interpretation of small metal product manufacturer dependence on the Urals metallurgy is also exaggerated. Considering that the South Russian enterprises supplied the metal only to large factories, Bargon noted the dependence of handicraftsmen on the Ural industry, whose remoteness from the central provinces of Russia increased the cost of iron substantially. It should be noted, however, that the low quality of the Urals iron made it unsuitable for the production of a number of metal products, for example, for Pavlov knives. The researcher A. Kolkotin noted in the early twentieth century, that the Pavlov enterprise required more than 100 different types of iron for its production; the low quality of the Ural varieties made it necessary to make purchases in England and Germany. During the first years of the century, more than 100,000 poods of steel were purchased there annually. Besides, it is necessary to take into account the crisis experienced by the Urals metallurgy itself in the early 20th century. The consequence of this, on the other hand, was the transition to the craftsmanship among many regional workers previously engaged in large-scale production. This also is not agreed particularly with the A.V. Bargon's conclusions about the total decline of small industry and the suppression of large industrial production (Bargon, 1933, pp. 17-18; cf.: Kolkotin, 87).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Summarizing, it should be said that already in the first third of the twentieth century German studies of Russia revealed contradictory tendencies in the assessment of handicraft production state and prospects in Russia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. An objective approach to the problem is noted in the works by M.L. Schlesinger and O. Hatch, taking into account both the achievements and the difficulties in the development of handicraft production. On the contrary, A. Bargon's later work anticipated the conclusions of historians - "pessimists" of the second half of the last century. At the same time, A.V. Bargon, based on his own observations, was forced to acknowledge a certain progressive development of Russian small-scale industry during the First World War. "Pessimistic" assessments of the Russian non-censorship industry were refuted already at the end of the 20th century in the fundamental work by K.

Gestwa in much more detail than in the works by M.L. Schlesinger and O. Hatch, who showed and proved both relative stability, and rather high chances for the progressive development of a number of handicraft industries in the country.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors confirm that the presented data do not contain any conflict of interest.

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