

Yam Gon'ba in Siberia before the beginning of the 18th century

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Abstract. On the basis of archival sources introduced into scientific circulation for the first time, the process of formation and functioning of the “Yam gon'ba” system in Siberia at the end of the 16th – the beginning of the 18th century is revealed, its features and characteristics of community-based organizations, professional, social and economic activities of “yamschiks” are revealed. The conclusion is made about their great role in the colonization of the region and its allocation to Russia.

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Introduction

In 1582 the Cossack detachment headed by Yermak Timofeyevich moved beyond the Ural mountains. These events marked the beginning of joining Siberia to the Russian state [1]. The management system based on “voivodships” was introduced in the region, and its colonization began [2]. However, retention and development of remote and vast areas would be impossible without establishing high-quality communication between them and Moscow. At first, the major burden of governmental transportations in the region was provided by “cart duty” (Podvop duty) laid on the indigenous population. However, due to difficulty and unfamiliar character of the gon'ba, representatives Tatars, Ostyaks and Vogul nations used to flee away. Thus, at the end of the 16th century the government was inclined to think about foundation of professional yamschiks institution: and so on the main transport artery Verkhoturys (1600), Turinsk (1600), Tyumen (1601), Demiansk and Samarovsk yams were established (late 1620s – the beginning of the 1630s.). As regards their location, the Verkhoturys, Turin and Tyumen yams were in cities (with Verkhoturys, Turinsk and Tyumen respectively). Demianskiy and Samarovsk yams are separate settlements in the Irtysh River (modern village Demjanskoe Tyumen region and Khanty-Mansiysk).

Main part

Organization of “Yam gon'ba” system in Siberia had its peculiarities. Unlike in the European part of the country where, prior to the beginning of the 17th century, the obligation to recruit and fund yamschiks was mostly borne by the so-called “taxed population” [3], beyond “the Stone” (Ural mountains) it was the government which was in charge of all matters related to arrangement and functioning of

organized communication. All Siberian yams were arranged by one common scheme. Central or voivodships authorities appointed a so-called “priborschik” (selector), among deti boiarskie (one of the categories of the feudal class in Russia), who selected volunteers in counties of the European Russia and/or in situ. The bail was paid for yamschiks. They were given money “assistance”, carts to destination places and horses with “gon'ba supply”. Also they could be provided with food and seeds. On arrival to the place, yamschiks were at the disposal of a “stroyschik” who solved matters of their accommodation giving them land lots for yards, vegetable gardens, arable land, hayfields, etc.

Each of the Siberian yam consisted of 50 “vyts” (share units) which were a kind of service and household units. From 1 to 8 yamschiks could be located within one unit. Their primary responsibility was actually a year-round transportation of government documents, cargos and persons on governmental assignments. To do this, yamschiks kept horses with sledge- and wheel-carts and maintained ships for sailing. In Demiansk and Samarovsk yams sledge dogs were also used for transportations in winter. The gon'ba was carried out in several directions. Their number and total intensity of traffic were increasing over time. Yamschiks from Verkhoturys drove from Verkhoturys town to Solikamsk, Turinsk, Pelym, to aboriginal yurt settlements and large villages; those from Turinsk drove from Turinsk to Verkhoturys, Tyumen, Pelym, areas of “yasak taxation”, to “free” settlements and villages; those from Tyumen – from Tyumen to Turinsk, Tobolsk and inland counties; those from Demiansk – from Demiansk yam to Tobolsk; those from Samarovsk yam – from their place to Demiansk yam, Surgut and to Sukhorukovy Yurts (in the direction to Beryozov town).

Yamschiks were paid the sovereign's salary for their service. When yams were first established, amounts of these salaries were: 20 roubles per one share unit for yamschiks for Verkhoturys, Demiansk and Samarovsk, and 15 roubles for those from Tyumen and Turinsk [4]. Afterwards, salaries were changed from time to time and reached, by the early 18th century, 28 roubles for Verkhoturys yamschiks and 20 roubles for all the others [5]. Primarily, yamschiks were also granted "bread provision". However, aiming to save up state money, this kind of provision was annulled by authorities, and yamschiks were "transferred on arable land". Only those from Samarovsk (they lived in the area with severe weather where it was impossible to gain good cropping) managed to retain their right for natural salaries. Yamschiks received also benefits of various nature. In 1607 yamschiks from Turinsk and Tyumen were given "subsidies" for purchasing horses (5 roubles per one share unit) [6]. According to Czar's Decree of 1630, debt claims of third persons to yamschiks from Verkhoturys were subject to solving in relation to those money bondages only the period of prescription whereof did not exceed 15 years [7].

In historiography the idea was rooted down that living standards of yamschiks were more advantageous than those of other categories of population in Russia. No doubt, in some lines of life their "yam" status was major for them. Yamschik's husbandry was better equipped with drawing power, namely horses. They also had privileges from the government which were mentioned above. However, in general terms, living conditions of Siberian yamschiks were hard and becoming even worse over time. The reasons were road difficulties, severe nature conditions, numerous abuses from travelers and people from voivod's directorate. For instance, in 1662 inhabitants of Verkhoturys yam complained against voivod V.M. Tregubov who used to imprison yamschiks arriving to Turinsk "in carts" and demand from them a ransom in amount of 6 roubles [8]. The disastrous situation was aggravated by the governmental policy aimed at severe economy of financial funds. Despite the ever increasing intensity of yam gon'ba, the state refused to enlarge the number of share units. The unprecedented inflow of people and freights caused acute deficit of transportation means and forced yamschiks to lease them on the side at their own expense. For instance, in 1644/45 yamschiks from Samarovsk spent over 855 roubles for hiring carts [9]. Salaries were low and often paid irregularly. Yamschiks from Turinsk received just a half of their salaries due to be paid to them for 1654/55, and as late as in 1656. By that time they were in such a deplorable state that voivod M.M. Musin-Pushkin had nothing to do but acknowledge

that yamschiks were not able to drive to and from any more, as they didn't have horses and money for purchasing thereof [10]. Due to deficit of money in cash, some portion of salaries was paid by the government in form of natural provision (clothes, furs of inferior and medium quality, etc.), which, being actually non-liquid, were realized by yamschiks for next to nothing. Moreover, beyond "the Stone" such form of remuneration as "pass distance money" (progonniye money) was not practiced for quite a long time [11]. Siberian yamschiks did not have charters which were issued to population of many yam settlements in European Russia and granted wide privileges to them (such as immunity from legal proceedings of local administration, redemption of major taxes, trade derogations, etc.). They were actively involved into compulsory services (erection of defense forts, handling of grain supplies in dock yards, construction and servicing of government-owned ships, etc.) and payment of common state taxes, which was called "fifth" and "tenth" den'ga. All the said above serves to explain the fact why Siberian yamschiks mostly ate a humble pie, if we speak about their property status. Throughout the whole of the 17th century due to escaping and mortality of their members, yams were constantly getting depopulated, and authorities encountered difficulties related to lack of volunteers when recruiting new people [12].

However, despite this dismaying situation, yamschiks managed to perform their duties. Speed of transportation (except for spring and autumn periods with their muddy roads) was quite high. For instance, the way from Verkhoturys to Tobolsk (over 600 km) in winter was usually covered for 7 – 8 days (75 – 86 km daily). Sometimes the speed was even higher. Response letters sent on 21 December 1687 from Tobolsk to Moscow were in Siberian Office as soon as on 15 January 1688 [13]. In 1685 S.A. Sobakin who directed for voivodship in Yeniseysk covered the distance between Demiansk and Samarovsk yams just for 3 days (13 – 15 June) [14]. The same time-length was spent for passing the length between Verkhoturys and Tyumen for deacon G. Kirillov in 1697 (22 – 24 February) [15]. In all these cases the gon'ba speed reached 100 km a day, and was even higher in the last instance. Just to compare: the record value of riding in medieval France was 86,9 – 90,12 km a day, while the average speed ranged within 32,18 – 53,1 km a day [16].

Yamschiks were a peculiar estate-social group being intermediate between recruited service men (strel'tsy and urban cossacks) and men under tax (urban settlement inhabitants and peasants). Population of each Siberian yam united into a community ("mir"). This organization was

characterized by all segments of society and had pre-state roots [17]. An assembly was gathered for solving most essential matters. Such assembly was also a place for the mir's officials who were sitting in "yam's (local council's, mir's) izba". Local public authorities were headed by an headman. He was assisted by foremen (up to 5 men per one yam). They represented their community to the outside world (they were able to apply a collective petition), judged yamschiks for their small delinquencies, took part in the procedure of giving allowance to yamschiks, monitored priority of starting a gon'ba, took care about filling of vacant share units, etc. Current paperwork was maintained by a yam's d'achok (scribe). He was hired and supported from the community's funds. Regardless the large dependence on central and local authorities (voivodes and bailiffs) [18], yam community organizations up to the early 18th century played an important role in Siberia's social and political life. They stood for their interest not only to other groups of people but to the state as well. As for the state, it had nothing to do but take into account, up to a certain time, existence of yams communities, due to peculiar conditions in the territory [19]. For instance, in 1692 yamschiks, urban settlement inhabitants and peasants of Turinsk composed a collective petition against voivod B.A. Chelishchev. The people accused him in excessive abuses and asked to send them another voivod. In particular, the voivod did not pay allowance to yamschiks in time (and partially appropriated it), "without fault" beat and imprisoned them in jail (extorting bribes), widely used their carts for his own needs, etc. [20]. Upon investigation, Siberian Office decided to dismiss this high-ranked officer.

Yamschiks took part in economic colonization of the region. In their vacant time they were involved into cropping and beast raising, crafts (flour-milling, hunting, fishing, forging, etc.) and trade. In 1623/24 in Turinsk there were yamschiks plus their brothers and male children – in total 57 souls. They mostly lived in their Yamskaya sloboda consisting of 43 yards. Nine more yam yards were in the uezd. In total, yamschiks possessed slightly more than 245 dessiatines (measure of land area equal to 1, 1 hectares) of arable lands, 120 dessiatines of grass lands and hay fields for 3730 shocks [21]. Tyumen yam was more populated. By the mid- 1623 it consisted of 81 yamschiks (together with children, brothers and nephews – 162 persons). Of them only 47 yamschiks were permanent residents in the urban settlement itself and in Yamskaya sloboda, whereas the others settled down in villages. They owned 1087,5 dessiatines of arable lands, about 202 dessiatines of grass lands and hay fields for 4410 shocks [22]. As for yamschiks from Verkhoturys, in

1624 there were 55 of them (together with children, brothers and nephews – 86 persons). They possessed 616,5 dessiatines of arable lands, 615 dessiatines of grass lands and hay fields for 6630 shocks [23]. In terms of dimensions of agricultural lands, yamschiks from Verkhoturys surpassed people from the urban settlement and service men, only letting peasants ahead. By the end of 1680s inhabitants of Verkhoturys yam officially possessed over 1320 dessiatines of arable lands [24].

Conclusion

Thus, the system of yam gon'ba played its important role in the history of Siberia of the late 16th – early 18th centuries. Due to their professional, socio-political and economic activity, yamschiks contributed to assimilation of the territory and its strengthening within the Russian state.

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