

THEORY AND HISTORY OF CULTURE



UDC 2+316 (470+571)

Original article

<https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-3-53-59>



Social-legal and Marital Status of the Clergy's Women of the Russian Empire in the Second Half of the 19th Century

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Annotation

Introduction. The article discusses the features of the social and legal status of the clergy's women in the second half of the 19th century, analyzes family legislation regulating family and marriage relations, and also compares the position the clergy's women with representatives of other estates of the Russian Empire.

Materials and methods. The work uses historical, comparative and chronological methods. Historical documents and materials were used.

Results. In the Russian Empire of the second half of the 19th century there were significant changes that influenced all spheres of society, including spiritual. Girls of all classes, with the exception of the clergy's representatives, were given the opportunity to get an education, develop, find their profession and vocation, while the life of the clergy's girls was limited to traditional patriarchal and religious foundations.

Discussion and conclusion. The situation of the clergy's wives (their rights and privileges that they possessed, unlike representatives of other classes, restrictions in everyday life, as well as the peculiarities of conclusion and dissolution of marriage with representatives of the clergy) is of great interest within the framework of the studied problem. This topic is interesting and important when studying the history of the second half of the 19th century due to the fact that during this period the Russian Orthodox Church had a significant impact on the life of society.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, clergy, family, the clergy's women

For citation. Kuklenko OM. Social-legal and marital status of the clergy's women of the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century. *Science Almanac of Black Sea Region Countries*. 2023;9(3):53–59. <https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-3-53-59>

Научная статья

Социально-правовой статус и семейное положение женщин духовного сословия Российской империи во второй половине XIX века

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Аннотация

Введение. Рассмотрены особенности социально-правового статуса женщин духовного сословия во второй половине XIX в., анализируется семейное законодательство, регламентирующее семейно-брачные отношения, а также проводится сравнение положения женщин духовного сословия с представительницами других сословий Российской империи.

Материалы и методы. В работе использованы историко-сравнительный и хронологический методы. При написании работы использовались исторические документы и материалы.

Результаты исследования. В Российской империи второй половины XIX в. происходили значительные перемены, оказавшие влияние на все сферы жизни общества, в том числе и духовную. Девушки всех сословий, за исключением представительниц духовного сословия, получили возможность получать образование, развиваться, найти свою профессию и призвание, в то время как жизнь девушек духовного сословия ограничивалась традиционными патриархальными и религиозными устоями.

Обсуждение и заключение. Большой интерес в рамках исследуемой проблемы вызывает положение жен священнослужителей, их права и привилегии, которыми они обладали в отличие от представительниц других сословий, ограничения в повседневной жизни, а также особенности заключения и расторжения брака с представителями духовенства. Данная тема интересна и важна при изучении истории второй половины XIX в. в связи с тем, что в этот период значительное влияние на жизнь общества оказывала Русская православная церковь.

Ключевые слова: Русская православная церковь, духовенство, семья, женщины духовного сословия

Для цитирования. Кукленко О.М. Социально-правовой статус и семейное положение женщин духовного сословия Российской империи во второй половине XIX века. *Научный альманах стран Причерноморья*. 2023;9(3): 53–59. <https://doi.org/10.23947/2414-1143-2023-9-3-53-59>

Introduction. The study of the social and legal status of women in the history of Russia has recently become increasingly important. Despite the fact that interest in female and gender history arose at the end of the 20th century, this topic remains relevant and interesting at present.

One of the least developed and studied directions in the study of female history is the position of women of the spiritual class which is of great interest for the research. Until the beginning of the 20th century the Russian Empire remained an Orthodox state in which the Russian Orthodox Church played a significant role in the socio-political position of a woman, not only the clergy. The church regulated many aspects of a woman's life, including marriage and marital status. In this regard, the study of the status of the clergy's woman in comparison with representatives of other classes is important.

The purpose of this work is to study the social and legal status of the clergy's women in the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th–early 20th centuries and identify their characteristics.

Results. Considering the peculiarities of the social and legal status of the clergy's woman in the second half of the 19th–early 20th centuries, it is worth noting that during this period they occupied a subordinate position, as representatives of other classes in general, which is associated with the “conservative patriarchal concept» that prevailed at that time in the Russian Empire, which relied on the Christian doctrine that «a wife was created for her husband as an assistant «like him»”.

Since the middle of the 19th century in society, issues of the need to “liberate women” began to be actively discussed, and since 1861, after the bourgeois reforms of Alexander II, the women's liberation movement began to actively spread. Representatives of all classes were given the opportunity to get an education, find employment in low-paid work, etc. Things were slightly different with representatives of the clergy.

The legal status of the clergy's woman was determined by the position of her husband on the church ranks [1]. Regardless of the previous class status before marriage, the girl automatically assigned herself the duties of a “representative of the church department” and was part of the clergy. The woman retained her class status after the death of her husband, if she did not remarry. Otherwise, she lost all privileges.

The clergy's wives had special privileges: in order to preserve the people's respect for the priesthood and to preserve the feeling of their own respect in the spiritual environment, the wife and widow of the clergy were exempted from corporal punishment in the case of crimes [2].

As a rule, it was the wives of priests who were engaged in raising children and farming, since the father of the family did not have time for this [3, p. 135]. In general, from the point of view of Christianity, raising children is an important duty and ability of a woman [4, p. 318]. Another important duty of any woman, including the clergyman's wife, was the guardianship of a house or household [4, p. 343].

At the same time, the woman was in a dependent position: without her husband's consent, she could not get a job, get an education, she had to listen to her husband, love, respect, please him and show him all “affection” [5]. At the same time,

the husband had to live with his wife in harmony and love, “respecting, protecting, and forgiving for her shortcomings, alleviating her weaknesses, delivering food and maintenance according to his condition and capabilities” [5, p. 465].

In Orthodoxy, married clergy were not only allowed, but also more encouraged. The marriage of the clergy was associated with special strict rules and it was possible only until consecration. After consecration, the clergyman could not marry [6, p. 104]. Therefore, for a man of the clergy, the choice of the future wife was limited in time. As a rule, representatives of the clergy married during their studies or immediately after graduation from the seminary or maintained loneliness for the whole life.

If even among the laypeople, divorce was very rare and accompanied by lengthy procedures, then divorce was practically impossible for the priest [7]. The severity regarding the divorce in the legislation had been formulated by 1841 by the Charter of Spiritual Consistories, according to which marriage could be dissolved only by a formal spiritual court at the request of one of the spouses, if the adultery of one of the spouses or their inability to the marriage was proved; one of the spouses was sentenced to punishment associated with deprivation of all rights or exiled to Siberia with deprivation of rights and privileges; one of the spouses was declared missing [7, pp. 368–369].

Among the clergy, the above-mentioned reasons were very rare, and therefore there were practically no divorces. Even in the case of abuse of the wife, the spouses were not divorced, and the husband could only be punished. According to A. N. Nadezhdin, the assumption of divorce had always had a bad effect on a woman, and banning divorce is a way to protect a woman from the tyranny of her husband [4, p. 162].

Children of clergymen expelled from educational institutions, or who graduated, but did not enter the service, entered into marriage on a common basis. At the same time, their children and wives did not have the right to charity by the methods existing in the spiritual department and did not inherit the clerical status [8, p. 163]. Representatives of the clergy had to ask permission to marry from their superiors. The bride’s origin of non-clerical origin was not an obstacle to marriage, subject to church rules about wives. The clergyman could not marry a girl belonging to different faith, a widow or an actress. Their children could not marry heretics.

An important feature of the family status of the clergyman is the fact that he could not remarry if he remained a widower [7]. This was not a prohibition, but rather one of the qualities that a priest should possess according to the teachings of the apostle Paul. While the Church allowed the second and third marriages for the laypeople, although they were perceived as sins, the priest had to set an example for the flock: to show firmness, purity and obedience to the will of God. The fourth marriage had been banned since 1651. If the fact of violation of the law regarding the conclusion of the fourth marriage was revealed, then a man and a woman were divorced [9].

In many ways, the procedure for clergy’s marriage was similar to the procedure for marriage among churchgoer. Marriage was prohibited without the consent of guardians or trustees for those who did not reach the age of majority [10], parents [11]. At the same time, it was forbidden to force children to marry, both a young man and a young girl. Parents took the oath by law that they did not force their children to marry. A ban on marriages with people with mental disabilities was also introduced for everyone [12], with “blood and spiritual” relatives [13], etc.

The choice of a life partner for a priest was important, while priority was given to the daughters of the clergy and not only because the daughters inherited a place in the parish of their father, but also because they had been brought up in a spiritual environment since their childhood, knew the way of the priest’s life and were ready for what was expected in marriage [14, p. 296]. An ideal partner for the clergyman was a graduate of the diocesan women’s school, since the main task of such schools was to prepare worthy spouses for clergymen.

There were both happy and unhappy families among the clergy. Sometimes arranged marriages led to the fact that “a beautiful, moral and educated girl married an ugly, drunk and immoral groom” [14, p. 296] or vice versa. Accordingly, life in such families did not work out very well.

As a rule, marriages were concluded early enough. The young man married at the age of 21, and the girl married at the age of 16. In accordance with the law, marriage was limited by age: for girls, marriage was allowed no earlier than 16 years, and for men no earlier than 18 years [15], while diocesan bishops were given the opportunity to allow marriages when the bride (or groom) was less than six months before adulthood in case of “especially difficult situation of families” [16]. In addition, there was a law in the Russian Empire, according to which the age limit for marriage was established, namely 80 years, which was explained by the main purpose of marriage, namely procreation, while at the age of 80 it was “very desperate to hope” [17].

In many dioceses of the Russian Empire there were diocesan schools for the daughters of clergy with a special curriculum for the training of future wives of priests. Along with general education subjects, the girls also took a church course. However, mainly girls got their education at home or went to the convents of the diocese where they got an opportunity not only to get basic knowledge about Russian literacy, but also to develop skills in many crafts, which was a significant help in future married life. This form of education of the clergy's girls after reforms of the 1860s was replaced by women's diocesan schools [18, pp. 94–95].

The main goal of these schools was to prepare girls for marriage [19, p. 309]. Graduates of such schools were usually engaged in pedagogical activities which continued until marriage. At many schools, elementary schools were opened where graduates of schools practiced and taught. In addition, girls taught in parish schools or schools subordinate to the Ministry of Education [19, p. 313]. Sometimes girls went to the most remote places of the Russian Empire where men refused to go, received a very small salary from the spiritual department and devoted their whole lives to education and assistance to the local population [19, p. 314]. Those girls who married clergy were engaged in educational and medical activities in the parish of their husband.

Another center where representatives of any estates could go and get an education, do social and charitable affairs were monasteries and religious houses. After the reforms of Alexander II, more and more girls, including peasant women, began to go to monasteries, since they were one of those places where girls could engage in self-development and get an education [20].

The financial situation of the clergyman's family was sacred and difficult. He was in a dependent position on his flock, since the budget of the priest's family mainly consisted of fees for occasional service (i. e., prayers for the need, demand of individuals), state salaries, their own household and prestimony (monetary or bread giving out from parishioners and the state) [14, p. 176].

As a rule, the living conditions of families of rural priests and clergymen were not different from the living conditions of the village poor [14, p. 382]. After graduating from the seminary, the graduate was sent to the place in the parish with his young wife without a single amount for accommodation, without an apartment or other place of residence. The priest could only hope for a church gatehouse, the living conditions of which were difficult: a small room with an earthen floor, small windows, wet walls and mold. The priest got the opportunity to build his own house only a few years later, if he managed to save money [14, p. 382].

It was difficult to feed the family, and if the clergyman died ahead of schedule, he condemned his family to difficult life trials. Widows and children could only rely on class preferences in accordance with the Regulation on the charity for the persons of clergy.

The advantage in determining the elderly patients or the dead was given to their relatives, who took on the responsibility of taking care of them or their family. If the family of the deceased clergyman had no relatives, then they went to outsiders who agreed to provide benefits to the family of the clergyman.

Widows and orphans of the spiritual class had an advantage to become a baker who bakes communion bread, or to get special voluntary alms from parishioners [21].

Widows and orphans of spiritual class could claim and hope for benefits from the guardianship of the poor of spiritual class. To get help, those in need had to apply for benefits. However, guardianship only helped when it was found that the supplicant really needed help. If a widow or adult children could earn money for their own food and life themselves, they were most often denied assistance, either lone-time assistance were given for the purchase of tools and materials for work, or when orphans married. In addition, if the supplicant had children or close relatives on the ground, then they weren't helped. The guardianship provided assistance so that the children or relatives would take care of the supplicant [22, p. 203–219]. The received benefit, as a rule, was enough only to meet the primary needs of the needy and their family members.

In cases where there were no posts of bakers who bake communion bread in the parish, the guardianship could send girls with their families to new places of residence, where orphaned families did not always receive a warm welcome. Without their own accommodation, they had to rent premises, which required additional costs. Sometimes, by baking prosphora, widows worked off the debts left by their husbands to rural societies [22, pp. 367–372].

At the end of the 19th century. old-age insurance savings banks (mutual benefit funds) were opened, which were established specifically to provide widows and orphans of spiritual rank. However, they were not common in all territories of the Russian Empire and had significant differences.

In 1902, widows and children of the clergy were given the opportunity to receive pensions and lump sum benefits after the death of the priest, if he had already received a pension after his dismissal from service or was entitled to a pension due to seniority within the prescribed period. The size of the pension was determined by the length of service of the clergyman, as well as the position held, the spiritual rank and the spiritual institution where he served. Such pensions could not be received by adult children who had reached the age of 21, sons who entered the service or public institutions for state maintenance, as well as daughters who married or were accepted into a public institution for state maintenance.

The position of the clergyman's family was quite difficult. The system of providing for clergy and their families was imperfect, and they faced serious difficulties.

Discussion and conclusion. The clergy's wives had special privileges, unlike representatives of other classes: in order to preserve the people's due respect for the holy dignity, they were exempted from corporal punishment. In case of the spouse's death, they could receive pensions, benefits, etc.

Divorces were rare among the clergy, unlike representatives of other classes. Marriages were concluded early enough, since the clergyman could not marry after the rite of consecration. At the same time, the procedure of marriage for clergy was similar to the procedure of marriage among parishioners.

Girls of the clergy got the opportunity to study at diocesan women's schools, in which future wives of clergy and later teachers were trained. While representatives of other classes got the opportunity to master not only pedagogical professions, education for girls of the clergy remained conservative.

In many ways, the differences in the position of the clergy's woman from representatives of other classes are due to the fact that the husband was a representative of the clergy, who was an example of spirituality, purity and obedience to the will of God for the flock, as well as an example of upbringing and religious views.

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Received 01.07.2023

Revised 20.07.2023

Accepted 24.07.2023

Conflict of interest statement

The author do not have any conflict of interest.

The author have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Поступила в редакцию 01.07.2023

Поступила после рецензирования 20.07.2023

Принята к публикации 24.07.2023

Конфликт интересов

Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Автор прочитал и одобрил окончательный вариант рукописи.