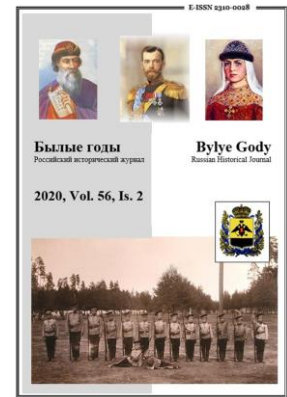


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## Gypsies in Siberia: Resettlement, Family and Economic Activity between the 18<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Historical Aspect)

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### Abstract

The timespan between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the ethnic map of the regions taking shape in the Russian Empire. In this process, essential drivers were various types of external and internal migrations. With the influence of voluntary and forced migrations, different ethnic groups emerged in Siberia, living both in compact communities and dispersed over the vast territory. Gypsies in Siberia constituted one of the ethno-dispersed groups, with first mentions dating back to the 1720s. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Gypsies had spread throughout Siberian provinces. Despite such a long record, there are virtually no academic works in the Russian gypsology on the history of Gypsies in Siberia and the paths their development took in different historical periods. The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct certain aspects of the history of the ethno-dispersed group. It primarily focuses on the challenging sides of the group's formation, peculiar facets of its social life, legal status and specific circumstances of the economic activities undertaken by the Gypsy group in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. The foundation for the paper is built on the documents of central and regional archives (St. Petersburg, Tobol'sk, Tomsk), which become subjects of the scholarly interest for the first time.

**Keywords:** Gypsies, migration, camp, nomadic lifestyle, exile, Siberia.

### 1. Introduction

For centuries, Siberia was not only a “crossroads of civilizations”, but also a “melting pot” in which the merger of indigenous peoples and migrants resulted in the rise of the macroregion's modern population. The history of Siberia in the modern era is associated with its integration into the Russian state and further economic development. This would have been impossible unless certain groups had moved there from the European part of the country. The unauthorized and organized resettlement efforts as well as replenishment through penal settlements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resulted in the foundation of subregional ethnic groups (Ukrainians, Germans, Poles, Jews, Finns, etc.). In this period, various Gypsy groups came into being in Siberia to create a community of the “Sibirskaya Roma”.

### 2. Materials and methods

The history of Gypsies in pre-Soviet Russia is a direction that is covered only by isolated works in the scholarly literature. The historic exploration of Gypsy groups in specific regions is at a very early stage. The purpose of the work is to restore some aspects of the initial history of Gypsies in Siberia of the late eighteenth – first half of the nineteenth century. To this end, we need to identify the time first Gypsy groups appeared in Siberia, determine the sources that contributed to the growth of the new ethno-dispersed group, review the legal and social situation of its members and highlight the types of their economic activity.

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One of the major problems a researcher faces is the absence of a source field. On the one hand, we have no sources created by Gypsies themselves, and on the other hand, researchers fail to carry out search work in archival collections, seeking to ground their papers primarily on published materials. However, it is the central and regional archives that have managed to retain written sources. Identifying and introducing the documents into research for the first time will enable us to retrace a variety of aspects distinguishing Gypsies' life in Russia from the angle of state history.

Of course, published sources, in the first place, with regulatory and legal content are important for understanding the evolution of state policies related to the Gypsy population in the Russian Empire. In our publication, we clearly showed that between the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, the theory of national policy and the practice of its implementation were fraught with considerable differences. For this reason, we cannot rely solely on acts and regulations published in various editions of the Complete Code of Laws of the Russian Empire. We should look into other regulations of a more restricted application. These include the "Statute on Passports" and the "Exile Statute", which provided guidance to the regional authorities in determining their actions toward Gypsies. However, these sources should be complemented with documents from archives.

In 2017–2018, we completed a research work in several Russian archives and were able to uncover documents related to the history of Gypsies in Siberia in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Some archival funds of the Russian State Historical Archives managed to preserve documents that are linked to the subject under review. For example, the documents passed by the Committee of Ministers in the early nineteenth century repeatedly revealed information on the resettlement of the Gypsies in Siberia. The Governing Senate also turned to the Gypsies' situation. In particular, its archival collection still stores a number of documents describing efforts to ensure the adoption of sedentary lifestyles by Gypsies in 1808–1809. The documents also mention the draft edict on sentencing Gypsies to exile to Siberia for vicious behavior, which was prepared by the Ministry of Justice in 1809. Individual references to Gypsies in the Russian regions are found in the documents issued by the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Senate, the First Siberian Committee and other public institutions. Valuable information on Siberian Gypsies is contained in the reports by Siberian governors and provincial Treasury Chambers, which have survived in the archives of certain ministries. The most useful demographic and economic information on the Gypsy population in specific regions of Russia is stored in the archives of the Ministry of State Property.

The regional archives accumulated documents that are helpful in defining the local features of Gypsies' coming and living in a certain province. In this regard, the particular importance can be attached to the documents of the Tobol'sk archive. For example, the records of the early 1790s, kept by the Tobol'sk vicegeral government, enable a restoration of one of the earliest episodes in the history of Siberian Gypsies, associated with their migration from European Russia, including name lists of camp members. Materials of the first half of the nineteenth century from the Tobol'sk and Tomsk Prikazes (administrative departments in eighteenth century Russia) for the Exiles give an idea of the Gypsies who were moved to Siberia within the framework of the penitentiary system (previous place of residence, nature of the offense, term of punishment and location of the correctional facility). Primary materials of the nineteenth century population censuses, which contain data on the family composition, social status and economic activities, also play an essential role.

A number of helpful documents exist in the State Archive of the Tomsk Region. The archives of the Tomsk provincial government (1804–1822) preserves documents on the Gypsies residing in different districts of the Tomsk governorate. Several reports, addressed to Tomsk Governor D.V. Illichevsky, enclose name registers that contain Gypsies' personal data. The same archival collection can offer documents related to another campaign to prevent vagrancy among Gypsies (1819), implemented in the Tomsk governorate.

The archives of the Tomsk provincial administration (1822–1917) also have various documents on local Gypsies. Some of them were exiled to Siberia for vagrancy or other crimes. In addition, prisoner files (stateynye spiski) also survived, which provide personal and anthropometric data. Their use can help determine the locations where Gypsy convicts were settled in the Tomsk Governorate, their age and some other features of the exiles. This material makes it possible to accomplish a comparative study to correlate Gypsies with members of other ethnic groups.

When addressing the history of Siberian Gypsies, we should not forget that from the middle eighteenth to early twentieth century, the Altai part of the Tomsk Governorate retained its legal separation and was administered by His (Her) Imperial Majesty's Cabinet. This attaches particular importance to the documents that regulated the life of Gypsies in various Siberian regions. This problem was reflected in the documents that required to preclude Gypsies from settling down in the lands of Altai plants and factories (from 1816).

The published sources include accounts given by foreigners who mentioned Gypsies living in Siberia (Bell 1763, Sauer 1802). These sources written by contemporaries are helpful in tracing back the time Gypsies appeared in the Russian province.

The sources identified allow us to reconstruct different aspects of the life Siberian Gypsies led at the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The study utilized general and special research methods that include descriptive, chronological, legal and statistical methods with a historical focus. The choice of the research toolbox is brought about by the task to address specific objectives.

### 3. Discussion

Although Russia has been a multinational state since its emergence, the knowledge of the history of the ethnic groups inhabiting the country wants much more consistency and balance. This can be explained by government policies, the presence or absence of public interest, the preservation of historical documents and other factors. The combination of these and other reasons can be an explanation of the current extremely poor knowledge of the Gypsy history in the Russian Empire. The academic tradition, which would study Gypsies in Russia in the context of the history of a certain region, does not exist at all.

Our interest focuses on Gypsies who lived in Siberia in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. The history of subregional ethnic groups in Siberia in the imperial period has only received a very unstructured attention from researchers so far. The past of individual ethnolocal groups, such as Germans, Poles or Jews, was highlighted in a multitude of articles, papers, monographs and theses. On the other hand, the history of other non-indigenous ethnic groups, which include Siberian Gypsies, has only been glossed over or has not been studied at all (Smirnova-Seslavinskaya 2013: 22-43).

The publications of the all-Russian nature only mention the fact that “near Moscow and St. Petersburg, Gypsies appeared in the eighteenth century.... A few years after the arrival of Gypsies in Central Russia, camps pitched their tents in the area stretching from the Arkhangelsk Governorate, Siberia and other outskirts of the empire, right up to the Sea of Okhotsk” (Vladykin 1969: 206). Of course, this is an extremely simplified pattern of Gypsy settlement in the Russian Empire with migrations spanning over a period of more than 100 years. The works of modern authors also contain references to Siberian Gypsies, but their historical background rests outside the scope of these publications (Bessonov et al., 2000).

Meanwhile, contemporaries turned their attention to the Gypsies who lived in some Siberian provinces as early as in the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, ethnographer S.V. Maximov pointed out in his book “Siberia and hard labor” (Sibir’ i katorga) at the presence of Gypsies in Siberia among those sentenced for exile for theft (horse-stealing) (Maximov 1900: 231). Some materials came out as official publications. For example, a small article providing historical and ethnographic information was printed in the “Reference Book of the Tobol'sk province for 1884” (Pamyatnaya knizhka Tobol'skoi gubernii na 1884 god). Its author, perhaps, was K.M. Golodnikov, a Siberian ethnographer and publicist. The published material is valuable, first of all, for the accounts of an eyewitness who left brief descriptions of family relationships, everyday life and Gypsy culture.

Isolated publications on Siberian Gypsies in Soviet Gypsy studies concentrate primarily on historical and ethnographic aspects. The author of these publications was V.I. Sanarov who was acquainted with the life of the camp from the inside. The wealth of the ethnographic material accumulated by him during his life in the camp was complemented with certain materials from the State Archive of the Tyumen Region. Sanarov's efforts can be highly appreciated as he significantly expanded the boundaries of the history of the Sibirskaya Roma. For example, while K. Golodnikov wrote in his essay that Gypsies appeared in Siberia early in the nineteenth century (Golodnikov, 1884: 52), Sanarov moved the milestone to the first quarter of the eighteenth century (Sanarov, 1970: 126).

Some historical insights into Gypsies in Siberia are provided by the monograph “Gypsies” (Tsygane) (2018). The treatise concluded, among other things, that “part of migrants headed to Siberia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and there, known by the name of Siberian Gypsies, they made up the major group of the Gypsy population in Siberia” (p. 85).

One of essential aspects characterizing studies into the history of Gypsies in Russia is the stance taken by the government and local administrations on the ethnic group. The few available sources allow us to explain specific details of the life Gypsies had in different governorates. This issue is reviewed by our paper published in the historical journal “Voprosy istorii” (Shaidurov, 2020: 181-191).

Therefore, we can say that the history of Siberian Gypsies to date is a tabula rasa to a greater extent.

### 4. Results

Over the seventeenth century, Siberia was a center of gravity for migrants. This attractiveness can be primarily attributed to rumors of the unimaginable riches offered by the region. Some were tempted by a free life without boyars (members of an old order of Russian nobility, ranking immediately below the princes: abolished by Peter the Great) and tsarist voivodes (town managers in the Russian state in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), while others were attracted by forests abundant in furs, and still others were eager to obtain fertile lands. However, the unauthorized resettlement was prohibited, and the tsarist government was unable to arrange the organized migration of peasants and tradespeople to areas beyond the Urals.

One of the first mentions of Gypsies in Siberia dates back to 1721 and belongs to Scotsman John Bell who was hired in the Russian service (1715–1746). Being on the staff of the Russian embassy to China (1719–1721), he traveled as a doctor from St. Petersburg to Peking (Beijing), describing the journey in a two-volume treatise published in Glasgow in 1763. In the second volume, Bell mentioned the story by Siberian Vice-Governor Petrov-Solovov about a vagrant group of about 60 people (men, women and children) who headed for China. After Petrov-Solovov, Bell calls them Gypsies (tzygane) (Bell, 1763: 157).

Referring to Petrov-Solovov, Bell indicated that the Gypsies had probably come from Poland. Their route can be reconstructed on the maps of the first quarter of the eighteenth century: through Central Russia

to Nizhny Novgorod or Kazan, then to Solikamsk that grew to become a center of the Russian-Chinese transit trade at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Moscow-Siberian Highway continued to the gateway to Siberia – Verkhoturye and further to Tobol'sk (red line on the map). The route hosted inns (*yamas*) and outposts that carried out both customs and police functions, preventing fugitives from escaping to Siberia. The Gypsies' further road to the East passed through the capital of Siberia, Tobol'sk, where the Gypsies finally stopped to a halt. Their further journey was impossible without passports introduced by Peter I, so, by order of Vice-Governor Petrov-Solovov, they were detained (Bell, 1763: 158). However, a Siberian historian, Oleg Kationov, notes that as early as in 1654 the Verkhoturysky *voivode* identified the existence of a different road that skirted Verkhoturye and ran further to Siberian settlements (Kationov, 2004: 87). In the middle of the 18th century, the authorities had to ratify a shorter route to Siberia (Moscow – Kungur – Yekaterinburg – Tyumen – Tobol'sk) (Kationov, 2004: 88). It might be that the Gypsies went to Siberia by one of these roads (yellow line on the map).



**Fig. 1.** Map of Siberia, 1800<sup>1</sup>  
Source: Atlas of the Russian Empire. Saint Petersburg, 1800

Traveling vast distances in sparsely populated Russia in the early eighteenth century was fraught with many challenges. One of them was food. Like Bell, we can assume that the Gypsies, while roaming to the East, could exchange foodstuffs with the peasants, offering them their own craft products. It is unlikely that they were engaged in fortune telling and divination due of the existing language barrier. But we cannot rule out trivial theft. If we take into account the fact that the Gypsies went to Siberia along one of the illegal roads, bypassing settlements, in this case, primary sources of sustenance for them were hunting, fishing and gathering.

<sup>1</sup> Red line – the path of the Gypsies from Kazan to Siberia in the 1720s. Yellow line - the path of the Gypsies in the late 18th century.

Presently, there are no other known documents that would help track the further fate of the group of Gypsies, referred to by Bell. The endeavor to uncover these documents is a new research goal.

We have no reliable information about Gypsies in Siberia in the middle and in the second half of the eighteenth century. But documents from different archives show that Gypsies lived in various regions of Western Siberia in the 1790s.

One of such areas was Altai that was part of the Kolyvan'-Voskresensk (from 1834 – Altai) Mining District (administered by the Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty from 1747 to 1917). The year of 1797 saw the District's administrative structure finalized. It was in this period that the Cabinet issued an order to relocate Gypsies, who were found in the district's territory, to state-owned lands. Based on this decision, we can conclude that by that time Gypsies had already been present on the District's lands. The decision can also be explained by the following reason: in the late eighteenth century, Altai plants were key suppliers of silver to the domestic market, primarily used for the production of silver coins. The non-ferrous metallurgy boom in the last third of the eighteenth century was largely associated with Altai plants employing mining engineers from German principalities. In 1772, silver production reached its peak – 1,277 poods (about 20.9 tonnes). Silver mines and smelteries were tightly controlled by 8 mining companies. The annual caravan of silver, which departed from Barnaul to St. Petersburg, was accompanied by soldiers of the regular army. In 1816, the ban, which prohibited Gypsies from residing on factory land, was reapproved (GATO. F. 61. Op. 1. D. 42). Hence, the Cabinet took pro-active measures to prevent Gypsies from having the temptation to engage in counterfeiting of money. The step was justified as the judicial practice in the European part of the Russian Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century had to deal with frequent cases of Gypsies making false banknotes and coins, and the Gypsies suspected of the crime were put on the All-Russian wanted list (GUTO GAT. F. 329. Op. 3. D. 87).

Another region, which became home to Gypsies in the 1790s, was the Tobol'sk province (later the Tobol'sk Governorate with its capital in Tobol'sk). In 1792, in the Tobol'sk Governorate, local authorities found a group of Gypsy families, numbering 115 people, led by elders Evstafy Martynov, 84, and Ivan Maksimov, 75 (GUTO GAT. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 145. L. 8-9v).

Following the investigation, it became clear that these families of “Belarus Gypsies” were registered as belonging to the Colonel of the Ingermanland Regiment<sup>1</sup>, Aleksey Melgunov<sup>2</sup> (GUTO GAT. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 145. L. 20). In all probability, the certificate of “registration” was drawn up before December 28, 1761, when Melgunov was promoted to major general. Such a record could be a formal procedure. A contract could be concluded between the Gypsy families and Melgunov, in which the Gypsies recognized themselves as house serfs and received a passport in return. The passport gave the right to move within the borders of the governorate, an opportunity that they could not but make use of. Very few copies of similar contracts, dated by the end of the eighteenth century, have survived until now (Shaidurov, 2018: 206).

For many years, these Gypsies roamed throughout the Novgorod governorate and were engaged in changing horses and other petty goods (GUTO GAT. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 145. L. 27v). It was also found out that as they had no permanent place of residence, they were not included in the census list and therefore paid no taxes and duties.

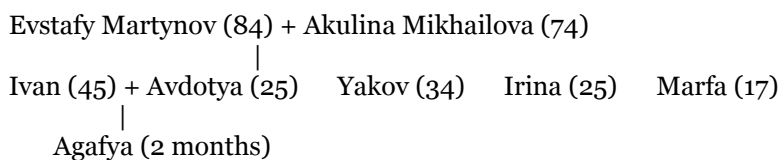
Initially, it was planned to deport the Gypsies to the Kostroma Governorate. The reason was the initiative of the Kostroma Treasury Chamber to trace down fugitive Gypsies. However, Martynov managed to prove that they were not runaways. The Tobol'sk authorities decided to settle the Gypsies in the Tarski district, and the measure was enacted through the appropriate order to the Turin lower zemstvo court. The entire procedure was carried out in accordance with the provisions of the decree dated November 4, 1784. According to the accounts by M. Sauer, who was in Tobol'sk for a short visit, Governor A.V. Alyabyev planned to found a special settlement for them, but he had to lodge them in separate families. No success was either achieved by his attempt to turn the Gypsies into farmers. The Gypsies did not cultivate the land they received but led their traditional life. Their basic activities still included begging, blacksmithing and veterinary medicine (Sauer, 1802: 331).

The documents that have been preserved in archives enable an understanding of the camp composition. It consisted of 22 families: 4 families of three generations and 18 families of two generations (GUTO GAT. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 145. L. 6-9).

Three generation families were rather large and had 9.25 members on average. The first generation consisted of the head of the family and his wife, the second generation was represented by their children and the families of their children, and the third generation consisted of grandchildren.

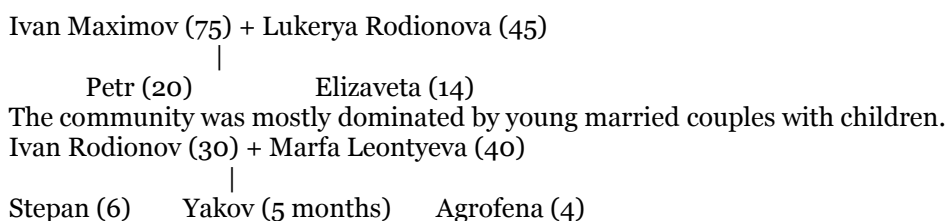
<sup>1</sup> The Ingermanland Regiment (1703–1918) was an infantry regiment of the Russian Army; it was stationed in the Novgorod Governorate until 1772, which comprised Novgorod, Pskov, and Tver lands.

<sup>2</sup> Melgunov Aleksey Petrovich (1722–1788) – a Russian statesman during the reign of Peter III (1761–1762) and Catherine II (1762–1796), Active Privy Counsellor (1777), Senator, Member of the Committee for Drafting a New Code (1767), Governor General of the Yaroslavl Governorate (1777–1788) and Vologda Governorate (1780–1788), recipient of the Orders of the Russian Empire: of Saint Andrew the Apostle the First-Called (1780), of Saint Alexander Nevsky (1762), of Saint Vladimir (1785). A major benefactor in the Russian provincial areas in the 18th century. A proponent of enlightened absolutism and Freemasonry.

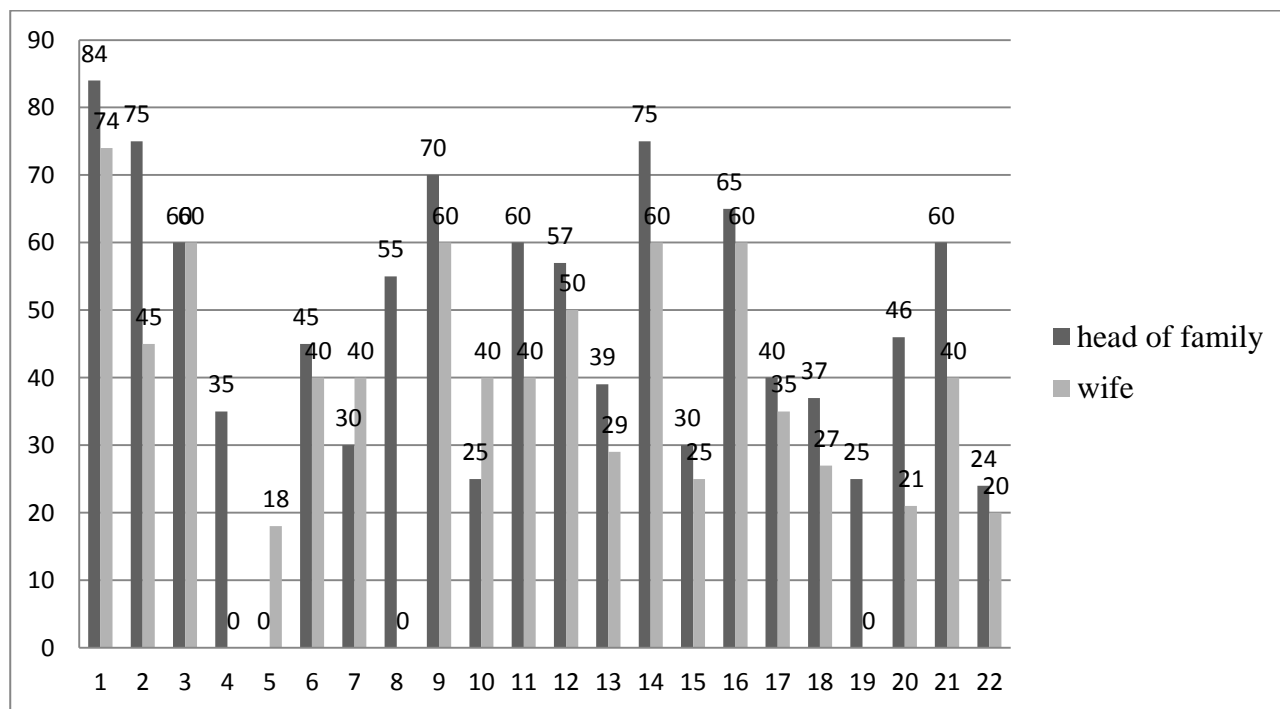


The head of a three-generation family was 71 years of age on average.

The camp's two-generation families were represented by married couples with children. The average population of such a family was 4.4 people. The head of a two-generation family was 49 years of age on average. In 7 of 17 cases, the head of the family was above 55 years old. These were elderly married couples whose children continued to live with them.



The average age of the head of the family was 49.4, his wife – 41.3. In most cases, heads of families were older than their spouses. Only 2 cases showed that wives were 10 and 15 years older than their husbands (see Figure 1).

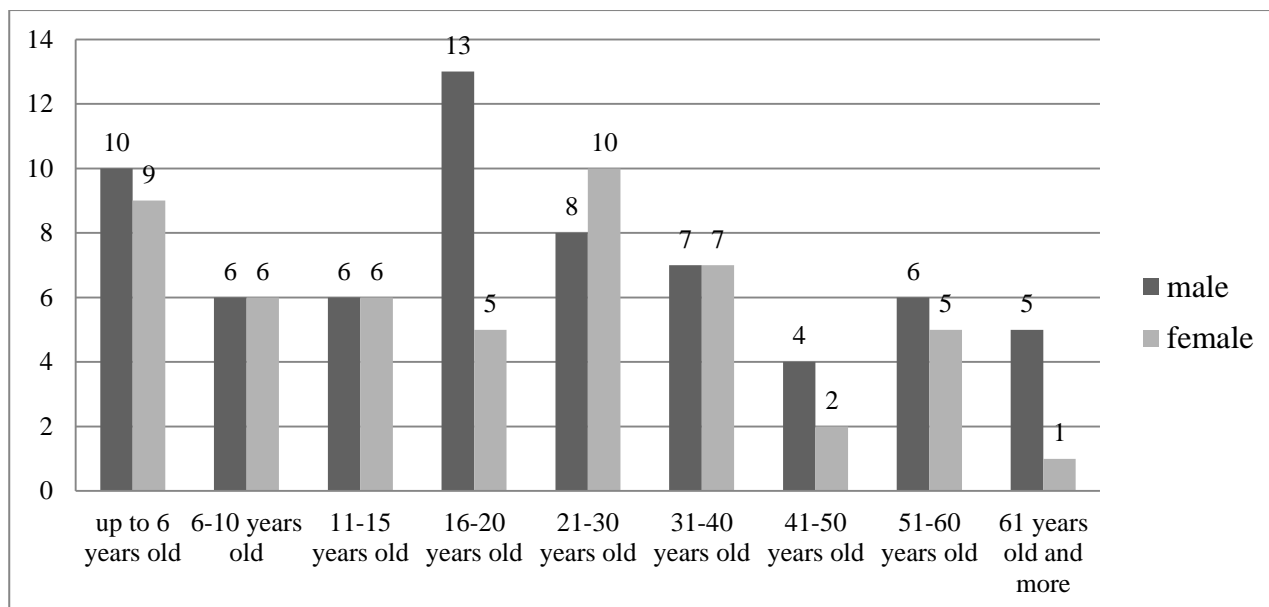


**Fig. 2.** Age of heads of families and their wives  
 Source: GUTO GAT. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 145. L. 6-9

In practice, the age difference ranged from 4 to 30 years. In 9 families, the age gap exceeded 10 years. This variation indicates the existing practice of digamy when a second marriage was entered into after the death of one of the spouses.

Gypsy families of this camp consisted mainly of men: half of the families had more men, 6 families had equal number of male and female members, and only 5 families had more female members.

The distribution of the Gypsy camp into groups according to gender and age illustrates a sustainable development of the community (see Figure 2).



**Fig. 3.** Age and gender structure of a gypsy camp, Tobolsk, 1792

Source: [GUTO GAT. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 145. L. 6-9](#)

The diagram shows that there is a significant imbalance only in two age groups (16–20 years, 61 years and older). We can see the predominance of men in both cases.

Indirect evidence suggests the marriageable age of girls. For example, widow Sofya Gavrilova, 40, had a son, Anton Gavrilov, who was 24 years old. Proceeding from this, we can conclude that the mother gave birth to him at the age of 15-16 years and got married at 14-15.

Women's child-bearing age reached 40 years. The wife of Ivan Rodionov, Marfa Leontyeva, was 40 and had three children as of 1792 with the youngest one (son Yakov) being 5 months old. These were not the only examples in the camp. However, there were unique cases as well. For example, the wife of the first camp elder, Akulina Mikhailova, 74, had younger daughters, aged 25 and 17.

The name list for the camp helps identify the patronyms of the Gypsies ([GUTO GAT. F. 341. Op. 1. D. 145. L. 6-9](#)). These data will be instrumental in further reconstruction of Gypsy genealogy on the basis of census audits carried out in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The Gypsy family in the nineteenth century retained patriarchal qualities. A camp consisted of tents belonging to individual families. They elected the elder (leader) who became an unquestioned authority for the entire camp. He was responsible for the camp's economy, ensured safe keeping of the camp's treasury which he could use only as generally agreed by the camp ([Golodnikov, 1884: 54](#)).

A Gypsy family had only elementary essentials. The property list was traditional: a horse, harness, 4-wheeled cart, tent, pillows, blankets, plates, pots, a frying pan, bags with rags ([CGIA SPB. F. 960. Op. 3. D. 72. L. 5-7](#)).

As we can see, Gypsy camps reached Siberia over the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth century, led by their nomadic practices. Some of them stayed there. However, voluntary migration was not the only source that formed a community that would become known as "Sibirskaya Roma" (Siberian Gypsies).

As early as at the beginning of the nineteenth century, several government officials of the Russian Empire came up with proposals to settle Gypsies, who were unfit for military service, in Siberia. This kind of proposal was made by Count von der Pahlen ([RGIA. F. 1347. Op. 4. L. 58. L. 2](#)).

At some stage of the decades-long efforts to stop vagrancy, authorities began to sentence Gypsies for penal settlement in Siberia. The region also received those Gypsies who were convicted of other criminal and administrative offenses. As a result, they arrived in Siberia having a status of a convict laborer<sup>1</sup> or a convict settler<sup>2</sup>. The age of those who were sent for penal settlement varied.

Certain information on the exiled Gypsies can be provided by the authors of the mid-nineteenth century. For example, Russian ethnographer Sergey Maximov travelled across Siberia in the early 1860s. His book "Siberia and hard labor" (Sibir' i katorga) mentioned Gypsies. According to Maximov, the exiled Gypsies were sentenced to live in Siberia mainly for theft (horse-stealing). In a smaller scale than from Novorossiysk provinces, but in a

<sup>1</sup> Convict laborer – a criminal sentenced to hard labor in a penal labor facility for a serious crime. In the Russian Empire, the penal labor location was predominantly Eastern Siberia until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Penal labor was used in mines and in the construction of railways.

<sup>2</sup> Convict settler – a criminal sentenced for exile for a criminal offense and sent to a certain place to serve the term determined by the sentence. The exile sentence could or could not include deprivation of civil rights.

larger scale than in from the Volga region provinces, where horse-stealing was a common practice among the Tatars and Bashkirs, “there were thieves from Bessarabia – the primary haunt of the Gypsy tribe, from where this people, like locusts, set off to neighboring areas for their criminal business of robbery and fraud of every kind in the whole of Russia up to the remote Vyatka” (Maximov, 1900: 231).

Voluntary migrations and exile resulted in three groups of Gypsies in Siberia, who differed from each other in their civil legal status. Different groups were allowed to be engaged in certain types of activity.

The first group consisted of personally free Gypsies who ended up in Siberia as a result of migrations. Legally, these Gypsies were automatically ranked as state peasants in the second half of the eighteenth century.

In the time of the next campaign to eliminate vagrancy among Gypsies in the early nineteenth century, they were categorized as petty tradespeople. Similar steps were implemented in Siberia as well. For example, in 1811, it was publicly announced about the resettlement of Gypsies in provincial towns and cities. While putting the initiative into practice, the police collected information about Gypsies, who to that date were not registered in rural communities and continued to lead a nomadic lifestyle. Authorities in the Omsk district of the Tobol'sk Governorate found 18 Gypsies (RGIA. F. 1286. Op. 2. 1819. D. 246. L. 62). Based on the Edict of Emperor Alexander I, they were assigned to the petty tradespeople estate of the Omsk city. However, in most cases, registration in this or that estate did not entail settling down in the specified locality, establishing housekeeping arrangements and abandoning the traditional way of life.

Archival documents demonstrate that the Gypsies did not move to Omsk. Moreover, the formal registration with the petty tradespeople category became a real nuisance to city dwellers. First of all, the problem was in paying taxes. Gypsies as petty tradespeople were charged with appropriate taxes and duties (poll tax, provincial tax (*zemstkaya podat*) and other). By the time of the 7th census audit (1815), the Gypsies were heavily indebted to the treasury: the poll tax arrears amounted to 492 rubles, provincial tax – 2 rubles 66 kopecks and penalties for back taxes – 266 rubles 56 kopecks<sup>1</sup> (RGIA. F. 1286. Op. 2. 1819. D. 246. L. 62). Nominating taxes per Gypsy, an annual average sum will be 3 rubles in silver. Omsk petty tradespeople refused to recognize this debt for their community. It took the Minister of Finance, Count Dmitry Guryev, who intervened and initiated the issue of a Senate decree which wrote off the arrears of the Tobol'sk Treasury Chamber from the Omsk petty tradespeople community, and the Gypsies were expelled from the community and put on a wanted list by the Tobol'sk provincial government (RGIA. F. 1286. Op. 2. 1819. D. 246. L. 63ob.). The Tobol'sk authorities, who negligently allowed the disappearance of the Gypsy camp, were ordered to track it down. It was necessary to bring the Gypsies to court for vagrancy and punish local officials for connivance or complicity (if the Gypsies were given passports that permitted them to go to another province). This story went nowhere, so we can suggest that the Omsk Gypsy camp was not found.

Meanwhile, a positive experience of registering Gypsies in the petty tradespeople category in the same period can be illustrated by a case in the Tomsk Governorate. In February 1815, a Gypsy camp of 113 people, led by elders Petr Bushuyev and Vasily Chetverikov, was detained in Tomsk (GATO. F. 1. Op. 1. D. 241. L. 12).

Initially, the Gypsies were categorized as peasants and assigned to one of the villages in the Tomsk governorate. At the same time, the Gypsies said to the local authorities that “we [the Gypsies – V.Sh.] are not capable of farming and cultivating land, except for trade, by our nature” (GATO. F. 1. Op. 1. D. 241. L. 12). If they were made to live in the village, this could have had the most tragic consequences. With no sources of income, the Gypsies could “go to the very extreme and will not be able to have any food for themselves and their families” (GATO. F. 1. Op. 1. D. 241. L. 12). For this reason, they appealed in August 1815 to classify them in some urban community.

In this period, the Edict of Emperor Alexander I on compulsory registration of Gypsies in urban communities was already in force for several years. In accordance with the law, the registration was executed by order of the governor. No consent of the petty tradespeople community was required (PSZ RI-I. Vol. 31. No. 24,795). Guided by this Edict, the Tomsk governor ordered to record the Gypsies with the petty tradespeople community of the Kainsk town that at the time had already become a center for a large Jewish community. Siberians of the first half of the nineteenth century called Kainsk the “Jewish Jerusalem”, because the group constituted 4/5 of the urban population (Maximov, 1900: 128). The provincial administration perhaps had an intention to concentrate the “harmful” population in one place.

The documents provide evidence that the Gypsies agreed to this decision and accepted the obligation to pay due state taxes and secular duties. In addition, the Gypsies promised to donate 200 rubles for the construction of new Gostiny House (shopping center) and Gorodnichesky House (an office of the district police-inspector). (GATO. F. 1. Op. 1. D. 241. L. 12). Such actions by the Gypsy community were designed for a very specific goal – to obtain passports for further unimpeded movement throughout Siberia.

Gypsies, who came to Siberia, unlike Jews, were not subject to restrictions on registration as merchants. We have evidence that from the end of the eighteenth century, the inclusion of Gypsies into the merchant guild was a widespread practice. For example, researchers know of Gypsy merchants in Moscow (Laryushkin 2018: 121–127). Archives have managed to preserve documents confirming that Gypsies were

<sup>1</sup> In this case, the amounts are denominated in bank notes (*assignatsiya*). In the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1 ruble in silver cost approx. 3,5 rubles in bank notes.



registered in the merchant societies of such provincial capitals as Ryazan, Tambov, Voronezh, St. Petersburg, Vitebsk and other cities.

Siberia was no exception. Census audits and other documented materials of the first half of the nineteenth century give information on the Gypsies recorded as Siberian merchants. In 1833, Gypsies Ivan Petrovich Bushuev, 68, with his family, Ivan Vasilyevich Starshy Chetverikov, 68, with his family and Mikhail Vasilyevich Chetverikov, 70, with his family, who lived in the Novorozhdestvenno village, were registered in the Tyumen merchant society (*GUTO GAT. F. 154. Op. 8. D. 440. LL. 23-25*). The audit materials lead to a suggestion that earlier they were recorded in the Yalutorovsk merchant guild, a city in the same Tobol'sk Governorate.

Later documents show the formal nature of Gypsies' registration in the merchant estate, which indicates their pragmatism and forward thinking mindset. The authorities required that they be assigned to a rural or urban community. But the only opportunity for them to maintain traditional (nomadic) ways was through belonging to the merchant estate. According to the "Urban Statute" (*Gorodovoye polozheniye*) of 1785 and later regulations, it was necessary to declare your cash capital to be registered in the guild. In the reign of Empress Catherine the Great, it was required to declare the availability of 1,000 rubles to become a member of the 3rd guild (a lower one) (*PSZ RI-I. Vol. 22. No 16187. § 92*). For example, records of the Tobol'sk Treasury Chamber evidence that Gypsy merchants Bushuevs and Chetverikovs "were not engaged in trade and other crafts except for buying and selling things, as well as bartering horses" (*RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 26. L. 4*). Each family lived on a passport that was issued to the head of the family, and the document allowed them to move freely within the borders of a governorate.

Thus, personally free Gypsies responded to the steps taken by the authorities, which were supposed to modernize and improve Gypsies' life. Some fled in search of new places to reside, while others tried to adapt to new conditions.

Another category of Gypsies in Siberia was constituted by exiles and convicts, whose status was determined by the "Exile Statute" and the "Statute of Punishments". While Jews or Poles were liable to depreciatory exceptions, the penitentiary system of the Russian Empire did not impose any incapacitating measures against Gypsies.

The third category of Gypsies in Siberia was established by those whose term of penal servitude or settlement came to an end. Their further fate was determined by several circumstances. Not everyone was lucky enough and had an opportunity to return to European Russia. The overwhelming majority remained to live in Siberia. In this case, Gypsies should be recorded with any rural community and assigned to the category of state peasants. However, although Siberian old-timers, according to witnesses, were sympathetic to those who went under police escort to a penal servitude facility, only strong pressure from the local administration could make them agree to accept yesterday's criminals into their communities. For example, according to prisoner files of the Tomsk Department for Convict Settlers (*Ekspeditsiya o ssylnykh*), Nemtsov Efim, 19, and Ivanov Marko, 56, were dispatched to be settled in the village of Kireevskoe, Bogorodskaya volost (a peasant community consisting of several villages or hamlets), in different years (*GATO. F. 3. Op. 36. D. 323. L. 1 ob.*). The accompanying documents contain no references to where they had previously lived or why had been sent for a penal settlement (*GATO. F. 3. Op. 36. D. 323. L. 5*).

By 1840, Gypsies had spread and lived almost in every Siberian province. According to incomplete data provided by the provincial treasury chambers in the Ministry of State Property and Ministry of the Interior, there were over 1,220 Gypsies registered in the Tobol'sk, Tomsk and Irkutsk Governorates (*RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 4, 14, 26*).

The social status (*sosloviye*) of Gypsies in Siberia pre-determined the range of the economic activities permitted to them. With materials of audit censuses and reports by treasury chambers of several Siberian governorates, we can identify distinct features in Gypsies' position in Western and Eastern Siberia.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, in the Tobol'sk Governorate, local Gypsies inhabited virtually all districts. Most were registered in rural peasant communities. But, sources confirm that the major part of the Gypsies did not carry on any regular farming activities. Settled Gypsies usually earned their living by doing paid work for local Russian peasants, practicing farriery<sup>1</sup> and blacksmithing (*RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 26. LL. 8-11*). However, the overwhelming majority of Gypsies, assigned to the peasant estate, led a semi-nomadic life, as evidenced by the following words in the documents: "They live in different villages based on written vids (identity cards – V.Sh.)" or "are absent without a passport" (*RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 26. LL. 9 ob., 10*).

Tradespeople from Gypsies concentrated in the largest provincial cities – Kurgan and Yalutorovsk. Unlike peasants, they owned homes inside the city, but still pursued the same semi-nomadic tradition with "temporarily leaves using passports and seeking employments consistent with their estate" (*RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 26. L. 9*).

The same lifestyle was led by the Gypsies who were registered in the Tyumen and Yalutorovsk merchant guilds. Local officials noted, for example, that the family of Anna Bushueva, a merchant of the

<sup>1</sup> Farriery – a horse hoof care, combining a blacksmith's skills with veterinary medicine to primarily address a horse's hooves, feet and legs

3rd Yalutorovsk guild, consisting of herself, three families of her sons and an unmarried son (17 people in total), "set off with passports every year to various provinces to be engaged in bartering, buying and selling horses" (RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 26. L. 13). The same was true to the Tyumen merchants, Ivan Bushuev, Ivan Chetverikov and Mikhail Chetverikov, who were not engaged in trade and other crafts, except for buying, selling and bartering horses (RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 26. L. 4).

The Gypsy community of Eastern Siberia was dominated by convict settlers that resided in remote villages. Few of them lived in families. As it was the case in Western Siberia, such Gypsies made their bread by practicing crafts (forging, shoemaking, sieve making), day-work or seasonal work at the farms of peasant old-timers (RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 4. L. 6-8). Gypsy families who were engaged in agriculture were a more frequent view (RGIA. F. 383. Op. 2. D. 1413. Vol. 4. L. 8-11).

In the second third of the nineteenth century, some parts of Siberia witness the outbreak of gold rush when private gold mining operations were quite widespread. Gold miners were in desperate need of workers in the short mining season. This problem was a real challenge due to the scarce Siberian population. It was difficult to find workers who could leave their settlements for several weeks because passports were a very costly purchase. Against this background, Gypsy convict settlers appeared to be a very attractive labor resource.

Some of the surviving documents suggest that whole Gypsy camps were hired by gold works. The elder and gold producer or his representative signed an agreement that also specified a down payment. Key "providers" were the Tobol'sk and Tomsk Governorates from where Gypsies went off in search of a living (RGIA. F. 1286. Op. 13. 1852. D. 1072. L. 9). The Gypsy presence in the gold mines had extensive geography: Yeniseysk and Irkutsk Governorates and Yakutsk Oblast (an administrative division corresponding to an autonomous province).

The journey of the hired camp to the mine was very often accompanied by petty thefts in old-timer villages, which it passed, and fights with local peasants. This kind of incidents, which were not uncommon, prompted the governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Count Nikolay Muravyov, to introduce in 1852 a temporary ban on hiring Gypsies in gold mines in Eastern Siberia (RGIA. F. 1286. Op. 13. 1852. D. 1072. L. 30b.). In October 1856, the Main Directorate of Eastern Siberia slightly softened its stance: employing Gypsies at the mines was again permitted provided they complied with the mandatory passport regime established by Article 149 of the Statute on Passports and Runaways (RGIA. F. 1286. Op. 13. 1852. D. 1072. L. 18).

## 5. Conclusion

Summarizing the above, during the eighteenth and first third of the nineteenth century, Siberia received a Gypsy population. One of the first mentions of Gypsies in the region belongs to a Scotsman in the Russian service, J. Bell, and dates back to the early 1720s. However, this fact has not yet been confirmed by other documents of this period.

Initially, the camps that came to Siberia numbered from 20 to 100 or more people. The surviving documents allow us to conclude that they came from the European part of the Russian Empire, where they turned up as a result of migrations from the provinces that were founded in the territories ceded to Russia following the Partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 1770s – 1790s. From the start of the nineteenth century, Siberia became a destination for Gypsies sent here for administrative and criminal offenses to serve terms in penal servitude facilities or penal settlements. The migrations resulted in the emergence of a group, who called themselves the "Sibirskaya Roma", and the process continued later.

The Siberian administration was tolerant towards illegal migrants. Some officials made efforts to incorporate them into the rural and urban communities in the region.

In Siberia, Gypsies enjoyed the same rights as most Russian subjects. Most belonged to the category of state peasants. The attempts, designed by the Siberian authorities to turn them into urban dwellers, were successful in isolated instances. Only an insignificant part of the Gypsies, which possessed substantial capital, was listed among merchants of the third guild and that helped them retain freedom of movement.

As soon as they were accepted to a rural or urban community, Gypsies switched to a semi-nomadic way of life. In Siberia, they maintained their traditional types of economic activity, such as farriery, trade and barter of horses, blacksmithing, shoemaking and sieve making craft. On the other hand, they tapped into areas new to them – arable farming, sheep raising and working in gold mines.

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