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Novgorod Governorate’s Marshal of Nobility Mikhail Nikolayevich Butkevich, a Forgotten Soviet Historian and Archivist

Abstract

The paper reconstructs the biography of a forgotten historian archivist M. N. Butkevich (29.12.1858—23.03.1933). His pre-revolutionary life is described: his social background, studies at the St. Petersburg University and his fascination with the Narodniks’ ideas and deportation to Vologda under overt surveillance in 1879, followed by a successful and typical career of major landed gentry that culminated in his election to the State Council, achievement of the rank of Actual State Councillor, and election as Novgorod Governorate’s Marshal of the

Nobility early in 1917. In 1927, after several years of despondency, deprived of his fortune and privileges, M. N. Butkevich became a staff member of the USSR Academy of Sciences' Commission on the History of Knowledge with the help of Academician V. I. Vernadsky. In his line of duty, Butkevich had performed a number of important historical and archival studies of the documentary legacy of M. V. Lomonosov, P. S. Pallas, and others. Butkevich's work on sorting out Lomonosov's papers was highly valued as 'very meticulous and helpful' by V. I. Vernadsky, A. I. Andreev, and M. M. Soloviev. His contribution to the archeography of Lomonosov's works is well worth exploring. Besides his participation in the re-publication of Lomonosov's works, his description of Lomonosov's papers in Leningrad is well worth mentioning. This description is typologically similar to description of the Pallas documents, but is probably even more detailed. Butkevich's description in 14 folio pages offers results of his study of the materials from the Archive of the Conference of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Incunabula Department, the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the State Public Library. Events of the 'Academic case,' which resulted in the purge of 'old-regime' workers from the Academy, did not affect Butkevich much. Surprisingly, even after Vernadsky had to leave his post of the Commission for the History of Knowledge director, in which he was replaced by N. I. Bukharin, little changed for Butkevich. Moreover, on March 15, 1930 deputy director of the Commission for the History of Science academician I. Yu. Krachkovsky authorized M. N. Butkevich to collect archival materials for special projects. The paper is based on the documentary sources introduced for scientific use for the first time.

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Keywords

Archive, history, history of science, Academy of Sciences, documentary legacy.

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