

УДК 94(47)+94(571.12)

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2020-3-917-928

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Young Scholar B. F. Porshnev on the Slave Formation: According to the Text Preserved in the State Archive of the Stavropol Region

Abstract

The article is devoted to an unknown episode in the biography of the eminent Soviet historian B. F. Porshnev (1905–1972), who worked in the higher educational and scientific institutions of Rostov-on-Don in 1930–32, and among others, in the North Caucasus Regional Highlander Research Institute of Local History, where he primarily lectured and taught history of socio-economic formations to post-graduate students. In Rostov, B. F. Porshnev, who later declared himself a scholar in the French history, showed himself as a Marxist social scientist. 1930–32 saw a discussion on socio-economic formations in the Soviet historical science, during

which the antiquity was legitimized and received the name of “slave formation.” The literature follows the content of this discussion in the regions not quite as well as in the center. The State Archive of the Stavropol Krai stores B. F. Porshnev’s documents and his report on the slave formation, which he gave in a dispute in the North Caucasus Regional Highlander Research Institute of Local History; this indicates that the discussion of socio-economic formations took place in Rostov as well. The report of B. F. Porshnev was typical Marxist work, in which sketchiness, social science, and abstractness dominated, while real historical material was absent. In B. F. Porshnev’s mind the slave formation was a logical stage in the development of mankind, however, not all peoples underwent it. Only sedentary peoples could expand slave system. They constantly pushed their borders and conquered first nearby, then distant peoples, turning them into slaves. Thus the empires of antiquity arose: Ancient Rome, other states of antiquity, Han China. Slaves were the main productive force within the slave formation, and violence, war, and capture were the main source of its replenishment. The slave formation collapsed as a result of class struggle between the exploiters (slave owners) and the exploited (slaves); however, this happened under objective external conditions, i.e., during barbarian invasions.

Keywords

Historical source, antiquity civilization, slave formation, Rostov-on-Don, discussion, Marxism, historian.

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Submitted 13.11.2019, published (for citation):

KONDRATIEV, S. V., KONDRATIEVA, T. N. Molodoi uchenyi B. F. Porshnev o rabovladel'cheskoi formatsii: po sokhranivshemusya tekstu v Gosudarstvennom arkhive Stavropol'skogo kraia [Young Scholar B. F. Porshnev on the Slave Formation: According to the Text Preserved in the State Archive of the Stavropol Region. In Russ.]. IN: Vestnik arhivista / Herald of an Archivist, 2020, no. 3, pp. 917-928. doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2020-3-917-928

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Полностью материал публикуется в российском историко-архивоведческом журнале ВЕСТНИК АРХИВИСТА. Ознакомьтесь с условиями подписки [здесь](#) .