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A Trade Education. The Example of St Petersburg from the 19th to the Early 20th Centuries

The purpose of the article is to show the development of the education of tailors in St Petersburg in the 19th century. This had a significant impact on the Russian craft education in general. Although apprentices were in a difficult situation, a positive trend manifested itself in the development of the apprenticeship, as can be seen in St Petersburg in the 19th century. It is evident that craft tradition played an important practical role in the evolution of piece production. The author reveals how the social and economic position of tailors changed in reaction to the growing westernisation of St Petersburg, the European capital of Russia. This city was famous for its luxury, attracting a large number of European tailors: this led to a cultural symbiosis and the flourishing of the trade. Over time, Russian craftsmen were able to move away from the blind imitation of foreign models and become masters in their own right. The history of handicrafts is currently attracting increasingly levels of interest and thus is undergoing a concomitant rise in its prestige: it has helped improve the self-consciousness of craftsman and tailors today and can demonstrate resonances between tradition and modernity.

Keywords: St Petersburg; craft apprentices; modernisation; tailors in St Petersburg; urban handicrafts; urban craftsmen; westernisation.

In recent years, a range of important publications have been released on the history of professional and trade education in Russia before the beginning of the 20th century: these works have given a general picture of the development of such education and have provided the basis for further research (1; 2; 24). A brief review of the education of tailors in St Petersburg can reveal aspects of the history of urban crafts in Russia and help us to understand how heavy industry and urban crafts interacted, complimenting rather than replacing each other.

Trade education in the capital was formulated in several arenas of the tradesmen estate, society, and the state. These were institutions like Russian craft councils and guilds as well as private, social, and government organisations. If we follow their activities, it is possible to paint a general picture of the development of trade education and the interaction of ideas and initiatives.

Georgi related in his description of St Petersburg in 1789 that among the tailors were many ‘tinkers’ (*Pfuscher*), by which he meant non-guild tradespeople, among them women, preparing female clothing and serf tailors in noble homes who sewed domestic clothes and the like for nobles and servants [6, S. 196].¹ A large number of unknown tailors, dressmakers, embroiderers, and lacemakers from the enserfed peasantry worked in country estates and urban palaces. In childhood, these individuals had been settled in the city to study with trade masters. As a rule, the apprentices were maintained poorly, did not receive a basic education, and were exploited as a free labour force (9, pp. 179-180; 18, l. 12; 7, S. 285-286).

In M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin’s short story *Grisha the Tailor*, his hero, Grigorii Avenirov, the future Moscow ‘military and civil tailor’, receives a typical craft education with foreign tailors: it is not coincidental that the firm in which he works has a German name. Such was far from unusual, since the presence of many German and foreign craftsmen was characteristic not only of St Petersburg but also of Moscow, especially in clothing production: ‘In terms of origins, he was a serf, and had been sent at the age of ten to learn at the then-famous Moscow tailors Schilling and Toepfer. Here he familiarised himself with his trade for a long time: he dragged irons, ran to the tavern to get boiling water, partook in a brawl, learned bad language, drank wine

on the sly, and so on. In a word, he received a comprehensive education. At fifteen, they put a needle in his hand and he, by watching others, learned to sew on straps. He cross stitched, ripped out the results, and then cross stitched again, until finally it no longer proved an obstacle. After a year, he was sat on a workbench and from here he was turned into a real tailor. However, he could not cut cloth (this was done by the owners of the firm themselves); only though teaching himself did he partially master this art' (25, p. 261).

At the beginning of the 1840s, it became apparent to guild craftsmen that they needed to establish a higher level of trade education. This they related in their petitions to the government and in discussions in their autonomous organisations, like guild and general trade councils and in the urban trade departments of city councils. In 1842, the master tailors V. A. Rezanov and Karl Kessner wrote a plan 'about educating boys to be master tailors', which they gave to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) economics department, into whose domain guild craftsmen fell (19).²

In 1847, Rezanov published a brochure about tailoring education in Petersburg in which he repeated the thought he had expressed in 1842, noting that the 'Germans and French' had a better system of educating their apprentices [17, p. 1; 7, S. 285]. He believed that the reason for this was the insufficient education of Russian tradesmen. Rezanov came to the conclusion that it was necessary to organise trade education beyond the walls of the workshops (see 31, p. 10). The attempts to improve trade education were directly connected to the establishment of a system of general education in Russia and the reforms of the 1830s instituted by P. D. Kiselev, the minister of national education. Here we can see how the attempts to create primary schools, and thus a system of general education, were closely related to similar efforts in the sphere of crafts to establish trade and drawing schools.

Rezanov suggested that it was necessary to improve the education of boys in tailoring: at present, boys started training at the ages of seven or eight and studied for between six to seven years. As an example of an optimal training scheme, he looked to the model offered by foreign masters, who only introduced children to the trade itself once they reached twelve years of age: thus, they were old enough to have already received a basic education at school or in the home. This meant that gaining practical knowledge coincided with the period when tastes and habits were being formed. After the conclusion of their apprenticeship and two to three years working as journeymen, they were dispatched with wages to travel across Europe, working with different masters and gaining experience (19).³

A striking example of this is furnished by the fate of the Russian tailor Michel, who became a great master-couturier. The story of this former serf boy acquired a considerable amount of fame thanks to V. Piskunov's article from 1859 about the inadequate level of attention that society, journalists, and writers paid to tradesmen: 'the lives of tradesmen are rarely put to paper, but there are so many subjects and personalities for stories, novels, and plays!' (12, p. 345). The fact that tradesmen were so ubiquitous in daily life meant that they were accepted as a normal part of urban habitation and thus did not draw special attention. The spread of ideas of enlightenment, the common weal, social justice, and rights in Russian society before the middle of the 19th century led to a growth of interest in the position of tradesmen, including tailors. Piskunov argued that the chief problem was that particular aspect of serfdom whereby landowners always opposed the manumission of those serfs who had become famous masters in St Petersburg.

So it had been in the case of Michel. As a serf boy, Mishka (as he was then known) was accepted by a famous French master tailor. He proved talented. Successfully completing his training and becoming a journeyman, the boy acquired from his teacher all the necessary knowledge about cutting and sewing: 'the journeyman Mishka was transformed into monsieur Michel, and he visited Paris: he returned a complete Frenchman and a true virtuoso with the scissors' (12, p. 347). The successful tailor naturally desired to redeem himself from serfdom. But, to his surprise, the 'lord' (*baryn*) refused to accept either a 5,000 or even a 10,000 rouble payment. We should remember that tailors could be wealthy: the court tailor Johann Henrick Neumann had built two stone houses on Nevskii Prospect (no. 17 was built in 1736-7 and no. 18 in 1742) (4; 3).

Michel resorted to the intercession of his salon clients, explaining that the landowner had asked for the unheard-of sum of 100,000 roubles.⁴ 'Michel raised a ruckus and want to start a trial with the lord, but

this would have ended badly for Misha if the authorities had not intervened in his favour and rescued him from his woes. The affair was settled: Michel paid his lord not 100,000 roubles but 30 or 40,000 and thus left free. [...] This is the kind of importance that the crafts question has for us. This Mishka, by his intelligence, capabilities, and useful activity, was more important than hundreds of village Mishkas, ignoramuses' (12, p. 348).

The suggestions of the tailors Rezanov and Kessner corresponded with the spirit and demands of the time. In 1836 a Sunday school for drawing was opened under the Technological Institute in St Peterburg; in 1840 a free drawing school for was also established. Its graduates included many talented artists, such as I. E. Repin. A considerable number of the pupils in these schools came from the families of craftsmen (7, S. 305-307). Despite the famous passivity and conservatism of tradesmen, it was precisely among the guild masters that the initiative for organising trade education was born: members of the guild council and its officials were active proponents.

We have the impression that master tailors were particularly socially active. In September 1854, the aforementioned master K. Kessner, originally from Mitava (Jelgava in Latvian), proposed to the economics department of the MVD that a bureau for the tradesmen of the capital be organised: this would, among other things, help masters to find apprentices and vice versa.

Nikita Maksimovich Komarov, a master of the tailors' guild, a member of the crafts council between 1844 and 1850, and a senior crafts representative between 1856 and 1859, was one individual who did much for the development of trade education in Petersburg [7, S. 278-279; 22, l. 3-4]. In his opinion, it was necessary before all to open trade and Sunday schools. In the latter, religious instruction, reading, writing, and arithmetic would be taught, while the former would instil knowledge of between one and four different trades (see 32, pp. 112-117). Komarov also pointed out that a journal for tradesmen was required.

According to Komarov's proposal in the trade board of the City Council, on 26 July 1856 the guild management opened on its account a 'hospice for the orphans and poor children of tradesmen' in which there was space for 30 infants (13, pp. 3-7, 9-10, 26-28). The authorities, in the persons of P. N. Ignat'ev, the military governor general (1854-1861), E. P. Kovalevskii, the minister of education (1858-1861), and S. S. Lanskii, the minister for internal affairs, fully supported the initiative of the Trade Council (22).

Komarov also initiated the opening of Sunday classes and the publication of a journal for tradesmen, as is clear from his speech and suggestions in the trade board of the city council on 5 June 1858. Touching on questions of the quality and sales of products made by Russian craftsmen, Komarov pointed to the prevailing public opinion that 'Russian' and 'foreign' products corresponded to 'bad' and 'good' workmanship respectively. The head of the estate correctly remarked that although this opinion was founded on prejudice, it was in many cases justified (22, l. 3-5). The best means for raising the quality of products was in raising the education of the craftsmen. In the same year as Komarov proposed his initiative, an assembly of the most public members of the trade board resolved to assign the considerable sum of 200,000 roubles for the construction of the Aleksandrovskaja school. This winged four-storey stone building was built in 1861 (23, l. 23; 7, S. 164, 280-282).

As early as 23 November 1862, the guild representative Egor Efimovich Malkov opened the boarding section of the Aleksandrovskaja school on Great Moscow Street, where it remained until 1868. Later it was transferred to a house on Chernigov Street, and then on 17 May 1874 to a three-storey stone building on Ligovskii Canal (today Ligovskii Prospect, 295): 200 children studied there (13, pp. 3-7, 9-11, 26-28; 7, S. 280-282). The date of this school's foundation can justly be considered the beginning of 'regular' trade education on a social basis. This school was the first non-governmental educational institutional in St Petersburg, and it gave the children of tradesmen a comprehensive trade and general education. Here, in specially equipped workshops, carpentry, lathing, blacksmithing, and foundry were taught. The school also provided lessons in religion, Russian, arithmetic, drawing, geography, penmanship, and music. In 1874, there were 106 pupils, in 1874, up to 200, and in 1887-8, 242 (11; 8, pp. 232-233).

The enlightened publicity campaign of Komarov bore fruit. In 1862, the Trade Council began

publishing the journal *Russkii remeslennik* (Russian Tradesman), in which tailors could find out about fashionable European trends. However it only existed to 1867, since it had to stop publication in view of the limited demand among tradesmen: nonetheless, its significance should not be denied (7, S. 279-281). The appearance of the journal meant that it was now difficult to talk about tradesmen as an exclusively 'dark' mass alien to any enlightenment. Furthermore, the level of literacy among women of the tradespeople estate was, according to data from 1869, comparatively high in comparison to those from the townsfolk, peasantry, and *raznochintsy* (7, S. 279).

The decision of the Petersburg city council in the 1860s about assigning funds to maintain trade education in the capital helped to put a range of private and corporative educational institutions on their feet. The desire to correct the current situation was motivated by the poor conditions in which pupils lived and their lack of rights in workshops [20, l. 1-2, 18-20]. The monotonous routine in both the spare time and working hours of apprentices meant that it was difficult to develop fully professional staff [29, pp. 76-92; 28, pp. 68-73]. Many years later, in 1889, the factor inspector G. F. Rakeev further remarked on the dissatisfactory state of the trade workshops (15, pp. 20-22; 16).

The 1861 imperial edict 'On making trustees for the poor responsible for the position of students in the trade institutions of Petersburg' was important as an additional instrument of control but it had little influence on the position of apprentices in the workshops themselves. No less than this, the Imperial Philanthropic Society was not established, legally speaking, as a supervisory organ over the position of pupils, but it did initiate the foundation of a whole range of educational institutions with a trade character (7, S. 286-287; for developments in Central and Western Europe, see 10; 14; 30).

From the second third of the 19th century, several charitable organisations appeared in Petersburg with the aim of supporting children from poor families. These associations founded Sunday classes, trade schools, and hospices in which a working education, founded on the study of trades, played an important role. Of particular significance was the Emperor Alexander II Trade School, located on the corner of Voskresenskii Prospect and Shpalernaia Street, and the Tsarevich Nicholas Trade School (today on the corner of Moskovskii Prospect and Krasnoarmeiskaia Street). The latter, which had been founded in 1870, was earlier called 'a house of charity and trade education for poor children'. It is evident that, in this school, trade was considered to be an inseparable part of the full physical, spiritual, and intellectual development of children. This educational establishment was also sponsored by Alexander II and thus was part of the tradition whereby the majority of the charitable bodies of the capital were under the trusteeship of members of the imperial family (27).

The development of the textile industry in St Petersburg in the second half of the 19th century led to the opening of many seamstress workshops, where girls from poor families were often sent to learn on the job. These workshops fell under the jurisdiction of the management of the crafts guilds, which could not strictly control all of them: it is evident that they did not strive to expand their authority beyond the limits established in the first third of the 19th century. A special commission under the governor of Petersburg, which sat from 27 November to 12 December 1891, was concerned by the fact that the 'management of the trade guilds, without any proof, is issuing certificates that bestow the rank of mistress for opening independent trade workshops even to pupils of the so-called "schools of cutting and sewing"' (36, pp. 16). V. E. Vladmirov, a senior member of the tradespeople estate, was invited to the first session of the committee, while representatives of the silver smiths, confectioners, and tailors were asked to the second session.

The social activity of the master tailors which we noted earlier can be traced in later times. The high level of internationalism among all the tradesmen of Petersburg, and not just the foreign ones, is clear from the events of 1897, when the capital's tailors received an invitation from the Belgian Society of Tailors to a congress being held as part of the International Exhibition in Brussels. On 27 July, M. V. Tru, the senior manager of the tailors' guild, held a meeting of 100 master tailors to elect two deputies who knew French. They resolved to issue travel expenses from the guild treasury (34).

An analogous situation occurred on 9 March 1899, when delegates of the St Petersburg Trades

Association discussed the question about providing travel expenses for trips to the International Exhibition in Paris in 1900. The following declaration of the delegate V. P. Aleksandrov is significant: 'Many of the masters from St Petersburg would desire to visit the International Exhibition in Paris in 1900, but they cannot realise their wishes in view of the considerable travel costs [...] A visit to this exhibition and a detailed review will deliver nothing other than advantages for augmenting the art of our trades and, consequently, our understanding of the craft industry' (33, l. 1). The delegate suggested that they petition the authorities about whether it would be possible to obtain additional expenses for the travel of tradesmen from St Petersburg to the International Exhibition and back.

Conclusion

To summarise, the trade education of tailors in St Petersburg in the 19th century took a complex path, from utter obscurity to becoming the subject of significant plans and events. At the beginning of the period under consideration, there was a high level of polarisation between serf tailors and foreigners. By the end of the century, the distinction between Russian and foreign tailors had been mostly erased thanks to the abolition of serfdom and the rise in literacy and mobility rates. Now it was possible to observe a wide degree of cooperation among foreign and Russian craftsmen. Foreigners were numerous not only in foreign-owned shops, but also in Russian ones. The improvement of trade education in St Petersburg in the 19th century points to positive changes in the social and economic social status of the capital's tailors. Their high reputation was achieved both because of the status of the capital, where there were higher levels of demand for quality products 'in the most recent fashion', and because the crafts in Petersburg were westernised by the newest technology and western experience.

Learning how to be a tailor took place exclusively in workshops under the supervision of masters because of the specificities of the trade. Trade schools offered an education in the crafts close to the large-scale industrial production which was useful in the rapidly developing metallurgy and woodwork industries. Apprentice tailors could receive a primary education and develop their aesthetic tastes in the hospices, drawing schools, and Sunday classes if this was the will of their masters. Assembly line production was originally developed predominately among seamstress workshops producing lingerie. This is no coincidence, since the administration of crafts guilds at the end of this period gave a great many certificates to open schools for cutting and sewing.

The positive experience of tailors in St Petersburg in the 19th century is useful for didactic purposes in the study of trades today. The model of learning developed sought to combine a good general and aesthetic education with a professional one in the special educational institutions and trade workshops: this thus included theoretical and practical knowledge. Guild masters had unique experience: they were both professionals in their craft and also specialists in promoting their product on the market as small businessmen. The philosophy of the modern trend for 'hand-made' goods presupposes a combination of high-quality products made from natural materials that do not harm the health of the consumer and the 'charged' spiritual energy of a master who 'puts his soul' into his goods. We can thus talk about *sustainable development* for future generations not in the typical socio-economic terms of the 20th century, that epoch of capitalism and socialism, but in a more general sense of ecological consciousness whereby we strive for harmonious societies and for harmony with the natural environment of which we are a part.

The path of the development of trade education among tailors in 19th-century St Petersburg was neither straight nor unidimensional. Difficult and long work had to be completed to convince the state and enlighten the tradesmen before all interested parties understood that educating apprentices was valuable because it would allow the trades to flourish. This development was significant not only for the capital but also for the rest of Russia. Despite the generally difficult position of trade apprentices, there appeared a positive trend in the development of their education. From this time, Russian tradesmen were able to overcome their subordinate position in relation to foreigners and become full partners and competitors. Detailed research on the history of trades and crafts can raise the prestige and self-understanding of tradesmen and tailors today:

showing how tradition and modernity have worked together opens perspectives on the future.

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¹ См. в русском варианте: «Сие ремесло имеет здесь отменно много худых мастеров, ибо кроме многих баб и других женщин, делающих женское платье, большая часть господ имеет обученных портных из крепостных своих людей, кои шьют ливреи на служителей, также домашнее платье и прочее» (5, с. 201).

² Архивные материалы, касающиеся Комарова и Резанова впервые введены автором в научный оборот в своей диссертации о ремесленниках Петербурга, опубликованной в 2002 г. (7). The archival materials relating to Komarov and Rezanov were originally introduced by the author in the historiographical review in his dissertation

about the tradesmen in St Petersburg, which was published in 2002.

³ Немецкие подмастерья (*Handwerksgeselle*) отправлялись в традиционное странствие (*Gesellenwanderung, Tippelei, Walz, Wanderschaft*) в своих типичных костюмах: шляпах, двубортных жилетах и с посохами. German journeymen (*Handwerksgeselle*) went on their traditional 'tour' (*Gesellenwanderung, Tippelei, Walz, Wanderschaft*) in typical costumes consisting of hats, double-breasted jackets, and staffs.

⁴ Для примера, средняя цена дома ремесленника составляла 5587 руб. (35, с. 6-8).