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The Testament of Major General J. Sternshants (1728): Life and Death of the Lower Corps Officer in the Recently Annexed Provinces of Iran

Abstract

The article and the document publication are dedicated to an episode of the Russian expeditionary Lower corps stay in the provinces of Iran annexed to Russia as a result of the Persian campaign of Peter I (1722–1723). The 1728 document is stored in the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation; it is the testament of major general Johann Sternshants. Former Swedish officer, Sternshants entered into Russian service and served as commandant of the Astara province in 1727–1728. His testament describes a large-scale experiment in management and exploitation

of the lands, quite different in their natural conditions, lifestyle, and culture inhabitants; specifics of relations between the Russian military administration and local residents; local tradition of offering gifts when seeking a solution of some problem; income and expenses of a Russian officer in Iran — that is, details rarely reflected in official documents. Other documents, also introduced by the author into scientific use, are from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Dagestan and the Russian State Military History Archive; these also contain information on the management of overseas territories. They show that the Russian troops were scattered over considerable space, they faced antagonism of the population in a country that had strong traditions of statehood and could hardly maintain order in the occupied provinces. In Iran, soldiers and officers of the Lower corps suffered heavy losses from disease; Peter I's plan to create a large commercial city-port in the mouth of the Kura failed, as local conditions and climate proved unsuitable. The military command appointed locals to administrative positions, but could not guarantee their loyalty; khans and sultans were afraid of Russian soldiers and their commanders, but often defected and ran to the Turks. The young Empire was not yet ready to develop and manage its remote overseas provinces.

Keywords

J. Sternschanze, recently annexed provinces of Iran, Astara, Iran, Bottom corps, 1728, historical source.

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