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Census book of the city of Arsk 1656–1657

Abstract

Russia's «small» towns remain understudied and unattractive to most researchers, although their role in the history of a given region is just as significant as that of large and medium-sized settlements. The medieval and early modern periods in their development present challenging studies for a number of objective reasons. Therefore, the publication of historical documents, their analysis, and the expansion of knowledge about the events and facts of these towns must be ongoing. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is the publication of a census book for the suburb of Arsk, located in the Kazan district, from 1656–1657, which is housed in one of the collections of the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA, Moscow). Using the principles of historicism and objectivity, as well as historical typological and comparative methods, the study compares the social groups of the Arsk population with other suburbs of Kazan during this period. The author characterizes the population of Arsk: a description with brief occupational characteristics is provided for three categories: service people, the townspeople and suburban population, and the clergy. Based on the statistical data obtained, it is concluded that the predominant population in the town of Arsk in the mid-17th century consisted of service people «by pribor», the majority of whom were Streltsy. The second largest category were residents of the suburbs, while the smallest portion of society was represented by church clergy. The obtained data indicate that in 1656–1657, Arsk continued to serve as a military fortress, fortified in the second half of the 16th century. However, the steady growth of urban development, reflected in the census book, demonstrated the emerging evolution of the fortified town into a trade and craft center for the region. The significance of this published document lies in its role as a primary source for the city's socioeconomic history in the 17th century, providing varying degrees of detail on issues of toponymy, demography, religion, fortification, and more. Furthermore, the publication of all surviving census books for the city of Arsk in the 17th century is nearing completion. This research may be useful to specialists studying the formation and development of fortified towns in the Middle Volga region, and in the Kazan region in particular, as well as to local historians, museum workers, genealogists, and the general public interested in the medieval and modern history of Tatarstan.

Keywords

Arsk city, fortress, Kazan district, census book, service people, clergy, townspeople, Kazan province 1656–1657.

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