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Sources on the Title Heraldry of the Tsardom of Muscovy of the 16th – the First Half of the 17th Century

Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of sources containing information on the land heraldry of the Tsardom of Muscovy, which reflected territorial title of the Russian rulers. The historiography usually mentions 5–6 artefacts and pictorial sources with images of such coats of arms. In fact, the complex of these sources can be significantly expanded. The author has managed to collect information about ten artefacts, two visual and four written sources, which allow to follow the evolution of the title heraldry in pre-Petrine Russia starting from the 16th century. Furthermore, two seals descriptions containing information about land coats of arms remain unpublished. The

analysis of sources leads to the following conclusions. The beginning of the Russian title heraldry dates back to the reign of Ivan the Terrible. It was probably connected with refining of his territorial titles after the Livonian War. The Great Seal of Ivan the Terrible (late 1570s) has a set of title seals with images, most of them quite simple. These emblems reflect mainly natural or economic features of specific lands. Some emblems are purely symbolic, some borrow directly from Western European heraldry. These title emblems (called seals prior to the 18th century) continued up to the Romanovs' reign. For instance, the front of the seal of Ivan the Terrible became a source for title emblems reproduced on the armor of Pseudo-Demetrius I, which was made by Western European masters. They probably took their cue from an imprint of the front side of the seal sent with the order. Emblems from the reverse side of the seal were not reproduced on the armor. Under Mikhail Fyodorovich (apparently, in late 1620s) the complex of title emblems underwent its first significant transformation. Some emblems continued to the end of the 16th century, some were formed anew. The new system of title emblems translated into a description of seals made after the Moscow fire of 1626. This document is also yet unpublished. The reform of the title seals may have been associated with making of a new complex of royal regalia in late 1620s. The new seals appeared in the composition of the cover for tsar's saadak (quiver), which, apparently, was made at the same time.

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Keywords

Heraldry, title of tsar, titular heraldry, title emblems, territorial coats of arms, historical sources, artefacts, visual sources, written sources.

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