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Career of a Foreigner in the Russian Province of the First Quarter of the 19th Century: The Case of V. F. Blankengorn

Abstract

The article shows the procedure for reconstructing biography of a foreign specialist who worked in the Russian Empire in the first quarter of the 19th century. The author analyzes materials in 'Mesyatseslov with a list of functionaries or the General staff of the Russian Empire ...' for 1813—1825. It allows to follow the foreigner's gradual movement up the career ladder, accompanied by reception of class ranks. Records of service (formularnye listy) within the studied time framework contain further biographical details. These important documents on the service of the provincial official are preserved in the fond of the gubernia board in a regional

archive (in this case, the State Archives of the Smolensk Region). Since records of service mention that the foreigner was of Lutheran confession, the parish registers of the corresponding church have been studied. The discovery of the record of death of the subject allows to date his life. Thus, the career of a Berlin native V. F. Blankengorn, who served as uezd and later gubernia land surveyor in the Smolensk gubernia, has been reconstructed. In 1812 Blankengorn was made to stay in occupied Smolensk; later, when the city was liberated, he was acquitted, as he did not render assistance to the enemy army. In 1823-1831 the Smolensk gubernia formed a part of the General-governorship (with center in Vitebsk) alongside with the Vitebsk, Mogilev, and Kaluga gubernias. Thus, documents related to Blankengorn's being awarded his first Russian order in 1824 proceeded from the Chancellery of the Governor-General. In the studied period being awarded any order of the Russian Empire (regardless of its degree) opened a prospect of obtaining noble dignity. The article based on the study of the biography of V. F. Blankengorn, adjusts the dating of the 'Atlas of the Smolensk Province.' This 25-sheet manuscript executed by Blankengorn is now stored in the department of cartographic publications of the Russian State Library. In its digitized form, the Atlas is available on the official website of the Library. It includes the maps of all cities and uezds of the Smolensk gubernia and its general map. Precision and artistry of the manuscript suggest that it was created for Emperor Alexander I's tour of the Smolensk gubernia in 1824.

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Keywords

Historical sources, foreigners in Russia, V. F. Blankenghorn, cartography, Germans, first quarter of the 19th century, Russian Empire.

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