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“I Greatly Rejoiced When Our Business Was to Be Resolved by a Decree of the Great White Tsar...”: Letters of the Kalmyk Khan Ayuka to the Emperor Peter Alekseevich and Chancellor G. I. Golovkin (1714)

Abstract

The article addresses written evidence of the Russian-Kalmyk relations in the early 18th century. It is to introduce into scientific use new documentary sources belonging that period when the epistolary written tradition of the Kalmyk nobility was at its apogee. While studying these sources, not only a brief historical description of the period has been provided, but also methods of paleographic identification of manuscripts and archaeographic analysis of the monuments of Old Kalmyk writing have been used. The article publishes transliteration,

translation, and two copies of the original letters of Kalmyk Khan Ayuka: one addressed to the Emperor Peter Alekseevich, another to the Chancellor Gavriil Ivanovich Golovkin. Both letters have been found in the Kalmyk Affairs Foundation of the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts. The letters were delivered to Moscow by the Kalmyk embassy led by Hojim (1714). Until now their contents have remained unknown to the wide array of researchers. The documents contain information on the difficult situation on the Russo-Turkish frontier after the signing of the Adrianople Peace Treaty in 1713. Participation of the 20,000 Kalmyk cavalry in the Kuban campaign against the Nogais (1711) incited the latter to retaliate. Kalmyk areas on the Lower Volga were constantly threatened the Kuban Nogais, which forced Ayuka Khan to ask for Russian military assistance. A distinctive feature of these sources is the fact that they are written in the old-Kalmyk writing “Todo bichig” (“clear writing”) and end with a red square stamp granted to Ayuka Khan by Dalai Lama VI in 1698. The letters are phrased in the traditional epistolary genre typical of the official correspondence of the Kalmyk nobility of the time: despite their brevity, they brim with truth, life, dynamism, and tension. Further identification and investigation of the Kalmyk letters in the Russian archives should be a comprehensive effort of various specialists, thus setting a promising trend in the scholarship.

Keywords

Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, historical sources, Russian-Kalmyk relations, Kalmyk letter, Peter the Great, Ayuka-Khan, G. I. Golovkin.

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