

Scientific article

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2026-3-693-706

For citation

Muchaeva, I. I. (2026). On the golden seal granted by the Russian Emperor Nicholas I to the Kalmyk court of Zargo in the first third of the 19th century, Herald of an Archivist, no. 3, pp. 693-706. DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2026-3-693-706

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On the golden seal granted by the Russian Emperor Nicholas I to the Kalmyk court of Zargo in the first third of the 19th century

Abstract

In the early 17th century, the Kalmyks, a nomadic Buddhist people who had migrated to the banks of the Lower Volga from Central Asia, voluntarily accepted the citizenship of the Russian Tsar and joined the multinational and multi-confessional Russian state. The historical experience of statehood, as well as the existence of their own written language and traditional culture, predetermined the formation and functioning of institutions of power in Kalmyk society, which, during the first half of the 19th century, were integrated into imperial legislation regulating the activities of nomadic society. One such institution was the Zargo Court. For the first time in Russian historiography, the subject of this study is a golden seal granted by Emperor Nicholas I to the Kalmyk Zargo Court. Drawing on various historical sources – a set of documents from the collections of the Russian State Historical Archive and the National Archives of the Republic of Kalmykia, as well as a piece of material culture – an exhibit from the collections of the State Historical Museum, the author attempts to reconstruct the fate of this artifact. Preserving objects of historical value in the context of a people's nomadic lifestyle is a complex process. The lack of permanent structures, including those capable of storing artifacts, during the 19th century was one of the reasons for the paucity or absence of authentic objects characterizing not only the people's material culture, which determined the relevance of this research. Furthermore, the history of the Kalmyks is replete with tragic events, which also hindered the preservation and accumulation of historical treasures. The golden seal granted to the Kalmyk people by Emperor Nicholas I served as an attribute of state power, and organizing the ceremonial presentation of the result of the emperor's will had political significance in the non-Russian community. M. P. Putyatin, a special assignment official sent to the Kalmyk Steppe in the Astrakhan Governorate, was given clear instructions on how to conduct the golden seal award ceremony, inviting representatives of the privileged strata of Kalmyk society—noyons, zaisangs, and clergy – as well as commoners, and organizing a feast. Protocol specifically designated a Buddhist service to commemorate the event. In conclusion, the author notes that the golden seal bestowed upon the judicial body in the Kalmyk Steppe marked its «golden age», and today this artifact stands as evidence of the gradual integration of non-Russians into the imperial political and legal

space.

Keywords

Kalmyk steppe, Astrakhan province, Russian Emperor Nicholas I, Zargo court, golden seal, State Historical Museum, M. P. Putyatin, artifact, State Antiquities Depository.

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The article was received in the editorial office on 13.02.2025, recommended for publication on 20.06.2026

You can read completely article in the russian historic-archival magazine “The Herald of an Archivist”. Read more about terms of subscription [here](#) .

Полностью материал публикуется в российском историко-архивоведческом журнале ВЕСТНИК АРХИВИСТА. Ознакомьтесь с условиями подписки [здесь](#) .