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Review of the Materials of the Military Reconnaissance Expeditions of the Russian General

Staff Officer G. V. Novitsky in the North-West Caucasus in the late 1820s – first half of the 1830s

Abstract

The article presents a source study analysis of a set of documents from the collections of two federal archives: the Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA), the Russian State Archive of the Navy (RGA VMF), and one regional archive: the State Archive of Krasnodar Krai (GAKK). These documents were collected in the first half of the 1830s during expeditions undertaken by Georgy Vasilyevich Novitsky, an officer of the Russian General Staff, to the strip of land between the Kuban River and the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus, which lay outside the zone of imperial rule. The researcher's documents illustrate an atypical distribution of archival information, as the researcher's primary materials were deposited in the regional archive, while the federal archives contain clerical copies with critical comments and individual additions. Novitsky has attracted the attention of contemporary scholars of the Caucasian War primarily due to his published memoirs, written by the scout in the adventure genre known as "survivor literature". However, despite the fact that G. V. Novitsky's archival materials constitute one of the first examples of organized study of the southeastern borderland of the Russian Empire and reflect the realities of the Russian-Mountaineer conflict raging in the region, the officer's creative legacy remains virtually unknown in modern Russian scholarship. It was published only in fragments in regional periodicals of the 19th century, which are also difficult for modern researchers to access, and has remained unnoticed by both Soviet and contemporary scholars studying pre-revolutionary cultural and ethnographic descriptions of the peoples of the North Caucasus. The article is structured according to a problematic chronological principle, revealing the content of G. V. Novitsky's analytical reports on the land and people of Transkubania in the context of reconstructing the main stages of his activity in the Caucasus from the late 1820s to the first half of the 1830s. The author points to the organic connection between the officer's military intelligence missions and the narrative of his research materials with the general trends of European methods for organizing the intellectual development of the frontiers in Africa and India. It is concluded that the similarity of certain plots to the images and ideas of British military intelligence officers such as Henry Pottinger, John Barrow, and Andrew Connolly is not the result of plagiarism on the part of G. V. Novitsky, but rather a manifestation of similar "colonial situations" encountered by the Russian intelligence officer in the Asian borderlands of the Russian Empire.

Keywords

Military and reconnaissance study of the Caucasus, military statistical descriptions, ethnocultural reviews, archival documents, General Staff of the Russian Empire, Separate Caucasian Corps, intellectual development of the borderland, road descriptions, G. V. Novitsky.

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