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SAMUEL GMELIN'S ITINERARIES AS THE SOURCE OF THE HISTORY OF THE EASTERN TRANSCAUCASIA

Gohar Mkhitarian

In the second half of the 18th century, thanks to academician Samuel Gottlieb (Georg) Gmelin (Polievktov 1935 : 116-119), the study of the northern regions of the Eastern Transcaucasia and Iran is put on an academic level. S. Gmelin's expedition left St. Petersburg on June 26, 1768 for a long journey. His way passed through the Moscow-Voronezh-Tsaritsin-Astrakhan and made the journey from Caspian Sea to Derbent-Baku, then to Shamakhi and Salyan. The expedition went away from there moving to the seaport of Anzali-Rasht-Balfrush. In 1771 S. Gmelin returned to Astrakhan. During that time, S. Gmelin visited Mozdok then in 1774 he moved to the eastern coasts of the Caspian Sea to explore the lagoons of Astrabad and Anzali (Mkhitarian 2018). It is noteworthy that S. Gmelin's expedition should follow a strictly defined schedule and explore the western coast of the Caspian Sea for about a half year. In October, the expedition was supposed to return to the Caucasus in order to join J. Güldenstädt's expedition and then make the passage to the Ghezlar. On January 8, 1774 in a letter addressed to the Ghezlar Superintendent's Office from Baku, S. Gmelin asked for four comfortable apartments for the expedition members and Professor Güldenstädt's apartment for him (Archive 1912: 69).

However, on the way back, a little bit farther away from Derbent (4 day-distance) the expedition along with the 20 Cossacks was captured by the ruler of Khaïtakes on February 5. The negotiations between the Russian authorities and the Utsmi on releasing the academician were delayed for 6 months. Eventually, S. Gmelin died from fever in July 27. It should be noted that S. Gmelin managed to convey his travelling notes to the members of expedition student Ivan Mikhailov and translator Fyodor Baur who were released from captivity. They sent report entitled "The death of Academician S. G. G. Gmelin captivated by the Caucasian ruler" to the Imperial Academy's Committee from Ghezlar in August 3, 1774 (Readings 1867:11-16) 42 manuscripts written in Russian, German and Latin, are preserved in Gmelin's personal fund of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Thus, S. Gmelin's expedition explored a vast territory from Saint Petersburg to the western shores of the Caspian Sea and the northern regions of Iran. He could hardly explore the geographical location of these areas, natural resources, information on the previously known and unknown species of flora and fauna with illustrations and graphics. S. Gmelin had to strictly follow the assignments (Fradkin 1950: 216-217) and requirements of the Academy, composing daily travelling notes and periodically sending them to Saint Petersburg.

Of course, the travelers of all time have written their itineraries while S. Gmelin's records were not amateur and cognitive notes. Those were the scientific studies based on reliable information addressed to the Imperial Academy in the form of reports. That was a matter of concern to the scientist who did not find enough time for properly elaborating the collected materials. In the introduction of the first part of the work, he hoped to complete the notes by making the necessary corrections after returning from a journey (Gmelin 1771: 1). Academician S. Gmelin's work entitled "Travelling" was first published in German (Gmelin 1770-1784) by the Imperial Academy in 1770-1784 during his trip. This work involved four parts and five volumes. In parallel with this, in 1771-1785 the work was translated into Russian and presented to the Russian readers in the same volume (four parts, five volumes) (Gmelin 1771-1785). The description of the region located on the western coast of the Caspian Sea includes the first part of the third volume of the work. The Russian imperial approaches to the rulers of Dagestan, the Eastern Transcaucasia and the northern regions of Iran are vividly reflected in the itinerary. Thus, he wrote about the ruler of Khaïtakes as rogue and venal governor who was not sincere to the Russian Empire and expressed his positive attitude only through words related to the security issues. Then, S. Gmelin noted that even if by the command of the ruler the foreign travelers were accompanied by guides, from past experience it was known that the ruler sent a large number of armed forces to rob the travelers (Gmelin 1771: 26). It becomes clear from the review that after visiting the region, S. Gmelin had a clear idea of the local khans, including the ruler of Khaïtakes who would later capture the scientist and other members of the expedition. Speaking about rulers, khans or governors, he revealed their political attitude towards the Russian empire, pointing out the potential benefits of their domains for the Empire. Paying tribute to the historical past, Gmelin considered the Caucasian Khans, including Fath Ali Khan of Kubbeh and Derbent, to be the "Persian ruler" viewing the region as an integral part of the Iranian state (Gmelin 1771: 42). He thoroughly examined the political influence of Fatah Ali Khan in the Eastern Transcaucasia. For example, the merchants passing through Shamakhi, had to pay Fath Ali Khan for the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. According to the academician, the reputation of the Hajis in Shirvan was so high that no significant decision was made without their permission.

However, the Khan of Guba deprived Shamakhi Hajis of their titles and carried them captive to Derbent and Guba (Gmelin 1785: 96-97). So they wanted to emphasize the absolute power of Fath Ali Khan on the Shamakhi people as an example to the inhabitants of other domains that are subject to Guba. Fath Ali Khan could freely appoint a governor in the regions that recognized his supreme power and intervene in the khanate's inner affairs. The commandant of Shamakhi was the khan's brother Abdulla Bek who was dismissed for double taxation and immoral life. Thus, the new governor of the Shamakhi was the khan of Baku, but he was also deprived of his power because of the complaints of the Shamakhi people (Gmelin 1785: 97). After the capture of Shamakhi (1769) Fath Ali Khan's distrust of Shamakhi people was obvious from his rare visits to Shamakhi. During his visits the khan spent the night in a village a bit far away from Shamakhi where he hunted a hawk. Being the witness to the following situation, S. Gmelin argued that Fath Ali Khan considered the Shamakhi Khanate to be the invaded state that he governed not as "the father of the people" but through the conqueror's right (Gmelin 1785: 97). The rulers of Baku and Shamakhi (Mkhitarjan 2013), who recognized the sovereignty of Guba's khan, were obliged to pay him income tax (money) and provide necessary provisions and send soldiers to protect the khanates from the Caucasian mountaineers and "other Persian khans". The Khan of Guba was even authorized to bring troops to Shamakh if the khan of Shamakhi refused to pay the tax. Fath Ali Khan's responsibility for other khanates S. Gmelin called "patronage".

The khan of Baku who was Fath Ali Khan's son-in-law did not temporarily pay some taxes (except for the army and food) and with the permission of khan kept the income 35000-40000 earned from the salt and oil. However he was "the princeling protected by the Khan of Guba". Moreover, S. Gmelin noticed that the following condition could not prevent Fath Ali Khan from appointing the khan of Baku to fill the mayoral seat at any time (Gmelin 1785: 83-84). S. Gmelin noted that Fath Ali Khan considered himself a Shia Muslim but since he had "intentions" toward Lezgins and Tatars (to reveal the consequences of being mercenaries), he tolerated Sunnis. Those who were close to the khan were claimed that he did not obey any "law" (Gmelin 1785: 49). The unlimited power of the ruler of Guba and Derbent did not affect the lezgins living in the villages. Leaving the Guba the expedition moved to the west passing through the five lezgian villages the first of which (the name was not mentioned) was the hereditary domain of Fath Ali Khan. Despite the fact that the above mentioned villages were under the control of Guba Khan, he did not have any administrative, political and economic lever to suppress the people (Gmelin 1785: 50). It should be noted that in the second half of the 18th century, in parallel with the Russian Caucasus policy, the Russia's ruling circles undertook the conquest of the Caucasus from "inside". The expedition settled in the Eastern Transcaucasia during the Russian-Turkish war, in 1768-1774, and the members' lives were endangered. In his letter addressed to G. Miller in 1770 academician P. Pallas expressed his concern about S. Gmelin's expedition. S. Gmelin's "Georgian" journey was mindless for him noting that no new discovery in those territories was worth putting the expedition at risk (Osipov 1993: 111). Indeed, the Transcaucasian and Dagestan governors were suspicious of assurances about the about the friendship of the Russian Empire. By that logic, the reception of the expedition by the khan of Derbent and Guba Fath Ali Khan should also be considered. When S. Gmelin handed the recommendation letter to Fath Ali Khan sent from the governor of Astrakhan, the khan stood up and bowed down after reciting the imperial title while reading the letter. On the other hand, he refused to provide horses for the expedition so that they could move to Baku from Derbent, as he was anxious that in that way they would be able to investigate the territory thoroughly. According to S. Gmelin, the Armenians living in Derbent who were always aware of the surroundings of khan, assured him that he was considered to be a spy. For that reason, the "Persians" thought S. Gmelin visited the region especially during the Russian-Turkish war not for the scientific research but for the observation of the area. Moreover, at the end of the journey, Fath Ali Khan told S. Gmelin that his initiative to carry out scientific research was fictitious hinting at his political intentions (Gmelin 1785 : 42-44, 109). The khan of Baku obviously evinced the negative attitude toward the expedition (Gmelin, Puteshestvie po Rossii dlya issledovaniya trech carstv estestva, 1785, pp. 61-62). Besides, when the khan was informed of Gmelin's visits to the oil wells, he wondered whether the foreigners in Russia were allowed to visit such places. All the attempts made by the academician to explain the true intentions of his visit were in vain. During his stay in Baku, S. Gmelin always noticed some people around his lodgment spying the Russian ship (Gmelin, Puteshestvie po Rossii dlya issledovaniya trech carstv estestva, 1785, p. 77). Academician J. Guldenshtäd't's expedition also overcame such obstacles in Dagestan by Tarki's shamkhal in the 1770s (Guldenshtedt 1809: 116-117). One of the values of S. Gmelin's work is the veracity of the information. S. Gmelin noted only what he had seen with his own eyes. So he always criticized the transmission of unreliable information which was not seen with the author's own eyes. Due to his observation skills S. Gmelin could precisely distinguish between primary and secondary information in the extensive description by emphasizing the most valuable.

Thus, S. Gmelin conveys eyewitness information on the relations between Transcaucasian and Iranian khans, their internal and external policies, their relations with the Russian Empire and finally analyzes them by giving political assessments. Summing up S. Gmelin's studies in the first half of the 1770s, we can state that he has sometimes deviated from the recommendations of the Russian state officials, academics and governors and approved his personal observation guided by the sense of duty of the scientist toward the science and the society.

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გოჭარ მხითარიანი

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