Land-cover patterns in Russian territorial and municipal heraldry between the 17th and 19th centuries

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Abstract. The paper analyzes a set of Russian territorial and municipal coats of arms between the 17th and 19th centuries for the way they blazon natural and artificial land-cover patterns of Muscovy and the Russian Empire. It establishes that the first coats of arms that designed images of such patterns date back to the late 17th century, with a geographical component as such to be auxiliary. The share of coats of arms with geographic images makes up 13% in the heraldry of the Russian Empire, although, in most cases, this motive in such coats of arms is a priority. The coats of arms depicted hydrographic patterns (2/3 of the total number of coats of arms), among which a majority involved images of rivers blazoned by four iconographic types, relief forms (less than ¼), primarily mountains, as well as forests (1/10) and single artificial patterns in the form of water and land routes.

1. Introduction

Heraldry is an interesting and in many ways unique historical source for studying the historical past in all its dimensions – from politics and ideology to culture and science. Coats of arms symbolically display information about a variety of phenomena and events, including natural features, economic life, cultural attractions, etc. Within modern environmental history (ecological history), heraldry also has a significant source-studies value. Being a pictorial source, the coat of arms in a capacious and concise form can reflect the ideas of the world around in its geographical and natural embodiment, characteristic of certain historical periods. Indeed, to a greater extent this applies to territorial and municipal heraldry, since it is most closely related to a specific geographic location.

Various land-cover patterns, both natural and man-made, are also blazoned in the territorial and municipal coats of arms. This is even one of the most important conditions to make such coats of arms emerge and exist, since one of the most important functions of any coat of arms is identification. A clear and unambiguous identification of the bearer of a coat of arms at the level of territorial and municipal heraldry can be directly attributed to the localization of this bearer in a geographic space that has its own characteristic features. The study into the sets of such coats of arms can show, firstly, how significant a geographical component is in the heraldry of different countries and eras, and, secondly, reflect specific land-cover patterns and whole categories of such patterns in ideas of certain territories in the light of their symbolic perception. The official nature of such heraldry gives it the status of a widespread view of natural and geographical characteristics of the country.

In modern historiography it is relevant to explore the territorial and municipal heraldry of both European countries [1] and Russia [2] within environmental history, but this requires further attention and development.
2. Materials and Methods
The paper deals with Russian territorial and municipal coats of arms of the 17th – 19th centuries, presented in several collections. The territorial heraldry of the Muscovite period was shaped during the 16th – 17th centuries and found a finishing touch in the Royal Titular compiled in 1672 and available to researchers [3]. The territorial and municipal heraldry of the Russian Empire also had a long historical path to go, accompanied by a certain evolution and even reforms. An overwhelming majority of coats of arms of this period were published in a special collection in 1900 [4]. The total number of all approved territorial and municipal coats of arms of pre-revolutionary Russia amounted to about 700 items.

Undoubtedly, Russian heraldry developed and was largely shaped under the influence of European heraldic traditions. In different periods, various national “schools” of heraldry somehow contributed to the heraldry of Russia, however, the existing layer of original emblems, as well as the independent pathway of heraldry on the basis of Russian culture, made Russian heraldry a completely independent and self-sufficient cultural phenomenon. The possibility of using territorial and municipal coats of arms of Russia for the historical study of various geographical patterns is due to the very principle of creating such coats of arms. In particular, it was expressed once the bulk of municipal coats of arms was created in the era of Catherine the Great by the herald master A.A. Volkov, who was ordered to convey the natural features and occupations of local residents in the coats of arms [5].

Land-cover patterns could be depicted in coats of arms in various ways – both through specific images (objects), real, conventional or symbolic, and through such a semantically important phenomenon in heraldry as tincture. In particular, azure was extremely indicative here, which could symbolically denote aqueous space. The history of azure and, more broadly, blue in the cultural context (as well as a number of other tinctures) already became a subject of scientific research [6, 7]. It is important to note that other features of formal heraldic objects, for example, a coalescence of parts or a wavy shape, could also indicate certain geographical and environmental features.

The research subject is land-cover patterns that are present in a set of territorial and municipal coats of arms of Russia in the 17th – 19th centuries in the conventional-symbolic or realistic-iconographic images. These patterns, primarily, involve natural sites – water (rivers, lakes, seas), landforms (mountains, hills), landscape elements (forests). Man-made patterns (canals, roads) were found to be present only in some examples, since they were hardly ever depicted in the coats of arms. A methodological toolkit rests on source-studies and semantic analysis, which greatly facilitated the fact that formal descriptions of coats of arms explain their semantics (which is by no means typical of Russian heraldry at large).

3. Results and Discussion
The oldest layer of Russian territorial coats of arms is, first of all, the title coats of arms, i.e. coats of arms of those provinces whose names were included in the territorial part of the title of Russian sovereigns. This array dates back to the 1570s, i.e. by the time of the reign of Ivan the Terrible. It acquired its final form by the end of the 17th century, having been visually enshrined in the Royal Titular of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich created in 1672. In total, the source contains 33 territorial coats of arms, partly dating back to the previous heraldic tradition, and partly created anew. Among the latter, there is the only one in which the geographical features characteristic of a particular region are clearly displayed. This is the coat of arms corresponding to the title designation “Sovereign Iberian Regions”, i.e. one of the parts of Georgia (under the Iberian land, the Russian side historically meant Kakheti). The coat of arms contains an image of an erupting volcano pierced by two arrows, and although there are no active volcanoes in the Caucasus, the image of the mountain itself certainly refers to the mountains of the Caucasus.

Two more territorial, and later city coats of arms that blazon fish and water, also go back to the coats of arms of the Royal Titular. This is the Novgorod coat of arms that contains a base being water in which two fish swim towards each other. Later, this base in the city coat of arms of Novgorod was depicted in azure, which meant the same water. This water, most likely, depicted the Volkhov River,
while the fish swimming towards each other, in addition to the characteristic, purely heraldic composition, reflected the idea that the Volkhov could flow both in one and the other direction. The second such coat of arms is owned by Belozersk. It contained two crossed fish emblazoned over blue water that meant White Lake. In the later city coat of arms, fish were emblazoned onto an azure escutcheon.

In the city heraldry of the Russian Empire, the azure tincture of escutcheon could itself symbolize water, and, therefore, specific hydrographic sites. These involve, for example, the coat of arms of Saratov, in which the color of the shield blazons the Volga, or the coats of arms of Kola and Nizhnekkamchatsk, which contains the image of a whale in an azure field, implying in one case the Barents Sea, and in the other – the Pacific Ocean.

However, when it comes to land-cover patterns that, in the coats of arms, were indicated by special objects, then their total number amounts to about 90 items. In total, for the entire period of pre-revolutionary Russian urban heraldry, about 700 city coats of arms were approved, so land-cover patterns are thought to be present in about 13% of them. There are most of the coats of arms with images of hydrographic sites – almost 60, with a vast majority of such sites to be rivers. This is quite natural and is explained by the obvious fact that Russian cities usually were founded along river routes. The rivers themselves in urban heraldry could be interpreted in various ways.

First, it could be allegorical images going back to European emblems that became famous in Russia in the early 18th century. Rivers in this tradition were blazoned as lying bearded deities, often leaning on vessels from which water flows (these objects as such could represent both the images of Neptune or Tritons, or simply serve as a personification of a particular river). In addition, the very vessel (jug) with flowing water could denote the river. In the Petrine era, this iconography became known in Russian heraldry, and ultimately the coats of arms of such cities as Veliky Ustug, Voronezh, Aleshki and Dokshitsa go back to it. In the arms of Veliky Ustug, Neptune holds jugs in both hands, from which water flows, thereby indicating the location of the city at the confluence of the Sukhona and Yug Rivers. In Dokshitsa coat of arms, two jugs with water pouring mean the sources of the Viliya and Berezina Rivers that flow in this region. In addition, the two streams of water symbolize the waterways along these rivers to the Baltic and Black Seas. In the arms of Voronezh, a jug with pouring water implies the Voronezh River, whereas in Alyoshka coat of arms, a lying male figure with a jug symbolizes the Dnieper River as such. It is indicative, however, that there is a few of such coats of arms and chronologically they either go back to the Petrine emblems, or represent single cases in the Catherinian (1796) and Nicholas I (1844) heraldry.

Secondly, rivers could be displayed as heraldic objects – a pale, a fess or a bend. Moreover, in some cases, these objects were wavy and azure, which further emphasized their semantics. There are a little more than 20 such coats of arms in total. Most of these coats of arms date back either to Catherinian time, or to the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries, when many purely formal principles prevailed in Russian heraldry. The fess blazons the river in most of the coats of arms. These are the coats of arms of Aldan (Aldan), Atkarsk (Atkara), Blagoveschensk (Amur), Cherni (Chern), Kaluga (Oka), Kremenchug (Dnipro), New Margelan (Shakhimardan), Olekminsk (Lena), Tashkent (Chirchik, a tributary of the Syr Darya). In the coat of arms of Taganrog, two fesses display the Volga and Don Rivers. In the coat of arms of Friedrichsgam, the fess meant the Gulf of Finland; two fesses were also present in the coats of arms of the Suwalki and Nyuland provinces (the kingdoms of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Finland, respectively). The bend symbolizes the rivers in the coats of arms of Orlov (Vyatka), Pavlograd (Volchya), Romanov (Volga), Verkhnedneprovsk (Dnieper), Vladikavkaz (Terek). In some cases the name of the river (coat of arms of Novokhopyorsk) or the course of the river (coat of arms of Porechic) is even emblazoned on the bend. Finally, the pale means the rivers in the coats of arms of Przemysl and Tarusa (in both cases, the Oka is meant), as well as Samarkand (Zeravshan). The Oka River is thus three times displayed by heraldic objects in the city coats of arms, approved in 1777.

Thirdly, realistic images of rivers were quite common (this generally applies to the coats of arms approved in the era of Catherine II). The Volga is represented in the coats of arms three times in this
form (coats of arms of Kostroma, Rybinsk and Sviyazhsk), and there are also images of such rivers as Bug (Voznesensk), Don (Zadonsk), Pyana (Perevoz), Tura (Tyumen), Ural (Uralsk) and others. The coats of arms of Brest-Litovsk and Kovno realistically depict even the confluence of two rivers. It is significant that in a number of cases ships are depicted sailing down the rivers, symbolizing trade and shipping.

Fourthly, rivers could also be displayed by graphic images, in some cases even close to images on geographical maps. This method was used when it was necessary to depict not the river as such, but some of its remarkable features or the assemblage of several rivers. In the coat of arms of Kutais, the confluence of two rivers is shown in this way, in the coat of arms of Yukhnov – three, and in the coat of arms of Plyos – a Volga reach that gave the name to the city. The Kirenga River is noteworthy as the peculiarities of its flow are reflected in two city coats of arms at once – Kirensk and Ust-Kirensk (in one of the coats of arms – with the help of a special heraldic object). With the help of a conventional object, the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers was also blazoned by Khabarovsk coat of arms.

The rest of the hydrographic objects were marked in the city coats of arms much less frequently. Only two coats of arms show lakes – Beloe, in the already mentioned Belozersk coat of arms, and Podonskoe in the coat of arms of Podonsk, Novgorod province. Five coats of arms depicted the seas – the Black Sea in the coat of arms of Izmail, the Baltic Sea in the coat of arms of the Baltic port and the Caspian Sea in the coats of arms of Derbent and Cuba (in the form of a realistic image), as well as in the coat of arms of the short-lived Caspian region (conventionally – as an azure fess in the third quarter of the coat of arms). Two islands were blazoned – one realistically in the coat of arms of the city of Ostrov (an island on the Velikaya River), the other – symbolically in the coat of arms of Kronstadt (Kotlin Island in the Gulf of Finland in the form of an island on which there is a boiler). Finally, only one artificial hydraulic engineering structure is reflected in heraldry: this is the Ladoga Canal in the coat of arms of Novaya Ladoga, dating back to the first half of the 18th century.

Orographic objects are represented in 20 city coats of arms. Some of them represent relatively large mountain ranges in the Caucasus (such are the coats of arms of Derbent with the image of the Greater Caucasus Range, Cuba – Beshbarmag Mountain, Pyatigorsk – Beshtau Mountain) and in Crimea (Chaytyrdag in the coat of arms of Simferopol). The Armenian Highlands are denoted by the image of Ararat with Noah’s Ark on top in the coat of arms of the Georgian-Imeretian province. Of the mountains of Central Asia, only the Western Tien Shan is represented in heraldry in the form of the sacred mountain Throne of Solomon (Sulaiman-Too) in the coat of arms of the now Kyrgyz city of Osh (the coat of arms itself was approved in 1908). The Valday Upland is marked by a mountain in the coat of arms of Valdai, and the coat of arms of Krasnoyarsk depicts Red Mountain, i.e. elevated bank of the Yenisei River (“red yar” that gave the name to the city). In other cases, the mountains are more likely local attractions (the coats of arms of Cherepovets, Sarapul, Uralsk, Ushitsa, etc.).

The coat of arms of Kamchatka region, approved in 1851, is exciting. It has “three fire-breathing mountains”, i.e. three volcanoes symbolizing the main attraction of the region. After the liquidation and accession of Kamchatka region to Primorsky region, the volcanoes became the coat of arms of Primorsky region, approved in 1878. It contains the images of two active volcanoes on the sides of the azure pale. Another natural phenomenon associated with fire was first recorded in the coat of arms of Caspian province (1843), where there is “ignited gas emitted by jets from the ground” in the second part of the shield, and then in the coat of arms of Baku (1883) – “three gold flame in a black field.” This refers to the famous fires of Yanardag and the Ateshgah temple – burning outlets of natural gas.

Forests were symbolically displayed only in nine city coats of arms of various provinces of the empire. Sometimes these were images of traditional trees, sometimes a forest or even a forest thicket (as in the coat of arms of Turinsk, Tobolsk province). The forest was symbolically present in the coats of arms of the cities of Litin (Podolsk province), Orheev (Bessarabian province), Pronsk (Ryazan province), Temnikov (Tambov province), the already mentioned Turinsk, Tsivilsk (Kazan province) and Verro (Livland province). In the coat of arms of the city of Pruzhany (Grodno province), a lonely spruce in the second quarter symbolized the famous Belovezhskaya Pushcha.
Only two city coats of arms depicted communication routes, and in one of them these images also meant the name of the city. The coat of arms of the city of Kresttsy, Novgorod province, had two large roads in the lower part, crossing one another in a cruciform manner. This meant the roads that really intersected near this city from Novgorod to Moscow and from Pskov to Vologda. In the lower part the coat of arms of the city of Novoaleksandrovsks, Kovno province, had the Kovenskoe highway and the obelisk commemorating its construction in 1841.

4. Conclusion
The territorial and urban heraldry of Russia between the 17th and 19th centuries, analyzed for the way in which it reflects information about the land-cover patterns of the country, shows that for the first time the geographical theme appeared in Russian territorial heraldry in the late 17th century. It was concerned with both relief elements (Caucasus Mountains) and hydrographic sites (White Lake and, probably, the Volkov River). Of the entire totality of early territorial coats of arms, coats of arms of this kind accounted for no more than 10%, and the geographic information they depicted was clearly peripheral and played an auxiliary role.

During the period of the Russian Empire, the share of coats of arms that displayed certain objects increased and amounted to about 13%. Land-cover patterns were not the most significant elements for urban heraldry as a whole, but in many cases they embraced the main symbolic meaning of the coat of arms. Hydrographic objects were most common (almost 60 coats of arms), and in this category the most common were rivers. Excluding a number of coats of arms, in which specific water bodies were blazoned with azure tincture, four iconographic types of images of rivers in coats of arms can be distinguished. These are, in order of decreasing number of examples: 1. Conventional images in the form of heraldic objects (23), of which the most common was the fess (13), i.e. a horizontal object, then the bend (7) is diagonal, and the pale (3) is vertical. 2. Realistic images of rivers (16), including even the confluence of two rivers. 3. Graphic images of rivers in cartographic or similar form (5). 4. Symbolic images of rivers in the form of their personification, deities, images from the category of emblems (4). The use of one method or another correlated to some extent with the development of the specialized language of Russian heraldry.

Seas and lakes were a clear minority among the emblems; there is a single image of a canal in the city heraldry.

Orographic objects were emblazoned in about 20 coats of arms, among which the most distinctive are the mountains of the Caucasus and Crimea. A significant part of such objects, however, were narrow-localized. In territorial and urban heraldry, such remarkable elements as volcanoes and burning sources of natural gas were singly blazoned.

Forests are blazoned in 9 city coats of arms alone, and that only, most likely, in those cases when a forest in a given area could have some natural features (deaf taiga, for example) or commercial value (Belovezhskaya Pushcha).

Finally, images of land routes are found in urban heraldry purely sporadically and only in etymological or concrete historical aspects.

All in all, despite a rather modest representation of geographical symbols in Russian territorial and urban heraldry between the 17th and 19th centuries, it was distinguished by a noticeable variety of both the objects blazoned and the methods of their symbolic design.

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