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Activities of Prince N.G. Repnin as Governor-General of the Kingdom of Saxony (1813–1815)

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Abstract

The article is devoted to study of activities of Prince N.G. Repnin as Governor-General of the Kingdom of Saxony in 1813–1815. The authors came to conclusion that immediate prerequisites for successful career of N.G. Repnin as a statesman were his long military service. During his stay in Saxony, the prince gained unique and invaluable experience as a civil servant, manager and functionary. The prince successfully carried out an administrative-territorial reform in the kingdom, ensuring publicity and communication of power among population via mass media and systematic reception of citizens. A military reform was carried out by transforming law enforcement agencies and armed forces of the state. The administration of N.G. Repnin conducted a socially oriented economic policy, which was aimed at comprehensively facilitating life of most residents through customs, financial and tax reforms. The main essence was to reduce fiscal measures, strengthen the national currency (thaler), centralize industries. The main units of Saxon infrastructure were restored. The work of cultural, educational and artistic institutions was resumed. N.G. Repnin took personal part in these activities, having donated considerable financial resources. To consolidate population, honorary awards were introduced, national and religious holidays were celebrated.

Keywords: prince N.G. Repnin, Kingdom of Saxony, governor-general, territorial recovery, reforms.

1. Introduction

Prince Nikolai Grigoryevich Repnin (1778–1845) is an outstanding military and statesmen of the Russian Empire. He was Hero of Austerlitz (1805), Governor-General of Saxony (1813–1815), Military Governor of Little Russia (1816–1835), member of the State Council (1835–1836). However, his life and work have received scant attention in historical scholarship, in particular his military and administrative activities as Governor-General of Saxony in 1813–1815. The article purpose is to briefly examine main aspects of Repnin's reformist activities during his relatively short tenure as the ruler of Saxony.

2. Materials and methods

The article is based on important historical sources: documents from the Russian State Historical Archives in St. Petersburg ([RSHA](#)). It made possible to reconstruct significant events in military and administrative activities of N.G. Repnin on the territory of Saxony in 1813-1815. Besides, the research included sources of separate individuals who were part of the Repnin's inner circle during his tenure as the Governor-General ([Pokhod russkoy armii..., 1964](#)).

The research comprised general scientific and specifically historical methods. The former included synthesis and analysis, deduction and induction, generalization and historical description. The latter provided critical, anthropological, historical-biographical, problem-chronological, and content analysis methods.

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Synthesis and analysis explored extensive military and administrative activities of Prince N.G. Repnin as Governor-General of Saxony. Induction and deduction identified and accumulated empirical material for theoretical definitions, evidence illustrations, and conclusions. Historical description highlighted the most significant events in Repnin's life and work.

Critical analysis assessed representativeness of historical primary sources and documents. An anthropological method estimated prince's reforms concerning local residents of Saxony. Historical biography explored Repnin's role in the history of Saxony and his managerial contribution to social development. Besides, this method considered influence of historical conditions, motives, and goals on prince's policy.

The problem chronology represented a general understanding of Repnin's military and administrative activities as the head of Saxony (in chronological sequence and logical completeness). Content analysis interpreted historical primary sources, both personal and journalistic. This discovered subjective aspects of Repnin's life, which was not reflected in archival documents.

3. Discussion

Despite relevance of our research topic, we acknowledge the fact that this subject is a "blind spot" in historical scholarship. An exception is a published notebook by A. Imberg, a renowned Russian functionary and civil servant. He belonged to N.G. Repnin's immediate circle during his stay in Saxony (Imberg, 1870).

A significant milestone in study of prince's activities as de facto Viceroy of Saxony was a monograph by M. Antonovych, a renowned Ukrainian émigré intellectual and a grandson of Ukrainian historian V. Antonovych. Published in 1936 (Berlin), this monograph was titled "Prince Repnin, Governor-General of Saxony". The work was based on documents from the Prussian Secret State Archives and the Austrian State Archives. Written in a lively, journalistic, and figurative style, the study was educational, introducing the reader to vibrant personality of N.G. Repnin and his cultural, administrative, and financial activities in Saxony. However, M. Antonovich, as an enemy of Soviet power, was unable to access materials from the USSR archival repositories with documents directly related to life and work of this high-ranking official of the Russian Empire. Therefore, the study turned out to be far from complete (Antonovych, 1936).

After publication of this work, there was a long pause in Repnin's historiography. Only at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries did researchers resort to a thorough study of Repnin's life. For example, new works were devoted to prince's tenure and activities as military governor of Little Russia (Zakharova, 2019; Konopka, 2008). However, the Saxon period remains an unfilled gap in prince's historiography, which makes this article highly relevant.

4. Results

Prince Nikolai Grigoryevich Repnin-Volkonsky was born on 28 January 1778. His father, Prince Grigory Semyonovich Volkonsky, was a renowned military figure in the Russian Empire, serving as Governor-General of the Orenburg Region in 1803–1816. From his earliest years, Nikolai Grigoryevich was surrounded by care of his mother. Prince's education continued at the First Cadet Corps, one of the best institutions. Nikolai was fluent in several foreign languages (RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 31: 2).

Since the famous aristocratic Repnin dynasty had no heirs, Emperor Alexander I, by decree of 12 June 1801, conferred the title of Prince Repnin to Nikolai Grigoryevich. It was a sign of respect to Prince Grigory Semyonovich Volkonsky for his services to the state (Storozhenko, 1898: 2). On 26 January 1802, N.G. Repnin was ordered to serve in the army. On 12 September 1802, Nikolai married Countess Varvara Alekseyevna Razumovskaya. She was a granddaughter of Count K. Razumovsky, the last Ukrainian hetman. The wedding took place in Baturyn on the estate of Count K. Razumovsky, who was living out his last days in "his beloved Little Russia" (RBS, 1913: 119).

During the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805, N.G. Repnin was captured. As a prisoner of war, he met with Napoleon Bonaparte. The French ruler appreciated his military skill and courage. He was given adequate medical care, and his wife was allowed to care for her wounded husband. In Brussels, Napoleon, intending to free Repnin, wanted him to swear an oath of honor that he would not fight against France. However, Nikolai refused, declaring that he "had sworn an oath to serve his sovereign to the last drop of blood and would fulfill it" (RBS, 1913: 119). Napoleon released Repnin, who was awarded the 4th Rank Order of St. George on 30 January 1806. On 11 September 1806, he was dismissed from army with the rank of major general. Already on 11 November 1808, Repnin was again accepted into military service (RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 31: 1-2).

In 1809, Nikolai Grigoryevich was appointed Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the royal court of Westphalia, ruled by King Jerome (Napoleon's brother). Upon his appointment, he received instructions stating that "the foundation of Russian policy is the friendliest unity and good accord between France and Russia" (RBS, 1913: 119).

During the Napoleonic era, N.G. Repnin participated in foreign campaigns and battles of the Russian Empire's army near Dresden and in the decisive battle and complete defeat of the French army near Leipzig (RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 31: 3). For his military valor, Repnin was awarded diamond insignia of the 1st Rank Order of St. Anna and the Austrian Cross of St. Leopold.

After occupying Leipzig with his troops, Alexander I ordered an announcement to King Friedrich Augustus of Saxony that “he regarded him as a prisoner”. Previously, he had given Saxon army and material resources to complete French disposal. Friedrich Augustus was removed from power, captured, and sent to Berlin. On the same day, the government of Saxony was transferred to Lieutenant General and Prince N.G. Repnin ([Pelits, 1849: 111](#)).

On 9 October 1813, Austria, England, Prussia, Russia, and Sweden concluded the Convention on Administration of the German Provinces Liberated from Napoleon Bonaparte. The draft was drawn up by Baron G. Stein. The allied powers appointed him head of the Central Department, that is head of administration of German regions liberated from Napoleon ([Pokhod russkoy armii..., 1964: 394-395](#)). G. Stein could establish authorities he deemed necessary at his own discretion. Each of the allied states appointed an “agent” to resolve administrative issues in the occupied provinces. The Department could appoint governors and provide them with special instructions in the occupied provinces. Also, the organization oversaw actions of governors who could be recalled if necessary. The Department reported to the monarchical courts of the allied states every appointment or removal of governors. It was planned that senior military officials would be appointed as governors who would carry out their duties under direction of the Central Department. In case of extreme necessity, governors could make independent decisions, which they would report to the Department.

The Convention imposed the following duties on governors:

1. To control all supplies to allied armies on the entrusted areas;
2. To encourage the country under their control to supply and fund general military expenses;
3. To provide effective assistance to troops;
4. To manage and supervise activities of local authorities.

Maintenance of governor’s administrations had to be funded via revenues received from the entrusted territories, which would be distributed among Russia, Austria, and Prussia in proportion to the 150,000 troops each country would contribute. Sweden would receive income corresponding to the 30,000 troops deployed, and the Regency of Hanover would receive income proportionate to the army sent on the campaign ([Pokhod russkoy armii..., 1964: 395-397](#)).

According to the Convention, the primary responsibility of the Saxon government was to maximize use of local resources to continue the war against Napoleon. Prince Repnin served as a temporary ruler of the kingdom, after which Saxony was to be occupied by Prussia. The Governor-General’s office consisted of four sections: police and cultural affairs; finances; troop supplies; military forces ([Antonovych, 1936: 10](#)).

The section heads, along with several advisers, formed the Governor-General’s Council. The final decision was made by the Governor-General, who communicated directly with Baron G. Stein. Governor-General’s orders had to be carried out, and failure to comply was punishable. Directly under Repnin’s command was the secret police, which monitored activities of the Austrian allies seeking hegemony in Germany. In his memoirs, G. Stein noted that many Austrian officials traveled throughout Saxony and obstructed implementation of Governor-General’s orders ([Antonovych, 1936: 13](#)).

Austrians did everything possible to stay in the strategically important region as long as possible. The provinces were exhausted by the billeted troops. Like in Germany, residents were obliged not only to house the troops but also to provide generals, their servants, officers, and soldiers with firewood, candles, and food. In this regard, deployment of the Russian army seemed more tolerable, as soldiers were confined to barracks, and their provisions were handled by representatives of the Russian administration.

The population suffered from war destruction. In villages with 150 residents, only 10–12 people remained; the rest migrated, fleeing starvation. Many villages and towns were reduced to ashes. Looting and marauding soldiers deprived people of food. Volosts were left without livestock, which was taken by the French. There were thousands of orphans and wounded persons ([RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 425: 1-2](#)). The state treasury contained only banknotes; the exchange rate was half of silver. The Saxon army, which numbered 5,300 people, went over to the side of the allied coalition after the Battle of Leipzig ([Antonovych, 1936: 9](#)). In these circumstances, the Governor-General had to solve the following problems: securing trust of people and loyalty of government officials, studying state structure of the kingdom, forming a Saxon army, raising the rate of banknotes ([RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 425: 3-3](#)).

Wartime provided little incentive for reform, but certain decisions made by the prince allow us to characterize N.G. Repnin as an administrator. The entire country was divided into 11 provincial commissariats, reporting directly to the Governor-General. As for the Central Administration, the Governor-General’s Council replaced the Privy Cabinet, and its four sections became rudiments of ministries. In this way, N.G. Repnin created his own centralized administrative system, more suited to the current situation. Laws were published for the first time in Saxony, and the Saxon government began using periodicals to publish its decrees ([Antonovych, 1936: 22, 25](#)).

N.G. Repnin reformed the Dresden police, which had previously consisted of three independent organizations (royal, regional, and municipal). He created a single, centralized police agency headed by a president with the rank of colonel. The number of police officers corresponded to the settlement size and entitled them to receive assistance from military garrisons. Doing everything possible to improve the internal system of governance, the Governor-General’s office set a goal of restoring the Saxon army. The primary

objective was to arm and field a large army, consisting of three organic components: the regular army, the militia, and the volunteering patriots. Russian officers became instructors for new military units (RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 425: 24-24). On 27 October 1813, N.G. Repnin issued an appeal to local residents calling for participation in forming a Saxon corps to fight Napoleon. It was also distributed as leaflets and announcements. As a supplement to the appeal, N.G. Repnin issued the Charter of the Saxon Volunteer Corps.

The Repnin appeal found a response among Saxon population. The corps formation was completed in January 1814. Later, it was sent to the theater of war combats. In total, the Russian authorities in Saxony raised a 21,000-strong army, which took part in military campaigns of 1814-1815 in France. For their bravery in battle, Emperor Alexander I assigned the Saxon troops to the Guard (Pokhod russkoy armii..., 1964: 412-415, 425).

The situation in Saxony required founding an authority to recover war-torn settlements and provide assistance to affected civilians. For this purpose, a special commission was formed, to which the Governor-General's Office assigned 300,000 thalers in the form of bank bonds. The commission was charged with distributing funds received for the benefit of devastated cities and residents from benefactors in Germany and other countries. For example, due to Repnin's efforts, in addition to aid for residents of Germany, England provided 25,000 pounds sterling exclusively for residents of Saxony. The commission operated independently from the Governor-General's Office. Bread, seed grain, breeding stock, and essential items were distributed either free of charge or at minimal cost. Private individuals were recruited to help local residents (RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 425: 10-11).

The Governor-General's Office allowed affected citizens to pay taxes not on the due date, but whenever possible. In certain critical cases, Saxons were exempted from paying taxes altogether. This policy, of course, led to reduction in state revenues, which had already fallen significantly. Furthermore, the Office abolished duties on grain and livestock imported into Saxony and reduced duties on foreign alcoholic beverages, which further decreased state revenues. Essentially, Repnin's tax and customs policy was aimed at ensuring that measures to streamline the kingdom's finances would place the least possible burden on population. A special law prescribed actions for stockpiling firewood for private consumption. Those in need were given firewood on a deferred payment basis. A deferment was also granted for purchase of state-owned timber for restoration of homes by fire victims.

Roads were repaired and postal services were streamlined. To eradicate rudeness among postmen, a rule was introduced that any misdemeanor would be subject to fine and imprisonment. The Governor-General's Office was guided by the principle that the post served not to enrich the government, but to ensure convenient and safe communication between residents. Despite economic crisis and possibility of paying local bureaucrats' fees in porcelain goods or banknotes, the Office ordered that not only official salaries but also pensions and other payments should be issued (RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 425: 12-13).

One of the serious problems the Governor-General had to resolve was reimbursement of funds for supply of food, forage, and ammunition, as well as for treatment of the wounded and sick from the allied forces stationed in Saxony or near its borders. As a result, the Russian army owed the kingdom 272,000 thalers, and the Prussian army owed one million. Besides, N.G. Repnin was forced to use funds intended for hospital maintenance to pay 85,000 thalers for 10,000 cloaks of the allied armies. In Saxon interests, he asked the Russian government to repay the funds. The government, in turn, ordered N.G. Repnin, in Russian interests, to find counterfeit Russian banknotes issued by Napoleon Bonaparte during the War of 1812 in the amount of several millions. Repnin began searching for these counterfeits immediately after his appointment as Governor-General. He declared that Saxon residents who did not hand over counterfeit banknotes within the appointed time would be subject to a military court and exile to Siberia, with a fine of five times the amount they had concealed.

But in 1814, according to secret information received, it became known that in addition to the identified 6 million, there was another million in banknotes, the concealment of which fell on one of the royal bankers of Saxony. The prince commissioned Chief Auditor A. Imberg to investigate this case, arriving in Dresden on 14 March 1814. The situation was complicated by the fact that when the prince assumed the kingdom, the state treasury had little more than a million thalers, meaning it was practically empty. Under these difficult circumstances, the Leipzig and Dresden bankers had provided significant financial assistance to the Russian government. Therefore, the investigation was to avoid disgracing the banker.

A. Imberg honorably carried out Repnin's assignment. As a result of his efforts, a million counterfeit banknotes, given by the King of Saxony to a local banker for safekeeping, were discovered in Leipzig. The banker himself justified his actions by claiming that he had received the money from the king and had not handed it over to avoid disgrace. He later feared punishment. Considering the Leipzig banker's services to the Russian government, he was pardoned (Imberg, 1870: 394).

According to military regulations, all fortifications erected in a besieged city, after its capture by the victors, became the property of the city commander-in-chief. After the Battle of Leipzig, N.G. Repnin was appointed Governor-General of Saxony, and therefore all buildings legally belonged to him. N.G. Repnin decided to sell these assets. The total proceeds amounted to over 70,000 thalers, which was spent on rebuilding the city. In addition, the prince used funds obtained through a financial transaction to restore the territory of Saxony. When Nikolai Grigoryevich assumed control of the kingdom, the state treasury had less

than 1.5 million thalers. Meanwhile, 930,000 thalers were urgently needed for military supplies to a Prussian contractor, who was not expecting such a favor. The financial administration proposed giving the contractor 10,000 thalers. But Prince N.G. Repnin ordered the entire sum to be allocated, explaining that even if the 10,000-ruble debt were repaid, the remaining capital would still be insufficient to form and finance a 50,000-strong militia. If one person received such a huge sum from the Russian government, others would assume there were millions in the treasury, and Saxony would thus be able to obtain a loan as a solvent country.

According to Saxon laws, anyone receiving money from the state treasury had to pay 10 % to the grantor. The contractor presented the required amount to N.G. Repnin, but he refused. These funds were used to restore sites of historical and symbolic value for Saxons (for example, in Dresden) (Imberg, 1870: 395).

Important reforms were implemented in construction and maintenance of public, court, and military buildings (with the exception of those under the military department). They were subordinate to the Main Construction Directorate, which in turn was controlled by Dresden police. Royal palaces, whose maintenance entailed significant costs, were transferred to the Privy Financial Council for their most profitable use. Palace lands were leased to fund the state budget.

Before the war, the Saxon Porcelain Factory received regular subsidies from the state treasury (up to 60,000 thalers annually). Under N.G. Repnin, it lowered prices and improved quality. Like faience and stoneware enterprises, the factory began to generate revenue for the state budget.

During Repnin's reign, a daily newspaper was published. It covered all Governor-General's orders, information on kingdom's revenues, and budget allocations. Simultaneously, the prince's administration attempted to ensure balance and fair distribution of public goods within the state.

The Governor-General and government members effectively informed citizens of their plans for country's development via periodicals and other publications. A special state award, the Green Cross, was established for Saxons who distinguished themselves through public service. It was available to any citizen of the kingdom, regardless of status or wealth. Attempts were made to address national and religious issues in the region (for example, the problem of Saxon Jews). The occupation authorities encouraged citizens to celebrate religious and public holidays to preserve "piety and true religion".

Another important innovation was regular meetings between the Governor-General and citizens on strictly established reception days. Officials heading the tax, customs, and treasury departments began to receive remuneration from the state treasury. In order to increase state revenue, salaries of most chamberlains and gentlemen of the bedchamber were discontinued. The Oberjägermeister's Office was abolished. To ensure successful development of the forestry industry, the Forestry Academy was founded, where specialized officials received training. Residents engaged in horse breeding were given an opportunity to use state-owned stud farms. The Swiss Guard was disbanded. The poorest sections of population received benefits or pensions. Expenditures on the court economy were reduced (RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 425: 13-18).

When Nikolai Repnin assumed control of the kingdom, one of his most important tasks was preserving the king's property, as Emperor Frederick's sister and nephews resided in the palace. In 1815, Frederick, upon returning to the throne, revoked all orders and ranks bestowed upon Saxons at Repnin's behest. However, the prince system of kingdom government remained intact. This was a clear recognition of Repnin's administrative talent. Moreover, as A. Imberg recalled, N.G. Repnin was devoid of any passion for profit. He spent his fortune on restoration of Saxony (Imberg, 1870: 398).

The Governor-General enjoyed no privileges at the Saxon Court, receiving no income other than his salary: 1,000 thalers per month and 1,500 chervonets for travel expenses. N.G. Repnin maintained the house in which he lived at his own expense. Overall, prince's expenses significantly exceeded his income. At the end of his reign, when Saxony came under Prussian rule, the Prussian king awarded Prince Repnin the Order of the Black Eagle and a gift of 100,000 thalers.

Under N.G. Repnin, the thaler exchange rate strengthened, and interest on state debts was paid on time. Thanks to efforts of the Governor-General's office, Saxon state banknotes enjoyed better credit than those of some other states. Navigation on the Elbe River was restored. N.G. Repnin contributed greatly to development of science, art, and education. Classic cleanliness, grooming, and order returned to Saxon daily life (RSHA. F. 1035. Op. 1. D. 425: 16, 27, 30, 32, 37, 38). N.G. Repnin did everything possible to unite the German nation and convinced Saxons of territorial indivisibility and need to preserve old rights and privileges. For this aim, he applied works of famous German publicists (Antonovych, 1936: 18).

On 7 November 1815, Prince Repnin transferred the Kingdom of Saxony to control of Prussia with the goal of their further unification. He left Dresden for Vienna.

5. Conclusion

Overall, N.G. Repnin's career as a statesman in the Russian Empire was directly linked to his extensive service in the Russian army. The future dignitary rose from Hero of the Battle of Austerlitz to the post of Governor-General in the most important region of Germany (the Kingdom of Saxony, 1813–1815). He was acquainted with Napoleon Bonaparte, who, despite Repnin's capture, recognized his military achievements.

As an interim governor of Saxony, N.G. Repnin gained extensive management experience, which proved invaluable later. Despite the Russian army's occupation status, its presence in Saxony, thanks to the prince, was regarded by population as a tolerable burden, because it was maintained by the Russian

administration. N.G. Repnin established 11 regional commissariats, a central authority, and the Governor-General's Council. The latter became a prototype for future ministries. For the first time in Saxon history, all state legislation and government decrees began to be published in the media. The number of civil servants and law enforcement agencies was reduced, and corruption fell. Disparate police agencies were integrated into a single, centralized law enforcement structure. N.G. Repnin succeeded in forming a skilled Saxon army. Tax and customs reforms were implemented. It abolished duties on imported essential goods, reduced tariffs on imported alcohol and tobacco, deferred tax payments. Road infrastructure, postal service, and navigation were restored. Repnin's administration pursued a sound financial policy. The national currency (thaler) was significantly strengthened. The fragmented porcelain industry began to generate profits for the state treasury.

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