

**"A Swiss Robinson Crusoe 1725" - Christoph Gassmann's journeys in southern Russia,
their edition and value as a historical source.**

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"A Swiss Robinson. 1725" is the name of a book printed in 1725 by the publisher Lindinner (Zurich, Switzerland) [1], existing only twice (one exemplar stored in Swiss national library, one in the Archives of Canton of Zurich), and thus being quite unique. In 1966 the book was published anew with comments by Michael Jeremijev [2]; a Russian translation of it was published in Paris in 1971 [3]. Those editions, however, have a lack of detailed comments.

"A Swiss Robinson. 1725" is the "true" report of the adventures of Christoph Gassmann, a mason from Albisrieden near Zurich. He participated at the battle of 'Pultawa', fell into prison and consequently was several years in Russia as a prisoner. He lived seven years among the Kalmyks in southern Russia; freed, however, occurred to be in Astrakhan. In Astrakhan Gassmann again - for this time unforced - served the Tsar and participated at an expedition to Persia. In 1722, at least, he could leave Russia, following a journey from Astrakhan over Moscow and Saint Petersburg back to Zurich [1].

Gassmann's pastor, Beat Werdmüller, was interested in Gassmann's adventures and figured as a "ghostwriter" for his stories. However, Werdmüller was interested in Gassmann's report rather from a religious point of view, depicting his return as salvation by god. Werdmüller used several printed sources as additional material, since he wanted to add historical and ethnographical facts to the report, and didn't believe Gassmann in all points. So it remains unclear, which percentage of the "Swiss Robinson" is really the report of Gassmann, and which part belongs to other sources added by Werdmüller.

The main questions will be, which value the book has as a historical source concerning questions of ethnography, e.g. referring to the ethnography of Kalmyks or Oirat-Mongols in the 18th century. How can we reconstruct what Gassmann has really seen, and how can we compare Gassmann to other diaries and reports by foreign travellers and officers - such as Patrick Gordon [4] and Pierre Lefort [9] - in (southern) Russia in the 18th century? [4,5,8,9]

The analysis of "Schweitzerischer Robinson"/"A Swiss Robinson Crusoe" shows, that many prejudices which exist about Russia nowadays can already be found in Gassmann's memoirs (which might be called a travel report after all) [6]. Gassmann can be regarded as a profound source of what might be called a *opinio communis* about Russia among well-educated people in Switzerland and Central Europe in the 18th century, who had a background of reading about Russia in different publications of their time or who had the luck to meet travellers and adventurers who had seen Russia with their eyes.

Furthermore, Gassmann is an example of which view of the great military campaigns had the "common man", i.e. a common soldier, who was even forced to participate at the campaigns. Therefore it is a unique source which can be seen as the contrary of the less rare diaries and logbooks by the military leaders.

Editions:

- [1] Schweizerischer Robinson. 1725. Curiose Nachricht von den Reisen Christoph Gassmanns / des Stein-Metzen von Albis=Rieden. Der in Sächsischen und Schwedischen Kriegs-Diensten gestanden / bey Pultawa gefangen / nach Moscau, Casan, Astrachan / unter die Kalmucken und andere Tartaren geführet worden. fehrners eine Reise über die Caspische See und in Persien gethan und endlich A. 1724 nach 22jährigem Abwesen naher Hause gekommen. [...] Zusammengetragen von Beat Werdmüller / Pfr. Zürich, 1725.
- [2] Die Reisen Christoph Gassmans: 1702-1724. Zusammengetragen von Beat Werdmüller, neu hrsg. und erläutert von Michael Jeremijev. Bern, 1966.
- [3] Странствования Христофора Гассмана. Военно-историческая библиотека "Военной были", Н.16. Париж, 1971.

Literature:

- [4] Исторические путешествия. Извлечения из мемуаров и записок иностранных и русских путешественников по Волге в XV-XVIII веках. Сост. В. Алексеев. Сталинград, 1936.
- [5] Fakten und Fabeln: Schweizerisch-slavische Reisebegegnung vom 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert. Hrsg. Monika Bankowski. Basel, 1991.
- [6] Scheidegger G., Perveres Abendland - barbarisches Russland: Kulturelle Missverständnisse in der russisch-abendländischen Begegnung im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Zürich, 1993.
- [7] Galiffe J.A., Notices généalogiques sur les familles genevoises, Genève 1829.
- [8] Posselt M., Der General und Admiral Franz Lefort. Sein Leben und seine Zeit. 2 Bd. Frankfurt am Main, 1866.

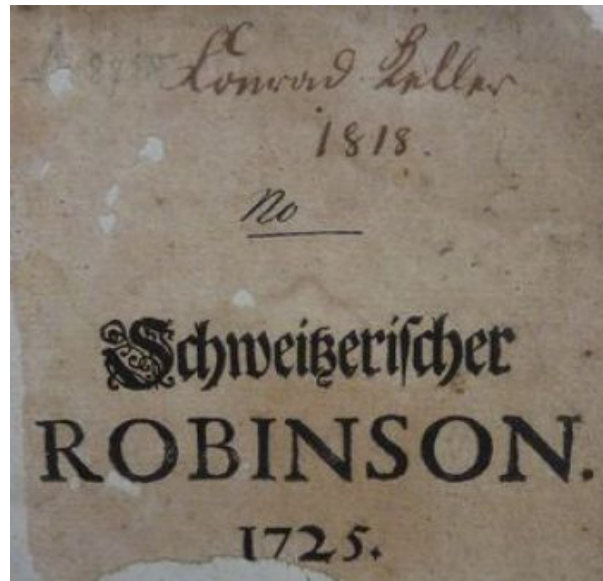
Sources from archives:

- [9] Archives des Etats de Geneve, Archives Lefort, Letters from Pierre Lefort 1715-1727.

Список литературы

1. Schweizerischer Robinson. 1725. Curiose Nachricht von den Reisen Christoph Gassmanns / des Stein-Metzen von Albis=Rieden. Der in Sächsischen und Schwedischen Kriegs-Diensten gestanden / bey Pultawa gefangen / nach Moscau, Casan, Astrachan / unter die Kalmucken und andere Tartaren geführet worden. fehrners eine Reise über die Caspische See und in Persien gethan und endlich A. 1724 nach 22jährigem Abwesen naher Hause gekommen. [...] Zusammengetragen von Beat Werdmüller, Zürich, 1725.
2. Die Reisen Christoph Gassmans: 1702-1724. Zusammengetragen von Beat Werdmüller, neu hrsg. und erläutert von Michael Jeremijev, Bern, 1966.
3. Странствования Христофора Гассмана. Военно-историческая библиотека "Военной были", 16, Париж, 1971.
4. Исторические путешествия. Извлечения из мемуаров и записок иностранных и русских путешественников по Волге в XV-XVIII веках. Сост. В. Алексеев. Сталинград, 1936.
5. Fakten und Fabeln: Schweizerisch-slavische Reisebegegnung vom 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert. Hrsg. Monika Bankowski, Basel, 1991.
6. Scheidegger G., Perveres Abendland - barbarisches Russland: Kulturelle Missverständnisse in der russisch-abendländischen Begegnung im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Zürich, 1993.
7. Galiffe J.A., Notices généalogiques sur les familles genevoises, Genève 1829.
8. Posselt M. Der General und Admiral Franz Lefort. Sein Leben und seine Zeit. 2 Bd., Frankfurt am Main, 1866.
9. Archives des Etats de Geneve, Archives Lefort, Letters from Pierre Lefort 1715-1727.

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