

THE FLAG COLLECTION OF THE HERMITAGE

Dr. George Vilinbakhov

The Hermitage, well known as a museum of fine arts and history of culture, also has excellent collections of militaria: arms, uniforms, military decorations and flags. The collection of flags in St. Petersburg began to take shape as early as the reign of Peter the Great. In his time, banners and standards were in use in regiments during 5 to 20 years, being given to arsenals or regimental store-houses thereafter. The military regulations of 1716 established an order to collect trophy banners. In 1730 some arms, guns and banners were brought to St. Petersburg from Moscow and other towns. From the mid 18th century on the St. Petersburg Arsenal collected old Russian and captured banners, and in 1756 the Memorial Hall was created for the purpose. In addition, trophy banners and flags were preserved in the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul. During the reign of Catherine the Great, a special ceremony was established for bringing the trophy banners to the Cathedral.

In the 18th century regimental banners and standards of the Russian Army were often changed, old ones being given to arsenals, regimental store-houses and the Memorial Hall. In the 1860s, all the objects from this Hall were distributed among various museums, but the major part went to the Kronwerk (upper quarters) of the SS. Peter and Paul Fortress, where the Artillery Museum was set up. In the following years, the collection of banners in the museum continued to grow, although a large number was kept in regimental museums and cathedrals in St. Petersburg, such as the Cathedrals of SS. Peter and Paul, Kazan Trinity, and the Transfiguration Cathedral. In 1877 the director of the Artillery Museum, N.E. Brandenburg, published the catalogue of the collections of banners and standards. After the October Revolution of 1917, P.I. Belavenets continued to enlarge the collection of banners in the Artillery Museum, and after the Second World War the majority of them were transferred to the Hermitage. Now the Hermitage possesses 6'470 banners, standards, flags, «bunchuks» etc., together with 2'945 cravats, cleats, etc. and over 24'000 drawings and photographs of banners.

The collection in the Hermitage is of unique value for its diversity and comprehensive range of Russian banners. The Russian section is the largest, having about 4'000 exhibits (banners, standards and flags) from the 17th to the beginning of the 20th centuries. They present the history of the development of symbols and models of Russian flags. There are rare examples from the period prior to Peter the Great, e.g. large infantry banners of the late 17th century. One of them is of an uncommon size, 370x410cm. Another was painted in 1698 by the monk Gerevasij from the Kyzichskij monastery [Fig. 1]. The gem of the collection are 133 banners from the reign of Peter the Great. The Hermitage collection has banners of the Life Guard «Preobrazhensky» and «Semenovskiy» regiments, of the Guard regiments of 1700 and of 1701 [Fig. 2], of 1706 and of 1707 for the horse order. They are richly decorated with a two-headed eagle, so called «hand of God with the sword», a

St. Andrew's cross and palm branches. A special type of banner with St. Constantine's cross was made in 1711 for the Turkish campaign. The collection includes infantry and cavalry regimental banners of 1700 and 1712. One model of regimental banners of 1700 was decorated with the portrait of Peter I.

About 420 banners and standards date from 1725-1796. Among them are richly decorated banners of regiments of the Guard of Peter II [Fig. 3], Anna Ionnannovna and Elisabeth I. Also of interest are banners of the Cadet Corps (school) [Fig. 4]. The coats of arms of Russia and Holstein were joined on the banners of Peter III. The 1712-1796 banners of line regiments were decorated with coat of arms of various towns [Fig. 5]. The standards of cavalry regiments were embroidered with golden and silk threads. Special banners were made for foreign regiments (e.g. Greek). The Life Guard of the Grand Duke Paul had banners with paintings of the Russian Naval Jack («guis»), because he was the general admiral of the Navy [Fig. 6]. The group of banners and standards of Emperor Paul I comprises 1'071 objects. Every company and squadron had its own banner. Every regiment from the time of Paul I had its own colour and banners [Fig. 7]. Later, after Paul I had become the great master of the Russian military heraldry, the number of banners decreased. At that time, the first model of standard like the «labarum» appeared for the Horse Guards («Chevalier-Garde-Corps») [Fig. 8, top row, at left]. In 1799-1800 this regiment carried three types of standard [Fig. 8, top row]. At that time the heavy cavalry regiments of the Guards («Cuirassiers») showed on their standards the double-headed imperial eagle flying up to the glorious cross [Fig. 8]. The tradition of this model for standards of the heavy cavalry regiments of the Guards existed until 1917.

The group of 19th and 20th century banners and standards includes 2'136 objects. Of particular interest are those conferred as a reward for distinguished service, including the Banners of St. George, which were given to regiments as a whole. The first St. George banner was awarded to the «Kievskiy» Grenadier regiment for bravery in the battle of Schöngraben in 1805. Later, many regiments of the Guard and the Army received this reward. Before 1883 the models of the banners and standards changed only slightly in comparison with those of Paul I's time. Emperor Alexander III established a new model of banners and standards in the so-called «Russian style». This model existed until the Revolution of 1917. During the Revolution many banners and standards were destroyed. Fortunately, some banners have been preserved in the Hermitage collection, like the banner of the «Semenovskiy» regiment of the Guard [Fig. 9], or the colour of the «Finlandskiy» dragoon regiment [Fig. 10].

The foreign section of this collection includes 686 European and nearly 2'000 oriental banners. Most of them are trophies captured by the Russian Army, between the Great Northern War of 1700-1721 and the First World War. Altogether there are examples from nearly fifty different countries and nations: 1) Swedish banners, standards, flags: 272 objects. They are trophies from Russian-Swedish wars of the 18th to early 20th centuries. 2) German banners, standards, flags (201 objects), including 125 items from Prussia. They are tro-

phies from the time of the Seven Years War to the First World War. An important group of them dates from the time of the Napoleonic Wars, they were captured in 1812. There are Westphalian, Bavarian, Saxonian, and other banners of German states. 3) French banners and eagles (60). The main part of these were captured in 1812–1814. For example, the banners of 44th and 127th regiments of the Line Infantry. But some of them were captured earlier, during Suvorov's Italian campaign. The eagle of the 4th regiment of the Line Infantry was captured by the Horse Guard regiment at Austerlitz in 1805. 4) The group of Polish banners (48). 5) The group of Hungarian banners (39). 6) Besides, the collection has 1'941 oriental banners; 1'859 of them are Turkish and were captured during the Russian-Turkish wars of the 18th to early 20th centuries. Some of them are wonderful examples of oriental art. 7) The group of Chinese banners consists of 53 objects from the time of the 1900 rebellion.

The unique collection, in conjunction with the documentary evidence also preserved in the Hermitage, like paintings, drawings and the archive materials collected by Belavenets, provides a widely ranging source of material for research. Over 24'000 drawings and photographs of banners, standards, flags, etc. were made before World War I. They represent not only real objects, but archives' reference plates. Belavenets suggested to start this archive after his visit to Stockholm, where he studied the collection of drawings of the trophies done by Hoffmann in the Royal Military Archive. Some figures presented here belong to that special archive. The first scholar to study the collection in the Hermitage was N.N. Semyonovich, a specialist in the history of Russian and Soviet naval flags. The curator of the banner collection, K.K. Mamaev, is the author of the banner section of the Museum catalogue «Monuments of Russian Culture from the First Quarter of the Eighteenth Century in the Hermitage Collection». The Hermitage Library has manuscripts and books on flags, e.g. «Book on Flags» by Carel Allard, printed in Kiev in 1709.

The Hermitage collection of banners is of interest not only in connection with the military past of Russia. Many of the banners are also splendid examples of decorative and applied arts. This collection of flags, together with the archive and library, is a real centre for vexillological research.



Fig. 1
An infantry colour of Peter the Great in 1698.

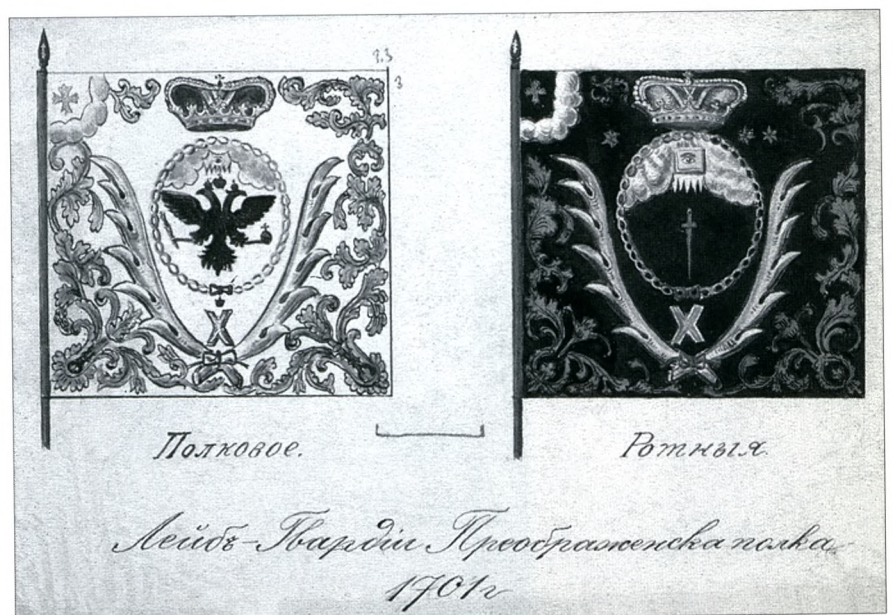


Fig. 2
A white colonel's and a black ordinance colour of a Guard regiment of 1701.

Fig. 3

The white colonel's colour and the ordinance colour of a Guard regiment of Peter II, 1727.

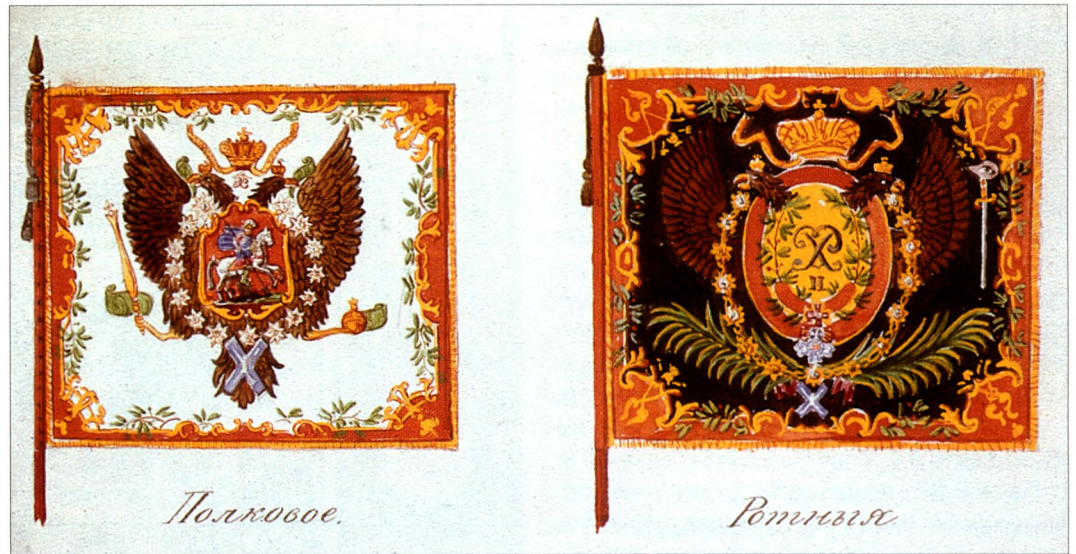


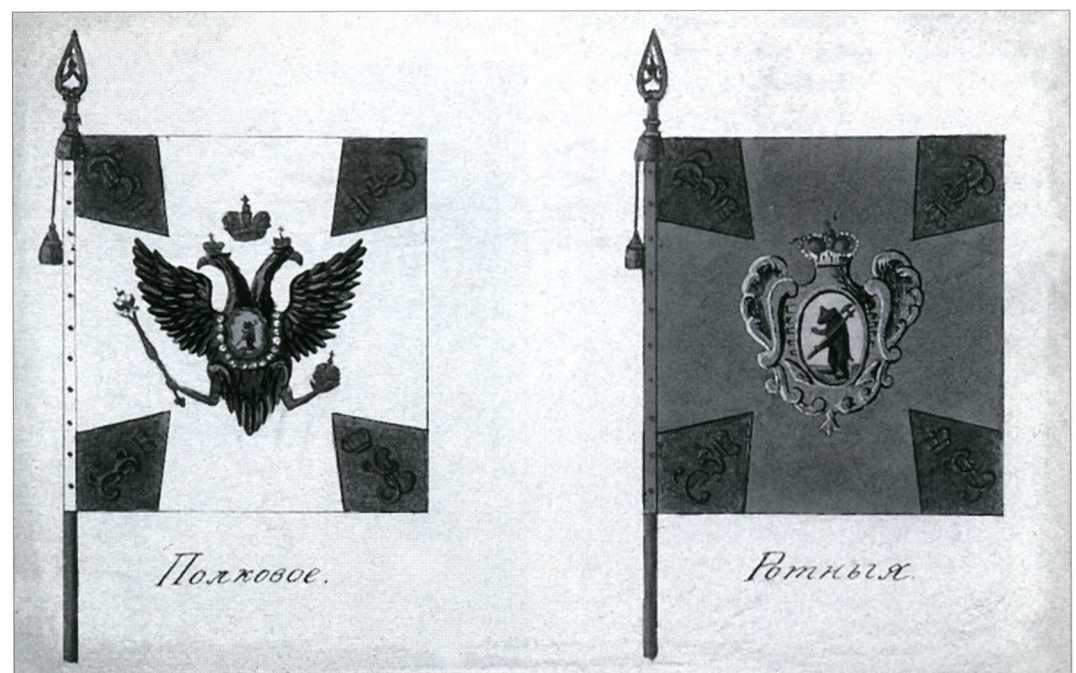
Fig. 4

Banner of the Cadet Corps, 18th century. The red and golden emblem of the military school is laid on the black eagle, which is accompanied by various attributes. All of it is placed on a yellow cloth with red wedges. Lettering, crowns, ciphers and some of the attributes are in gold.



Fig. 5

The colonel's white colour and the red ordinance colour of the «Iaroslavsky» infantry regiment, each one with green wedges showing a crowned monogram in gold. The coat of arms of the town of Iaroslavsk is yellow with a black bear standing on green ground and holding a red axe.



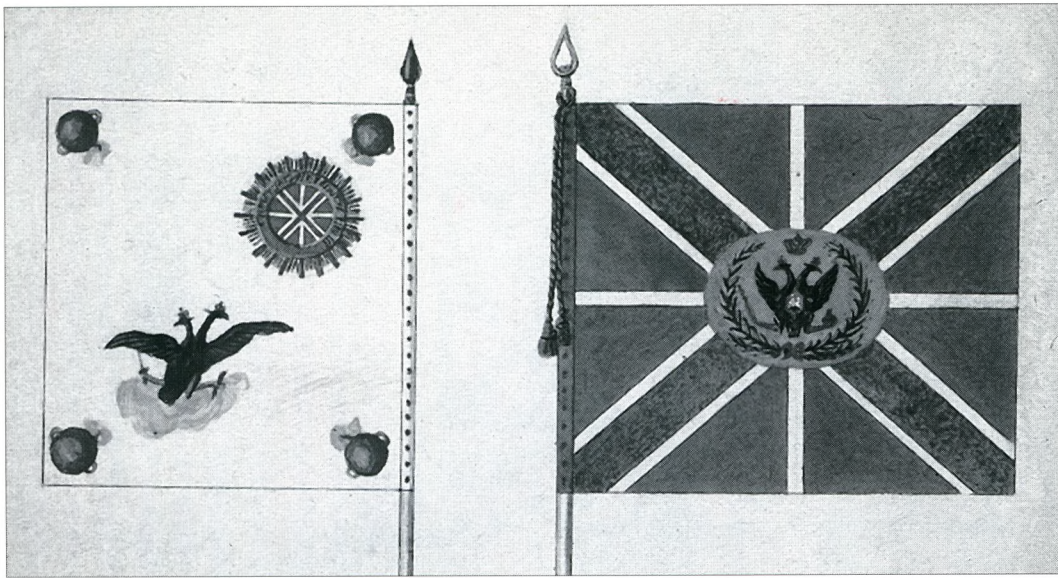
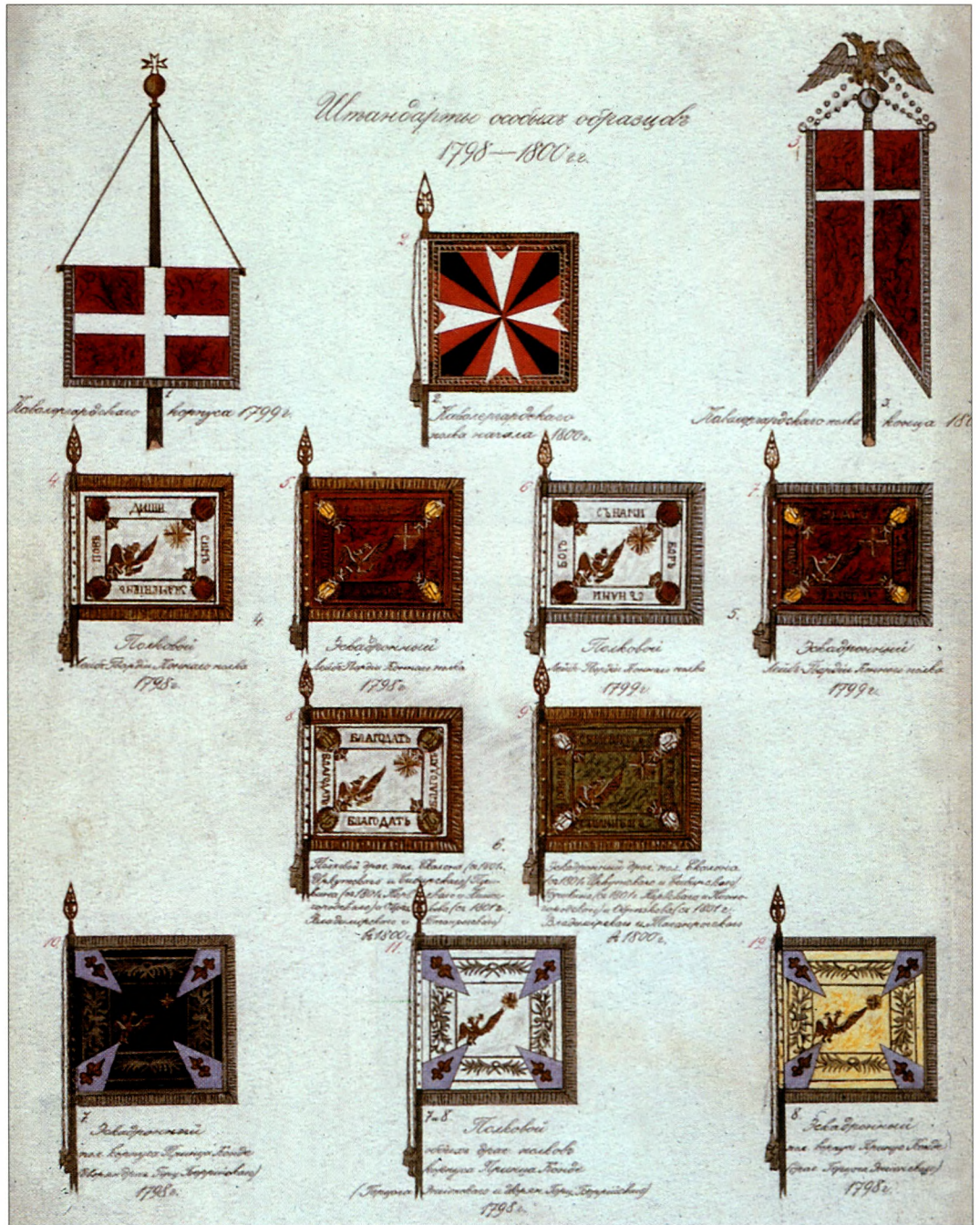


Fig. 6
Colours of the so-called «Gatchina» troops, the Life Guard of Grand Duke Paul: At left is a white flag with black imperial eagle, golden bombs and the navy emblem in a golden halo, while at right there is a black imperial eagle surrounded by a green wreath within a dark yellow oval, which is superimposed on the naval jack.



Fig. 7
Regimental colours of the time of Paul I.

Fig. 8
A cavalry standard of the «labarum» type of the Horse Guards, and other colours of heavy cavalry regiments of the Guards, 1799–1800.



left: Fig. 9
Colour of the «Semenovsky» regiment of the Guard, 1883: A religious scene is depicted in natural colours on a purple cloth with golden inscriptions, surrounded by a red border with golden stars. The free sides of the colour have a golden fringe.

right: Fig. 10
The white colour with blue filigrane ornament and the imperial coat of arms of the «Finlandsky» dragoon regiment of 1889 has a golden fringed blue border with golden stars.

