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**THE MONASTIC ACCOUNT
BOOKS AND PRICE HISTORY OF
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA**

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THE MONASTIC ACCOUNT BOOKS AND PRICE HISTORY OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA²

This article uses the records of monastic account books to assess the level of prices in Russia in the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The data from these books allow us to construct salt and rye price series, and identify prices of other goods for single years. The resulting numbers demonstrate that the prices remained largely unchanged. The exceptions were the mid-1640s and the early 1660s, when the price fluctuations were driven by the failed financial reforms. The available data shows the prices did not change synchronically in Russia and Europe. Our assumption, therefore, is that Russia stood apart from the price revolution of Western Europe in the seventeenth century.

Keywords: price revolution, monastic account books, price lists, price series, Alexei Mikhailovich's reforms.

JEL Classification: Z

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In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, all Europe experienced a pronounced general rise in prices, often called a ‘price revolution’.³ However, scholars showed little interest in Russian prices. As a result, we still do not know for certain how prices changed throughout this period in Russia. Nevertheless, various concepts on the Russian price revolution exist. Arkady Mankov went much beyond the limits allowed by his evidence, concluding that there was a general increase in prices in sixteenth-century Russia analogous to the price revolution in the West. According to Mankov, the prices of agricultural commodities rose three to four times between the beginning and end of the century.⁴ Paul Bushkovitch expressed the point of view that in Russia there were two price revolutions: one took place from 1550 to 1630, and the second revolution occurred in the eighteenth century. In his opinion, prices were three times higher in 1620 than in the last third of the sixteenth century.⁵ According to Boris Mironov, the price revolution came to Russia in the eighteenth century, “Its hallmark was the escalation of prices, which (expressed in silver) rose five-fold”.⁶ However, he did not have exact data on seventeenth-century prices. We, therefore, can assume that the Russian price revolution came before the eighteenth century.

The present article is devoted to an examination of these problems. In order to do this the study will consider monastic account books (*prihodno-raskhodnye knigi*), which provide a great deal of information regarding prices. Significant work has been undertaken by researchers to release the monastic account books.⁷ Nevertheless, in order to construct price time series, we should examine archive sources.

³For example, Fischer, *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythm of History*; Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain*.

⁴Mankov, *Tseny i ikh dvizhenie v russkom gosudarstve XVI veka*.

⁵Bushkovitch, *The Merchants of Moscow*.

⁶Mironov, ‘Consequences of the Price Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Russia’, p. 475.

⁷Bashnin, ed., *Hozyajstvennye knigi Vologodskogo arhierejskogo doma Svyatoj Sofii XVII – nachala XVIII v.*; idem, ed., *Prihodno-raskhodnye denezhnye knigi Vologodskogo arhierejskogo doma svyatoj Sofii i okladnye knigi cerkvej Vologodskoj eparhii. XVII – nachalo XVIII v.*; Dmitrieva, ed., *Prihodnye i raskhodnye denezhnye knigi Kirillo-Belozerskogo monastyrya, 1601 – 1637 gg.*; Francuzova, ed., *Prihodno-raskhodnye knigi Soloveckogo monastyrya, 1571–1600 gg.*; Ivanov, *Buhgalterskij uchet v Rossii XVI – XVII vv.: istoriko-istochnikovedcheskoe issledovanie monastyrskih prihodno-raskhodnyh knig.*

I

Our study is based on a set of monastic account books that cover the period from the 1640s to the 1720s and are preserved at the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts and the Central State Archive of the City of Moscow. Most of the surviving account books were written by members of the Solovetsky Monastery, the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, the Don Monastery, the Trinity-Gleden Monastery, and the Spaso-Prilutsky Monastery. Our data on prices, therefore, refer to markets of Vologda, Moscow, Arkhangelsk, and the surrounding towns and villages.

Attempting to construct price series, even one limited to this particular region, is not an easy exercise. This type of investigation faces many problems. First of all, a researcher using the sampling method is obliged to check whether the resulting sample is random. We, therefore, needed to consider whether the data are normally distributed. We found (see figure 1) that the graphs of our data almost describe a bell curve: the distribution tends towards normal. (In this paper, we show only one example). Therefore, it can be concluded that the preserved data can be considered a random sample and can serve as the basis for identifying summary measures. Another conclusion is that there are close results of calculating a mean, median, or mode. To calculate average annual prices, we chose the mode, which is an observation in the data set that occurs most frequently.

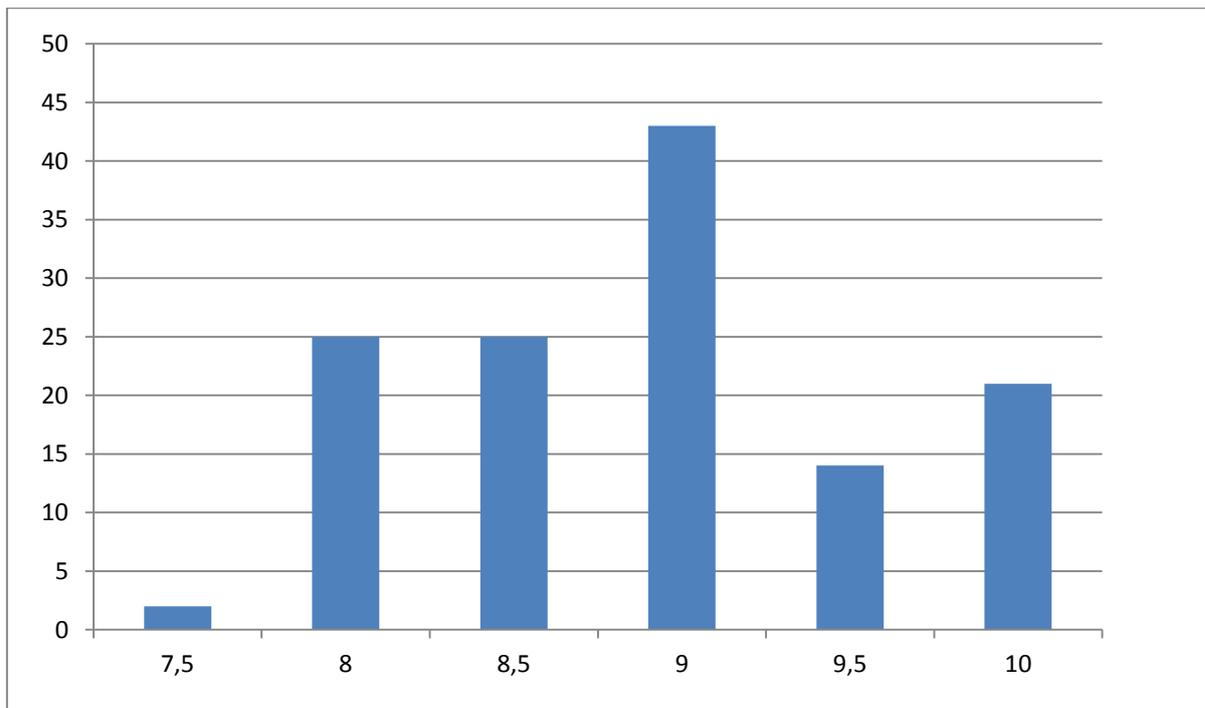


Figure 1. *Distribution of salt price data (kop./ pood): Vologda, 1671*

Source: RGADA, f. 196, op.1, d. 189, l. 4ob.-34ob.

Another problem is whether the data are reliable. We can verify this by comparing the data from the monastic account books with those from price lists (*vedomosti*), which, since the early eighteenth century, were produced by government officials. Using the price lists⁸, Mironov constructed time series on grain prices.⁹ Unfortunately, he showed little interest in the source criticism.¹⁰ As an example, we compared the price data for Moscow, St Petersburg, Vologda, and Bezhetsk. We found (see table 1) that there are little gaps in the data. It can be concluded that the independently created sources (the monastic account books and the price lists) agree on a particular point, enhancing their reliability. It must be added that the monastic account books, in contrast to the price lists, provide primary data, underlining their reliability.

⁸It should be noted that, the price lists of this era give the opportunity to use only an average between maximum and minimum prices (RGADA, f. 248, kn. 814).

⁹Mironov, *Klebnye tseny v Rossii za dva stoletia*.

¹⁰On the price lists of eighteenth-century Russia, see Mustafin, 'Vedomosti odna s drugoyu nikakogo skhodstva ne imeyut: verifikaciya dannyh o hlebnyh cenah v Rossii v XVIII veke'; Pavlenko, 'Vedomosti XVIII veka o hlebnyh cenah kak istoricheskij istochnik?.'

Table 1. *Grain prices from different sources (kop./chetvert)*

Year	Product	Market	Price	
			1	2
1714	rye	Vologda	66	66
1714	oat	Vologda	30	36
1715	rye	Vologda	75	75
1715	oat	Vologda	33	43
1716	rye	Vologda	120	108
1717	rye	Moscow	100	88
1717	oat	Moscow	35	47
1717	oat	Bezhetsk	99	50
1717	rye	St Petersburg	231	200
1718	rye	St Petersburg	256	230
1719	rye	Bezhetsk	160	170
1719	oat	Bezhetsk	60	60
1720	rye	Moscow	120	122
1720	oat	Moscow	42	55

Notes: 1 – Data from the monastic account books; 2 – Data from the price lists.

Sources: RGADA, f. 1441. op. 2, d. 255, l. 7ob-8; d. 279, l. 5; d. 280, l. 5-5ob; d. 467, l. 1ob-2; f. 1447, op.1, d.1, l. 2;

RGIA, f. 815, op. 1, 1713, l. 115-116; op. 2, 1717, l. 61; 1719, l. 1089.

Mironov, *Klebnye tseny v Rossii za dva stoletia*, p. 194.

Finally, it should be noted that the account books writers did not use Arabic numerals, Christian dating conventions, and modern monetary units. In addition, an account book could cover either several months, or one year. All these factors require a tremendous amount of work to construct the time series.

Let us turn to description of price movements. In our research, we focused mainly on salt prices. This choice stemmed from the fact that salt is known to have been one of the most important articles in Russian commerce, and especially in commerce of the Solovetsky Monastery and the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery. In addition, most of the records from their account books concerned the salt prices.

As the data in table 2 demonstrate, the salt prices remained largely unchanged. The exceptions were the mid-1640s and the early 1660s, when the prices rose two to three times. We compared these data to Mankov's data and found out (see figure 2) that the salt prices remained largely unchanged for over a century. Our time series is limited to 1705, because later the salt prices were controlled by the government. As Arcadius Kahan put it, "the production of salt in Russia was an economic activity in which the government during almost the entire eighteenth century acted as a monopsonist".¹¹

At the end of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, other goods' prices (rye, oat, wheat, barley, hemp seeds, pea, pepper, and wax) seemed to be relatively stable (see table 3). The exceptions were also the mid-1610s and the early 1660s, when social conflicts occurred. It should also be taken into account the fact that, for over a century, *chetvert's* weight decreased from 4 poods to 8 poods.¹² However, the research detected price synchronism. At this point, we can make only cautious conclusions due to a lack of complete data on the price fluctuations.

¹¹Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer, and the Knout: An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia*, p. 91.

¹²Kamenceva and Ustyugov, *Russkaya metrologiya*, p. 104-108.

Table 2. *Salt prices in Vololгда, Arkhangelsk, and Moscow, (kop./pood)*

Year	1	2	3	4	Year	1	2	3	4
1644	10.5				1670		10*		
1645	11	11.5			1671		11		
1646	28.5	10.5			1672	11	12**	7.5	
1647	29	30			1673	9			
1648	12	13			1674	11			
1649	11	9.5			1676	12			
1650	12				1678		11**		
1651	10.5				1679			3.5	
1652	11				1681			3	
1653	13.5				1683			4.5	
1654	10				1685				8.5
1655	12				1686				7
1656	11.5				1687				12
1657	12				1688			3	
1658		17	7.5		1689			3	
1659			8		1691		10*		13.5
1660	18				1693		8*		
1662	30	25**	16		1697		7*		
1663	13				1698		6*		
1664	10		7		1699	6			
1665	15				1700	6			
1666	15	16			1702	7	10.5**		
1667	15	17			1703		8**		
1668	16				1704	9			
1669	15								

Notes: 1 – Vololгда market: data from the account books of the Solovetsky Monastery.

2 – Vololгда market: data from the account books of the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, the Spaso-Prilutsky monastery (*), and the Vologda archbishop house of St Sophia (**).

3 – Market of Arkhangelsk’s surrounding towns and villages.

4 – Moscow market.

Sources: RGADA, f. 196, op. 1, d. 93, l. 2-9, 13-22; d. 172, l. 5ob-7ob; d. 173, l. 4; d. 176, l. 8-9;

d. 189, l. 1-3ob.

f. 1187, op. 1, d. 992, l. 8ob; d. 1325, l. 14; d. 1388, l. 20ob; d. 1434, l. 6ob.

f. 1195, op.1, d. 12, l. 2-9ob.

f. 1196, op.3, d. 78, l. 3ob-6ob.

f. 1201, op. 1, d. 46, l. 5-6ob; d. 49, l. 10-10ob, 23-25, 34-35, 46ob-52; d. 54, l. 6-10ob, 24ob-26ob, 42ob-46, 59-61, 78-81ob, 94ob-97, 104-111, 120ob-121ob; d. 51, l. 3ob-5ob; d. 58, l. 17-17ob, 33-35ob, 42-47ob, 63ob-65ob; d. 63, l. 4ob-7ob, 13ob-29ob, 39-40ob; d. 67, l. 5-13, 44-47; d. 71, l. 16; d. 154, l. 4ob-5ob, 46ob-47; d. 416, l. 10, 19ob; d. 519, l. 3-7, 50-56ob; d. 535, l. 8; d. 553, l. 4ob; d. 914, l. 4-39.

f. 1441, op. 1, d. 1433, l. 5ob-8; d. 1438, l. 3-25; d. 1441, l. 2-26; d. 1470, l. 3-16; d.1455, l. 3-5ob; d. 1460, l. 8-18ob, 42-49; d. 1464, l. 3-5ob.

f. 1456, op.1, d. 27, l. 3ob, 6ob, 7ob

CSACM, f. 421, op. 1, d. 21a, l. 32; d. 32, l. 4ob

Bashnin, ed., *Hozyajstvennyye knigi Vologodskogo arhierejskogo doma Svyatoj Sofii XVII – nachala XVIII v.* pp. 705, 711, 722, 738, 743, 747, 749.

It must be borne in mind that there was a lowering of the silver content of ruble. It weighed initially 67.54 grams of silver. However, from 1641 to 1690 the ruble contained 42.42 grams of silver. From 1691 to 1698, it further depreciated to 35.55 grams. From 1699 to 1710, it weighed 24.72 grams¹³. This means the silver content of ruble declined by a factor of 2.7 for over a century. But despite this, the nominal prices on goods were almost stable.

¹³Mironov, *Klebnye tseny v Rossii za dva stoletia*, p. 36.

Table 3. *Prices in Vololгда*

	rye (kop./ chetvert)	oat (kop./ chetvert)	wheat (kop./ chetvert)	barley (kop./ chetvert)	hemp seeds (kop./ chetvert)	pea (kop./ chetvert)	pepper (kop./ pound)	wax (kop./ pood)
1578	12.5	6.5						
1584	35	6.5	45	27	52.5	51		250
1588	41	16.5	44.5	30.5	45	60		162
1597	15.5	8				20		304
1600	17.5	8	25	12.5	27	26		
1613			100		67			
1616	82		125			200	20	409
1621			161.5		160	230	17	444
1627				50			15	
1641			100			102		
1645	42			33				
1648			108				15	
1651	48	24	70	36	72	78.5		165
1662	400	150						
1667	120			105		130		
1673	84		110					
1688						95	14	
1692	48						14	350
1697	100		87		96			
1703						105	15	515

Sources:

Bashnin, ed., *Hozyajstvennyye knigi Vologodskogo arhierejskogo doma Svyatoj Sofii XVII – nachala XVIII v.* pp. 605, 612-737.

Dmitrieva, ed., *Prihodnye i raskhodnye denezhnye knigi Kirillo-Belozerskogo monastyrja, 1601 – 1637 gg.* pp. 89, 148, 154, 205, 206

Mankov, *Tseny i ikh dvizhenie v russkom gosudarstve XVI veka*, pp. 107-111, 165-166.

RGADA, f. 1201, op. 1, d. 416, l. 114-140;

f. 1441, op. 1, d. 1433, l. 22-22ob; d. 1468, l. 3; d. 1473, l. 5-7ob; d. 1479, l. 2ob-24.

III

Was there a price revolution in Russia in the seventeenth century? Our figures show that the question needs to be answered negatively. However, we cannot rule out that the price stability can be attributed to the influence of push-and-pull factors. Unfortunately, fragmentary data do not allow us to take into consideration such factors as the money supply and the changes in population. However, it should exclude foreign factors, since in the seventeenth century the salt prices (see figure 2) did not change synchronically in Russia and Europe. (As an example, figure 2 shows the prices in Vologda, Moscow, Amsterdam, and Sweden). This means Europe's price revolution did not affect the Russian salt market. Perhaps, the prices on basic goods of the Russian export such as fur, leather, fat, potash, and beeswax were more closely related to European prices.

There is a question of what caused price fluctuations in the mid-1640s and the early 1660s. The causes are related to the failed financial reforms. In 1646, the government replaced different taxes with a universal salt tax. This drove up the price of salt, leading to the Moscow Uprising of 1648, also known as the Salt Riot. In 1654, the Russian government decided to begin issuing copper money in large quantities, equating them with silver money.¹⁴ Fortunately for us, the writers of account books¹⁵ clearly separated transaction records for copper and silver money. This triggered a substantial rise in prices and the Moscow Uprising of 1662, also known as the Copper Riot. In 1663, copper coinage was abolished. As the above data indicate, these price fluctuations bore short-term character. However, during the reign of Alexei Mikhailovich, neither wars nor other riots had such a strong influence on price change.

¹⁴Buganov, *Moskovskoe vosstanie 1662 g.*, p. 33.

¹⁵RGADA, f. 1201. op. 1, d. 58.

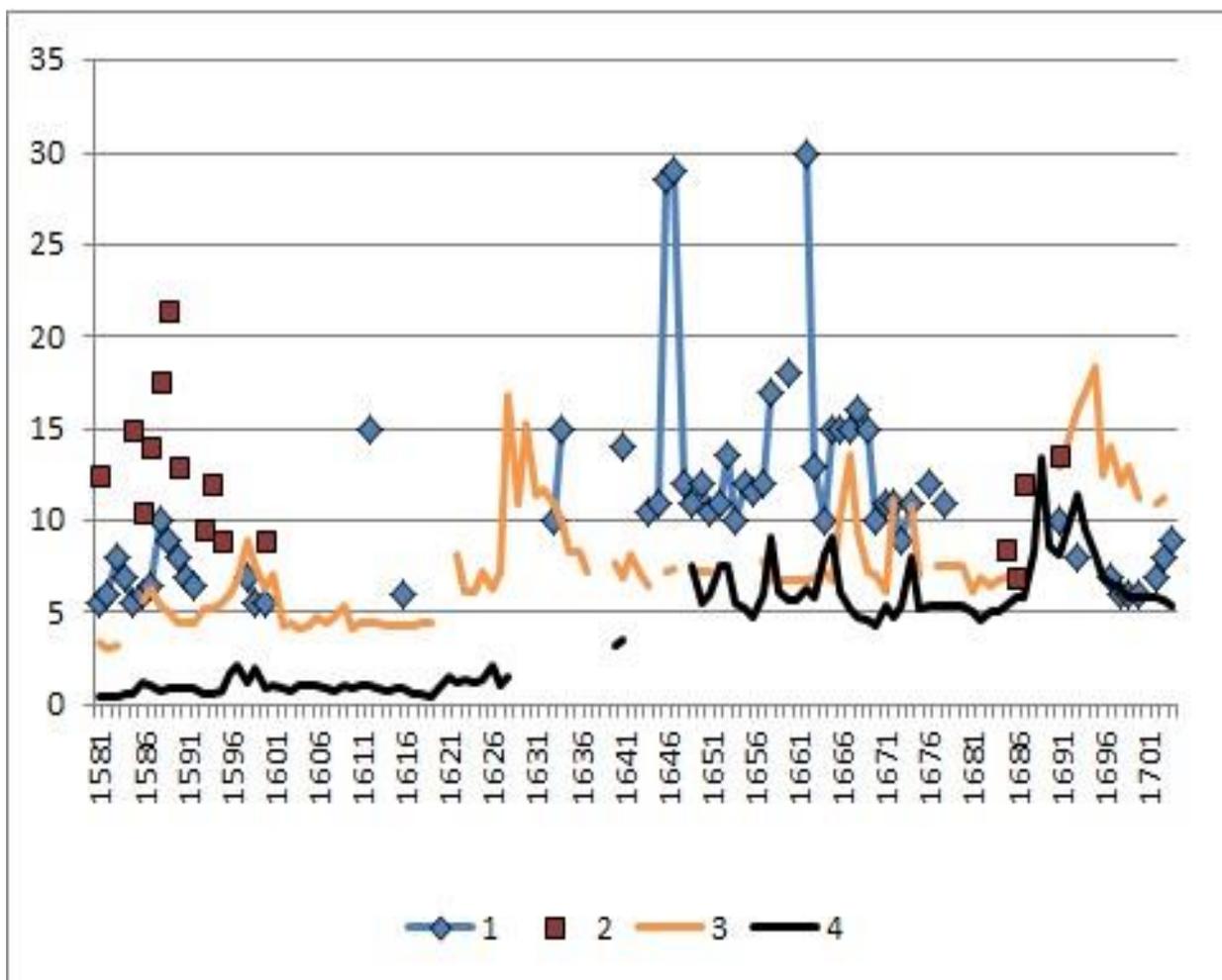


Figure 2. Salt prices in Russia, The Netherlands, and Sweden, 1580s – 1700s

Notes: 1 – Vologda prices, kop./pood

2 – Moscow prices, kop./pood

3 – Amsterdam prices, guilders/loop

4 – Sweden prices, kronor/10 kilogram

Sources: Data from Russia, 1644–1704: see data in tab. 2

Data from Russia, 1581–1634: Bashnin, ed., *Hozyajstvennye knigi Vologodskogo arhierejskogo doma Svyatoj Sofii XVII – nachala XVIII v.* pp. 612-737; Dmitrieva, ed., *Prihodnye i raskhodnye denezhnye knigi Kirillo-Belozerskogo monastyrya, 1601 – 1637 gg.* p. 334; Mankov, *Tseny i ikh dvizhenie v russkom gosudarstve XVI veka*, pp. 175-177.

Data from the Netherlands: International Institute of Social History, <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/data.php>

Data from Sweden: Historicalstatistics.org. Portal for Historical Statistics, <http://www.historia.se/VolumeICh8ConsumerPriceIndex.xls>

In conclusion, we hope other regional scholars will be interested to search for sources that make it possible to extend such price series both geographically and chronologically, and to explore the relationship between the price fluctuations in Russia and Europe.

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