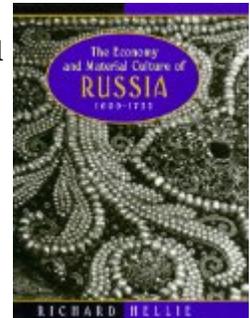


**Richard Hellie.** *The Economy and Material Culture of Russia 1600-1725*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999. xi + 671 pp. \$42.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-32649-8.



**Reviewed by** Lindsey Hughes

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Professor Richard Hellie of the University of Chicago is a major authority in the field of early modern Russia history and a new book by him is bound to be greeted with eager anticipation. *The Economy and Material Culture of Russia* does not disappoint, although, like all Professor Hellie's writings, it challenges and occasionally provokes. The purpose of the study is "to tell the reader what material commodities existed in Russia between 1600 and 1725 and how much they cost" (p. ix), an "elementary" exercise which turns out to be both extraordinarily illuminating and occasionally frustrating. It does this through an analysis of more than 107,000 records drawn from some 350 volumes of published documents, representing "transactions"-purchases, sales, donations, bequests, confiscations, fees, taxes, dues and so on-involving some 33,300 individuals and institutions. A historical introduction is followed by twenty-two thematic chapters, each covering a "sector" of the economy. I list them all in order to do justice to the vast scope of the project: agricultural produce; domestic animals and fowl; wild animals and furs; fish and sea produce; processed and imported food, beverages and tobacco; forest

products; construction materials; metals, minerals, chemicals, gunpowder and currencies; paints, ink, dyes and oils; gems, perfumes, spices, drugs and jewelry; manufactured goods : (i) metal and glass, (ii) wood, and (iii) books, candles, paper, rope, rugs, tapestries and tents; hides, leather, horn, feathers, bristles; textiles; notions and linen; clothing and accessories; real estate; wages; vehicles and transportation costs; services and income transfers; taxes, fees, fines. Each chapter includes itemized charts (listing the number of mentions, inclusive dates, minimum, median and maximum prices) and graphs indicating price swings over decades or sometimes over the course of one year (e.g. hay, figure 2.12, horses, figure 3.2). There are also case studies of two rich men-M. I. Tatishchev (document from 1608) and Prince V. V. Golitsyn (1689-90).

Although market behavior and price fluctuations in early modern Russia are not without interest to the present reviewer, I approached this book mainly as a cultural historian. On this level it yields insights too numerous to list: on fees for weddings, payments for dishonor, taxes on caviar,

wages for gardeners; the role of candles in the Russian climate; reading habits (books range in price from 1 kopek to 100 roubles, with prices falling over the period); nails (twenty-eight different kinds, priced in different units, some in containers of unknown size). Beef was the most popular meat, but fat was especially prized in the Russian diet (p. 98, with a slight detour into the Moscow University cafeteria in the 1960s). Death "offered myriad fee opportunities": funeral payments to all officiating clergy, burial prayers, commemorative services. The information on the possessions of Prince Vasilii Golitsyn (ca. 1643-1714) is drawn from a remarkably complete data set occasioned by the valuation of his property following his exile in 1689. Professor Hellie provides separate tables for different categories. Here as elsewhere, certain cultural conclusions require further thought. Did Golitsyn's eighty-one mirrors express his desire to "look at himself as an important individual" (as suggested by Professor Hellie, p. 592) or were they in fact fashion accessories intended to make rooms look bigger and their owner seem richer, often set too high on the walls actually to look into? We learn that "Golitsyn was *probably* [my italics] some form of Orthodox believer" (p. 594), whereas the icons and religious books found in his houses mark him out as much a believer as any of his contemporaries. What we can be sure of is that, by Russian standards, Golitsyn was very rich indeed, although he was probably only modestly wealthy in comparison with a top French aristocrat, say. By comparison, the earlier rich man studied, Tatishchev, was "not far from a peasant" (p. 602), while Golitsyn spent more on one set of curtains (400 roubles) than the anonymous peasant could accumulate in a lifetime. (The composite picture of the Russian peasant (ninety percent or more of the population) as "an unwashed right-brained pre-literate eking out a drab existence in a log hut" (p. 644) may offend some).

On a broader plane, this study throws light on the role of the state, one of those "eternal questions" of Russian history. State intervention was

large in the factor market but small in the domestic product economy. The state did not fix prices, for example, except for slaves (3 roubles apiece from the 1630s). It helped to lower costs by imposing standard measures and running the excellent state post road system, and was also an innovator in technology transfer, but (in Hellie's view) it tended to stifle or crush initiative from below and did not promote contracts ("never part of the Russian consciousness" (p. 642)).

The data yields on Russia pre-1700 are very impressive. We can now calculate, for example, that a Muscovite laborer with his 3 kopeks per day (p. 419) could buy 10 inches of the cheapest woolen cloth, 3/50ths of a pig, 15 bricks and so on (p. 632). But given that the major source used for Peter I's reign was the incomplete *Letters and Papers (Pis'ma i bumagi)* of Peter the Great (so far published only to 1713) and that a paltry 432 of the records analyzed were generated in St Petersburg (c.f. 37,584 in Moscow), I would urge caution when it comes to drawing conclusions about cultural developments in the period 1700-25. Hellie notes that very few *new* [my italics] items appear in his data set after 1700 and that "the influence of the Petrine era on the material culture of Russia was trivial" (p. 642), with borrowed vocabulary items mainly limited to naval and military objects. But inclusion of just a few more Petrine documents could produce a rather different picture. A part of my own research recently has concerned Peter's dress reforms and their impact on elite women. (As is well known, Peter forced urban dwellers to adopt Western fashions by decree.) Hellie's chapter "Clothing and Accessories" provides a wealth of information on Muscovite clothing (which represented a substantial investment in elite households) and also points to the strong influence of Turkish/Tatar vocabulary: the extent to which pre-Petrine Russians dressed more like "infidel" Turks and Tatars than Christian Europeans is truly remarkable and underresearched. But the data sets fail to chart the appearance of Western vocabulary items, including

only "mundir," "shuba" and "shliapia" (the latter both pre-Petrine borrowings anyway). *Delo o pozhitkakh gosudaryni Natalii Alekseevny* [1716] (Moscow, 1914) or *Doklady i prigovory sostoiavshiesia v pravitel'stvuiushchem Senate v tsarstvovanie Petra Velikogo* (6 vols , St Petersburg, 1880-1901) would have yielded "shlaforok" (from German: informal unboned day dresses ); "bostrog" (from Dutch, short jacket); "fantanzh" (from French, "fontange," headdress with ribbons and lace); "korsetki" (boned bodices) and much else besides. These and other borrowed terms would not have showed up in Professor Hellie's data sets because they were not priced. A study of the extent to which Peter changed the appearance of his subjects outside urban centers would require a different kind of data set than the one used for a study of prices.

Despite this reservation, *The Economy and Material Culture of Russia, 1600-1725* is an indispensable compendium of information for students of early modern Russia. One of its many virtues is its accessibility to non-economists, while economic specialists on Western Europe will find rich comparative data. Professor Hellie and his team are to be congratulated.

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