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Research Report

« The economic life in Russia in the light of the *Domostroi* (1550-1800) » (July 15 – August 25, 2015)

The research we will give a report on in the following paragraphs should be considered as a part of the global investigation we have been undertaking in our PhD thesis entitled « The *Domostroi*. A Russian medieval domestic book through the ages (XVIth-XVIIIth c.) : from the manuscript tradition to the historical contexts ». Indeed, one of the main issues we deal with in our PhD work is a better understanding of the sense and the value one can assign to the *Domostroi* at different stages of its history and obviously, given the nature of the text, the question also concerns its « economic » aspect. That's why we were very glad to benefit from the grant delivered by the History Project and the Institute for New Economic Thinking, which allowed to address this precise question of the economic life representation contained in the *Domostroi*.

To start talking about the turn our investigation took, it seems useful to remind what was the particular goal we put behind the general title « The economic life in Russia in the light of the *Domostroi* (1550-1800) ». Today we understand that it would be better if reformulated, for example, in the following way : « The economic life of the one who lives according to the *Domostroi* (1550-1800) », because in actual fact the *Domostroi* doesn't give us a global representation of the economic life in Russia from the XVIth to the XVIIIth century, but only of some of its aspects that enter in the sphere of an individual life of a certain type of population. The signification given to the epithet « economic » included exchanges and transactions outside the estate (*dvor*) as well as various activities inside its limits. In other terms, the meaning we took on for « economic » is close to its ancient equivalent *oikonomikos*.

The title of our research project necessarily reminds the numerous studies that had already addressed the question about the information on the everyday life of a household and its different aspects that one can dig up from the *Domostroi*. There is yet a difference between these studies and our research. First of all, the economic aspect has not been examined as such by all of them, and there are only a few works that broached the economic aspect seriously, that is to say tried to go further than a simple summary of the *Domostroi*'s text¹. In other words, a strictly economic commentary was a rather new point of view on the Russian domestic handbook. Secondly, we aimed to tackle the economic question in a deeper way. Our approach consisted in going a step further than the previous studies by putting the *Domostroi*'s text on the test thanks to its comparison with other sources related to the economic life of the XVIth-XVIIIth century². It meant proceeding to a detailed economic commentary. Thanks to the new data we hoped to obtain we thought that in a second phase we could ask anew another « classical » question about the *Domostroi*, namely the

1 The first work that tried to comment the economic part of the *Domostroi*, i.e. the article of A.N. Afanas'ev (1850), is also the first study on the Russian medieval work in general. Other works dwelling more or less on the economic aspect are those of V.N. Leškov (1855), A.A. Zimin (1958) and C.J. Pouncy (1994). The studies of I.Â. Porfir'ev (1860), I.S. Nekrasov (1872) and S.M. Solov'ev (1857) are less interesting for our purpose. Concerning the recent publications, there are still some articles on the *Domostroi* as a reflection of the Russian everyday life in the 16th and 17th century, but all of them seem to come down to a simple summary of its content. See more on the www.elibrary.ru.

2 The only scholar that adapted a similar approach was A.N. Afanas'ev. Regrettably, the documents and texts he compared the *Domostroi* to dated from the XVIIth century only and were related to the court life.

relevance of using the latter as one of the sources in the study of the economic life in Russia from the XVIth to XVIIIth century.

During our research, we realized at what extent such a project was ambitious. Indeed, there were several important difficulties we had to go beyond. Perhaps the most important was due to the nature of the economic sources we were looking for. From the beginning, our idea – quite natural – was to compare the *Domostroi* to the private acts and documents (*častnye akty*), i.e. the documents that inform us about private individual's possessions or transactions. Yet it is well known that the private everyday documentation is a type of documentation the less likely to be conserved through the centuries. The second important difficulty was related to the existence of at least three different versions of the *Domostroi* and the fact that its manuscript tradition stretches from the mid-XVIth to the end of the XVIIIth century, crossing thereby very different periods of the Russian history. The question was the following : at what extent these parameters should be taken into consideration ? We must confess that this second problem has not been solved in the framework of the present project and that consequently our approach, apart from the distinction between the two main versions of the *Domostroi* (a long one and a short one), didn't pay a lot of attention to the history of its text³.

Despite these two main restrictions we had to accept, there were a lot of questions that we could still address. One of the most important concerned the « economic » sources that would be pertinent for a comparison with the *Domostroi*. There was indeed a double question : which transactions exactly and between whom are mentioned in the *Domostroi* ? Analyzing this question led us to draw five main thematics : economic actors, economic spaces, acquisition and storage of goods, contracts and loans, and taxes. The principal information was found in chapters 16/49, 20/16, 30/26, 31/27, 34/30, 35/31, 36/32, 38/35, 39/34, 43-46/40-43, 49/46, 60-62/60-62⁴. In function of the thematics defined above, we were able to select a fitting corpus of private acts implying economic subjects. It included the acts dealing with the purchase of different kinds of property (*kupčie*), the acts related to the division of estate between the heirs (*del'nye*), wills (*duhovnye* or *izustnye gramoty*), *kabala* contracts⁵ and marriage documents (*sgovornye* and *râdnye gramoty*). In the course of our work we realized that legal acts could also be of some interest. In particular, the petitions of those who were victims of a theft are one of the rare types of document that allow to have a deeper insight into the items stored in a warehouse.

Despite the existence of many acts collections that have been published since the XIXth century, the sources we examined were mainly unpublished ones. Such a choice was due to the fact that, unfortunately, the published acts are not so much suitable for an economic commentary of the *Domostroi*. There can be actually two reasons for it : or the editors concentrated on the « official » documents that deal with the Russian state and powerful institutions such as monasteries, that is to say not with the economic actors the *Domostroi* implies, or the chronological interval covered by the publication doesn't correspond to the period we are interested in – or both. Of course, here and there it is possible to come across some interesting private act, but the picture we can draw thanks to these publications remains too partial. That's why we decided to make the most of the opportunity represented by the History Project grant to diversify and complete the documentary base we needed for our issue.

3 Even if some late copies of the *Domostroi* that we read didn't give any interesting evidence of text modifications in the economic chapters, it seems too early to conclude that such modifications didn't occur. As for the manuscript RGB, f.98, n°703, it merits a particular study.

4 The first number corresponds to the Long Version's numbering of chapters, the second to the Short Version's one. An English-speaking reader can refer to the C.J. Pouncy's edition of the Short Version of the *Domostroi*.

5 In the Glossary of the C.J. Pouncy's edition, we can read the following definition : « a contract that bound the borrower to serve the lender until his debt was paid or until the death of one of the parties ».

We visited the following Russian archives : the Manuscript department of the National Library of Russia (RNB), the Historical archive of the Institute of History (SpbIIRAN) and the Manuscript department of the Russian Academy of Sciences Library (BAN) in Saint-Petersburg, and the Manuscript department of the Russian State Library (RGB) in Moscow. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough time to visit two other important archives, namely RGADA and GIM. At the National Library of Russia we consulted the I.K. Zinčenko collection of acts and charts (RNB, f.299) and the Main collection of acts and charts (RNB, f.532). Among the numerous acts collections of the Institute of History we gave priority to the main collection of acts and charts, i.e. the Collection of acts before 1613. Finally, at the Russian State Library we found several interesting private acts in the collections of I.D. Belâev (RGB, f.28), Â.P. Garelin (RGB, f.67) and N.P. Rumâncev (RGB, f.256). The researches at the Russian Academy of Sciences Library didn't give any interesting results.

As we said before, the first theme that had to be examined concerned economic actors. For this question, it was important to stress the variety of population categories the *Domostroi's* economic advices imply. Some observations had already been made in this sense by A.A. Zimin. Our task consisted in supporting and developing this argument thanks to the evidence provided by the private economic acts, in particular, those dealing with the purchase or division of different kinds of property. Even if the social status is rarely mentioned in this type of acts (unless the transaction affects a prince or a nobleman), the latter contain some other useful clues, such as the location of the purchased or divided property. Apart from the social status, it was interesting enough to notice that property transactions concern women as much as men.

The question of the economic spaces the *Domostroi* makes reference to was the second point we have tackled. It had already been noticed in the previous studies that the *Domostroi* firstly describes an urban economic life. However, we should not forget the mentions of the « villages » (*selo* or *derevnâ*) the *Domostroi's* master can possess. As for the aspects that the private acts allow to evidence, the most interesting one is that the economic space of the *Domostroi* is in fact a split one, because the outbuildings listed in the text are not necessarily situated in the limits of the estate itself. The possessions of the *Domostroi's* master represent a sort of web where the estate is linked to some other more or less distant premises elsewhere in the city space. This evidence could put the « enclosed » representation of the *Domostroi's* household into perspective.

The acquisition and storage of goods is one of the most important themes in the *Domostroi*. According to the text, this part of the economic life should be the object of a frequent (perhaps even everyday) recording. For the moment, our research didn't allow to find the corresponding documentation. It should be admitted that we neglected the « books of expenses and incomes » (*rasxodo-prixodnye knigi*). The problem with this kind of source is that it is usually associated to an important institution, for example, a church or a monastery. As for the « common » estates of the XVIth and XVIIth century, it seems more difficult to find such documents. But such possibility should not be excluded.

In this part of our investigation we had recourse to legal acts. As we mentioned before, we looked for the documents that would give any information about the stocks one could store in his warehouse. The idea was to compare the « ideal » exhaustive lists given by the *Domostroi* to some concrete examples. The petitions addressed to the czar further to a theft seemed the most relevant for this purpose as they detail all that had been stolen. The sole disadvantage is that this type of petitions are quite rare and usually in a very poor condition.

The two last thematics, namely contracts and loans, on one hand, and taxes, on the other hand, have been studied less than the others, mainly because of the lack of time. We succeeded in exploring only two cases. The first is that of the contracts based on the *kabala* principle. The documentary evidence shows that this kind of contracts was widely spread and represented one of

the usual means to loan some money. The fact that the *Domostroi* warn about the danger it represents for one's liberty is entirely justified by the testimony we can find in the legal acts related to the non respect – by the borrower as well as by the lender – of the contract conditions.

The second case we had time to examine was that of the marriage contracts. The *Domostroi* doesn't mention explicitly this kind of documents but they are implied by its text (see chapter 20/16). The contracts in question are the « agreement » contract (*sgovornaâ gramota*) and the contract that describes the dowry (*râdnaâ gramota*). Interestingly enough, it appears that the *Domostroi* considers the marriage only from the economic point of view⁶.

To conclude we must first of all note that the approach we chose to comment the economic aspect of the *Domostroi* seems quite pertinent. As we have just seen, the different documents we referred to were useful in different ways. Some of them were useful to detail allusions or to give a concrete example of what shape can take the « ideal » described by the *Domostroi*, the others to better localize different kinds of property. In other words, thanks to its evidence we can have a deeper insight into different aspects of the economic life the *Domostroi* makes reference to.

Yet it is for sure that we must continue the investigation. In particular, now that the different thematics have been studied, it would be interesting to put it in a diachronic perspective, that is to see until which moment the *Domostroi* remains a relevant reflection of the Russian economic reality.

6 We don't take into consideration chapter 67 of the Long Version of the *Domostroi* as it represents a later addition to the main text of the work.