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HUNTING ACTIVITIES OF RUSSIAN POMORS ON SPITSBERGEN IN THE 18TH CENTURY: NEW EVIDENCES IN TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE⁴

The Russian hunters used to kill animals in the Arctic long before the 18th c. However, the Petrine modernization has changed their life strongly. The Government has put the new goals in order to make the Russian blubber industry some kind of a driving force for the Europeanization of the enormous region of the Russian North. However, what were the economic and political contexts for that? And could this governmental project be successful at all?

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Introduction

Spitsbergen is perhaps the most studied and discussed Arctic archipelago from historical point of view. Its' unique story of no-mans' land, common treasury of resources (blubber and later coal) has attracted a lot of attention. Speaking about Russian part of Spitsbergen history, we may distinguish several critical points of historical discussions. Those are the role of the Pomors in the discovery of Spitsbergen, their outstanding ability to survive in the severe conditions of the archipelago and a special place of Spitsbergen (Grumant) in the local culture. Two things are important for this literature. Firstly, it is predominantly based on the interpretation of archaeological findings. The documentary sources on Spitsbergen activities of the Pomors are relatively scarce for the 18th c. and are not found at all for the previous period. Secondly, the importance of Spitsbergen for the Pomors is accepted without any discussions as a starting point of research. Both points however require closer consideration.

The Russian marine harvesting in the 17th c. appeared to be rather bureaucratized. It is highly doubtful that any significant branch of industry could avoid governmental control, taxation and regulation. The fact that the documents mention regularly expeditions to Novaya Zemlya and do not mention expeditions to Grumant considering the work of the Russian administrative mechanism in the 17th c. has only one explanation – the Russians used to visit and exploit the islands of Novaya Zemlya regularly and these expeditions were economically significant industry which was not the case of Spitsbergen.

As for the importance of Spitsbergen as such for the Russian marine hunters we should remember that the Pomor peasants used to leave the harbors with very practical purposes. Their aim was not to discover new lands or get the reputation of supreme ice navigators, but to find marine animals. Pomors were interested in walruses and seals as source of blubber and from this point of view Spitsbergen has no significant advantages over Novaya Zemlya for instance. The Europeans of the 17th c. on the contrary considered Spitsbergen as very special place due to the abundance of whales in these waters. The whaling industry is the base for this perception and the economic importance of this Arctic archipelago for the prosperity of the Netherlands was crucial for the place Spitsbergen occupied in the public attention. Therefore it is quite logical to study the history of Europeanization project looking for the reasons of the governmental interest in Spitsbergen.

From this point of view the Grand Embassy seems to be an important part of the story. For sure the Russian government had some knowledge of Spitsbergen long before this time but the special commercial importance of Spitsbergen for the maritime mightiness of the country is definitely the thing of European and specifically Dutch culture. The Netherlands since 1697 became a center of training for young Russian sailors recruited in the White Sea region and

eventually Spitsbergen occupied certain place in this practice. For instance, in 1703 Cornelis Cruijs, the well-known employee of Peter the Great and the key person in the development of the Russian navy has informed the tsar that he sent two young Russians to Spitsbergen onboard of the Dutch ships (obviously whaling vessels) to get practice.⁵ This is the earliest document containing clear and direct information on the Russians going to Spitsbergen onboard the whaling ships – and those ships were Dutch.

The practices of blubber companies

The monopoly of Menshikovs' Company was granted initially on January 20, 1703, the Company itself was organized on January 31 and the monopoly was confirmed once more on February 15. Taking into consideration the official position of Menshikov and Petr Shafirov, strong support from the tsar and the importance of the project in the modernization plans the Company can be described as semi-state institution and the administrative bodies were definitely obliged to cooperate with the companions completely – at least theoretically. The research of the history of Menshikovs' Company to great extent confirms the assumption made by Ekaterina Andreeva, one of the best experts in Menshikovs' biography, that Peter considered the Menshikovs' property as the state possessions and disposed it freely in the state interest.⁶

The conditions of monopoly required from the local officials to provide the control over the local hunters and blubber traders. The Company had the exclusive right to purchase the fat (and since February 1704 also cod) from the hunters and to sell it to the merchants. The monopoly did not limit hunting and fishing as such, these activities were opened for everyone. The local administration had to build the outposts and provide proper control to stop smuggling.⁷

The Company organized two directions of commerce – the market control and the hunting. The market activities based on the governmental support started almost immediately. During all the period of existence the company concentrated a lot of efforts on the purchase of marine mammals products from the hunters and reselling it to the foreign merchants. The companions themselves justified activities of that kind by claiming that on the free market before the company was organized the traders used to create problems for hunters trying to establish unfairly low prices and to delay payments.⁸ Thus they have represented the conflict between the market agents as a social tension and the company as a social peacemaker dangerous for dealers, not for producers.

⁵ See: Krotov P.A. 1995, "K istorii rossijskogo flota: matrosy - "zamoriane" pri Petre Velikom." Otechestvennaja istorija, № 5, p. 163.

⁶ See: Andreeva E.A. 2008, "A.D. Menshikov – «poludержавный vlastelin» ili balansiruiushhii na kraiu propasti?", Menshikovskie chteniia, vyp. 6, SPb, 2008, pp. 12 – 13.

⁷ Russian State Archives of Ancient Documents (hereafter RGADA), coll. 1261, inv. 6, f. 159, p. 19.

⁸ RGADA, coll. 198, inv. 1, f. 1035, p. 56.

The Company Courtyard (Kompaneiskii Dvor) became the center of Company's activities in Arkhangelsk. The history of this enterprise had not been studied yet. According to the tsars' decrees issued in 1703 all the owners of the enterprises of such a kind in the region were obliged to sell their property to the Company and the procedure was rather complicated. They lost their property rights immediately and all the buildings they possessed were to be recorded and evaluated by the local administration, then the documents were to be sent to Moscow and after that "the Company will pay".⁹ The procedure looks very harmful and derogative for the blubber industrialists and it obviously aimed to provide immediately some necessary premises for the Company and at the same time to prevent competition of any kind. So, it is possible to assume that at least initially the companions used some kind of already existing infrastructure before they completed their own. The timing is unclear at the moment but in April 1709 Yakov Nekliudov described the Courtyard as a complete complex (it will be described in more details below).¹⁰ This was the place where the Company concentrated the marine mammals fat purchased from hunters and melted it in order to sell it to the foreigners. That's how the skipper Stepan Yushkov in 1712 described the normal sequencing for the marine mammals hunters: "Every year when the vessels arrive from the sea, they present the fat and the customs officials make records, and the hunters give this fat to the Company Courtyard according to the customs records and the company clerks inspect the process and make records."¹¹

Additionally to the fat that the hunters delivered to the courtyard on their own ships the company possessed some quantity of transportation vessels that were periodically sent to the hunting grounds to take the products there and to deliver them to Arkhangelsk. These activities are well recorded in the documents of Arkhangelsk administration for 1712. This kind of navigation apparently started in late June – early July. For instance on July 5 1712 the company agent Mikhailo Okladnikov has sent "the transportation karbas through Berezovskoe mouth¹² to the sea to take and deliver to the city from the hunting grounds the blubber and the skins".¹³ Five more trips were organized in July and August with the same purpose.¹⁴ The purchased fat was melted directly on the courtyard where the Company had necessary equipment.

The organization of hunting expeditions was the second direction of company commerce. The companions had no monopoly for these activities but definitely intended to take part in it. The sources reveal several forms of such expeditions. The Company waged the hunting teams

⁹ RGADA, coll. 1261, inv. 6, f. 159, p. 17 back – 18.

¹⁰ Bazarova T. A. (ed.), 2011, *Kantseliariia vitse-kantslera Petra Pavlovicha Shafirova. Chast' 1. 1706 – 1713*, St. Petersburg, Mir, p. 158.

¹¹ St. Petersburg Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences (Hereafter SPb II RAN), coll. 10, inv. 2, f. 128, p. 17.

¹² The most eastern branch of the Northern Dvina estuary.

¹³ SPb II RAN, coll. 10, inv. 2, f. 553, p. 20.

¹⁴ SPb II RAN, coll. 10, inv. 2, f. 553, p. 29, 30, 33 back, 35 back, 39.

and sent them to the sealing and walrus hunting grounds in the White and Barents Sea area, relatively close to Arkhangelsk. During the season the Company regularly sent the vessels to deliver provision for the hunters as take their products. For instance on June 21 1712 the same Mikhailo Okladnikov sent to the Sea the karbas “to take the fat from the hunting grounds and skins and to deliver empty barrels... according to the customs permission onboard the skipper Eremei Okladnikov and 12 crew members”.¹⁵ On July 12 he sent two vessels “to the hunting grounds to get fat and skin, skippers and crew members with empty barrels and grain for provision”.¹⁶

Another option for the company was to take part in the organization of hunting expeditions to the remote grounds like Spitsbergen together with other actors. For instance when on May 22 1712 the hunting team with the skipper Larion Yakovlev departed to Grumant (Spitsbergen) on the vessel belonged to the city dweller Ivan Zviagin, they have got the permit to pass the Novodvinskaia fortress situated downstream from Arkhangelsk with the special support from the company agent Petr Businov.¹⁷ This is a clear indication of some special connection of this hunting expedition to the Company though the companions were definitely not the major organizers.

The last but not least – the Company used to send own vessels to Spitsbergen. The earliest available data on the Russian ship going to Spitsbergen is from 1709 and this is the vessel of European construction departing from Arkhangelsk in early June with the mixed crew onboard consisting of Russians and foreigners. The whales were obviously the main target for this vessel. An unsuccessful expedition of that kind apparently took place a year earlier in 1708 and this was perhaps the first experience of that kind for the Company.¹⁸ The time gap between the foundation of the company (1703) and the first attempt of whaling on Spitsbergen (1708) seems to be too large and we may conclude that the Company did not start the preparations to the whaling activities immediately. No information is available also on the further history of this ship, we don't know yet if the companions continued to send the vessel for whaling to Spitsbergen.

However since that moment the data appears in the sources on the private vessels going to Grumant – Spitsbergen. In 1710 the customs officials have recorded three hoekers owned by the merchants of Gostinaya Sotnia Fedor and Osip Bazhenins and two karbases that belonged to the city dwellers (i.e. the members of Arkhangelsk community) Ivan Zviagin and Yakov

¹⁵ SPb II RAN, coll. 10, inv. 2, f. 553, p. 12 back – 13.

¹⁶ SPb II RAN, coll. 10, inv. 2, f. 553, p. 25.

¹⁷ SPb II RAN, coll. 10, inv. 2, f. 553, pp. 3 – 3 back.

¹⁸ See for details Kraikovski A., Dadykina M. 2014, “«Promysel starat'sja umnozhit'»: dejatel'nost' Sal'noj kompanii A.D. Menshikova i morskije promysly na Russkom Severe. 1704–1721 g.” Menshikov memorial readings 2014. The scientific almanac. Volume 5 (12), St. Petersburg, pp. 74 – 75.

Soroilov. In total five vessels with 71 crew members are recorded. The ships departed from Arkhangesk to Grumant between June 28 and July 20.¹⁹ Petr Golitsyn, who was the governor of Arkhangelsk in 1708 – 1711, reported to the tsar in late summer 1710 (he starts letter from greetings with the capture of Riga – this took place on July 4 1710, consequently the letter is sent in late July – early August as the latest) that “lodias and other seagoing vessels” owned by the Dvina inhabitants going to Spitsbergen in spring 1710 were robbed by the unknown pirates. Nobody was killed but the pirates (one of them was under the Dutch flag) took almost all the provision and the Pomors were forced to return back to their harbors.²⁰ Thus we may conclude that in 1710 more than 6 ships belonging to the locals departed from the area of Arkhangelsk to Spitsbergen. Their voyages however were rather dangerous because of piracy.

The problem of privateers on the way to Spitsbergen was apparently rather serious in this period. Yakov Nekliudov in 1709 also mentioned the necessity to “avoid French ships”.²¹ In 1711 the dwellers of Arkhangelsk Asei Afanasiev Kirov, Filipp Dorofeev (named in the same archival file as Filipp Omosov), Luka Barabanskii and Terentii Lebenin reported to the tsar that they “in previous years used to visit the Groenland land (Spitsbergen) for hunting activities but now the foreigners rob on the sea” and asked His Majesty “to give a letter for the safe access to Spitsbergen, Denmark, England, Holland and Hamburg”.²² The passes was issued according to the tsars’ decree of February 13, 1712.²³ However it is not clear if these documents were able to protect the vessels from the pirates in the Arctic.

In general the documents demonstrate the link between the company activities and the increase of Spitsbergen shipping. In 1712 the customs officials in Arkhangelsk have recorded five vessels departing to Grumant. As it was mentioned above the company agent Petr Businov took part in the paperwork for one of these trips, two vessels (one of them is labeled as karbas) were sent by Fedor Bazhenin, one karbas by Ivan Vishniakov and one soima by Vasili Dudin from Kholmogory.²⁴

To sum up, the documents demonstrate the crucial importance of the modernization project as well as an outstanding role of the Menshikov Company in the development of Russian Spitsbergen activities. The plan of transfer of whaling technologies from Europe eventually placed the polar archipelago into the center of attention for the group of Russian marine hunters.

The hunters on Spitsbergen used to kill walrus for blubber as they did it on Novaya Zemlya. For instance in 1712 the peasant Evstrat Pochinkov reported to the taxation officials that

¹⁹ SPb II RAN, coll. 10, inv. 3, f. 11, pp. 41 back – 44 back.

²⁰ RGADA, coll. 9, Inv. 8, f. 11, pp. 116 – 116 back, 134.

²¹ Bazarova T. A. 2011. Pokhodnaia Kantseliariia vitse-kantslera Petra Pavlovicha Shafirova. Chast’ 1. 1706 – 1713. St. Petersburg, p. 156.

²² RGADA, coll. 159, inv. 2, f. 5111, pp. 2 – 2 back.

²³ RGADA, coll. 159, inv. 2, f. 5111, p. 3.

²⁴ SPb II RAN, coll. 10, inv. 3, f. 553, pp. 3 – 3 back; 8 – 9 back, 15.

in 1710 he had in his storage 13 barrels of blubber from Grumant.²⁵ Direct documentary evidences of the 18th c. clearly demonstrate that the Pomors considered Spitsbergen first of all as a source of blubber and that this blubber they got predominantly from walruses, not from seals or whales.²⁶

The history of Menshikov Company came to an end in 1721 when the Serene Prince has lost the Tsars' propensity. However, the practices and actors involved into the activities of the subsequent companies are to be studied through the perspective of Menshikovs company legacy. The Kola whaling company organized in 1723 was an attempt to concentrate on the Spitsbergen whaling expeditions in order to make this part of former Menshikov company activities profitable by itself. According to the decree published in 1723 the new Company had to build in Arkhangelsk five whaling ships and form the crews of the Russian sailors and Dutch whalers. The Company was opened for the foreigners who would like to become investors and shareholders, however after they have got pure profit equal to their previous investment (e.g. the person that invested 1000 rub. had to get this 1000 rub. back and another 1000 as a pure profit) they should either take the Russian citizenship or to get their money and leave the Company.²⁷ So, the document demonstrates that to the Emperors' opinion on the causes of failure of Menshikov Company in the development of whaling was the shortage of investments. The state finances in combination with the money of shareholders (including the foreigners) had to provide the new start – the whaling fleet and the experienced crew.

In 1729 the Kola whaling company has sent the ships to Spitsbergen three times. The ships were repaired and newly equipped in Hamburg²⁸, but the result of these efforts was quite weak. Based on that the government decided to reorganize all the whaling activities. The Senate has prepared a resolution that ordered to pass the whaling company into the private hands for any price or at least to reduce the governmental credits to certain amounts of 6000 rub. per year. The foreigners should be replaced with the Russians and the company directors should be replaced either.²⁹ No environmental obstacles were discussed. In general the government still believed in the picture of abundant and available natural resource that can be easily and profitably harvested by the well-organized centralized company.

After the Kola Whaling Company has been dissolved and the blubber monopoly came to the private hands, the successive companies belonging to Evreinovs, Shafirov and Schemberg

²⁵ SPb II RAN, coll. 10, inv. 2, f. 128, p. 16.

²⁶ See for details Kraikovski A. V., 2012, "Productivity and Profitability of Russian Spitsbergen Hunting in the Late 18th Century", LASHIPA. History of Large Scale Resource Exploitation in Polar Areas, Circumpolar Studies 8, pp. 19 – 21.

²⁷ Chulkov M. D., 1782, Istoricheskoe opisanie rossijskoj kommercii pri vseh portah i granicah ot drevnih vremjan do nyne nastojashago i vseh preimushhestvennyh uzakonenij po onoj gosudarja imperatora Petra Velikago i nyne blagopoluchno carstvujushhej gosudaryni imperatricy Ekateriny Velikija, sochinennoe Mihajlom Chulkovym. St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, p. 366.

²⁸ RGADA, coll. 397, inv. 1, f. 221, p. 27.

²⁹ RGADA, coll. 397, inv. 1, f. 221, pp. 23 – 25.

more and more tried to avoid whaling activities and to concentrate purely on the market operations.

Economy of the Blubber Companies

The whaling development project had undoubtedly been primarily commercial enterprise. Europeanization meant the intention to become the same powerful and wealthy. Therefore eventually speaking of the history of blubber monopolies we have inevitably to explore the financial records.

Capital investments and tangible assets.

The desperate need for investments has been the central issue for the correspondence on the whaling development since the very beginning. Menshikov Company has started in 1703 with the capital of 8500 rub.³⁰ By 1708 the shareholders have invested 20000 rub.³¹ Finally in 1717 the capital has been recorded at the level of 24000 rub.³² These investments were used to create the infrastructure that served the blubber monopolies for decades. The train oil industry required specific technology. The fat is to be melted and the 17th c. Dutch engravings, published in *Walvicon*, give good impression on the possible methods.³³ According to these materials the Dutch whalers have used either big pots of specific shape (wide, shallow, with some narrowing of the neck) or more solid constructions looking like small ovens with the possibility to pour the melted fat through the shunt tubes. The painting by Cornelis de Man, representing the train oil refinery in Smeerenburg, provides better insight. The oven is constructed of brick and consists of the ball and the big jars incorporated into the brick basement.³⁴ Noticeably the Russian visitors apparently did not see these constructions during the Grand Embassy.

The practical experience of the companies was far more materially-minded. By 1703, as it was described above, the Pomors have had long history of blubber production. Therefore no wonder that the White and Barents Sea area had already had some appropriate infrastructure. According to the decree signed in 1704, the blubber industry was situated on the territories rented from the state. The document provides no details, but requires those “rented places, where the blubber was melted, to give to the company for the same rent... and the building there to describe and assess,

³⁰ RGADA, coll. 198, inv. 1, f. 3, p. 2 back.

³¹ SPb II RAN, coll. 83, inv. 1, f. 1418, p. 1.

³² RGADA, coll. 198, inv. 1, f. 103, p. 1.

³³ Kleyn, E & Hacquebord, L 1987, 'Walvicon: aanzet tot een iconografie van de walvisvaart, 1580-1770'. in *EPRINTS-BOOK-TITLE*. 5 edn, Groningen, Tentoonstelling over de walvisvaart rond Spitsbergen, Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, 1988, 1 January, p. 24.

³⁴ Rijksmuseum. SK-A-2355; Kleyn, E & Hacquebord, L 1987, 'Walvicon: aanzet tot een iconografie van de walvisvaart, 1580-1770'. in *EPRINTS-BOOK-TITLE*. 5 edn, Groningen, Tentoonstelling over de walvisvaart rond Spitsbergen, Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, 1988, 1 January, p. 35.

and to deliver this assessment to Moscow, so the owners will get compensation from the Company.”³⁵ The details are unknown; however, it obviously took some time from the Company to get control over the blubber melting industry – taking into consideration the normal bureaucratic practices of that time.

Nevertheless, the shareholders could not rely completely on the existing infrastructure. The Company courtyard in Archangelsk became the center of the blubber companies activities in the North for decades. It was constructed between 1703 and 1708 and consisted of several buildings. In 1734 the detailed descriptions has mentioned several specific wooden buildings named “the link” (sviaz’) – i.e. the long log cabin, consisting of several rooms. The first “link” from the Dvina River included four rooms, the kitchen and the dry cellar. The second one consisted of two rooms and a cellar. The courtyard also included the house that consisted of the clean room named “gornitsa” and the so-called “black” hut (the room with very primitive heating system having no pipe for smoke) built on the one cellar. Inside the courtyard, the document mentions 16 “holes for fat” and 8 “vats for fat”. Apparently, this is the description of the blubber refinery. This entire courtyard was surrounded with the newly built wooden fencing and the river near the courtyard had the wooden embankment, apparently used as a pier.

Among the utensils, the description has mentioned copper jars, textile, old cordage, dishes, icons, prints, furniture etc. Special attention was paid to the 6 copper jars for fat melting: 2 weighing 17 poods and 38 pounds (about 300 kg.), and 3 of 41 pood and 25 pounds (about 675 kg.), 1 of 14 poods 10 pounds (about 230 kg.). Among the instruments especially important were 5 buckets for fat.³⁶

To sum up – the company has built quite impressive group of buildings appropriate for both accommodation of personnel and the industrial activities. 16 ovens for blubber melting obviously required a lot of working hands. The fact that all the constructions except the fencing are described as “old” permits to suppose that they were constructed in the time of Menshikov.

The Company courtyard in Kola was obviously smaller. Nekliudov has reported to Menshikov in 1726 that the buildings constructed by Menshikov Company in this town were depleted by fire in 1725.³⁷ The base in this Arctic settlement however was necessary for the successful blubber trade and the owners of monopolistic privileges had to take care of it. In 1734, the Kola base included the house for the Greenland Company office near the Kola River furnished with tables and chairs. The description provides some architectural details. The building was a two-story and decorated with turned balusters. On the Kola River the company possessed the “link” for about 21 meters long and the log barn. On the bank of the Tuloma River the description mentioned the

³⁵ RGADA, coll. 1261, inv. 6, f. 159, pp. 17 back – 18.

³⁶ See: State Archives of Archangelsk region (Hereafter GAAO), coll. 1, inv. 1, f. 1270, p. 55 – 59 back.

³⁷ RGADA, coll. 198, inv. 1, f. 798, p. 1 – 1 back.

fat melting courtyard of approximately 140 to 140 meters. Inside the courtyard, two fat-melting jars were situated on the clay basements under the wooden roofs. The copper boilers were approximately 1,5 meters deep and about 2 meters wide. The melted fat was drained through the gutters. Additionally the document mentions 4 smaller old fat jars. The courtyard has also included the storages, the smithy, the instruments for fat melting, the constructions for drying whalebone, 5 copper jars for fat (in total about 1400 kg.) about 5 meters wide and 3 meters deep. Somewhere just near the water the Company also had the new storage and across the street the old one.³⁸ For sure, the situation of 1734 does not reflect the buildings that belonged to the Menshikov Company before 1725. However, the land plots were the same and taking into consideration the size of the town of Kola in the early 18th c. we can be sure that the blubber companies were the most powerful actors in the area.

It is even more evident if we will remember that those impressive possessions were just part of the company property in the region. In 1723 it was decided to build a new base for the Kola Whaling Company in the harbor situated to the North from the town of Kola on the Western side of the Gulf of Kola and named Ekaterininskaya after Catherine I, wife of Peter the Great. In 1734 the base included the house with inner porch, two storages and the wooden pier.³⁹ These three complexes served as a core of the company infrastructure for decades. However, the development of marine harvesting required also some investments into vessels and the ships were another important part of the tangible assets.

Menshikov Company in 1706 and 1707 has spent for the shipbuilding about 2170 rub. Noticeably, these payments were made in Archangelsk, and therefore the ship was launched on there.⁴⁰ Most probably those were the expenses for the vessel that departed to the hunting expedition in 1708. Nothing is known on the history of this ship. Apparently, it did not exist already in 1721, as it is not mentioned in the documents on the dissolution of Menshikov Company. Be that as it may, the Kola whaling company has built three new ships for 7000 rub. each.

Three ships were obviously considered as the minimum appropriate quantity of vessels for the whaling activities. When the ship Groenland vaarder has been lost in the sea, the Company, as it was demonstrated above, took measures to purchase the new one in Hamburg. In 1729 she was mentioned as *fluit* (i.e. vessel of Dutch construction).⁴¹ It is important to remember that some percentage of lost vessels was inevitable part of whaling activities. For instance, the

³⁸ See. GAAO, coll. 1, inv. 1, f. 1270, pp. 60 – 66.

³⁹ GAAO, coll. 1, inv. 1, f. 1270, pp. 66 – 69.

⁴⁰ SPb II RAN, coll. 83, inv. 1, f. 1418, p. 1.

⁴¹ Chulkov M. D., 1782, Istoricheskoe opisanie rossijskoj kommercii pri vseh portah i granicah ot drevnih vremjan do nyne nastojashhago i vseh preimushhestvennyh uzakonenij po onoj gosudarja imperatora Petra Velikago i nyne blagopoluchno carstvujushhej gosudaryni imperatricy Ekateriny Velikija, sochinennoe Mihajlom Chulkovym. St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, p. 405.

Dutch whalers between 1669 and 1725 have lost in the ice 318 out of 8027 participating vessels.⁴² The high percentage of lost vessels Russians had (25%) is linked to the fact that the Russian whaling fleet was too small and even one lost ship was very sensible.

Apart from the big whaling ships the companies needed a lot of much smaller vessels for transportation. To sum up, the blubber companies have invested a lot of money and efforts into the development of shipping and maritime infrastructure in the region. The activities on the infrastructure construction and maintenance through the perspective of modernization and Europeanization stay in a row with the implementation of European architecture and in general the European material culture. There are no doubts that the White and Barents Sea region in pre-Petrine time has already had network of harbors, shipyards and other sorts of facilities “all of which are as important as the ships themselves”.⁴³ The Europeanization in connection to the marine harvesting however means the reconstruction of this infrastructure on the base of some European examples – or at least some European images, intending to do the things “like in Europe”.

The infrastructure however was useless without the people and the human capital was another important part of the company expenses.

The whaling voyages to Spitsbergen were just a part of transportation activities that covered vast area from Archangelsk to Kola including the places of blubber hunting in the White Sea basin. However all the blubber both from whaling ships and from walrus and seal hunters had to be concentrated in the Company courtyards in Kola and Archangelsk. It means that the Russians intended to borrow the Dutch technology of blubber making which was the most common in that time. The Hollanders used to kill whales in the Ocean and to collect fat to be delivered to the Netherlands and melted there (the method known as the “ice whaling), while the Basques made experiments of the blubber refinery on board.⁴⁴ The descriptions of the blubber melting enterprises contained in the Russian documents permit to think that they were very similar to that fixed in the Dutch visual materials. The ovens of this construction are clearly seen on the engraving by Hans Egede, depicting the whaling on Spitsbergen in 1611.⁴⁵ The copper jars as well as the methods of using them are presented in details on the 17th c. Dutch prints illustrating the process of train oil refining on Spitsbergen.⁴⁶

⁴² Schokkenbroek J., 2008, *Trying Out: An Anatomy of Dutch Whaling and Sealing in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1885*, Aksant Academic Publishers, p. 33

⁴³ Gould R. A., 2011, *Archaeology and the Social history of Ships*, Cambridge University Press, p. 319.

⁴⁴ See for details Reeves R. R. & Smith T. D., 2006, *A Taxonomy of World Whaling: Operations and Eras. Whales, Whaling, and Ocean Ecosystems*, University of California Press, p. 90.

⁴⁵ See Dow G. F., 1925, *Whale Ships and Whaling: A Pictorial History of Whaling During Three Centuries*, Marine Research Society, pp. 69, 71.; Kleyn, E & Hacquebord, L 1987, 'Walvicon: aanzet tot een iconografie van de walvisvaart, 1580-1770'. in *EPRINTS-BOOK-TITLE*. 5 edn, Groningen, Tentoonstelling over de walvisvaart rond Spitsbergen, Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, 1988, 1 January, pp. 5 – 6.

⁴⁶ See Kleyn, E & Hacquebord, L 1987, 'Walvicon: aanzet tot een iconografie van de walvisvaart, 1580-1770'. in *EPRINTS-*

Salaries

The group of people officially waged by the companies, i.e. what we may call the Company official staff includes managers, agents, experts and hunters who were recruited to the ships belonging to the Companies. The company staff sometimes have got payments based on the share of profit. This was for instance the case of Alexei Rekunov, the Kola dweller waged as Menshikov Company agent in 1708, has got payments based on the share of capital of 400 rub.⁴⁷ However, the majority of waged personnel known from the documents have normally got the fixed payments. Noticeably this principal did not alter during all the history of blubber monopolies.

The data on the payments in the Menshikov Company is very scarce. Petr Shafirov in 1708 has informed Menshikov that the company expenses included “monthly payments and food for commandeur (apparently the Russian transliteration of the Dutch term for the head of whaling expedition) and his comrades”.⁴⁸ The amounts of money paid to the managers and invited experts are not known. The documents of the latter companies provide far more detailed information. The data on the salaries paid to the company managers and workers involved into the operations of the Company courtyard is presented in the table.

Table 1. Salaries of the blubber companies management. Rubles.

Companies	Kola Whaling Company	State blubber company	Shafirov	Schemberg	State blubber company	Shuvalov
Years	1725 - 1729	1726 – 1730	1734 - 1739	1739 - 1742	1742 - 1748	1748 - 1768
Director, year/person	300		500	600		
Number of directors	2		1	1		
Subtotal	600		500	600		

BOOK-TITLE. 5 edn, Groningen, Tentoonstelling over de walvisvaart rond Spitsbergen, Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, 1988, 1 January, pp. 24 – 25.

⁴⁷ See SPb II RAN, coll. 83, inv. 1, f. 1418, p. 1 back.

⁴⁸ SPb II RAN, coll. 83, inv. 1, f. 1418, p. 4.

Commissar, year/ person	120	150			150	
Number of Comissars	1	2			2	
Subtotal	120	300			300	
Agent on the Courtyard/ year			50	60	50	
Assistant of Agent on the Courtyard/ year				48		
Travelling Agent/mo nth			4	4	4	
Clerk			80	80	50	
Junior Clerk			2/mont h		36/year	
Watchman				14,4	12	
Blubber melter					5 – 8/ Summer	
Carrier					5 – 8/ Summer	
Source	Chulko v. P. 372	Chulk ov P. 390	RGAD A. Coll. 1261. Inv. 6. F. 159. P. 12	RGADA. Coll. 1261. Inv. 6. F. 159. P. 12 - 12 back	RGADA . Coll. 1261. Inv. 6. F. 159. P. 12 back - 13.	

We can see that the holders of the blubber monopoly have tried to keep the staff expenses on the relatively stable level. We can compare these salaries with the payments made to the army and the navy officers in the first half of the 18th c.⁴⁹ Through this perspective the director (from 300 to 600 rub. per year) could be compared to colonel (300 rub. per year) commodore (480) or captain commodore (600). Commissar was more or less equal to lieutenant colonel (150), agent on the courtyard – to ensign (50), clerk to lieutenant (80), watchman to non-commissioned officer (14,4). Of course this comparison gives just an idea. Boris Mironov in his recent research on the history of Russian standards of life has noted that “wages were paid in a variety of ways, either in kind (housing, rations, land, building materials), or in cash. Moreover, depending on each employer, workers were given a different number of holidays while the length of the workday changed with the season”.⁵⁰ This statement describes very well the situation with the wages of the company personnel responsible for the operations on the ground, but what took place onboard the vessels?

The first whaling experts who were recruited in 1724 by J. van den Burgh according to the contracts have got salaries on the following level: the blubber cutter – 60 guilders per month, which was paid in rubles as 22,3 rub.; his assistant – 45 guilders (16,66 rub.), harpooners – 40 guilders (14,81 rub.). Noticeably part of their salaries (“three months from each year”) were to be paid to their families in the Netherlands. The Commandeur Dirck Snecker had to get 25 rub. per month and free accommodation (i.e. his salary was on the level of the Company directors).⁵¹ Later, however, the Company has recruited far more foreigners to serve onboard the whaling ships.

It would be interesting to compare these payments to those existing in the contemporary Netherlands in order to evaluate the competitiveness of the Company on the labor market. Just to get some impression we could use the data, provided by J. de Vries. In the 18th c. the Amsterdam Admiralty has offered to the common sailors 11 guilders per month. The master carpenters in Amsterdam could get from 30 to 36 stuivers per day which is from 9 to 11 guilders per month.⁵² From this point of view the salaries in the Kola whaling company look very attractive. L. Soltow and J. van Zanden provide additional data to be used. According to their information the doctor on the Kola whaling ship earning from 325 to 480 guilders per year was significantly more successful than his colleague in the Netherlands, who has got from 150 to 264 guilders. The

⁴⁹ Durov I.G., 2014, “Pensii, pozhalovannye Petrom velikim neimushhim otstavnym oficeram, obespechivali veteranam dostojnuju starost’”, *Menshikovskie Chtenija*, Vypusk 5 (12), St. Peterburg, «XVIII vek», p. 79.

⁵⁰ Mironov B. N., 2012, *The Standard of Living and Revolutions in Russia, 1700-1917*, Routledge, p. 302.

⁵¹ Chulkov M. D., 1782, *Istoricheskoe opisanie rossijskoj kommercii pri vseh portah i granicah ot drevnih vremjan do nyne nastojashago i vseh preimushhestvennyh uzakonenij po onoj gosudarja imperatora Petra Velikago i nyne blagopoluchno carstvujushhej gosudaryni imperatricy Ekateriny Velikija, sochinennoe Mihajlom Chulkovym*. St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, p. 372 – 373.

⁵² De Vries J., 1978, “An Inquiry into the Behaviour of Wages in the Dutch Republic and the Southern Netherlands, 1580–1800.”, *Acta Historiae Neerlandicae*, Vol. X, The Hague, Springer, pp. 83, 86.

Commandeur with 900 guilders was very well compatible to the high-level Dutch clerk who has got around 1000 guilders. The carpenter, however, looks not that successful having the same salary as in the Netherlands – about 45 guilders per month.⁵³

The Russians, however, normally preferred to compare these salaries to their own income. In general in the early 18th c. it was common practice to pay the foreign experts higher salaries for the same work. For instance, we may compare the payments to the whalers to the salaries of the foreign officers. The Commandeur was equal to the captain of 2 or 3 rank (300 – 360 rub. per year), blubber cutter to lieutenant (180), harpooner to sub lieutenant (120), the sailor to ensign.⁵⁴

The foreign carpenters have got almost 10 times more money than their Russian colleagues. The salary of the foreign sailors was 7 – 10 times higher than that of the Russians. The sources, however, reveal the problem of payments discipline which makes all these comparisons very unreliable. The Russians normally used to get payments three times a year, while the foreigners according to the agreement had to get paid “every month without any delay”.⁵⁵ The documents, however, demonstrate that the real situation was apparently far from this ideal picture at least for the Russian participants. Yakov Nekliudov has reported in 1726 from Kola that he has spent all the salary of 300 rub. and even had to contract debts while wintering in Norway. Considering the bread prices in Kola he asked for some financial support.⁵⁶ Baron Petr Shafirov, the head of the College of Commerce, had also met problems in getting salary for the time he has spent in Archangelsk trying to promote the development of whaling and blubber industry.⁵⁷ The sailors have also petitioned to the state administration on the delays in payments though the company management has reported that all the payments were made perfectly on time.⁵⁸ As for the foreign experts, we can get some impression of their situation from the petition signed by Commander de Lang in Autumn 1728. He has reported that from 1725 to 1727 he has got all the payments. However about 150 rub. for 1728 were not paid on time and the commandeur has informed the governor’s office that he could not leave Russia until all the financial matters would be settled.⁵⁹ Noticeably the latter private companies were also not accurate enough in payments. For instance Solomon Vernizobre in 1744 has informed the

⁵³ Soltow L. & van Zanden J. L., 1998, *Income and wealth inequality in the Netherlands : 16th - 20th century*, Transaction Publishers, p. 44.

⁵⁴ Durov I.G., 2014, “Pensii, pozhalovannye Petrom velikim neimushhim otstavnym oficeram, obespechivali veteranam dostojnuju starost’”, *Menshikovskie Chtenija*, Vypusk 5 (12), St. Peterburg, «XVIII vek», p. 79.

⁵⁵ Chulkov M. D., 1782, *Istoricheskoe opisanie rossijskoj kommercii pri vseh portah i granicah ot drevnih vremjan do nyne nastojashhago i vseh preimushhestvennyh uzakonenij po onoj gosudarja imperatora Petra Velikago i nyne blagopoluchno carstvujushhej gosudaryni imperatricy Ekateriny Velikija, sochinennoe Mihajlom Chulkovym*. St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, p. 372 – 373.

⁵⁶ RGADA, coll. 198, inv. 1, f. 218, pp. 8 back – 9.

⁵⁷ RGADA, coll. 248, inv. 13, f. 731, pp. 94, 99.

⁵⁸ GAAO, coll. 1, inv. 1, f. 512, pp. 1 – 2; 7 – 8.

⁵⁹ GAAO, coll. 1, inv. 1, f. 512, pp. 25 – 25 back.

authorities that being the Director of Schembergs Company in 1739 - 1742 with 600 rub. of annual salary he has not got more than 740 rub.⁶⁰ In other words, the owner of the company did not pay for almost 15 months of his work.

To sum up, the personnel of the whaling companies can be roughly divided into three big groups. The foreigners have got good contracts, quite impressive for both the Russian colleagues and for the people of their home country. The Russian management has got payments more or less equal to the army officers. As for the third group – the whalers have got payments on the level of army soldiers or naval sailors. As a result of this system of payments the whalers were not interested in the result. The foreigners have got their high salaries according to the contract disregarding the number of killed whales, and the Russians could not get any profit from the successful expeditions considered just as their obligation. Noticeably in 1729 the College of Commerce have promised that perhaps in the future the Russian whalers will get some parts of the killed whales instead of fixed salaries – and this was represented as a grace, which they had yet to earn.⁶¹ No wonder that the Pomors did not want to serve onboard the whaling ships. However, using the monopolistic privileges the Companies have also controlled the income of all the marine mammals' hunter in the area including those who were formally independent. Now we have to study the blubber market in order to get better understanding of the place the Companies had in the economic life of the period on the different levels, be that the individual income of the hunters, the regional economy or the international trade.

Blubber commerce

The problem of productivity and profitability seems to be central for the history of the blubber monopolies. The need for silver has been the initial driving force for the whole project. In general we can see two perspectives, in a sense, two quantitative scales used for the assessment of success of the blubber monopolistic projects. The first scale is the hunting result. Through this perspective the observers and researchers used to answer the simple question – how many whales were killed by the Russian whalers? And how this result looks in the international perspective (say, comparing to the Dutch whalers)? However, what is important is the ratio of gains and expenses per one killed whale. It is much better from economic point of view to kill one whale with profit that to kill hundreds of them with loss.

Another quantitative scale is the number of barrels of blubber sold to the foreign

⁶⁰ RGADA, coll, 248, inv. 5, f. 284, p. 236 back.

⁶¹ Chulkov M. D., 1782, *Istoricheskoe opisanie rossijskoj komercii pri vseh portah i granicah ot drevnih vremjan do nyne nastojashhago i vseh preimushhestvennyh uzakonenij po onoj gosudarja imperatora Petra Velikago i nyne blagopoluchno carstvujushhej gosudaryni imperatricy Ekateriny Velikija, sochinennoe Mihajlom Chulkovym*. St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, p. 416.

merchants. But once again – the merchant who managed to sell one barrel of blubber profitably did much better than the one who sold hundreds of barrels with loss. The right way of research is to evaluate the profitability. That's the only way to get understanding of the result of governmental efforts to reorganize the system of Russian marine harvesting.

Analyzing the dynamics of the blubber trade we should remember that the story consists of the interactions between several groups of human and non-human actors. The blubber production is one of the most impressive examples of what John Richards has marked as “the World Hunt”. From the environmental point of view the blubber production meant commodification of the increasing variety of species of marine mammals, and this “massive living biomass ... was a resource free for the taking”.⁶² In other words, the resource was common and nobody was interested in control or protection. For us it means that the resource base of blubber production in the 18th c. was by far more poor than in the previous period. L. Hacquebord has evaluated the Greenland whale population on Spitsbergen before the commercial whaling started as approximately 46000 whales and the 17th c. hunt was rather destructive for these marine mammals. In the second half of the 17th c., when the climate and the ice patterns led to the high concentration of whales in Spitsbergen waters, in some years the whalers used to kill more than 2000 animals during the season. However, about 1715 the ice conditions have changed and the remaining whales have escaped from the most explorative hunting zones “and the success of the whaling at Spitsbergen decreased dramatically”.⁶³ In other words, the Russian whalers have appeared in Spitsbergen waters a bit too late.

The seasonality was also important from the economic point of view. The European whalers departed in spring and returned home in autumn. This hunt requires significant investments (big ships, relatively complicated instruments, numerous and well-trained crew).⁶⁴ The Russians used two methods of blubber harvesting. The easiest way was to kill seals on the ice of the White Sea from February to April during the spring migration. This hunt required minimum investments and attracted annually up to several thousands of the Pomors. The walrus hunters were much less numerous group of blubber producers who departed in summer and spent more than a year in the distant hunting grounds like Spitsbergen and Novaya Zemlya. These expeditions have required much bigger investments and no wonder that the hunters have normally used many of available natural resources to make their expeditions profitable.⁶⁵ The result of efforts, however, was the same from the market point of view. The train oil from the

⁶² Richards J. F. 2014, *The World Hunt. An Environmental History of the Commodification of Animals*, University of California Press, p. 147.

⁶³ Hacquebord L., 1999, “The hunting of the Greenland right whale in Svalbard, interaction with climate and its impact on the marine ecosystem”, *Polar Research*, 18(2), pp. 378 - 379.

⁶⁴ See for details Schokkenbroek Joost C.A., 2008, *Trying Out: An Anatomy of Dutch Whaling and Sealing in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1885*, Aksant Academic Publishers, p. 27 – 29.

⁶⁵ RGADA, coll. 1261. Inv. 6. F. 67. P. 66 back – 67.

whale fat has no significant difference from the same commodity got from the fat of walrus or seal. The whalers used to kill walruses if there were no whales around.⁶⁶ The Russian walrus hunters also did not hesitate to take the whale products if they were available. For example on December 28, 1722, Lazar Fedorov, the servant of Stephan Ivanov Lopukhin, sold in Kola 12 poods (about 200 kg.) of whalebones “stranded by the sea”.⁶⁷ These products were obviously obtained from the dead whales found on the shore, not from the whales killed by the hunters. One very important thing is to be stressed here. Not all the killed animals eventually became commodities – some of them were just lost. For whaling the percentage of the lost animals was up to 20.⁶⁸ For the Russians the percentage is unknown, however, it could be rather high considering the technology of walrus hunting based on the massacre of the animals. When the Pomors have managed to kill hundreds of walruses – they obviously had no technical opportunity to take all the blubber – the capacity of the barrels and the ship was limited.⁶⁹ Therefore the number of killed animals as such is not enough for the understanding of economic importance of the blubber industry. On the other hand, the quantity of blubber on the market does not reflect the total number of the killed animals.

The Archangelsk blubber market in general had two peaks of turnovers – in the mid 1720s and mid 1750s. The question is, however, how these numbers looked on the international level? To get some impression we will compare the dynamics of the blubber market in Archangelsk with the catches of the German whalers on Spitsbergen. To get the general trends we will compare the average catches for decades in quarters (the Russian barrel was considered as one half of the Dutch kwarteeel – the quarter).

⁶⁶ See for details Richards J. F. 2014, *The World Hunt. An Environmental History of the Commodification of Animals*, University of California Press, pp. 145 – 146.

⁶⁷ RGADA, coll. 273, inv. 1, f. 32771, p. 47

⁶⁸ Hacquebord L., 1999, “The hunting of the Greenland right whale in Svalbard, interaction with climate and its impact on the marine ecosystem”, *Polar Research*, 18(2), p. 379

⁶⁹ See for details Kraikovski A. V., 2012, “Productivity and Profitability of Russian Spitsbergen Hunting in the Late 18th Century”, *LASHIPA. History of Large Scale Resource Exploitation in Polar Areas, Circumpolar Studies* 8, pp. 27 – 29.

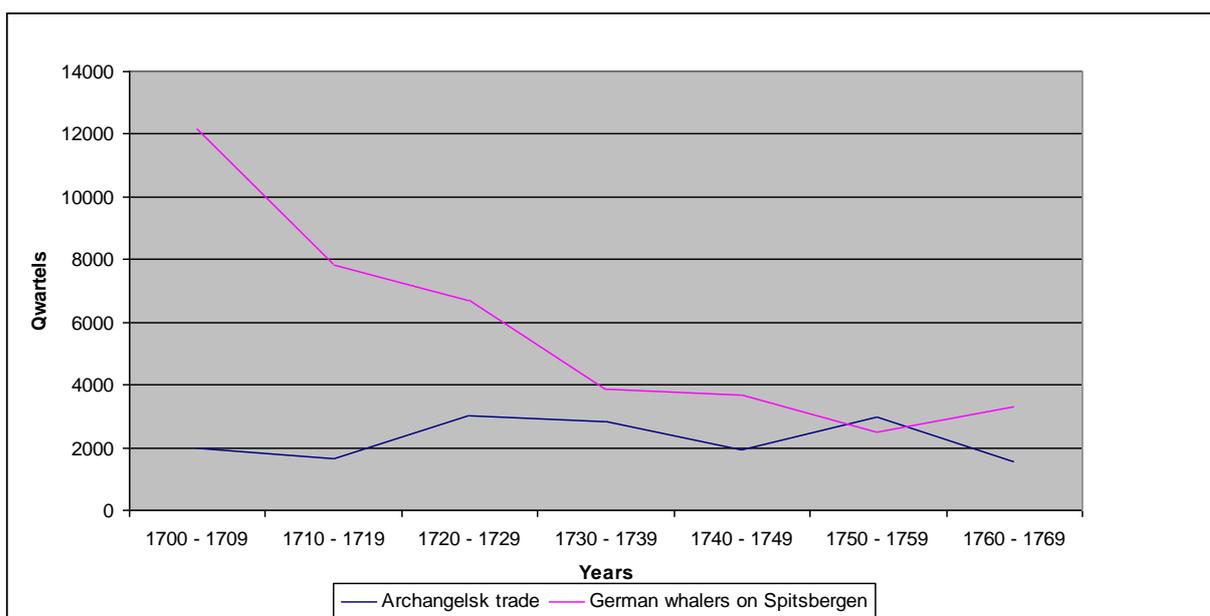


Figure 1 The blubber market in Archangelsk and the German whaling on Spitsbergen⁷⁰, average on decades, 1700 – 1769.

As it can be seen on the graph, the total turnovers of Archangelsk market were relatively stable while the German whaling production had clear trend for decrease and in 1730s – 1760s the blubber market of the Russian North was quite compatible to the German whaling in absolute numbers. The total profit could reach 13 – 15 thousands rubles and theoretically this was enough to cover whaling operation expenses described above. However, our question here is the price. The monopolistic companies used their position to get the markup at the level of 40 to 50%. In other words, every ruble spent for purchase of blubber earned up to 2 rubles on the market. No wonder that this commerce has attracted attention from the high level officials and aristocrats. Noticeably, 1725, when the blubber market was free, is an evident exception when both purchase and sell price decreased and the markup was on the level of 15%. Therefore, Petr Shafirov has been absolutely right when he reported that the free market for blubber was the direct way to low prices.⁷¹

It is interesting, however, to compare the dynamics of blubber prices in Archangelsk with that in Europe. The main idea of the monopoly as it was described by the company owners and projectors was to get more money from the foreign merchants, i.e. to make them to share with the Russians their profit they could get selling the Russian blubber on the European market. The most evident way to study the result of monopoly is to compare the prices that existed in Russia with the prices of train oil on the Amsterdam exchange. Considering the trade technologies we

⁷⁰ Calculated on the base of the data from Richards J. F. 2014, *The World Hunt. An Environmental History of the Commodification of Animals*, University of California Press, pp. 152 – 153.

⁷¹ RGADA, coll. 198, inv. 1, f. 1035, f. 56.

should compare the prices existed on the summer fair in Archangelsk with the prices of the autumn or of the next year. Additionally we have to take into consideration the fact that the Russian standard barrel was one half of the Dutch one, and the ratio between ruble and guilder was approximately 2,7 guilders for 1 rub. Therefore, to make the prices comparable we should multiple the Russian price indicated in rub. per barrel for 5,4. The results of these calculations are presented in the table.

Table 2. Fat prices in Archangelsk and Amsterdam in 18th c.

Year	Archangelsk price, rub. Per barrel	Archangelsk , guilders per quarter.	Amsterdam , guilder per quarter, max.	Amsterdam , min
1709	5	27	88	68,5
1727	3,75	20,25	46,75	46,75
1742	5	27	79	53
1743	5,5	29,7	45	43,13
1744	5,65	30,51	35,25	34,13
1745	4,8	25,92	35,25	33,5
1746	4,85	26,19	35	33,5
1747	4,4	23,76	49,5	35
1748	5,13	27,702	67,75	47,25

Sources: The table is based on the calculations from GRADA, coll. 1261, and from the online database of prices collected by N. Posthumus (http://www2.scc.rutgers.edu/memdb/search_form_postpr.php).

The data is too scarce to discuss any connections or even dependence between the prices on the blubber markets of Archangelsk and Amsterdam. What is notable, however, is the strong fluctuations of prices in Amsterdam, even during one year the minimum and maximum prices could be rather far from each other. The monopolistic companies in Russia on the contrary managed to keep prices relatively stable. While the blubber prices in Amsterdam have decreased in the middle of 1740s, they were relatively high in Russia, decreasing significantly the possible profit for the foreigners. This was the time of state monopoly when the governmental blubber company managed to earn almost two rubles from each one ruble invested. In other words, every barrel brought to the treasury 7 guilders of pure profit while the foreign merchants could earn about 5. At the same time in the period of high prices in Amsterdam the foreigners could perhaps get much bigger profits than Russians. The most important conclusion, however, is the fact that the possibility to manipulate with the prices has guaranteed the monopolists some profit

disregarding the situation on the international blubber market – and this was not the case for the whalers. For instance between 1720 and 1729 the Dutch whalers have killed in the waters between Greenland and Spitsbergen in total 12720 whales, and in the next decade only 11259 whales. At the same time more productive period brought them loss, and the less productive decade was quite profitable.⁷²

The structure of expenses also deserves some attention. The operational expenses were quite impressive and, according to the report, growing from year to year (633 rub. in 1725, 15792 rub. in 1727).⁷³ In this situation the blubber commerce was the major instrument to cover expenses. However, as we can see, the money invested into the whaling (about 100000 rub.) for 3 years brought products for 5139 rub. At the same time the resell of the goods purchased from the hunters was perhaps the most successful part of the commercial operations. To sum up, the whaling turned out to be unprofitable. The operation expenses were much higher than the profitability and the loss was quite impressive. However, it is important to remember that the decade between 1720 and 1729 was quite problematic for the European whaling as well. The Dutch whalers in this period have operated with annual loss of more than 2000 guilders per ship.⁷⁴ Therefore, the Russian whalers have just followed the general European trend. Be that as it may, Russians have got clear understanding of the fact that the whaling investments will be lost while the profitable blubber commerce could be organized on the market as mediating between the sealers and walrus hunters on the one side and the foreign merchants on the other. Moreover, this system brings reliable profits even without costly attempts to take part in the international commerce taking place in the major European centers.

Conclusion

To sum up, the local management practices of the blubber monopolies started as rather complex activities including organization of distant expeditions. The Russian hunting on Spitsbergen definitely has got significant push from the Menshikov company. The Kola Whaling Company and the State Blubber company in this perspective look like an attempt to separate the blubber commerce, which is the control over the existing industry and market, from the development of whaling. Finally the blubber company management has concentrated purely on the financial issues and the idea of development of some new industry became just part of rhetoric.

⁷² de Vries J. & van der Woude A., 1997, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*, Cambridge University Press, p. 261,

⁷³ Chulkov M. D., 1782, *Istoricheskoe opisanie rossijskoj kommercii pri vseh portah i granicah ot drevnih vremjan do nyne nastojashago i vseh preimushhestvennyh uzakonenij po onoj gosudarja imperatora Petra Velikago i nyne blagopoluchno carstvujushhej gosudaryni imperatricy Ekateriny Velikija, sochinennoe Mihajlom Chulkovym*. St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, p. 404.

⁷⁴ de Vries J. & van der Woude A., 1997, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*, Cambridge University Press, p. 261,

However the companies still used to play certain modernization role due to the introduction of the modern business practices, at least in the sphere of financial accounting. Being part of governmental Europeanization, the companies have significantly increased the area of application of written documentation. Working hand by hand with the state and being to some extent included into the governmental administration, the companies provided some kind of connection between the “big policy” of the metropolitan center and the local economic practices.

The government for sure had to pay attention to the reasons of the repeating unsuccessful attempts of whaling development. For instance in 1729 assessing the results achieved by Kola Whaling Company the College of Commerce concluded that the development of whaling requires private investments, well-prepared management and so to say “russification” of the industry in order to get rid of dishonest and negligent foreigners.⁷⁵ However the best analysis of the perspectives of the Russian whaling development was proposed by the merchants of Archangelsk on May 16, 1800 as a response for the request from St. Petersburg. Now we should go deeper into the arguments the members of Archangelsk City Council (Gorodskaja Duma) Yakov Nikonov, Alexandr Fomin with the colleagues have provided in order to support their main thesis that Russians would become very successful whalers if it would be profitable.⁷⁶

The merchants were absolutely right when they stressed that considering the geographic position of the Russian ports of Archangelsk and Kola as some kind of next-door harbors in relation to Spitsbergen and other whaling areas, the Russian Government was in illusions. The Russian harbors and transportation routes were ice-covered in the most important part of the whaling season, in the early spring, when the European whalers have left their havens free of the ice all year round. Norwegians, the Russian merchants pointed out, were living even closer to Spitsbergen but did not take part in the whaling because of the same reasons.

The severe climate and ice regime as the major environmental characteristics of the Russian North have determined far-reaching economic and social consequences. The Russian North had very low level of urbanization and very unsatisfactory population density. The whaling, according to the merchants, needed a lot of working hands and well-developed urban infrastructure which was definitely not the case neither in Kola, nor in Archangelsk. Additionally the big population requires a lot of provision, and the region is not suitable for agriculture. The authors even permitted themselves to note ironically that the government has to find the way to settle people in the Arctic and feed them without bread, and this would be quite a good way to provide the success of whaling projects. Until that moment the highly qualified marine mammals

⁷⁵ Chulkov M. D., 1782, *Istoricheskoe opisanie rossijskoj kommercii pri vseh portah i granicah ot drevnih vremjan do nyne nastojashhago i vseh preimushhestvennyh uzakonenij po onoj gosudarja imperatora Petra Velikago i nyne blagopoluchno carstvujushhej gosudaryni imperatricy Ekateriny Velikija, sochinennoe Mihajlom Chulkovym*. St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, pp. 413 - 418

⁷⁶ Russian State Historical Archives (hereafter RGIA), coll. 1285, inv. 2, f. 79, pp. 43 – 46.

hunters and fishermen had enough possibilities to live without participation in the whaling. This note obviously referred to the tragic experience of social degradation that took place in the late 1720s when the Kola whaling company has broken lives of the involved soldiers of Archangelsk garrison. The social memory was rather long-lasting. Noticeably, in 1800 two Archangelsk merchants, Kuzma and Afanasii Amosov, disagreed with the colleagues and prepared the project of whaling company. They proposed to make the whalers to settle on Spitsbergen in fact permanently considering the intention to return home after a year spent in the Arctic as useless waste of time.⁷⁷ The members of the city council obviously did not believe it to be possible to recruit the hunters for such a cruel inhuman exploitation.

The next consequence of the climatic and ice conditions was the inappropriate rate of capital turnover. The European whalers have invested money in winter – early spring and got them back in autumn, when the vessels have returned to the harbor of Amsterdam. The merchants of the Russian North had to invest money in winter and only could hope to get them back in the next autumn, as the Russian whalers could only leave their harbors rather late in May or even in June. So, they had to spend the winter on Spitsbergen and could only return with the haul onboard in the end of the next summer. It is necessary to note here that some merchants still have obviously tried to organize expeditions of that kind. This can be deduced from the description of the Russian hunting team on Spitsbergen written by the Swedish doctor S. Bacstrom in 1790. According to the document, he has visited the Arctic archipelago onboard of the British whaling ship in 1780 and took the chance to visit the Russian hunting station situated not far from Smeerenburg. Russians have reported that “some associated merchants in Archangel fit out... a vessel every year, of about one hundred tons” with the expedition onboard. The team had to spend one year in the colony before it will be replaced. During the year they hunt for various marine and terrestrial animals including the black whales.⁷⁸

The merchants have also paid special attention to the mechanism of financial security. The whaling required a lot of investments and in Europe, according to the members of Archangelsk city council, the investors were protected through the insurance system while in Russia the insurance of investments did not exist. In general, the merchants concluded, they could see no profit in the whaling projects neither for the private investors, nor for the state.

However, the situation deserves a bit deeper insight. The Commission of Commerce in 1763 had prepared the analytical description of the Russian blubber industry that existed in the North.⁷⁹ Using this document we can point out critical points of comparison between the Russian method

⁷⁷ RGIA, coll. 1285, inv. 2, f. 79, p. 48 – 48 back.

⁷⁸ Bacstrom S., 1810, “Account of a voyage to Spitsbergen in the year 1780 by S. Bacstrom M. D. A”, General Collection Of The Best And Most Interesting Voyages And Travels In All Parts Of The World. Vol. 1., Philadelphia, p. 619.

⁷⁹ RGADA, coll. 1261, inv. 6, f. 67, pp. 66 back – 67.

of getting blubber from walrus and seals and the European whaling. First of all, the striking difference is evident in the use of the natural resource. The key word for the whalers seems to be “concentration”. A lot of money concentrated in the companies were invested into the big and complicated vessels. A lot of people concentrated onboard were looking for the chance to find a lot of blubber concentrated in one huge animal. The whales themselves were also concentrated in the certain part of the Ocean. There can be no doubts that the European whalers in absolute numbers produced infinitely more blubber than the Russian sealers and walrus hunters. However, because of high investments and price fluctuations this industry can be considered as some kind of lottery. In the period between 1660s and 1800s the Dutch whalers had 62 years with profits and 64 years with losses.⁸⁰ Additionally this concentration led eventually to the decrease and even extinction of the whales themselves.⁸¹ The development of capital insurance in the Netherlands, so important for the merchants of Archangelsk according to the report cited above, developed in the 18th c. as a reaction of the market on the decrease of the whale numbers and consequently the whaling productivity.⁸² In the 18th c. “the whale fishery managed to keep afloat not so much because of the profitability of the fishery itself (as it eventually proved unprofitable at all), but because trade or barter with Inuit in the Davis strait turned out to be more lucrative”.⁸³

The Russian blubber industry on the contrary can be described as decentralized as much as possible. The Pomor hunters preferred to organize small hunting teams moving and acting independently on the vast territories. The required investments were rather small. In 1763 the College of Commerce had (though quite optimistically) assessed the expenses for the hunting expedition to Spitsbergen or Novaya Zemlya as 70 to 80 rub.⁸⁴, while in the Netherlands the whaling ship in that period has required on average about 14000 guilders which was equal to approximately 5000 rub.⁸⁵ From the environmental point of view Russians did not rely on the resources of one population of marine mammals but on the contrary tried to explore as many populations and species as possible. As a result the Russian blubber industry has never been compatible to the Dutch whaling in terms of absolute numbers (though, as it was demonstrated above, in 1740s could be quite successfully compared to the German whaling). Instead, Russians have demonstrated quite impressive stability. Of course, every individual expedition could be

⁸⁰ de Vries J. & van der Woude A., 1997, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*, Cambridge University Press, p. 261.

⁸¹ See for details Hacquebord, L., 2001, "Three Centuries of Whaling and Walrus Hunting in Svalbard and its Impact on the Arctic Ecosystem." *Environment and History* 7, no. 2, "Beyond Local, Natural Ecosystems" special issue (May), pp. 169–185.

⁸² See Spooner F. C., 1983, *Risks at Sea: Amsterdam Insurance and Maritime Europe, 1766–1780*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 145 – 146.

⁸³ Schokkenbroek Joost C.A., 2008, *Trying Out: An Anatomy of Dutch Whaling and Sealing in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1885*, Aksant Academic Publishers, p. 39 – 40.

⁸⁴ RGADA, coll. 1261, inv. 6, f. 67, p. 67.

⁸⁵ de Vries J. & van der Woude A., 1997, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*, Cambridge University Press, p. 261.

unsuccessful and moreover – the vessel and the people could be lost. However, the wide geographical scope and flexibility in terms of harvested resources were definitely the advantage of the Pomors making the blubber supply relatively small but stable. At the same time the Dutch Spitsbergen whaling has demonstrated clear tendency to decline.⁸⁶

To sum up, the project of whaling development was undoubtedly an integral part of the Europeanization of Russia. The new European power, completely transformed by the grandiose reforms, required the new system of marine resource exploitation. The new understanding of oceanic environment as superabundant and available for the technologically advanced society naturally led to the idea of the new industry – equipped with advanced technologies and maintained by the new people. The Pomor peasants were to become the real whalers with their newly obtained uniforms and skills. The monopolistic companies had to provide finances for this transformation taking more money from the pockets of the foreign merchants. Eventually the new industry had to overcome the purely export-oriented paradigm of development and to become inevitable part of the new economy and everyday life on the all-Russia level. For instance in 1715 Peter the Great has ordered to reorganize completely the shoe making industry in Russia. The local administrations have got the order to send the selected shoemakers to Moscow to be trained by the expert from Revel (nowadays Tallinn, Estonia) to treat the leather with blubber.⁸⁷ Therefore the European technologies had to support each other and the result of whaling expeditions to the distant Arctic had eventually to become part of everyday life of all the population of Russia (at least of those able to afford the leather shoes).

The practice, however, turned out to be far more complicated. The projectors and the governmental officials had to face the unexpected situation. Neither the old system was that bad, nor were the people ready to leave it for the new perspectives. The interrelations between the Northern environment and the local people turned out to be too strong. It was possible to use these links profitably as this was the goal the Pomors could understand. However, they were not ready for chasing illusions in turn for irrational hope to become the real Europeans.

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⁸⁶ de Vries J. & van der Woude A., 1997, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*, Cambridge University Press, p. 261

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