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Excerpts from Land Separation Books as Title Deeds for Hereditary Estates, Fisheries and Meadows: The 17th Century Materials from the Tikhvin Assumption Monastery Archive

Abstract

During the 17th century, the archives of the Tikhvin Assumption Monastery accumulated documents testifying to the monastery’s acquisition of rights to votchinas (hereditary landed

estate) and ugodia (collective name for fisheries, meadows, etc.). Among these documents there are excerpts from land separation books (otvodnye knigi). In order to determine the significance of such excerpts as title deeds, the article examines situations requiring their receipt, and sequence of actions of the patrimonials and authorities. It is generally accepted that grant deeds were basic document confirming monasteries' rights to votchinas and ugodia. The Tikhvin Assumption Monastery received its last grant deed in 1621. However, in the following years, the Monastery was granted new votchinas and ugodia, which also required title perfection. And yet thereafter all grants were issued without drafting grant deeds. The article considers four situations that demanded separation of land: proving rights to old landholdings; acquiring new votchinas on the basis of grant deeds; proving rights to ugodia recorded in census records, but not in grant deeds; acquiring new votchinas and ugodia on the basis of decree without grant deed. The study of the archival documents has made it possible to reveal how rights to votchinas and ugodia were established in the 17th century without issuance of grant deeds. First, the monastic authorities filed a petition in Moscow and received a decree ordering the authorities of Veliky Novgorod to separate the land. Upon receiving such order from Novgorod, a local official performed separation of land according to an excerpt from cadastral register and compiled a land separation book. In order obtain an excerpt from the land separation book, the procedure was to be repeated. In the case of disputes or legal proceedings with outside parties – landholders (pomeshchiki) or court peasants (dvortsovye) – a new land separation book for the successful party was to be drawn. Sometimes several years could pass between land separation and obtaining an excerpt from the land separation book. The monastic authorities did not seek to receive it immediately and, probably, did not have a clear idea of the need for such an action. The available data allows the author to conclude that excerpts from land separation books may have been main document proving ownership of votchinas and ugodia, but were usually obtained in case of land disputes. However, to decide a case, other documents reflecting the history of the grant were required: excerpts from cadastral registers and survey books, originals or copies of decrees, and command letters.

Keywords

Historical sources, demarcation, cadastral activities, grant deeds, cadasters, rights to votchinas and ugodia in the 17th century Russia, documents of the Russian monasteries of the 17th century, land separation books, Tikhvin Assumption Monastery.

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