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Sea Vessels of the Onega Cross Monastery in 1657–60

Abstract

The recent years have seen a growing scholars' interest in the Russian North exploration, sea expeditions of the 16th–20th centuries, and fishing industry and maritime culture of the Pomor Russians. Northern monasteries, which owned salt and fishing industries along the shores of the White Sea, played an important role in the exploration of the North and in the development of traditional Russian shipbuilding and navigation. Thus, the Solovetsky Monastery had its own fleet in the 16th – 17th centuries. Unlike the Solovetsky Monastery's fleet, ship economy of other Northern monasteries remains fragmentarily studied. The article analyzes first steps of the Onega Cross Monastery in creation of its own fleet: types of vessels, methods of their acquisition. The main sources are Transfer book (otvodnaya kniga) of the Onega Cross Monastery (1657) and account books for February 1657 – March 1661, stored in the fond of the Onega Cross Monastery in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA). While the Transfer Book (i.e. inventory of the monastic property) recorded presence or absence of ships in a certain year, the account books traced their movement. The monastery's account books are a valuable source on the history of its ship economy, containing various data on the monastery's vessels: they record ships purchase and fitting-out, construction orders, and sales; names of artisans and of sellers or buyers; hire and lease of ships; their repair; hiring of the so-called "Boat Cossacks" (hired workers) and captains; captains' names. The study is based on historical-genetic method. It shows that the monastery bought sea vessels from its very founding. The earliest mention of a sea vessel (karbass) purchase is recorded in the monastery's account book and dated May 1657. In 1657–60, the monastery used karbasses and boats (pavozkas) for shallow water deliveries. The monastery yearly ordered construction of several vessels of each type or bought them; names of sellers or craftsmen were indicated. All of them were residents of villages on the Onega. The monastery also sold several ships.

Keywords

Historical sources, Onega Cross Monastery, Solovetsky Monastery, account books, traditional wooden shipbuilding, Boat Cossacks, lodia, karbass, pavozka, anchor, sail.

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