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## KARAMZIN AND MONEY<sup>1</sup>

This article deals with the treatment of money in Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*. Our approach combines biographical research with new insights into the text in an effort to shed light on the notorious matter of the source of Karamzin's funding during his foreign travel in 1789-1790, and to understand his attitude to monetary transactions as it is revealed in the travelogue. This, in turn, allows us to deal with the contested issue of Karamzin's status as a "literary professional." These matters have been discussed on a number of occasions (Kliuchkin, Klein, Panofsky, to mention only most recent publications).<sup>2</sup> Existing studies, however, have avoided analyzing numbers and performing calculations, even if most of the questions they posed could not be convincingly resolved without recourse to quantifiable data. Needless to say, the information available to us is not exhaustive, and in many cases, we have to rely on estimates, conjectures and approximations. However, even this level of precision affords us a more complete understanding of many important aspects of Karamzin's biography and literary position, as well as the development of his economic thought.

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2. Konstantin Kliuchkin, "Sentimental'naia kommertsii: 'Pis'ma Russkovo puteshetvennika' N.M. Karamzina ["Sentimental Commerce: "Karamzin's Letters of a Russian Traveler"]," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 25 (1997): 84-99; Ioakhim Klein, "Mezhd Apollonom i Fortunoi: Karamzin-pisatel' v sociologicheskoi perspektive ["Between Apollo and Fortuna: Karamzin as a Writer in Sociological Perspective]," *Miscellanea Slavica*, 186-200 (M.: Indrik, 2008), Gerda Panofsky-Sörgel, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin in Germany: Fiction as Facts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010).

## 1

The first person who explicitly expressed his interest in the sources of funding for Karamzin's travel abroad was the Moscow governor-general Prince Aleksandr Prozorovskii, who was gathering incriminating information about free masons and the activities of the Friendly Learned Society they established in Moscow. In February 1791, Ivan Lopukhin, one of the leaders of the Rosicrucian order, wrote to his friend Aleksei Kutuzov, who was studying higher Masonic wisdom in Berlin, that Prozorovskii falsely believed that "Karamzin was Novikov's pupil, and had been sent abroad at his expense." Lopukhin claimed in this letter that "no one tried harder to dissuade Karamzin from this futile and fiscally ruinous voyage more than Novikov and his friends."<sup>3</sup>

Lopukhin was aware that his letters were intercepted by the secret police and it is possible that he was not being entirely candid. Both he and his addressee knew that Karamzin was in fact Novikov's pupil and belonged to the order at least until his departure from Russia. No wonder that these refutations did not convince Prozorovskii. After Novikov's arrest in April 1792, it fell to him to interrogate other suspects using a questionnaire compiled by the empress herself. The list did not include Karamzin; nevertheless, Prozorovskii put the question about Karamzin to Nikolai Trubetskoi. Trubetskoi assured Prozorovskii that Karamzin's travel was self-funded. Prozorovskii then dropped this line of investigation, even though Lopukhin and Ivan Turgenev, whom he interrogated later, were significantly closer to Karamzin than Trubetskoi.

Several memoirists had asked Karamzin the same question. His responses were inconsistent. Fedor Glinka recalled that Karamzin told him that he spent part of the per diem money given to him by the Friendly Learned Society on books.<sup>4</sup> However, Mikhail Pogodin wrote that Karamzin used for his journey 1,800 rubles he took as an advance to be repaid with future income from his estate. Pogodin did not identify the source of this evidence, but it is likely that he relied on the account of Karamzin's pre-departure arrangements with the Moscow free masons supplied by Nikolai Grech.<sup>5</sup> We have no compelling reasons to suspect two trustworthy memoirists sympathetic to Karamzin of inventing details. And Karamzin himself was not inclined to lies, as far as we know, but was a great master of cautious half-truths and strategic ambiguities. In our opinion, any plausible reconstruction has to take into account all available evidence, and to attempt to reconcile it whenever possible.

3. Ia.L. Barskov, *Perepiska moskovskikh masonov XVIII veka* ["The Correspondence of Moscow XVIII century Free-masons"] (Petrograd, 1915), 89.

4. G.P. Shtorm, "Novoe o Pushkine i Karamzine ["New Material about Pushkin and Karamzin]," *Izvestiia Akademii Nauk SSSR, Otdelenie literatury i iazyka*, 19, 2 (1960): 144-151.

5. N.P. Pogodin, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin po ego sochineniam, pis'mam i otzyvam sovremennikov* ["Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin according to his Works, Letters and Reminiscences of his contemporaries"] (M., 1866, I), 166, 68-69.

In 2008 Ioakhim Klein wrote that “we do not know, unfortunately, the exact amount of Karamzin’s income from his village, but under the able management of his brother Vasilii the village in any case produced enough income for Karamzin to spend 1,800 rubles on the journey”.<sup>6</sup> Referring to this assessment, Gerda Panofsky noted that “it can be taken for granted that as a member of the gentry Karamzin was in the position to cover travel expenses out of his own pocket,” even if the 1,800 rubles he mentioned to Pogodin did not cover every expense during his trip.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, we don’t have to take anything for granted. We can obtain estimates of both the cost of his travel and the amount of money he could collect from his land and his peasants from the information that is already available.

Karamzin enjoyed writing about money. In *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, he mentions it more than two hundred times, i.e. approximately on every other page of the book. In the last entry, he lists the “treasures” he brought home from his journey and mentions his financial accounts immediately after the notes he made en route and before all other memorabilia.<sup>8</sup> Monetary transactions served for him as the best traces of the impressions he made, and the emotions he experienced, during his voyage.<sup>9</sup> Karamzin also meant his book to become a sort of Baedeker for future Russian travelers, and provided them not only with the companion to memorable literary places of Europe, but also with practical guidance about the costs.<sup>10</sup> The prices (except, for some reason, during the English part of the journey) are indicated both in rubles and in local currencies, so that the reader could acquire basic knowledge of exchange rates. Below we offer a table of expenditures explicitly mentioned in the text and calculated in rubles.

Of course, some of these expenses are recorded more regularly than others, but overall it is possible to estimate the total amounts by extrapolating from the declared costs. The traveler’s precise itinerary and the number of days he stayed in different places make it easy to estimate the remaining figures. Unsurprisingly for a travelogue, *Letters* include very detailed references to transportation, food and lodging expenses. Karamzin includes around 65% of his expenses for meals, around 80% of transportation costs and nearly all lodging charges. We can calculate that Karamzin had to pay about 400 rubles for carriages, around 450 rubles for meals and around 130 rubles for lodging. Karamzin also mentions 350 rubles he spent sightseeing the countryside around Geneva and Zurich during the Swiss part of the trip. As in other cases, the actual cost of such voyages could be marginally bigger. These basic needs of a traveler, then, amounted to 1,500 – 1,600 rubles.

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6. Klein, “Mezhdu Apollonom i Fortunoi...,” 195.

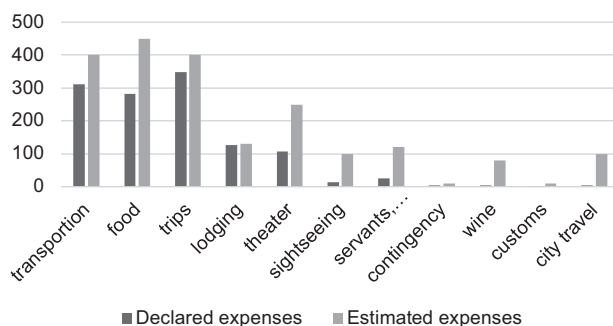
7. Panofsky-Sörgel, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin in Germany*, 65.

8. N.M. Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveller* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2003), 456.

9. See: Kliuchkin, “Sentimental’naia kommertsia...”

10. See: Jean Breuillard, “Karamzin et la France,” *Slovo*, 16 (1995-96): 65-95.

**Chart 1: Karamzin's expenses during the trip in rubles**  
(for more detailed information see Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix)



Other expenses are recorded in a less systematic way, and can be reconstructed only approximately. For example, whenever he stayed in a city, Karamzin hired servants. He says that in Berlin and Paris he had to pay them half a ruble per day.<sup>11</sup> If we assume that in smaller cities servants were cheaper and that he employed them for half of his journey, hired help costs would add up to over a hundred rubles. Similarly, the traveler drinks substantial amount of coffee and wine that it is not included in his food-expenses calculations. Coffee can add a few dozen rubles to the total sum, since the price of a cup that he mentions only once in the travelogue amounted to 15 kopecks. The cost of wine was significantly higher. For sanitary reasons, drinking wine during travels was a necessity rather than a luxury. Karamzin consumed wine at the very least at a rate of half a bottle per day. Since the price of a bottle varied widely in different countries, it is impossible to calculate a precise total. However, even if we assume the cheap average of 40 kopecks per bottle, the sum would come close to a hundred rubles. He could also have drunk beer, which he did not mention, apart from during the time of his stay in England, the reason of silence is probably connected to social representations; though he is not shy of mentioning drinking “bavaroise,” a fashionable, yet cheap beverage, presented by some contemporary authors as a substitute to a meal for people with moderate means.<sup>12</sup>

Karamzin also wrote that Paris was so dirty that one had to use a carriage or fiacre to travel around it. Traveling around the city appears to be a daily expense in Paris (as well as Berlin and London), but the price of a ride could vary from

11. N.M. Karamzin, *Pis'ma Russkogo puteshestvennika* [Letters of a Russian Traveller] (L.: Nauka, 1984), 48.

12. See: Rodolphe Baudin, “Portrait du Voyageur en mangeur sensible: nourriture et pratique de consommation dans les parties allemande et suisse des *Lettres d'un voyageur russe*,” in Rodolphe Baudin, ed., *Manger russe* (P. : Institut d'Études slaves (*La Revue russe*, 44), 2015), 39-64. Idem, “Shaping National Identities and Politics: French and British Foodways in Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*,” in E. Waegemans, H. van Koningsbrugge, M. Levitt, M. Ljustrov, eds., *A Century Mad and Wise, Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Groningen, 2015), 79-91.

fifty kopeks to four rubles per trip, so the range of possible expenses is wide. They should in any case add up to a substantial draw on the traveler's budget. By a conservative estimate, the subtotal for just these costs amounts to over more than three hundred rubles.

As we can judge from the *Letters*, Karamzin was an avid theatregoer. In Paris, he seems to visit theatres daily, and we have accounts of him attending performances in Berlin, Frankfurt, Strasbourg, London and other places. The price of a ticket in Paris varied from two to three rubles; in Germany, it might have been cheaper; in London, the traveler paid more than six rubles to listen to Handel's *Messiah* in Westminster Abbey. The sightseeing also had a price of its own – some places required guided tours, others had tickets or entrance fees sometimes amounting to ten rubles. The costs Karamzin mentions directly add up to 35 rubles but should have been significantly higher, and the overall cost of consuming products of high culture was over two hundred rubles (again, a conservative estimate).

The traveler also had to deal with regular expenses, the price of which is disclosed only occasionally. We know, for example, that he paid more than six rubles to the barber in London where he stayed for approximately four weeks. English barbers could get expensive. Karamzin specifically mentions that the Parisian were cheaper, but he needed this service performed on nearly every day of his journey. Likewise, one bath he took in Paris cost fifty kopecks, and another, "Russian" bath, was worth two rubles. We do not know how often he visited bathhouses and how much he paid, but this was undoubtedly another regular necessity. Small and unexpected expenses also arose all the time: the traveler had to pay customs duty and bribe customs officers; he paid fines to gatekeepers in cities, gave alms to the beggars, and bought lemonade and ice cream in coffeehouses.

All these types of expenses are discussed in the text, but there were others, which he did not mention at all. Karamzin avoided speaking about personal acquisitions that lacked practical significance for potential readers. For example, he says nothing about buying books except for acquiring two of Lavater's manuscripts from the author.<sup>13</sup> Even without Glinka's testimony there would be little doubt that a passionate bibliophile such as Karamzin would make the most of such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to enrich his library. In several episodes of his *Letters*, the traveler portrays himself seeking out locations that had special significance for a literature lover, and visiting them with relevant books in his hands or in his pockets. Most likely, he bought them on the spot. It is also inconceivable that Karamzin would travel for more than a year without buying and repairing items of clothing, footwear, underwear, or personal hygiene. He also had to acquire small gifts for the houses he visited during the journey. We will, of course, never be able to figure out all the expenses Karamzin had to make and left unrecorded in the book.

Still, available information allows some provisional and approximate calculations. We can assert that Panofsky was right, and the sum of 1,800 rubles mentioned

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13. He mentioned some other purchases, but without exact prices. Karamzin, *Pis'ma Russkogo puteshestvennika*, 68.

by Pogodin would not have been sufficient. At the same time, the overall cost of the journey was not exorbitant. We estimate that it fell within the range of 2,300 to 2,700 rubles.

## 2

Karamzin's annual income can be reconstructed with a higher level of precision. In March 1795, he sold his estate to his three brothers for 16,000 rubles. In a letter to his friend Ivan Dmitriev, Karamzin confessed that he was unsure whether the decision to sell was a good one.<sup>14</sup> According to Karamzin's subsequent letters to his eldest brother Vasilii, two of the brothers, Vasilii and Alexander, had to pay him 5,500 rubles each for their share of the estate. The remaining 5,000, then, were owed by the third brother, Fedor.

Karamzin suggested that instead of paying the debt outright, brothers could send him 10% of the interest annually, providing him with "certain and carefree income."<sup>15</sup> Otherwise, he was ready to accept payment in full and invest the funds in Moscow. The interest from private borrowers he could have hoped to receive on this investment would constitute the same 10%.<sup>16</sup> Given this huge difference, it is unsurprising that the nobility preferred private banking. The annual income Karamzin planned to receive would be roughly equal to the one he received before the sale from the land and peasants. Traditionally, the cost of the estate was calculated on the basis of an estimate for aggregate income over a ten-year period.<sup>17</sup> Karamzin's income for 1795 should therefore have amounted to about 1,600 rubles, according to his own assessment.

However, if we are trying to reconstruct Karamzin's nominal income in 1789, when he started his journey, we need to discount it using the inflation index for these six years: approximately 14%.<sup>18</sup> That means a net income of approximately 1,400 rubles. Furthermore, from 1769 to 1840, Russia had two different currencies

14. N.M. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu* [Letters to I.I. Dmitriev] (SPb., 1866), 53.

15. V.E. Vatsuro, "Pis'ma N.M. Karamzina k V.M. Karamzinu [Letters of N.M. Karamzin to V.M. Karamzin]," *Russkaia literatura*, 2 (1993): 80-132, here 99.

16. I.A. Bulygin, *Polozhenie krest'ian i tovarnoe proizvodstvo v Rossii, vtoraiia polovina XVIII veka: po materialiam Penzenskoi gubernii* [The Situation of Peasants and Commercial Production in Russia in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century] (M., 1966), 141; the state bank usually paid 4.5% interest on the deposit, PSZ (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* – The Complete Laws of the Russian Empire), I, vol. 22, no 16409, 629] and 5% on credit [PSZ, vol. 22, no 16407, 616] in State Zaemnyi Bank and 6% on credit in the foundling house [PSZ I, vol. 20, no 14241, 21].

17. This assessment principle was used when estates of the nobility were taken into receivership by the state (cf. GARO (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Riazanskoi oblasti – State Archive of the oblast of Riazan') f. 117, op. 16, d. 4, l. 13); it was even used in legislation (cf. PSZ II, vol. 1, no. 432).

18. B.N. Mironov, *Blagosostoianie naseleniia i revoliutsiia v imperskoi Rossii: XVIII - nachalo XX veka* [The Welfare of the Population and Revolution in Imperial Russia] (M., 2012), 416.

with changing exchange rate—silver rubles and assignats (paper rubles). During his travels, Karamzin had to use silver rubles—it was illegal to take assignats abroad, and they could not be converted into foreign currency. At the same time, due to a severe deficit of silver, domestic transactions were usually conducted in paper money (unless specifically stated otherwise).<sup>19</sup> The price of rye, which was the main staple sold on the market, was counted in bronze coins also tied to the value of assignats. While silver ruble was relatively stable, the value of paper money gradually diminished. In 1789, when Karamzin went abroad, one paper ruble was worth 89 silver kopecks, in 1795, when he sold his village, —70.5 kopecks.<sup>20</sup> If we convert 1,400 paper rubles into silver ones at the 1789 rate, we arrive at the sum of 1,250 rubles. We can say with some certainty that Karamzin's income at the time he went abroad was somewhere between 1,250 and 1,350 silver rubles.

We can use another method to verify this calculation. After the division of his father's estate, Karamzin inherited one third of the village Znamenskoe or Karamzino and the entire village Kliuchevka. According to the *Economic Notes* of late eighteenth century, based on the 1796 census, the former village had 243 male serfs ("souls") and the latter 141 serfs. The number of serfs could have increased in seven years since 1789 due to natural population growth, or decreased due to recruit drafts or epidemics, but these changes would not have been substantial. It is easy to calculate that Nikolai owned around 220 male peasants. All the serfs in Karamzin's estates had corvée obligations (*na izdel'e*),<sup>21</sup> and the average income from quitrent in that region was four rubles a year per male serfs in the 1780s and five rubles in the 1790s.<sup>22</sup> Income amounts received by landlords from corvée and quitrent were usually similar and we can extrapolate the available information to Karamzin's estates. This type of extrapolation is traditionally used by economic historians.<sup>23</sup>

If we allow 4.5 rubles of income from one male serf for 1789, the total would amount to 1,000 paper rubles. We should add to it around 100 rubles of annual income from a mill that also belonged to Karamzin, and an unknown sum from renting significant expanse of unpopulated land to peasants who shared half of their profits with their landlord.<sup>24</sup> It would be reasonable to expect that this income

19. B.N. Mironov, *Khlebnye tseny v Rossii za dva stoletia (XVIII - XIX vv)* [Bread Prices in Russia for two Centuries (XVIII-XIX centuries)] (L., 1985), 37.

20. Ibid.

21. RGADA (Rossiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov – Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts), f. 1355, op. 1, d. 932; d. 1425; d. 1427; d. 1876.

22. Arcadius Kahan, "The Costs of 'Westernization' in Russia: The Gentry and the Economy in the Eighteenth Century," *Slavic Review*, 25, 1 (1966): 40-66, here 43.

23. See Arcadius Kahan.

24. Panofsky wrongly suggests that Karamzin had sold his peasants, but not the land (Panofsky-Sörgel, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin in Germany*, 65). The documents registering the ownership of land composed in 1798 and 1812 clearly show that he did not have any share in the family land whatsoever. About a mill (See: RGADA, f. 1355, op. 1, d. 1876, d. 1427, d. 932, d. 1425, *Ekonomicheskie primechaniya* [Economic Notes]). The regime of farming and division of the harvest between a landowner and peasants varied, on the average the landowner got half of the harvest (See: RGADA, f. 1355, op. 1, d. 1427, l. 43, 44ob, 46-46 ob.)



source constituted between ten and twenty-five percent of the total: less than that would make the sum negligible and the whole enterprise of giving the land in lease unprofitable; a significantly greater amount would put the whole economy of serfdom in doubt. The estimate of Karamzin's annual income arrived at in this way falls between 1,250 and 1,400 silver rubles, which agrees with the earlier estimate.

Of course, all these reconstructions are rough and provisional, often based on average assessments and approximate estimates. However, they allow us to define the income brackets to which Karamzin belonged and to compare it with his financial status abroad. For a non-serving nobleman, living in Moscow, where he could not rely on the produce of his land and services provided by his serfs, was expensive, especially since Karamzin committed to supporting the Pleshcheev family, with whom he had established a closer emotional bond than with his brothers. In 1795, Karamzin wrote to Vasilii asking to send him 2,000 rubles of the debt urgently, so as to enable him to lend money to Alexander Pleshcheev. According to several memoirists, Karamzin never asked for the money back and never received it.<sup>25</sup> Later on, he wrote to Dmitriev that he would be happy to give away everything he had and to work day and night to feed himself if that could help the Pleshcheevs disentangle themselves from their debts.<sup>26</sup> This was not the first such instance. In July 1790 in a letter sent to London, Pleshcheev's wife Anastasiia accused Karamzin of deliberately concealing his address in order to make it impossible for them to send back the borrowed money.<sup>27</sup> We do not know the scope of this loan, but since Karamzin had to take an advance on his future income before leaving Russia, it seems clear that he was unable to save a sufficient amount of money for his journey.

The figure given by Pogodin, then, looks plausible. Karamzin could have had a sum of 1,800 silver rubles at his disposal. To collect it, he would have either had to borrow an amount roughly equal to his income of a year and a half, or—and this seems more likely—to supplement his annual income with several hundred rubles from his savings. Still, according to our calculations, this left him short of something between 600 and 900 rubles. This gap allows us to interpret Glinka's evidence in a way that would not contradict the information given by other memoirists. Karamzin paid roughly between 60 to 75 percent of his expenses out of pocket, but still was in need of a modest subsidy or a loan. He aspired to write a travel guide in the form of a personal travelogue. Since the grand tour of the sort that he attempted was affordable mostly to those whose means were higher than those he had at his disposal, he most likely needed more money for his journey than he was able to invest in it.

It is worth noting that Karamzin actually did not tell Glinka that his travel was funded by the free masons—only that the Friendly Learned Society provided him with a per diem to cover three meals a day. The sum he spent on food during the journey constituted about 450 rubles, and his stay abroad was initially planned for a

25. Vatsuro, "Pis'ma N.M. Karamzina k V.M. Karamzinu," 81.

26. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 79.

27. Barskov, *Perepiska moskovskikh masonov XVIII veka*, 3.



longer period than it actually lasted, so the subsidy he needed could possibly cover exactly this type of expense.

One more detail of Glinka's account is in need of clarification. By the time Karamzin left Russia, the Friendly Learned Society was bankrupt and its leaders were engaged in a series of conflicts with each other verging on outright hostility.<sup>28</sup> The Society, however, continued to send pensioners abroad, mostly at the expense of private benefactors acting on the Society's behalf. Novikov funded the travel of Mikhail Bagrianskii, Lopukhin of Maksim Nevzorov and Vasiliï Kolokol'nikov. If we pursue this line of thinking, the most likely candidate for sponsoring Karamzin would have been Ivan Turgenev. Turgenev came from the same province as Karamzin (Simbirsk), and had served as Karamzin's patron. He had brought the young man from Simbirsk to Moscow and introduced him to the members of the Rosicrucian circle. He was also a long-time correspondent and friend of Lavater's. Karamzin corresponded with Lavater, made plans to pay him a visit from the very beginning of his journey, and saw the Swiss thinker almost daily during his stay in Zurich. With Lavater's help, Karamzin managed to find an appropriate Swiss tutor for Turgenev's elder sons.<sup>29</sup> Later, Karamzin visited Turgenev in his exile in a Simbirsk village.

This type of philanthropy was also characteristic of Turgenev. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Turgenev sponsored Andrei Kaisarov's studies at the University of Göttingen. For understandable reasons, Karamzin could have been reluctant to identify Turgenev by name during the conversation with Glinka, and instead chose to refer to Learned Society as a whole, without distorting the truth too much. He also could have claimed with sincerity that his journey was self-funded, especially since it is conceivable that he did repay the loan upon his return. At the same time, he could take pride in the frugality that allowed him to acquire a library.

### 3

*The Letters of a Russian Traveler* had to serve not only as a book of practical advice. Much more importantly, the author meant it to be a universal manual of attitudes and feelings.<sup>30</sup> In his *Letters*, the narrator speaks about a specific incarnation of the spirit of finance—travel, or road, money. This aspect of the problem is not as trivial as it may at first seem, since it helps explain the special attention Karamzin pays to financial transactions. First of all, the traveler is constantly at risk of facing the problem of the lack of money, which is especially serious when

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28. Ibid.

29. E.K. Rykova, *Tvorchestvo vtorostepennykh pisatelei Ekaterininskoi epokhi: Ivan Petrovich Turgenev, mezhdu klassitsizmom i romantizmom* [The Works of the Second Rate Writers of the Catherinian Epoch: Ivan Petrovich Turgenev, between Classicism and Romanticism] (Ulianovsk, 2007).

30. A.L. Zorin, *Poiavlenie geroiia* [The Emergence of a Hero] (M.: NLO, 2016).

he is away from home. Beyond that, he has to guard the money he takes with him, preserve it as he travels, carry it around, and exchange it for local currencies. The intensity with which Karamzin mentions money fluctuates according to a consistent pattern: for instance, in Switzerland, where he stays in one place for a long period, it falls dramatically.

According to Gerda Panofsky, “whatever funds Karamzin had at his disposal during his journey, he apparently carried the entire amount on his person.”<sup>31</sup> This is, of course, not the case. Apart from obvious safety concerns, carrying around metal coins led to appreciable physical limitations on the amount of money the traveler could take with him—in weight and bulk.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Karamzin explicitly states that in Leipzig he met Mr. Melli, a young Genevan for whom he had had a letter from Petersburg from an English merchant Sh. Mr. Melli promised to the traveler to cash one of his “bills of exchange” and to exchange another one. Karamzin had with him the Dutch promissory note and needed a French one.<sup>33</sup> The traveler had obviously deposited his money in Moscow with an English merchant who opened a credit line for him. Karamzin mentions visiting bankers with the same purpose also in Frankfurt and London. As he speaks about a French “bill of exchange,” it is probable that he used or at least planned to use the same service in Strasbourg or Paris as well.<sup>34</sup>

A perceptive analysis of Karamzin’s attitude to commercial activity has been offered by Konstantin Kliuchkin in his article “Sentimental Commerce.” According to Kliuchkin, Karamzin succeeded in establishing monetary equivalents to the emotions he experienced. This argument is undermined, however, by Kliuchkin’s insistence that Karamzin’s economic thought ought to be linked to mercantilist theory.<sup>35</sup> In fact, Karamzin’s admiration for trade and commerce is in every way the opposite of mercantilism, with its emphasis on protectionist policies that implied that the government has to try to amass huge reserves of gold and silver by encouraging export and discouraging import, to limit consumption through non-tariff barriers and to prohibit the export of precious metals. On the contrary, the economic philosophy of the Russian traveler is significantly closer to the defense of free trade articulated by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*.

In a 1959 introduction to his publication of Karamzin’s “Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia,” Richard Pipes showed that Karamzin’s economic views “were derived from Western liberal economists whose ideas had gained wide currency in

31. Panofsky-Sörgel, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin in Germany*, 66.

32. Karamzin, *Pis'ma Russkogo puteshestvennika*, 396, *et passim*.

33. *Ibid.*, 61.

34. Panofsky refers to Karamzin’s statement that he feared being robbed in Prussia as he had all his riches with him (Panofsky-Sörgel, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin in Germany*, 66), but in that instance Karamzin clearly means all the coins he had to carry until his next visit to the banker. Needless to say, losing bills of exchange in a foreign country would also have been extremely burdensome and costly.

35. Kliuchkin, “Sentimental’naia kommertsiiia...”

Russia under Catherine II.”<sup>36</sup> In 1811, Karamzin made a devastating attack in his “Memoir” on Speransky’s financial policy exactly because it smacked of mercantilism. Faced with ballooning budget deficit and rampant inflation of paper money, Speransky convinced Alexander to proclaim in the manifesto of February 2, 1810, that assignats do not constitute money, but are instead a form of the internal debt of the state.<sup>37</sup> For Karamzin, this reasoning betrayed a complete misunderstanding of the basic principles of finance:

The value of gold itself is far more imaginary than intrinsic. Who would exchange in the winter a warm shirt for gold beads, if the latter were to be valued entirely for their usefulness? But I give up the shirt and accept the beads when I can get along without the shirt and use the beads to purchase a coat. If I can obtain a coat for a piece of paper as well, then the paper and the beads are to me of equal value. Assignats lose in value because they are many, but so does gold and silver.<sup>38</sup>

Karamzin strictly follows here Smith’s line of attack against mercantilists who attached special importance to metal. Like Smith, Karamzin actually prefers paper—a sheet of paper signed by the English merchant in Moscow assigns value to the labor of serfs in the Simbirsk province and converts it into silver coins paid to the rowers carrying the traveler from London to Greenwich. The final part of the *Letters of a Russian Traveler* devoted to England contains a special paean to the power and usefulness of exchange bills:

We look, we look around. We think—and praise the marvelous invention of money that produces so many wonders in the world and offers so many advantages in life. A piece of gold, no, even better: a piece of paper sent from Moscow to London—like some magic talisman give us power over people and things: I have only to wish and my wish is gratified; I say, “Do this” and it is done; everything, it seems, awaits my order.<sup>39</sup>

Different currencies serve not only as magic tools that tie countries together, but also as important manifestations of national cultures. In the digest of the *Letters* included in the article “Lettre au Spectateur sur la littérature russe” published in 1797 in the Hamburg francophone magazine *Le Spectateur du Nord* Karamzin wrote:

J’ai vu les premières nations de l’Europe, leurs mœurs, leurs usages et ces nuances de caractère, qui résultent du climat, des différents degrés de civilisation

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36. Richard Pipes, “The Background and Growth of Karamzin’s Political Ideas Down to 1810,” in N.M. Karamzin, *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia: A Translation and Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, trans. Richard Pipes, 1959), 3–92, here 80.

37. Karamzin, *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, 243.

38. *Ibid.*, 170.

39. Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveller*, 413.

et surtout de la forme du gouvernement ; je l'ai vu et j'ai appris à être plus réservé dans mes jugements sur le mérite et le démerite des peuples entiers.<sup>40</sup>

Europe is conceptualized here as a continuum of national body politics endowed by their own characters, mores and customs formed by geographic, cultural, and political factors. This perception attributed special importance both to the borders between nations and to the act of crossing them.<sup>41</sup> Original national characters that Karamzin valued so much could not exist without cosmopolitan travelers able to move between different countries and to compare them. Currency exchange became the mechanism that made such movement possible.

Karamzin crossed his first cultural border before crossing a political one. Two parts of the same historic town of Narva divided by the river belonged to two different cultural worlds: one was “of German character,” another, “properly called Ivangorod” – of Russian. “Formerly our border used to be here. “O, Peter, Peter!”<sup>42</sup> The narrator’s intonation here is marked by Karamzin’s trademark ambiguity. It is impossible to say whether he admires the genius of Peter who expanded imperial borders, or condemns the annexation of the alien territories that violated the ethno-cultural unity of the body politic. Possibly, he expressed both these emotions at the same time. In Riga, Karamzin observed the mixed character of the city: “Everywhere you go, you hear German, occasionally Russian and everywhere it is thalers and not rubles that are in demand.”<sup>43</sup> Language and currency, in equal measure, make it clear to the traveler what part of the world he actually entered.

This approach to financial transactions could have been at least partially responsible for Karamzin’s philosemitism, so uncharacteristic of the Russian nobles of the period. In the *Letters* he gives a highly unconventional portrait of a Jewish money changer who, apart from French thalers, provides his client with a passionate praise of Mendelssohn, the “Socrates and Plato of our days.” Karamzin also gave a sympathetic account of the financial leverage the Jewish community enjoyed in Frankfurt, where they managed to convince the director of the theatre to drop Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* from the repertoire after the first performance, by threatening him with a boycott of the theatre.

From this perspective, we can see the logic of “exchanging money for emotions and emotions for money,” so exhaustively demonstrated by Konstantin Kliuchkin. Karamzin seems to be one of the very few readers of Adam Smith who succeeded in tracing the connection between Smith’s two major works. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith identifies a universal sympathy among human beings as the source of moral judgment, while in the *Wealth of Nations* he describes the individual quest for profit as the single most powerful engine of general prosperity.

40. Karamzin, *Pis'ma Russkogo puteshestvennika*, 462.

41. Andreas Schönle, *Authenticity and Fiction in the Russian Literary Journey 1800-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 60-61.

42. Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveller*, 27.

43. *Ibid.*, 28.

For two centuries, scholars have treated these two models as an apparent contradiction, known as “the Adam Smith problem.” Only recently did intellectual history begin to deal with it seriously in the hope of establishing a logical connection between the Scottish thinker’s two principal works.<sup>44</sup>

According to James Otteson, who proposed the most convincing solution of “the Smith Problem,” in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith

shows how a system of moral standards develops as an unintended result of the numberless free exchanges people make with one another of their judgments of one another’s motives and actions. [...] Smith thinks this market model applies to human institutions generally, whether languages, moral standards, or marketplaces. They are all systems of order that result unintentionally from the desires, decisions, and actions of individuals.<sup>45</sup>

The scholar explicitly speaks about “currencies” of such market exchanges: in morality these are “personal sentiments and moral judgments,” in economics “private goods and services,” in languages “words, ideas, and wants.”<sup>46</sup>

It seems that Karamzin managed to understand this connection from the very beginning and in the *Letters of a Russian Traveler* produced a case study of the interactions between moral sentiments and financial transactions.

#### 4

This perspective allows us to tackle another important issue of Karamzin’s biography as well as of Russian literary history in general. Several authors, including such leading scholars of Russian eighteenth-century literature as Grigorii Gukovskii and Yurii Lotman, claimed that Karamzin was one of the first, if not the first, professional writer in the history of Russian letters who made “writing the main source of his living.”<sup>47</sup> This point of view was strongly refuted by Ioakhim Klein who argued that such professionalism “was impossible since no literary market existed at the time,” and the situation started to change gradually only at the beginning of the XIX century.<sup>48</sup> Once again, both sides state their positions without discussing actual figures, which undermines the validity of their assessments. It is also important to mention that this question has two interrelated but not identical aspects: the actual structure of Karamzin’s income, on the one hand, and, on the other, his own

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44. James R. Otteson, *Adam Smith’s Marketplace of Life* (Cambridge UP, 2002).

45. *Ibid.*, 172, 182.

46. *Ibid.*, 286.

47. Yu.M. Lotman, *O Karamzine* [On Karamzin] (SPb., “Iskusstvo,” 1997), 189.

48. Klein, “Mezhdru Apollonom i Fortunoi...,” 199.

perception of his status as a writer and of the importance of literary work for his financial well-being.

In the previous section, we established that Karamzin's annual income from his estate lay within the range of 1,250-1,350 silver rubles, which at the time amounted to around 1,400 – 1,500 paper rubles and most likely was closer to the lower number in that range. Unfortunately, by contrast with the period of his travels, we are unable to offer even a rough estimate of his expenses in Russia. In the 1790s Karamzin stayed with the Pleshcheevs on several occasions for extended periods, and we have no idea what their financial arrangements were. Still, it seems inconceivable that Karamzin would not contribute to the family budget, and would instead rely on his hosts for food and lodging, especially since the Plescheevs' circumstances were quite precarious. Information about Karamzin's honoraria for his literary work is also unavailable, but we can attempt a reconstruction based on comparable cases and indirect evidence.

Karamzin started his literary career as a co-editor of *Detskoe chtenie* [Children's reading]—a magazine for children published by Novikov. Already after departing for Europe, Karamzin was imagining a magazine he could start publishing himself after coming back. As he made plans for this publication, he also considered the likelihood of its commercial success. In August 1789, he compiled a memo for Lavater who was interested in exploring the possibilities for distributing books in Russia. In this document, Karamzin invited the famous Swiss thinker to contribute to the future periodical:

We can do it in a way that looks to me better and more profitable. Immediately upon my return to Moscow I will begin to issue a periodic publication. I have reasons to believe that there will be no lack of subscribers. What would you say if I were to publish your excerpts as you send them to me in a monthly magazine. [...] I will send to Zurich, annually, a defined sum depending upon the growth or the reduction in the number of subscribers; the former looks much more probable to me. In this way you will have a great deal more influence on the development of Russian minds as your works in a monthly magazine will reach more hands and be more widely read than if they were published in a separate book.<sup>49</sup>

Karamzin understood that Lavater was primarily interested mostly in exerting moral influence, but believed that profitability was an important issue and hoped to increase the circulation of his magazine by publishing in it the writings of one of the most famous European thinkers. Some memoirists claimed that he saw his future publication as a chance to improve his material situation. At first, his success in this endeavor was at best qualified, but gradually he established the literary reputation that was essential not only for his status but for his pocket as well.

The standard financial arrangement for publishing a periodical at the end of the eighteenth century involved an annual contract between the owner or manager

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49. Karamzin, *Pis'ma Russkogo puteshestvennika*, 495-496.

of a print shop and the editor. According to this contract, the publisher paid an annual honorarium to the editor who guaranteed him in turn a certain quantity of text at regular and defined intervals. The amount of money paid to the editor depended upon the estimated number of subscribers as well as the subscription rate. At the end of the year, the contract could be renegotiated, depending on the publication's success.

It is reasonable to assume that Karamzin followed a similar arrangement in publishing his *Moskovskii zhurnal*. In the summer of 1792, he wrote to his friend Dmitriev that "the subscribers have forced him" to leave the village and present himself in person before Okorokov and the workers of his print shop.<sup>50</sup> Vasilii Okorokov had been running the University printing house, where Karamzin's magazine was being published, since Novikov's lease was terminated in 1789. It is evident that he summoned the editor to ensure that the obligations before subscribers were being honored. By that time, Karamzin already felt that the magazine was a burden. The October and November issues for that year were published under the same cover, and in the December issue, which did not appear until after 1793 had arrived, Karamzin informed the readers that the magazine's publication would be halted by saying: "My obligations are over. I am free".<sup>51</sup>

Twelve years earlier, Christian Ridiger, who leased the university typography in the 1770s, had offered two hundred rubles per annum to a totally unknown provincial noblemen Andrei Bolotov for the magazine *Sel'skii zhitel'* [The Villager]. Bolotov was to provide one printer's sheet's worth of materials<sup>52</sup> weekly and to charge three rubles fifty kopecks for the subscription. The project did not work out according to plan, since the initial number of subscribers was only eighty<sup>53</sup> and never exceeded one hundred.<sup>54</sup> The publication stopped after one year, probably also due to the transfer of the print shop's lease from Ridiger to Novikov. Novikov, however, took a great interest in the venture and promised Bolotov to pay him twice as much as "the German (*nemtchina*) Ridiger," but also asked the editor to double the amount of published material to two sheets per week.<sup>55</sup>

Bolotov readily agreed to this suggestion, and the new *Ekonomicheskii magazin* [Economic Journal] proved to be a huge success. Novikov succeeded in mobilizing

50. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 30.

51. A.N. Neustroev, *Istoricheskoe razyskanie o russkikh povremennykh izdaniakh i sbornikakh na 1703-1802 gg.* [Historical Survey of Russian Periodical Editions and Collected Volumes for 1703-1802] (SPb., 1874), 702.

52. A printer's sheet (*pechatnyi list*) is a standard unit of measurement in common use during the eighteenth century: a full sheet produces two folio leaves when folded once, eight quarto leaves when folded four times, etc. Using this standard allows us to compare editions of different size.

53. A.T. Bolotov, *Zhizn' i priklucheniia Andreia Bolotova, opisanny samim im dlia svoikh potomkov* [Life and Adventures of Andrei Bolotov, Described by Him for his Descendants] (1870, 356).

54. A.Iu. Samarin, *Chitatel' v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVIII veka* [A Reader in Russia in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century] (M.: MGUP, 2000), 219.

55. Bolotov, 859.



his masonic network and brought in nearly four hundred subscribers initially<sup>56</sup>; the number continued to grow after the launch of the publication. *Ekonomicheskii magazin* remained in print for ten years, with supplementary print runs of some of the earlier issues. Each year Bolotov produced exactly 104 sheets of text. That amount was generally considered standard for a magazine. The editors of *Chtenie dlia vkusa, razuma u chuvstvovaniia* [A Reader for One's Taste, Reason and Sentiment] explained to its readers that they sometimes publish very long texts because it is not easy to find 104 sheets' worth of reading material that was both good and short every year.<sup>57</sup>

Karamzin promised slightly less. He advertised a monthly publication of more than 100 pages in octavo<sup>58</sup>, which would amount to approximately seven printer's sheets a month or 84 sheets per year. He produced, however, 88 sheets in the first year of *Moskovskii zhurnal* and 93 in the second and final year. Unlike Bolotov, Karamzin was not an unknown quantity in the world of journalism. He was a young but experienced editor with a history of success with a previous publication (*Detskoe chtenie*), a narrative of personal travels abroad awaiting publication and a commitment to contribute to his magazine from the leading poets of the time such as Derzhavin and Kheraskov. Okorokov, the print shop manager, was close to Novikov<sup>59</sup> and was certainly aware of Karamzin's potential as an aspiring editor. Given the level of inflation, which constituted approximately 17% between 1779 and 1791,<sup>60</sup> it would be reasonable to assume that Karamzin would have been offered at the very least not less than Bolotov had been twelve years earlier.

Karamzin's initial success was at best mixed. He hoped to have 500 subscribers,<sup>61</sup> but managed to attract only 258 for the first year and 297 for the second. Muscovites were charged five rubles for an annual subscription, subscribers outside of Moscow paid seven. The two extra rubles most likely reflected average transportation costs. Okorokov's gross receipts for the first year would have amounted to over 1,300 rubles and for the second to over 1,500 (some readers could purchase issues of the magazine piecemeal in the print shop's bookstore, without subscribing). Indirect evidence also allows us to give a very rough estimate of publishing costs.

In a recent monograph, Aleksandr Samarin analyzed the publishing history of *Vsemirnyi puteshestvovatel'* [*The Global Traveler*]<sup>62</sup>—the twenty-seven-volume translation of the highly popular *Le voyageur François* by Joseph de la Porte, produced by Yakov Bulgakov. The cost of one printer's sheet in volumes 4-11 of this edition, published between 1779 and 1782, was approximately eleven rubles,

56. Samarin, *Chitatel' v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVIII veka*, 220.

57. Neustroev, *Istoricheskoe razyskanie o russkikh povremennykh izdaniakh*, 693.

58. Ibid., 700.

59. Karamzin, *Pis'ma Russkogo puteshestvennika*, 609.

60. Mironov, *Khlebnye tseny v Rossii za dva stoletia*, 37.

61. Neustroev, *Istoricheskoe razyskanie o russkikh povremennykh izdaniakh*, 702.

with three of them covering paper costs.<sup>62</sup> *The Global Traveler* had a print run of a thousand copies, with around four percent of them printed on very expensive paper. For comparison purposes, the publishing cost of *The Description of the Russian Imperial City of Saint Petersburg* by Johann Georgi, which appeared in 1794, was 642 rubles 86 kopecks for 1,162 copies of 791 pages in octavo, i.e. 50 printer sheets.<sup>63</sup> If, for the sake of the comparison, we calculate the cost for 1,000 copies, it would amount to approximately 12 rubles per printer's sheet. Both editions were published in St. Petersburg.

The prices in Moscow could be slightly lower, and with the number of subscribers below 300, Karamzin needed three or four times less paper than Bulgakov or Georgi. The paper he used for *Moskovskii zhurnal* was more or less of the same quality as the one used for the cheaper version of *The Global Traveler* or the Georgi *Description*, so that an estimate of publishing expenses within the range of 10-11 rubles per sheet would be quite realistic. When we factor in the editor's honorarium, we see that Okorokov's total expenses could allow him to break even or to make marginal profit or marginal loss on the production of *Moskovskii zhurnal*. This estimate is corroborated by Okorokov's initial reluctance to extend the contract with Karamzin for another year. Karamzin's correspondence with Dmitriev shows that the decision that *Moskovskii zhurnal* would continue to appear in 1792 was not made until November 1791.<sup>64</sup> It is highly unlikely that the publisher would consider discontinuing a profitable venture or that he would choose to press ahead with a money-losing publication.

If our reconstruction is correct, the sum of 350-400 rubles received by Karamzin for editing *Moskovskii zhurnal*, when added to the approximately 1,300-1,400 rubles that his estate brought in, would amount to between 20 and 25% of his overall budget. This is not a negligible share of one's total income, but not one that would qualify Karamzin as a literary professional and arguably not the result he was hoping to achieve. This near-failure, however, did not discourage the young author from pursuing his goals.

As we can tell from the above quoted letter to Lavater, from the earliest stages of his literary career, perhaps going back as far as his work on *Detskoe chtenie*, Karamzin considered commercial success an important aspect of professional literary activity. In the nineteenth century, he reiterated this vision in his famous article "On Book Trade and the Love of Reading in Russia" published in the final magazine he edited, *Vestnik Evropy* [*The Herald of Europe*]. His letters to his friend, the poet Ivan Dmitriev, written in the 1790s, teem with remarks about the need for writing, editing, and translating to be economically viable. One can even call these statements declarations of literary professionalism.

62. A.Iu. Samarin, *Tipografshchiki i knigochety* [Typographers and book readers] (M.: Pashkov dom, 2015), 269-270.

63. Ibid., 153.

64. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 23-24.

In 1792, when Dmitriev decided to publish a collection of songs, Karamzin wrote to him: “What a strange idea [...] Whom do you want to serve? If it’s your pocket, that’s good; but are you correct in thinking this?”<sup>65</sup> However, already in the next letter he informed his correspondent that he was sending him, “for the reinforcement of his wallet,” the songs of Yurii Neledinskii-Meltskii, the most popular Russian author working in that genre. Karamzin advised Dmitriev to “publish the collection and collect money from the public.”<sup>66</sup> In December 1795, Karamzin told his friend about a plan to publish an annual selection of the best Russian poems and reported that several living poets were very pleased by this plan. “The print shop managers,” he added as he outlined the project’s commercial potential, “are pleased as well.”<sup>67</sup>

In August 1797, Karamzin wrote to Dmitriev that all his property had been distrained because ten years earlier he had agreed to serve as a guarantor of Novikov’s debts:

Can you believe that it did not bother me? If only the Pleshcheevs could disentangle themselves from their debts, I would agree to work day and night to feed myself.<sup>68</sup>

Obviously, he meant literary work. In December of the same year, he complained that he was distracted while having to “work to keep the coffers full, translate and collect materials for textbooks.”<sup>69</sup> In March 1798, he again reiterated that he needed to “translate to keep the coffers full” and described to his friend a “prodigious plan” for a “Pantheon of Foreign Literature,”<sup>70</sup> which, as he explained later, was being published “not for the University, but for the public.”<sup>71</sup> Once, frustrated by censorship and the general situation in Russian literature during the reign of Paul I, Karamzin complained that

if personal circumstances did not force him to deal with print shops, he would have laid his hand on the altar of the Muses and swore a bitter oath never to serve them either with either original work or with translations.<sup>72</sup>

We could cite more evidence that fits this pattern.

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65. *Ibid.*, 29.

66. *Ibid.*, 31.

67. *Ibid.*, 63.

68. *Ibid.*, 79.

69. *Ibid.*, 84.

70. *Ibid.*, 93.

71. *Ibid.*, 99.

72. *Ibid.*, 97.

In order to refute claims that Karamzin was a literary professional Klein cites his letter to Dmitriev from 3 June 1798:

I laughed at your thought to live by translations! Russian literature goes begging with a bag and a walking stick: one can profit little by it! Don't protest that I am afraid to acquire a rival in you; as an experienced translator myself, I can tell you, you won't stand in my way. I am publishing the *Pantheon*; you could publish a *Polytheon*. Each of us can have his little path follow. The problem is that publishers with their print shops are not getting richer, so they frown at translators.<sup>73</sup>

According to Klein, this letter allows us “to establish with certainty that Karamzin’s activities as a translator were not profitable.”<sup>74</sup> This statement, however, is based upon a misunderstanding. At that time, Dmitriev served as a chief executive of a Senate department. He had become disenchanted with his career in the civil service and was considering retirement. Karamzin considered it his duty to discourage his friend from giving up a distinguished position that provided him with a secure source of income for the uncertain fate of a literary professional. He also wanted to assure Dmitriev that his advice was not driven by fear of competition. At the same time, the mere fact that Dmitriev was considering such an option for a possible career change clearly indicates that he saw the path of a literary professional as economically viable and regarded his friend Karamzin’s career in that field a success story. There is very little doubt that this assessment was accurate.

In his correspondence Karamzin clearly articulates his identity as *an homme de lettres*, but that does not necessarily prove that he was one. As Klein points out, the writer provided no information about the actual commercial success of his books.<sup>75</sup> However, once again comparable data allows us to make provisional calculations. Unlike magazine editors, who usually received fixed annual payments from publishers, authors and translators of books were compensated based on actual revenue from sales. In July 1795, Karamzin told Dmitriev that his book *I moi bezdelki* [And My Trifles] was being published, and promised that he would settle accounts with the publishers and then send money to his friend. As soon as August, Karamzin wrote that the book’s entire print run had sold out, and Dmitriev was going to receive four hundred rubles.<sup>76</sup> The edition cost Dmitriev 120 rubles,<sup>77</sup> which meant that his profit amounted to 280 rubles. It is worth noting that for his abovementioned collection of songs Dmitriev received 200 rubles.<sup>78</sup>

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73. Ibid., 95.

74. Klein, “Mezhdú Apollonom i Fortunoi...,” 198.

75. Ibid., 197.

76. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 56-57.

77. Ibid., 59.

78. Ibid., 70.

Dmitriev had an established reputation as a poet. His 1791 poem “Modnaia zhena” [The Fashionable Wife], which Karamzin published in *Moskovskii zhurnal*, even caused a minor sensation. However, his literary popularity lagged far behind the growing fame of his friend, attested by the discrepancy in the frequency with which each man’s works were reissued. Dmitriev himself was well aware of this: he entitled his book *And My Trifles* after Karamzin had issued a two-volume set called *My Trifles*. It is possible to state with a high degree of certainty that Karamzin’s remuneration for books of comparable size would at the very least be marginally higher than Dmitriev’s—and most likely considerably higher. We should add that the every reissue cost substantially less than the original print, which resulted in larger profits, and translations were usually valued higher than original works. In 1778, Novikov offered Bulgakov two hundred rubles and twenty-five free copies for the translation of one volume of *The Global Traveler*. If the publication proved to be a success, Novikov was prepared to share half of the profits with the translator, but Bulgakov considered such terms unfair and rejected the offer.<sup>79</sup> These assumptions give us a sense of Karamzin’s income from his literary works.

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For a year after *Moskovskii zhurnal* was discontinued, at the end of 1792, Karamzin did not publish any new works. He had no intention of abandoning his literary pursuits, but was strategizing to ensure that his new venture in the realm of literature met with greater success. In June 1793, he expressed interest in buying metal types from the typographer Johann Schnorr, but by late July decided to postpone the acquisition.<sup>80</sup> In January 1794, he published Part One of an almanac, *Aglaiia*, followed by two volumes of *My Trifles* and a first part of the translation of Marmontel’s *Tales*: a total of four major volumes in one year. “The writer, new, but loved by all of us, reappeared at last, after a year of torturing the public by forcing them to wait impatiently,” Bolotov noted.<sup>81</sup>

Karamzin’s subsequent career as a writer can be roughly divided in two periods: one from 1794 to 1800, the other from 1801 to 1803 or 1804, when he was appointed to the position of the official historiographer and started working on his magnum opus. In 1794–1800, he published, including reissues, twenty major volumes of literary almanacs, collections of his works and translations, as well as eight volumes of individual works and the beginning of the second printing of *Detskoe chtenie*, which was not completed until 1803.<sup>82</sup> Karamzin was not the sole

79. Samarin, *Tipografshchiki i knigochety*, 59.

80. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 38–41.

81. N.V. Guberti, *Istoriko-literaturnye i bibliograficheskie materialy* [Historico-literary and bibliographical materials] (SPb., 1887), 23.

82. S.N. Ponomarev, *Materialy dlia bibliografii literatury o Karamzine, k stoletiu ego literaturnoi deiatel'nosti* [Materials for the bibliography of works on Karamzin for the

rights holder for the magazine, but his share of profits must have been substantial: the Russian children's magazine in existence continued to be in high demand and was reprinted again in 1819-1820.

For the whole of 1795, Karamzin, as he put it, was also "working for Ridiger."<sup>83</sup> Christian Ridiger, who had re-established control of the university print shop, hired the writer to edit the "Miscellania" column in the newspaper *Moskovskie vedomosti*, which was being published twice a week at the time. Karamzin contributed 169 articles for all 102 issues of the newspaper. According to Bolotov, "the book-seller Ridiger decided to attract a broader readership by attaching to each number several small articles under the name of 'Miscellania' and convinced the young writer Karamzin, who had however already become famous by that time, to take on the project of procuring materials for it."<sup>84</sup> Given that *Moskovskie vedomosti* had a circulation of more than 4,000 copies, Karamzin's honorarium should have been substantial. In 1797, Karamzin prepared an edition of Derzhavin's poems for publication and copy-edited it. We don't know whether he was compensated for this job or performed it pro bono, out of respect for the great poet, but it is plausible that he could have also used his editing skills as an additional source of income. Karamzin's statement in a letter to Dmitriev that he "is working to keep the coffers full, but dragging his feet"<sup>85</sup> should therefore not be taken at face value.

However, all Karamzin's achievements in the eighteenth century pale in comparison with the astounding number of publications that appeared in the first years of the nineteenth century due partly to the relaxation of the censorship regime under the new monarch but primarily due to Karamzin's unceasing efforts on the entrepreneurial and artistic fronts—and his steadily-growing fame. In three or four years Karamzin published fourteen major volumes of collections, textbooks and translations, six individual works and translations, and an eight-volume edition of *The Works of Karamzin*. These years also saw the completion of the second and the beginning of the third re-issue of *Detskoe chtenie*, as well as the second printing of *Moskovskii zhurnal*.<sup>86</sup> Karamzin's poems on Alexander's accession and arrival in Moscow were generously rewarded by the new emperor.<sup>87</sup>

However, the most important sphere of Karamzin's literary activity during these years was the new magazine *Vestnik Evropy*. We do not know the initial terms of his contract for this magazine, but for the second year, the publisher Ivan Popov had

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centennial of his literary activity] (SPb., 1883, SK (*Svodnyi katalog russkoi knigi grazhdanskoi pechati XVIII veka* [The comprehensive catalogue of Russian XVIII century books of secular print], vols. I-V, Moscow, State Library of the USSR. Online at <https://www.livelib.ru/book/1001411698-svodnyj-katalog-russkoj-knigi-grazhdanskoy-pechati-xviii-veka-1725-1800-v-pyati-tomah>)).

83. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 51.

84. Guberti, *Istoriko-literaturnye i bibliograficheskie materialy*, 23.

85. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 102. See also Klein, "Mezhdu Apollonom i Fortunoi...", 197.

86. Ponomarev, *Materialy dlia bibliografii literatury o Karamzine*.

87. Pogodin, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin po ego sochineniam*, I, 321.

offered him 6,000 rubles.<sup>88</sup> In paying an editor an exorbitant sum, unheard of in the annals of Russian literature, Popov was surely not motivated by philanthropy. This honorarium also gives us some retrospective sense of Karamzin's income from literature for the preceding years. Dmitriev had good reasons to be envious.

Recall that Karamzin had sold his estate in 1795 for 16,000 rubles and the most profitable investment of this sum possible could bring him an annual income of 10%, i.e. 1,600 rubles. Karamzin gave 2,000 rubles from the sale to the Pleshcheevs and most likely never got the loan back, which decreased his potential annual income by 200 rubles. In other words, simple calculations show that between 1794 and 1800 Karamzin's literary activity resulted in his at the very least doubling his income. In 1801-1803, his profits as a writer exceeded the interest on his capital by a factor of four or five (in the most conservative assessment). The change in his financial situation was also reflected in the gradual improvement in his living conditions.

In February 1795, Karamzin finally moved out of the Pleshcheevs' house and rented modest accommodations in the house of Fedor Kiselev on Tverskaia Street.<sup>89</sup> In June 1800, most likely after securing several contracts for the following year, he moved house once again and rented a larger apartment in Schmidt's house on Nikol'skaia Street.<sup>90</sup> That was the dwelling to which, the following spring, he brought his first wife, Elizaveta Protasova, Anastasia Pleshcheeva's younger sister. Karamzin had every reason to write to his brother with pride about the prospective financial well-being of his family: "She [his wife – AZ] has only 150 souls, but I can hope that with my income we'll spend a year in comfort and free of privation."<sup>91</sup>

However, Karamzin chose to trade this newly-acquired prosperity for the position of the state historiographer with a modest salary of 2,000 rubles per year. In making this choice, the writer had several considerations in mind. He was finally able to contemplate a life of financial stability. After the death of his first wife in childbirth, in 1802, Karamzin married Ekaterina Kolyvanova in January 1804. Kolyvanova, the illegitimate daughter of Prince Viazemskii, brought with her a huge dowry and a place to stay—the Viazemskii family estate in Ostafievo. In the register of Moscow landowners for 1812, Karamzin's daughter by his first wife is listed as owning 130 souls (no doubt, an inheritance from her mother's side), and his second wife is identified as the owner of 973 souls with an income of 10,000 rubles.<sup>92</sup> Karamzin himself does not appear in the register at all, since his estate had been sold years earlier.

Writing a history of Russia was Karamzin's long-cherished dream. "I am up to my ears in Russian history and see Nikon and Nestor in my dreams," he wrote

88. Ibid., II, 18.

89. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 52, 54.

90. Ibid., 117.

91. Pogodin, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin po ego sochineniam*, I, 323.

92. TsGA Moskvyy (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Moskvyy – Central State Archive of Moscow), f. 4, op. 1, d. 3225, Dokhody dvoryan v 1812 godu [The income of the nobles in 1812], l. 170-171.



to Dmitriev in May 1800.<sup>93</sup> In his letter to Mikhail Muraviev asking him to procure for him the position of the state historiographer, Karamzin wrote that he planned to earn from five or six years of journalism enough money to be able to concentrate on writing the history that “occupied his entire soul.”<sup>94</sup> At the same time, scholars usually overlook Karamzin’s clear belief in the commercial potential of his endeavor. He sensed the shift in the public’s tastes and was hoping to support his family with his *History*. In the same letter to Muraviev, Karamzin says that upon completing his work he will be able to renounce his pension “since the written *History* will ensure that he is never burdened by need”.<sup>95</sup>

Let us draw a few conclusions. There is very little doubt that Karamzin was a professional writer in all possible meanings of this word. His first venture with *Moskovskii zhurnal* was only a partial success, but it allowed the young author to acquire the name recognition that proved crucial to all his future achievements. As Karamzin himself wrote in his article “On Book Trade and the Love of Reading in Russia,” the market for literary production did exist in Russia in the 1790s and 1800s. However, it was still a nascent market. To navigate it as successfully as Karamzin did, one needed not only literary talent but also an exceptional commercial intuition, power of will, determination, discipline, and perseverance.

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93. Karamzin, *Pis'ma k I.I. Dmitrievu*, 116.

94. Pogodin, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin po ego sochineniam*, II, 17.

95. *Ibid.*, 18.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1: Declared and estimated expenditure of Karamzin during his trip, in rubles  
(local currencies converted into rubles using the exchange rates in Table 3)**

	Declared expenses						Estimated expenses
	Kurland	Germany	Switzerland	France	England	Total	
transportation	39.00	100.95	60.55	100.00	11.25	311.75	400.00
food	2.80	29.05	110.08	65.00	75.00	281.93	450.00
trips			349.10			349.10	400.00
lodging	18.00	7.20	50.00	38.50	14.70	128.40	130.00
theater		1.00		100.00	7.35	108.35	250.00
sightseeing		9.10		3.82	0.40	13.32	100.00
servants, barbers, baths		4.65		21.60	6.52	32.77	120.00
contingency		0.32		1.49	3.02	4.83	10.00
wine					4.00	4.00	100.00
customs		1.10			1.10	2.20	10.00
city travel		0.40		4.00		4.40	100.00
books							100.00
Total	59.80	153.77	569.73	334.41	123.34	1241.05	2180.00

**Table 2: Currency exchange rates, 1789-1790**

	Currency	Rubles	References
German	1 grosz (mite)	0.05	Karamzin, <i>Letters of a Russian Traveler</i> , 140
	1 thaler	1.20	Ibid., 142
French	1 new French thaler	2.00	Ibid., 229
	1 louis d'or	7.70	Ibid., 276
	1 livre	0.36	
	1 ecu	1.91	
	1 sou	0.02	Ibid., 336
British	1 pound	7.00	N.K. Brzhetskii, <i>Gosudarstvennye dolgi Rossii: Istoriko-statisticheskoe issledovanie</i> [Russian State Debts. Historical-statistical research] (M.: Kniga po trebovaniu, 2015). Table 5.
	1 shilling	0.35	
	1 guinea	7.35	
	1 penny	0.03	