USSR ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
N.N. Mikloukho-Maklay Institute of Ethnography

A.N. Yamskov

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS AND ETHNOCULTURAL TRADITIONS OF STOCK-BREEDING

(the Russians in Azerbaijan in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries)

12th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences
Zagreb, Yugoslavia, July 24-31, 1988

NAUKA
CENTRAL DEPARTMENT OF ORIENTAL LITERATURE
MOSCOW 1988

Ethno-cultural adaptation to environment is most graphically illustrated by such related cultural fields as subsistence economy and settlement patterns. However, it is not easy to notice changes of adaptation because this is a slow process which may last for centuries; it virtually coincides with the overall economic evolution, and settlement patterns have a tendency to intensify and to involve higher density of population.

However, in a number of cases the settlers involuntarily staged experiments of sorts, when groups of them found themselves in a geographically alien environment and were obliged to work out within several decades economic patterns and settlement systems suitable for the new environment. This was usually encouraged by cultural contacts between newcomers and indigenous peoples and by borrowing cultivation and stock-breeding experiences of the latter. Therefore, ethnographic studies of settlers and their descendants must focus on the correlation between adaptive development of initial culture and cultural borrowings from indigeneous peoples. In order to solve this task we must make use of ethnic ecology, its methods and data.

For this reason it is particularly interesting to analyse the techniques of stock-breeding of the Russians in Eastern Transcaucasia and those of indigenous peoples, including the Azerbaijanians, the Armenians and the Tats. The analysis draws on the data collected by the author[1] in the villages of Chuhuryurt, Kirovka (formerly Maryevka), Khilmilli, Astrakhanka, Ivanovka (southern slope of the Greater Caucasus in Shemakha and, in part, Ismailli districts), Slavyanka, Novo-Gorelovka, Novo-Saratovka, Novo-Ivanovka (northern slope of the Lesser Caucasus in Kedabek district).

These villages were founded in the 1840s-50s by the Russians who were banished or voluntarily came to join their dissident sects, including those of the Molokans, Dukhobors and Subbotniks. (In Transcaucasia, the Molokans had a number of subdivisions.) Most of the Russian villages in the region were originally multiconfessional, and at the end of the 19th century Baptists appeared among them. However, sophisti-

cated religious communities constituted a single whole, and villages were never devided into streets or sections on religious basis. Most of the settlers came from the Central Chernozyom area of Russia and middle Volga. A section of the settlers came from the Crimea to which their ancestors had moved from the Central Chernozyom early in the 19th century.

In Russia peasants did not engage in nomadic stock-breeding. Cattle was kept within the limits of village subsistence area adjoining the village. In summer, the cattle was grazing on village pastures and driven home every evening. In winter animals were stall-fed. This technique which is still used by small households is called -based stock breeding.

In Transcaucasia Russian settlers were confronted by very unusual environment. The region is characterised by vast seasonal pastures (lowlands in winter and highlands in summer) lying 50 to 200 km one from another. The Kura-Araks lowland, dry in summer, was virtually uninhabited in the 19th century with the exception of Azerbaijanian settlements scattered along river banks. In winter these semideserts and dry steppes were used as grazing grounds for the cattle of seminomadic and nomadic Azerbaijanian tribes (Padars, etc.). The foothills were used as pastures by the mountaineers (Lezgins and other Daghestanians, Tats and Armenians). Indigenous peoples engaged in nomadic and transhumant stock-breeding primarily constituted by sheep breeding.

Forests covered middle and lower slopes of the Greater and Lesser Caucasus. This belt, especially its lower section which is favourable for the cultivation of vines and other fruits, was the place where most of the Azerbaijanian, Armenian and Tat villages were founded. Along migration routes forests gradually gave way to alpine meadows and mountain steppe spring-autumn pastures. Higher slopes (alpine and subalpine belts) offered summer pastures and during many centuries of their utilization the upper forest belt was considerably narrowed.

Before they were included into Russia, the khannates of Eastern Transcaucasia granted privileges to Muslims, and Azerbaijanian nomads and seminomads had advantages in making use of pastures. However, tsarist government did not recognize their right to that land. Pastures were monopolized by the government and animal breeders were forced to pay rent. At first this policy did not change the techniques of using land by indigenous peoples because upper slopes and internal lowland areas could only be used as seasonal pastures. However, state monopoly on pastures and forests in that region made it accessible to Russian dissidents.[2]

Russian settlement in Transcaucasia had at least two distinctive stages: (1) the period of trials and errors (1830s-40s) and (2) the period when most of contemporary villages were established (1840s-50s). This division is suggested by the history of above villages.

Initially, banished dissidents settled in places reserved for them by local authorities (Slavyanka, Kisil-Kushlag, Topchi), but later on people were allowed to settle in other areas (some of Kisil-Kishlag residents, for example, moved to Topchi). There was a tendency to settle closer to the foothills at the first stage (Slavyanka is an exception). Winter pastures were given to the Russians for settlement because they were considered to be most favourable for cultivation (warm climate, water, and fertile soil and quite large and flat land plots). Land was primarily valued for its convenience for farming and gardening. In the same period and virtually under the same conditions settlements appeared in the southernmost areas of the Mugan Steppe, for example, Prishib, Privolnoye. However, outside southern areas of Mugan, the administrative settlement was unsuccessful. Above villages, with the exception of Slavyanka, did not last more than a decade. In the foothills settlers failed to sustain unfavourable conditions (malaria, polluted drinking water and heat in summer) for their sanitary and life experiences were not adapted to new conditions. (The Armenians and Azerbaijanians were well adapted to that environment.) At first, the economic activity of settlers was not very successful either.

Nearby mountain slopes with more convenient natural conditions attracted the settlers and encouraged the begginning of the second stage of Russian settlement in Transcaucasia. Settlers from foothills and other unfavourable areas sent delegates to investigate land plots offered by the government. These lands were mainly located in middle slopes (700 to 1600 m above sea level). Most often they chose the upper and less inhabited belt of middle slopes. Delegates saw two basic advantages of new lands: a favourable environment (moderate summer, lack of malaria, fresh drinking water); and habitual economic conditions (dry farm lands, nearby pastures, and forests, which could provide them with firewood and timber for building). Russian villages (Chuhuryurt, Khilmilli, Novo-Ivanovka and Novo-Saratovka) usually sprang up on a plateau-like rolling land high above sea level. New settlers from Russia aware of the experience of earlier settlers tried to settle in the areas with Russian villages (Novo-Gorelovka and Maryevka). However, erros were also committed at this stage and so settlements were moved to more favourable places within the same territory (Ivanovka, Novo-Gorelovka, Khilmilli, Novo-Saratovka).

However, middle slopes were not very comfortable for the Russians either. Cold climate, rocky soil and scanty areas of flat farming land obstructed agricultural development. Farmland shortages became expecially strong in the beginning of the 20th century, when migration and natural growth considerably increased the density of population whithin a limited land area. But there were abundant steep and infertile lands, unfavourable for ploughing, but good for summer grazing. Woodcutting, erosion on the ploughed slopes and, hence, disruption of crop rotation gradually increased the area of pastures and encouraged further development of stock-breeding.

Subsistence areas of Russian villages on middle mountain slopes of Eastern Caucasus were quite large and many pastures in the peripheral areas did not have road communications with host villages. Remote pastures (from four to eight kilometres away from the village) were used in summer to graze young animals (cattle and sheep) assembled in one or two herds. Herdsmen spent night by a fire, slept on "burkas" and sometimes built huts; they took turns once a week discending to the village (to have a bath or get food). However, dairy cattle, draught animals and horses were grazing outside villages and were put in a stall for the night. In winter all animals were put to stalls (Khilmilli, Novo-Ivanovka). The same techniques were sometimes used in steppe areas of Russia, especially in vast Cossack regions. Grazing areas in these regions were always limited to communal land and, actually, stock-breeding adjoining the village was village-based. Changes of settlement patterns did not occur there either.

Slavyanka and Novo-Saratovka suggest a unique economic and settlement patterns. In summer, dairy and draught animals were grazing on nearby pastures and in winter they were put to stalls in the village, while well-to-do families (about one-third of the village) usually kept young cattle and sheep at isolated "khutoroks" (small farms) on the periphery of communal lands (four to six kilometres away from villages). A "khutorok" is always a remote structure with a living accommodation and a facility for animals. In winter, elder sons changed each other there once a week and often visited their village. A "khutorok" was always located close to a "prigrev" (southern slope) having a pasture and rich heyfields. Middle slopes in Transcaucasia differ greatly in terms of solar energy they absorb. The difference between slopes exposed to the North and to the South, is the same as between two areas of the slope, one lying 700 to 900 m higher than the other. Therefore, snow on "prigrevs" usually does not lie for more than two days. For this reason, peasants grazed sheep on meadows during all winter, while cattle was put to stalls and grazed only occasionally. During a warm season "khutoroks" were deserted and pastures and heyfields were conserved.

In this case stock-breeding was always limited to communal lands and was virtually village-based; yet it involved more sophisticated settlement patterns with seasonal economic bases outside villages.

Molokans of the Shemakha area lived close to lowlands (40 to 120 km off it). For this reason in the second half of the 19th century Astrakhanka, Maryevka and Chuhuryurt were making use of winter pastures, or "kishlags" near the Kura River; certain areas belonged to peasant communities, while other lands were traditionally leased. Horse-driven wagons were used for communication between villages and "kishlags". The journey lasted for a day or two but in winter there was no communication.

In summer animals in these villages were grazed in the same manner as in Khilmilli or Novo-Ivanovka. In winter, only dairy and draught animals were put to stalls, while young cattle grazed on lowlands. Every village had a "khutor" of "khatenkas" (small huts) or roofed accommodations; close to the huts were "bazes", or open enclosures with a shed and a wall at one end. At night cattle were put to a "baz", and during daytime animals were assembled together and grazed in turns by their owners. Winter pastures were used by every second or third family, which had many animals. Such families of several generations appointed one or two men, sometimes a spousal couple, to pasture animals during winter on lowlands.

The evolution of stock-breeding in Ivanovka is of particular interest. Village herds of young cattle were grazing high in the mountains during summer, 25 to 30 kilomentres away from the village. These village pastures were called "yailag". In winter most of the herd was driven to remote winter pastures called "kishlag" located on lowlands at a distance of 25 to 30 kilometres away from the village. Thus, most of the cattle was kept on grazing lands and only in spring and summer cattle was driven closer to the village.

In addition, some richer peasants in Ivanovka and Slavyanka, by the end of the 19th century, opted for cash sheep breeding. For this, every year they leased alpine lands in summer and lowlands in winter from aborigines or the government. The sheep were catered for by hired Azerbaijanian shepherds, but each flock was always accompanied by young men of the owner's family.

Thus, subsistence area of each community was constituted by the main area adjacent to a village on the middle-sloped forested belt and pasturelands on a half-desert half-steppe lowlands or, in a number of cases, alpine meadows. The settlement pattern had also changed considerably, for in winter a section of able-bodied population (very small

however) spent much time outside villages on seasonal bazes. Great distance from villages and basic differences of natural conditions between winter and summer pastures make it possible to consider such stock-breeding as seasonal transhumance.

Such factors as migration, subsistence areas constituted by land plots lying at various vertically spread landscape belts, seasonal economic bazes outside villages and often outside village subsistence areas, and milking of sheep characterize the economic and cultural type of mountain farmers and herdsmen, who practised seasonal migration of animals and men to remote pastures. Thus, the culture of Russian peasants in Transcaucasia quite quickly acquired basically new elements, which, however, were virtually identical to those of settled highlanders. (Yet, in other spheres of economy and material culture, the Russians failed to develop techniques similar to those of the Caucasians.)

Above similarities, it seems, cannot only be explained by direct borrowings. First, material attributes of pasturalism (temporary and seasonal dwellings of herdsmen, enclosures and sheds for animals, stock-breeding implements and fodder, and earmarks) are very different for the Russians, the Armenians, the Tats and the Daghestanians. Second, the Russians virtually could not borrow the techniques of transhumant mountain stock-breeding from indigeneous peoples, because nomadic and seminomadic Azerbaijanians traditionally controlled all seasonal pastures and thus limited the chances of other peoples for the extensive stock-breeding. Moreover, the nomads were traditionally regarded as the best shepherds and that is why the Russians and the Armenians hired Azerbaijanian shepherds.

There is no ground to believe that the Russians directly borrowed the patterns for stock-breeding from nomadic and seminomadic Azerbaijanians. Apart from other distinctions settlers did not borrow nomadic adaptation models requiring seasonal migrations of entire families of stock-breeders, including dependents (children and elderly people). However, only a small section of the Russians went to remote pastures. Most of the members of extended family lived together in the village all the year round. As far as the impact of transhumance on the family and social structure of peasant communties is concerned, it resembles seasonal occupations of many Russians (craftsmen, woodcutters, etc.) from peasant communities inside Russia.

Finally, in contrast to native stock-breeders of the Caucasus who mostly engaged in sheep breeding, the Russians continued to raise basically cattle and began to move to remote seasonal pastures. This circumstance runs counter to the idea of direct assimilation by the settlers of practices of indigenous peoples.

Apparently, stock-breeding patterns new for the Russians, including seasonal migrations, took shape under the influence of winter lowland pasturing or pasturing on southern slopes. This may be borrowed directly from their neighbours, nomadic and seminomadic Azerbaijanians, or by hiring nomads as herdsmen who had no animals of their own. The transition to winter pasturing and transhumance occurred in less than 40 years. Thus in the beginning of the 1880s Ivanovka and the villages of the Shemakha area made use of winter pastures along the Kura river on a regular basis.[3]

Thus, the Russian settlers confronted by new environment of eastern Transcaucasia developed a number of specific cultural elements in stock-breeding by making use of new natural resources (winter pastures) and creating new socio-cultural mechanisms for their exploitation (stock-breeding patterns). The latter, however, corresponded to the basic model of Russian culture (settled way of life of cattle-breeding households).

REFERENCES

[1] Archives. Institute of Ethnography (Moscow). Papers of the Complex Ethno-Ecological Expedition to Russian Settlers in the Caucasus. A. Yamskov's Field Notebooks. No. 1 (1984-85), No. 2 (1986) and No. 3 (1987).

[2] D.I. Ismail-Zade. Russkoye krestyanstvo v Zakavkazye (Russian Peasants in Transcaucasia). Moscow, 1982, pp. 46-47.

[3] Materialy dlya izucheniya ekonomicheskogo byta gosudarstvennykh krestyan Zakavkazskogo kraya (Materials on the Economic Way of Life of Government Peasants of Transcaucasia). Tiflis, 1887, vol. 6, pt. 2, pp.109, 114.