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Articles and Statements

Traditional Agriculture of Central Kazakhstan in the Works of Researchers of the 1920s

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Abstract

The article examines the views of agricultural scientists, shed lighted on during the discussion that unfolded on the eve of collectivization. The article explores the works of Soviet historians, economists and agrarians of the 1920s, who studied agriculture in Central Kazakhstan. The thesis that agrarians and economists in the late 1920s studied the issues of determining the geographical and territorial boundaries of Central Kazakhstan, considered the ways and methods of economic development of the region. Explores the works of N. Tagiltsev, N. Mackiewicz, P.G. Amosov, N. In. Pavlov, B. Nikolaev, Nikolaev, S.M. Freudenberg and others. It must be emphasized that the majority of these researchers recognize the adaptive nature of the agriculture of the Kazakhs, supported the view that the geographic conditions, poor soil and water are responsible for the agricultural structure of the region.

Keywords: Central Kazakhstan, region, steppes, traditional agriculture.

1. Introduction

Agrarians and economists in the late 1920s – early 1930s, studied the issues of determining the geographical and territorial boundaries of Central Kazakhstan, considered ways and means of economic development of the region. It must be emphasized that, by saying Central Kazakhstan, the majority of these researchers understood the region where the practice is only semi-nomadic pastoralism. This is evidenced by the meeting that took place February 2, 1930 in the Council of People's Commissars of Kazakhstan. Transcript of the meeting was published in print under the title "What is the Central Kazakhstan?" (*Chto zhe takoye...*, 1930).

Participants of the meeting, having tried to answer the above-mentioned question, expressed their point of view, not always matching, and sometimes even conflicting. R.E. Filimonov expressed the view that the Central Kazakhstan – a «region mostly semi-nomadic and nomadic way of life, which is dominated by the extensive pastoral household. It stretches from west to east, runs through Kazakhstan and is limited to the north by isohyet 200 – 250 mm». R.E. Filimonov argued that the Central Kazakhstan includes parts of the Urals, Aktobe, Kostanay, Akmola, Karkarala, Syrdarya districts of the Karakalpakstan autonomous region, Guryev and Kyzylorda region. The total area of it exceeds more than 160 million hectares.

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Unlike R.E. Filimonov, A.F. Wojciechowski was of the view that the Central Kazakhstan – is only sandy and rocky desert, while semi-desert territory, in his opinion, is not part of this region. Y.L. Abramovich determined the Central Kazakhstan as "a broad geographical band with unsuitable land and unfavorable – historical conditions." M.G. Sirius denied the very legitimacy of discussing this issue, citing the need to study more household opportunities of the areas ([Chto zhe takoye..., 1930](#)).

The continuation of the debate on the Central Kazakhstan was publication in the journal «The national economy of Kazakhstan». So, I.I. Maslov, as well as R.E. Filimonov, by saying the Central Kazakhstan meant a huge area covering 2 million sq. km (or 66 % of the entire space), and called the region the area of extensive nomadic economy I.I. Maslov supported the officially concept of sedimentation, but recommended to refrain from large-scale subsidence in the most arid areas in this region, while there will not be held by specialists, as he put it, "experimental work" ([Maslov, 1929: 84](#)).

I.M. Potashev expressed his disagreement with him, who believed that the Central Kazakhstan cannot take so much space, and the amount of annual precipitation is not a criterion for determining the area of the region, so isohyet 250 mm cannot be the dividing line that separates the Central Kazakhstan from other regions. Unlike I.I. Maslov, he was not an opponent of risky experiments in sedimentation and ignored climatic factors ([Potashev, 1929: 75](#)).

Thus, summarizing the above, we can state that in the early 1930s in the economic-geographical definition of Central Kazakhstan, the question of the ways and methods of development of this region, there were substantial differences. These differences indicate a lack of clear criteria for geographic, economic and geographical zoning, and then point to the shortcomings of administrative division in Kazakhstan.

These differences also show the complexity of regional problems, which always brought in domestic and Western science ambiguous points of view. This way, some researchers, questioning the relevance and appropriateness of zoning, hold the opinion that the districts are only a "mental constructions that exist only in our thoughts" ([Dvoskin, 1986: 21](#)). A logical extension of this statement is the assertion that the regions are "intellectual conception designed thinking of using certain features specific to the territory, and rejects all those features which are considered as not related to the analyzed issue" ([Dvoskin, 1986: 43](#)).

This point of view, in our opinion, is not quite justified from the perspective of our study, as the territory of Kazakhstan is a range of climatic and soil characteristics that justify the need for its zoning.

According to the scientist B.Y. Dvoskin, definition of the region should include features such as an integrated development of the region, industrial specialization as a manifestation of the territorial division of labor, economic unity, integrity, economic cohesion of a region, developed, as much as it is possible, rational intra- and inter-regional economic relations ([Dvoskin, 1986: 46](#)).

2. Materials and methods

The need to study the climatic conditions is due to the conception of geographical determinism, insisting on the existence of a direct link between the geographical features of the region and the specifics of the economic activity of people. After all, economic – cultural types depend, as is well known, on the specific geographical zones. As Grach D.A. wrote: "Because of this, for example, no one would ever think to look in the steppes of Mongolia hunters of sea mammals; equally it is impossible to search within the circumpolar zone, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, people, herding sheep and camels" ([Grach, 1984: 127](#)).

A similar view was held by E. Huntington, arguing that climate, continuously pulsing, brings people to the prosperity, then decline. The decisive role in world events took place assigned to climatic factors: climate change could even lead to the death of a number of ancient civilizations of the East and led to the movement of nomads from Central Asia ([Grach, 1984: 126](#)).

In this article, we will adhere to the concept of geographical determinism, a theory which insists on the crucial role of the geographical factor in history.

3. Discussion

Problems of traditional household of the Kazakhs were the object of study of agricultural scientists and economists in the 20th – the first half of the 30s of the last century. Considerable

interest is presented by the study of K.A. Chuvelev, who believed that nomadic household – is household, "which used only power animals for disposal of the forces of nature" (Chuvelev, 1929: 41). According to him, an accurate and adequate definition of nomadic household is very difficult, since there are also unequal conditions for conducting cattle in different regions of Kazakhstan. In this regard, he singled out the plain-nomadic, mountain-nomadic, and wandering in the desert and other options herding household. It should be recognized that the K.A. Chuvelev was a supporter of gradual evolutionary development of the Kazakh household – from a nomadic to a more intensive forms of semi-nomadic and sedentary.

Similar views on the household of the Kazakhs and the problems of its development adhered researchers as M.G. Sirius A.I. Chelintsev, S.P. Shvetsov, A. Donich et al. They were guided by the view that a large part of the territory of Kazakhstan is suitable only for nomadic pastoral household. In other words they took into account climatic factors. So, M.G. Sirius in a series of articles carried the idea that a cattle breeding is the main sector not only agriculture but also the entire national economy of Kazakhstan as a whole. He rightly argued that areas for profitable agriculture in Kazakhstan may be only the small area where there is more than 300 millimeters of precipitation per year (Sirius, 1928: 17).

The scientist G.F. Prokopovich, who was later to become ranked "kondratevtsev" very reasonably emphasized that in the real Kazakhstan it is necessary to find such a course of action that would save valuable pastoral skills of the population. G.F. Prokopovich considered that these skills themselves constitute an irreplaceable capital, having of which is particularly important at a time when there is a reduction of worldwide the number of cattle (Prokopovich, 1926).

S.P. Shvetsov also like them, was a supporter of the evolutionary development of the Kazakh household. (Shvetsov, 1926). Thus, the process of sedimentation agricultural scientists considered not as a one-stage, but as a long-term process of household change of forms and the major factor they called, above all, historically natural conditions.

Researcher V. Blagoveshenskiy, as well as the above-mentioned scientists – agrarians, emphasizes the close relationship between the natural and climatic conditions and the household of the Kazakhs. In particular, a problem regarding sheep breeding he notes particularly the use of pastures in Kazakhstan. According to V. Blagoveshenskiy, the influence of climatic conditions can be traced at least in the fact that the Kazakh sheep well adapted to the natural environment, and they are capable of further crossing deserts and easily tolerate the cold, etc. (Blagoveshchenskiy, 1928).

Telzhan Shonan–ly rightly believes that the type of household develops under the influence of climatic conditions, which is why the Kazakhs were engaged in nomadic cattle breeding, rather than agriculture. For example, he claimed there are totally unsuitable for agricultural farm land south baganalinskih Atbasar county, mostly Karkarala county, and etc. (Shonanyly Telzhan, 1995).

A.A. Ermekov also believed that pasture-pastoral household with a nomadic way of life is the only viable form of management in the droughty steppes. A.A. Ermekov was not an opponent of the household changes, but was of the opinion that they should be developed gradually (Ermekov, 1995).

Natural conditions and household-economic prospects of Central Kazakhstan became an object of study of scientists such as N. Tagiltsev, N.I. Mackiewicz, P.G. Amosov, N.V. Pavlov, B. Nikolaev, G. Nikolaev, S.M. Freudenberg and others. In particular, N.N.Tagiltsev in his article "Lake Balkhash and the Balkhash region" explores the climatic, geographical conditions and economic structure of the region. The researcher recognizes the dependence of economic-cultural type of the geographical location from the region (Tagiltsev, 1928: 243).

Agronomist P.G. Amosov, by studying the features of the household of Karkarala district characterizes Kazakh pastoralism as an exclusively adapted to the natural conditions of the region, which was manifested in the animals breed, and in the methods of its breeding. According to P.G. Amosov, in the Kazakh cattle basis there is inherent "a healthy start in life, which has not yet been explored and studied" (Amosov, 1926: 73). P.G.Amosov is far from the interpretation of semi-nomadic household of Kazakhs as historically belated relic and does not support simplified and naive concept of progress according to which nomadism must inevitably be replaced by agriculture. He is convinced that the very nature dictates the choice of household system: "In what way, other than grazing, people could have used these spaces. There was no other way and they do not exist at present, and perhaps less likely that they will be accessible to our influence in the future» (Amosov, 1926: 69).

Researcher S.M. Freudenberg studied household and geographical conditions of Karkarala district areas: the radii of nomadism, population density, household structure. The author classifies the nomadic household of Karkarala District (depending on the radius of nomadism) into seven types: up to 5 versts, from 5 to 10 versts, from 11 to 50 versts, from 51 to 100 versts, and etc. (Freydenberg, 1929: 209). He concludes that the longest nomadic routes are typical for Balkhash area, differing by its lowest population density – 0.7 persons per 1 square kilometer. Study of S.M. Freudenberg differs by its low level of theorizing, but there is data in this work.

An article by N.N. Mackiewicz is aimed at the study of nomadic routes length, population density and types of nomadism in Semipalatinsk province (according to 1927). Considerable interest is presented by the description of Karkarala County, which, according to the author, has "the highest average length of nomadism" in the province – 776 versts (Matskevich, 1929: 22). N.N. Mackiewicz recognized the existence of the relationship between population density and radius of nomadism: a higher rate of population density influences, in his view, to the reduction of the length of nomadism. The researcher is of the view that the nomadic herding "in any case does not preclude the existence of culture." After all, no one doubts the fairly high cultural development of Switzerland or the Normandy, where the rural population prefers not to practice agriculture but cattle breeding.

N.N. Matskevich, while considering the economic structure of Karkarala county, comes to the conclusion that the maximum amplitude of nomadism was typical for county Degondelskaya – 776 versts. Long nomadic routes were also typical for Cato – Balkhash County and Shet County – 300-400 versts. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the distance is to one end. This means that in this county some households in the process of nomadism crossed more than 1.5 thousand versts which of course is a testament of their pronounced nomadic nature. This is confirmed by some of the numerical data. According Mackiewicz in Karkaralinsk county percentage of nomadic households was 95.3 % and settled – 4.7 %. The average length of nomadism was 54.5 versts. In 1926, during the nomadism households of Karkarala County passed 3 million. 911 thousand 530 versts (Matskevich, 1929: 13). These figures, of course, impress and convince us of the predominance in the Central Kazakhstan in the mid-1920s semi-nomadic household.

Cattle breeding was the dominant type of household of baganalins, the inhabitants of Baganalinsk region, economic history of which caused research interest in M. Sharipov. M. Sharipov considers the household structure, the level of availability of cattle, trading scope of baganalins in the early twentieth century and argues that Baganalinsky district in the pre-Soviet period was the richest (according to the number of cattle) district of Sary-Arka. Sharipov in his study presents some evidence indicating the scope of trading operations of baganalins at Atbasar fair. Russian merchant Baranov at the fair concluded commercial dealings only with baganalins twice a year. During only one trading operation he bought about 80 thousand sheep, which were then resold in Chelyabinsk (Sharipov, 1924: 151).

M. Sharipov in his study also notes the processes of impoverishment of baganalins caused by political events – the October Revolution and the Civil War. In particular, the researcher writes that in the early 1920s about 2 thousand households of baganalins were forced to migrate to the river Ishim and move into peasant villages as agricultural laborers, shepherds and seasonal workers; some baganalins started to employ in their household prosperous Kazakhs – pastoralists (Sharipov, 1924: 153).

According to the researchers, such trend was typical for the population of Kazakhstan in the beginning of the 1920s and "activity-channels of self-pauperized population" were varied. At the same time, scientists stress that it is about the pauperization not proletarianization of the Kazakh population.

In the work of A. Smolensky and G. Nikolaev there is an attempt for a statistical study of the Kazakh household (according to the budget survey Karkarala County in 1926). This study claims to be a comprehensive coverage of the problem: the study of the structure of the herd, a comparative analysis with the data of the survey of Shcherbina, the study of gross profitability of the Kazakh household, tax accounting, the degree of involvement in the market turnover. In particular, according to the budget survey of Karkarala County, the Kazakh household of this county were closely related to the provincial market, acting as a «sellers of livestock feed and livestock and buyers of industrial goods and bread».

A. Smolensky and G. Nikolaev noted the main features of semi-nomadic household on the eve of radical land reforms. However, significant differences in the levels of profitability among the various population groups were interpreted as an indication of primitive forms of animal husbandry, which, in our opinion, is the wrong point of view (Smolenskiy, Nikolayev, 1927).

Lack of trade settlements and infrastructure imposed on market relations of Karkarala County farms a unique imprint: a large part of the sales and purchases were carried out at fairs. As the researchers in end of the 1920s wrote: «... for such areas fair, on the one hand, is a major commodity artery, and on the other – a huge "procurement centers", where the nomad has the ability, without intermediaries, and without interrupting from the usual conditions of life, to sell the products of his household» (Nikolayev: 1928: 226). In particular, the increasing popularity had Koyandy (Botovskaya) Fair. G. Nikolaev wrote that at Koyandy fair there were held trading operations by representatives of villages such as Balkhash, areas of Akmola, Semipalatinsk and Jetysu provinces.

4. Conclusion

Thus, nomadism as a lifestyle and as a type of household was dictated by the need to survive in the steppe and semi-desert areas of Central Kazakhstan. The geographical factor was decisive in the emergence of nomadic pastoralism. This type of household arose in the region in the late Bronze Age and passed a long way of development – until the 1920s.

It is also necessary to establish the fact that the traditional household of the Kazakhs of Central Kazakhstan, in particular, nomadic pastoralism, triggered a research interest in economists and agrarians in the 1920s. It must be emphasized that the majority of these researchers recognize the adaptive nature of the household of the Kazakhs, supported the view that the geographic conditions, poor soil and water are responsible for the household structure of the region.

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