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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

Volume 3 Issue 6

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THE SEDENTARIZATION PROCESS OF NOMADIC KIPCHAKS IN THE FERGANA VALLEY (SECOND HALF OF THE 19th CENTURY)

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a comprehensive study of the sedentarization of nomadic Qipchaq communities in the Fergana Valley during the second half of the nineteenth century — the initial decades following the incorporation of the Fergana Oblast into the Russian Empire (1876). The research draws on unpublished documents from state archives in Russia and Uzbekistan, Russian administrative statistics, and ethnographic sources. Three principal drivers of sedentarization are identified: the confiscation of pasturelands, taxation policy, and the expansion of irrigated agriculture. The article also analyses how the sedentarization process affected the ethnic identity of nomadic communities.

Keywords: Qipchaqs, Fergana Valley, sedentarization, nomadism, Russian colonialism, ethnic identity, pasturelands, nineteenth century.

INTRODUCTION. The sedentarization of nomadic peoples in Central Asia has long been one of the principal themes of historical and ethnological research. However, the absence of a detailed study of this process for a specific ethnic group — the Kipchaks — within the context of the Fergana Valley creates a noticeable methodological gap. This article is directed toward filling that gap.

In the second half of the 19th century, three socio-economic systems collided in the Fergana Valley: sedentary agriculture, nomadic pastoralism, and semi-nomadic mixed husbandry. The Kipchaks, as a community engaged in traditional pastoral husbandry, became the primary “victim” of this collision under the conditions of Russian colonial rule. As N.E. Masanov has emphasized, nomadism is a comprehensive system of social organization, and any external shock to it destabilizes not only the economic foundation but also the cultural and social fabric.[1]

The primary aims of the research are: to identify the factors that led to the sedentarization of Kipchak pastoral communities in Fergana Oblast between 1876 and 1900; to reconstruct the pace and geographic map of the process; and to assess the impact of sedentarization on ethnic identity.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCE BASE

The study employs the comparative-historical method, statistical analysis, and the cross-referencing of ethnographic sources. The source base is divided into two groups: archival documents, and contemporary ethnographic and statistical publications.

Among the archival sources, the funds of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan (TsGA RUz) and the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) occupy a central place. As A.M. Khazanov has noted, Russian administrative documents are one-sided in their observation of nomads, yet their quantitative data constitute an irreplaceable tool for comparative study of the process.[2]

Among the key period sources, V.P. Nalivkin's 1886 work [3] and the ethnographic studies of B.Kh. Karmysheva [4] served as the basis for describing the economic structure of pastoral communities. S.N. Abashin's postcolonial analysis, in turn, allowed the concept of "ethnic group" to be viewed from a critical perspective.[5]

THE SETTLEMENT OF KIPCHAKS IN THE FERGANA VALLEY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19th CENTURY

Before the Russian conquest (1876), the Kipchaks of the Fergana Valley were settled primarily in the northern and northwestern parts of the region — that is, in the piedmont and valley sections of Namangan district and the environs of Kokand. According to Nalivkin's data, approximately 25,000–30,000 Kipchaks lived in the valley in the mid-19th century, practicing semi-nomadic and fully nomadic ways of life.[6]

With the abolition of the Kokand Khanate in 1876 and the establishment of Fergana Oblast, the traditional pasturelands of the Kipchaks were subsumed into the Russian administrative system. An 1886 report preserved in TsGA RUz (Fund I-I, Inventory 12, File 384) describes the initial registration of the nomadic population of Fergana Oblast and the procedure for delimiting their pasturelands.[7]

As D.N. Logofet attests, the colonial administration viewed nomads as an "disorderly" and "uncontrollable" population and adopted a policy of administratively "regulating" them — that is, settling them.[8]

THE PRINCIPAL FACTORS OF SEDENTARIZATION

Confiscation of pasturelands. The first and most powerful factor of sedentarization was the loss of pasturelands. The Land-Water Reform of 1886 (Polozhenie ob upravlenii Turkestanskim kraem) declared the traditional annual migration routes and pasturelands of the Kipchaks to be "state property." As a result of this policy, Kipchak communities in Namangan district lost approximately 40–60% of their principal autumn and winter pasturelands.

Data from the 1897 All-Russian census (TsGA RUz, Fund I-19) show that of the 12,400 Kipchaks registered in Namangan district, barely more than 28% had retained fully nomadic status; the remainder had begun to become semi-nomadic or to join the permanent village population.[9]

Taxation policy. The Russian administration introduced an annual "yurt tax" (kibit nalog) for the nomadic population — 2 rubles 75 kopecks per tent in 1876. As A.E. Snesev noted, paying this tax required monetary funds within the nomadic household, and the only means of obtaining money was through agriculture or the sale of labor to neighboring sedentary communities.[10]

Documents from 1897 held in the RGIA funds list separately the “settled” (osevshiye) and “migratory” (kochuyushchiye) populations of Fergana Oblast. These documents show that over a decade (1886–1897), the share of Kipchaks practicing sedentary farming rose from 18% to 41%.[11]

Expansion of irrigated agriculture. The Russian administration expanded the irrigation system in the Fergana Valley to produce raw cotton. This process, on the one hand, accelerated the conversion of Kipchak pasturelands into agricultural land; on the other, cotton cultivation became a new economic resource for Kipchaks who were settling down. According to A.P. Shishov’s description, Kipchak villages around Namangan had by the mid-1890s already taken on the appearance of settled Uzbek villages.[12]

THE GEOGRAPHIC PICTURE AND PACE OF SEDENTARIZATION

Data from B.P. Qosimov’s archival analysis show that the sedentarization of the Kipchaks in the Fergana Valley proceeded in two principal areas: the central part of Namangan district (the river-plain lowlands) and the environs of Kokand district.[13]

According to the 1904 statistical data in TsGA RUz (Fund I-I, Inventory 31, File 595), the total number of livestock in Kipchak households in Namangan district had declined by 52% relative to 1880. This figure demonstrates that sedentarization was not only a consequence of administrative compulsion, but also the result of economic necessity.[14]

If F. Barth’s theory of ethnic groups maintaining their mutual boundaries through economic specialization [15] is applied to the example of the Fergana Valley, one can observe that as the Kipchaks became increasingly sedentarized, the boundary that distinguished them culturally and economically from the “sart” (sedentary Uzbek) population gradually weakened. This state of affairs was reflected in local administrative reports through such phrases as the Kipchaks “have settled” or “have become sartized.”

SEDENTARIZATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Studies by B.A. Ahmedov show that even in areas where the Kipchaks had settled, they preserved a “Kipchak” identity within the framework of the clan system and the mahalla for several generations.[16]

M.J. Jo‘rayev demonstrated that the system of “laqab” (clan name) among Kipchak communities remained functional as hereditary memory and social structure even after sedentarization.[17]

A. O‘rinboyev’s research, based on archival evidence, showed that pastoral traditions among settled Kipchaks — in particular, the keeping of domestic animals and partial seasonal use of pastures — continued for one to two generations after the transition to agriculture.[18]

A 1910 administrative report in TsGA RUz concerning the “new Kipchak villages” in Namangan district notes the rapid development of agriculture among their inhabitants, yet records that more than 70% of the population of these villages still identified themselves as “Kipchak.”[19]

M.B. Olcott examined the impact of colonial policy on sedentarization extensively through the example of Kazakhstan, and her conclusions display important parallels with the processes in the Fergana Valley: in both cases, administrative compulsion, the loss of pastureland, and taxation policy combined to accelerate sedentarization.[20]

CONCLUSION. This research demonstrates that the sedentarization of nomadic Kipchak communities in the Fergana Valley during the second half of the 19th century was not the result of spontaneous or natural evolution, but rather the deliberate consequence of Russian colonial policy. The confiscation of pasturelands, the yurt tax as a financial burden, and the forced expansion of irrigated agriculture — these three factors, acting in concert, compelled the greater part of the Kipchaks to adopt a settled way of life between 1876 and 1900.

Archival data show that between 1886 and 1897, the share of sedentary Kipchak households in Namangan district rose from 18% to 41%. This figure confirms that the process proceeded at a very high rate, only 10–21 years after the beginning of colonial policy.

At the same time, the sedentarization process did not completely destroy the ethnic identity of the Kipchaks. The fact that the clan system, the ethnonym “Kipchak,” and pastoral traditions are recorded in administrative reports up to the early 20th century shows that sedentarization — even as the economic way of life changed — proceeded alongside the preservation of cultural and social identity for several generations.

As H. Ziyoev has emphasized, a full understanding of the history of Central Asia in the 19th and early 20th centuries requires the study of archival evidence demonstrating violence and compulsion within their precise historical context.[20]

For future research, it would be appropriate to conduct a comparative analysis for the same period across other pastoral groups in the Fergana Valley — the Kyrgyz, Qo‘ngirot, and Yuz. Such comparisons would help clarify the ethno-specific and general patterns of sedentarization.

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