

CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF HUMANITY STUDIES

Student: Elizaveta Pridannikova  
Thesis supervisor: Frantisek Kalenda

**Daily life of the Ural Cossacks from the 18th to the beginning of the 20th  
century**

Bachelor thesis

Prague 2021

# **Daily life of the Cossacks from the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century.**

## **Contents:**

Introduction.....	2
Theory and methodology .....	3
<b>I . History of the settlement of the Urals .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>II. Development of the Ural Cossackdom and ethnic belonging of the Ural Cossacks</b>	
When did the Cossack communities start to appear and why? .....	13
Who are the Cossacks ethnically?.....	15
Religious peculiarities of the Ural Cossacks.....	22
<b>III. Cossack household, families and daily life .....</b>	
Main types of the economic activities.....	29
Family and principles of upbringing in the Cossack families. Household duties.....	34
<b>IV. Revival of the Ural Cossackdom in the 21st century. ....</b>	<b>48</b>
Final remarks .....	54

## Introduction

I have heard about the Cossacks since early childhood. As a kid I didn't fully realize who the Cossacks were and what place they occupied in the history of Russia and of our family. Today as an adult I have a chance to re-evaluate my knowledge about this community and, hopefully, to draw some deeper message from it.

Today there is a Cossack revival supported by the government, so anthropologists and ethnologists have conducted some research work, which I rely on when writing this paper. Thanks to those works we can see that the Cossacks are a unique ethnic group of pre-revolutionary Russia. The Cossack movement played a huge part in the geo-political life of the country. Taken this new interest from the state, the scientific community, and common citizens, it is important to draw more research and gather information from the descendants of the Cossacks orally or in a written form.

Many questions are still open and / or require deeper analysis. Some researchers and local journalists mention that the reviving communities tend to romanticize the past and have difficulties with defining their socio-cultural and political belonging.<sup>1</sup> It is thus important to try to develop an objective understanding of the Cossack life and tradition, their history and role in the geo-political life of the Russian Empire. This perspective will allow us avoid misjudgements and have clear picture of what we shall aim to preserve, and what can be left behind.

This work aims to describe and analyse daily life of the Cossack, mainly from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and until the formation of the Soviet Union. I will also cover the history of the Ural Cossackdom, as it's a vital step in understanding the Cossack mentality. I will try to show peculiarities of daily life and habits in the Cossacks' settlements in the Southern Urals. In this work I will attempt to develop better understanding of where my ancestors come from. I will examine the cultural history of the Ural Cossacks and try to see the influence of the Cossack tradition on modern generations (like mine).

In order to write this work I have conducted a series of interviews with my relatives, namely my grandfather and two of his cousins. I am not the first person in the family interested in the events of the past. My grandfather's cousins have worked independently and simultaneously on

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g. O. Merzlikina. *Along the Ural banks... SGPU, 2007, Samara.*  
A. Skorik, R. Tikidjan. *Cossack Revival on the verge of the XXI c.*, article #6 from a collection *Cossack Don*, obllUU, 1995, Rostov-on-Don. P. 208.

the reconstruction of our family history based on the photo materials, letters, and oral evidences they could collect. Their work resulted in a book called *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*<sup>2</sup> (by my great-uncle M. Gorbunov) and in a detailed genealogical tree containing descriptions and photos of our ancestors (if available). I am using this material together with the oral records collected during my visit to Russia in winter 2020-2021.

Describing mundane life of the Cossacks is not always easy, because many details of this life are taken for granted as any usual, almost automatic action or thought. Therefore it requires additional questions and effort to revive these details in the memory. For example, when I asked my grandfather about types of vegetables his grandmother had been growing, he had to take time to recall this information. I have also unexpectedly encountered several unknown words (names of food, domestic objects, places and military vocabulary). Those words were unknown to me for two reasons: first, some were borrowed or influenced by the Turkic languages; second, some words were simply archaic and / or belonged to the local semantic variations.<sup>3</sup>

### **Theory and methodology**

In this work I rely on the information received from my family members. First of all, I used the method of oral history. I have conducted some interviews with my grandfather, my cousin from the Urals. I also rely on the recollections of multiple talks I had with my grandfather's cousin, grandpa Misha. Apart from oral method, I use a primary source – an autobiographical book by grandpa Misha.

Theoretical material can be also divided into two groups: academic texts of the late 20<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and books written by the researchers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Georgi and Pallas) following their travels to the region.

#### ***Primary sources***

As mentioned in the introduction, I rely on the evidences I received from my family in various forms. First of all, I use a book written by my grandfather's cousin, Mikhail Gorbunov. I personally saw him only several times in my life since he spent most of his life in Astana, Kazakhstan. He was older than my grandfather and recalled more about their childhood years on

---

<sup>2</sup> M. A. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*. 2014, Astana.

<sup>3</sup> N. Shuvalov. *From Paris to Berlin: Toponym*. The Southern Urals publishing house, 1989, Chelyabinsk.

the Urals. I remember him as a generous man who would always put his family above all. He would always bring me presents and talk about different things he saw, but sadly those meetings were only occasional. He passed away couple of years ago and thus I can only rely on the book he wrote for us, his family members. The book is called *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*. It was published in small number in Astana in 2014 and I was lucky enough to get my copy soon after. Grandfather Misha, how I used to call him, spent most of his life working in the State Kazakh University as the head of the study department. His academic education and work resulted in a well-written book with tremendous amount of details that he had been gathering for many years. Most of it talks about the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet he also provided vivid description of his grandparents' life based on what he recalled from them or other relatives. It shall be noted that both, he and my grandfather, spent a lot of time with their grandparents when they were kids. Thus the informations given in the book also contains thing he observed personally.

### ***Oral history***

My grandfather on my father's side, Vasily Pridannikov, also recalls a lot of household details from his childhood. Throughout the course of all my life I have heard different stories about the Cossack life, about the values that distinguished a good Cossack. His life took a course different from of his cousin. He moved to the Central part of Russia and worked as a Chief Engineer at the factory producing heavy machinery for construction and agricultural purposes. Yet despite different life experience, just like grandfather Misha, he always believed in the power of education, faithful attitude towards your land and family, and hard work to achieve greater results. Love for the Urals specifically was also part of their common values. My grandfather never lost touch with the family in the Urals and occasionally visited them with my grandmother.

During the preparation to write this work, I contacted one of my cousins in the Urals, Evgeny Pridannikov. Even though we never communicated before, he knew a lot about me from my grandfather and it felt very easy to talk to him. He immediately offered all his resources about our family, including the genealogical tree he is working on. Even though his work relates mainly to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and I can't use it in this work, it was amazing to see how passionate my cousin is about his home and family. When talking about his project to create a genealogical tree, he explained: „I want to have it all in one place, so that everyone [from the family] could access the information and know the true history. It's not for me, it's also for my children, for you, for

everyone.”<sup>4</sup> Evgeny also explained that our ancestors did a lot of things we can be proud of, things that can empower us and give something to hold on to in tough times. He doesn't consider himself a Cossack, but the values I saw in the older generation of our family seem to also live in him.

I specifically avoid the word „patriotism”, because my relatives predominantly use „love for motherland” or „love for your land”. I had a brief talk with my grandfather once, when he frowned and said that patriotism sounds politicized and distorts the meaning of the phrase. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the Cossacks have always been very defensive about their freedom, which resulted in repetitive clashes with the state. Even though my grandfather wasn't already a Cossack, he was brought up by his grandparents, who still considered themselves the Cossacks, even when Cossackdoms were banned after the fall of the Russian Empire. Based on the life of my family, I believe that the old values were never fully destroyed and will grow strong again despite any turmoil that might happen on the internal or external political arena. Going back to the „Love for your land”, I'd like to add that in case of my relatives' use of this phrase, it means 1) love for the nature; 2) love for your home / household / family. It came as no surprise for me, when Evgeny contacted my mother to gather information about her relatives. Despite the fact that they are not related anyhow, he didn't hesitate to include her into the tree because she is my mother and thus automatically part of the family. My mother was pleasantly surprised by this enthusiasm. Her family comes from the Central Part of the country, where people are more distant, so warm interest of an almost stranger seemed unusual. For me, observing this little situation was especially interesting, because it was the first time I could clearly see how different people's perception of things can be.

Concluding on the sources in my family, I'd like to add that there is a huge amount of small details and information that I happen to know because I grew up among photos of the Urals and of the ancestors, among stories and dreams told by my grandfather and his relatives that occasionally visited us (incl. grandfather Misha). Of course, many things have been lost during the past decades, but I hope I will provide at least a brief insight into the mentality of the Cossacks and their descendants, into their culture and history, as well as future aspirations.

### ***Theoretical material***

When describing the history of the Ural Cossacks I rely on the materials by the researchers from the 21<sup>st</sup> century (O. Merzlikina, A. Frolova, I. Murzina, V. Mosin, A. Superanskaya etc.), as

---

<sup>4</sup> *From my message history with him as of this winter.*

well as on the information provided by the travelers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (mainly Peter Simon Pallas and Johann Gotlieb Georgi). Pallas was a Prussian polymath, zoologist and traveler, who worked in the Russian Empire in the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1767-1810). He wrote numerous works during and after his travels, many of which are still available (also in Russian). I took his book *Journey across Different Provinces of the Russian Empire* originally issued in St. Petersburg in 1771-1788 (in German and in Russian).

Georgi was a Swedish traveler, ethnographer and doctor. He arrived to the Russian Empire in 1770 to take part in the scientific expeditions organized by the Academy of Science. Two years later he was sent to assist Pallas in the journey around the Urals and further to Siberia. Georgi later on also took a trip to the lake Baikal and issued his notes in German in 1775. I used his work *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian State, Their Everyday Rituals, Customs, Clothes, Dwellings, Fun, Religions*, Part 1, initially published in St. Petersburg in 1799. Today these books are available on the library websites or similar academic sources. I also used information that can be found in the open online archive of the Russian Military Historical Society. It a state funded organization with the goal of consolidating the resources of the State and the Society for the study of Russia's Military-Historical past, facilitating the study of national military history. The predecessor of this society was the organization under the same name established by Nikolai II and shut in 1917. In 2012, following the state decree #1710 it officially opened its doors for all enthusiasts in the area of military history.

## I. History of the settlement of the Urals

The Ural Mountains divide Europe and Asia. The area is rich in mineral resources, vast fertile lands, and kilometres of forests with diverse flora and fauna. The region itself has been known to the outer world for centuries. It is believed that even Herodotus mentions this area in his *Histories*: „...as far as their [Scythian] country, the tract of land whereof I have been speaking is all a smooth plain, and the soil deep; beyond you enter on a region which is rugged and stony. Passing over a great extent of this rough country, you come to a people dwelling at the foot of lofty mountains, who are said to be all - both men and women - bald from their birth, to have flat noses, and very long chins. These people speak a language of their own, the dress which they wear is the same as the Scythian... Thus far, therefore, the land is known; but beyond the bald-headed men lies a region of which no one can give any exact account. Lofty and precipitous mountains, which are never crossed, bar further progress.”<sup>5</sup>



Pic. 1. General map (from Wikipedia – cc license)

First people are believed to have come to the Ural Mountains around 300-250 thousand years ago from the Caucasus and the Central Asia. They moved up along large rivers Kama and Ural.<sup>6</sup>

Over the next millennia the peoples of the Urals have been repeatedly changing and replacing each other. Yet by the beginning of the second millennium AD there have formed several ethnic groups that are considered indigenous today: the Nenets in the north, the Khanty and the Mansi along the Ob River, the Bashkirs in the south and along the Ufa River, and some others. These peoples exist to this day within their former territories. Their ethnic



Pic. 2. Map of the region with rivers (from Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.)

<sup>5</sup> Herodotus. *The Histories*, 4.23 and 4.25. Penguin Books, 1954, Harmondsworth.

<sup>6</sup> V. Mosin. *The Southern Urals in the Stone Age*. Vol. 1 of *History of the Southern Urals*, comp. by S. Botalov, Publishing Centre JuUrGU, 2019, Chelyabinsk.

names have been reflected in the names of the constituent entities of Russia (e.g. the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District).

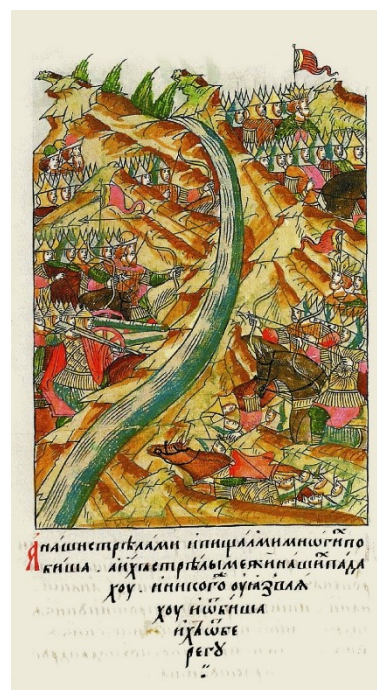
In the 9th - 12th centuries, several states appeared in the west of the Urals. The most famous of them were Kievan Rus' and Volga Bulgaria. These states (as well as individual principalities that emerged after the collapse of Kievan Rus) maintained close trade relations with the peoples of the Urals, and some lands even ended up under their control. We know that the peoples living in the lower and middle reaches of the Kama River were under the rule of the Volga Bulgaria. The peoples of the Northern Urals paid tribute to Novgorod.

However, the invasion of the Tatar-Mongols in 1237 devastated Rus' and other conquered territories. Many peoples of the Southern Urals were also under the Tatar-Mongol yoke. Needless to say that many connections and relations between the Urals and the western states were disrupted. The Russians' movement to settle in the east was suspended for almost 150 years.

Over time, the Golden Horde began to weaken and lose its power over a huge conquered territory. Besides, a new state to the north of it was rising and gaining strength around Moscow - the Grand Duchy of Moscow. As the Horde struggled to cope with multiple local conflicts, uprisings, and internal misfortunes, it couldn't hold a firm grip onto its western subordinates. Eventually, the Moskovite Rus' won an epic fight against the Horde on the river Ugra in 1480 (see pic. 3). After another victory over its second rival, the Novgorod principality, the Muscovite Rus' began to rapidly expand to the Urals and Siberia.

At the end of the 15th century, the territory in the upper reaches of the Kama River called the Great Perm became part of Rus'. However, due to intense relations in the past, the first Russian cities appeared in the Urals almost a century before that (e.g. Anfalov town (1409)).<sup>7</sup>

Settlement in the Great Perm area wasn't easy and peaceful because of the resistance from



Pic. 3. Battle at the Ugra River, XVIc. Manuscript (from Wikipedia – cc license)

<sup>7</sup> S. Botalov. *At the Origins of the Southern Urals Peoples. The Southern Urals in the Times of the Golden Horde (IX – beginning of the XV c.)*. Vol. 5 of *History of the Southern Urals*, comp. by S. Botalov, Publishing Centre JuUrGU, 2019, Chelyabinsk.

the neighbouring warlike peoples, especially, the Siberian Tatars. In order to protect settlements, special town fortifications were built – the Kremains. The first Kremlin in the Urals was built in 1535 in the city of Cherdyn. Two decades later, Bashkiria (the Republic of Bashkortostan today with a capital in Ufa) was also annexed to Rus’.

Merchants and religious leaders played a significant part in the settlement of the annexed territories. A prominent Russian historian of the XIX century Nikolai M. Karamzin wrote in the IX volume of *The History of Russian Government* about a Cossack called Yermak who crossed the Ural mountain chain in 1581.<sup>8</sup> It took him two years to conquer the Siberian and Ural lands. Before those events, around 1578, tsar Ivan the Terrible ordered two merchants, brothers Stroganov, to build fortresses from the Perm lands to the river Chusovaya in order to protect Russian lands and settlements from the Siberian and Nogai tribes.



Pic. 4. Model of the wooden Kremlin in Cherdyn (from Wikipedia – cc license)

In order to fulfil the tsar’s order, brothers Stroganov called volunteers to join their armed squad (*druzhina*). That time impoverished Cossacks were roaming in the area between Don and Volga, where they robbed merchants and royal ambassadors. „Among the violent Volzhsky atamans then there were: Yermak Timofeev; Ivan Koltso; Yakov Mikhailov, who was condemned to death by the tsar; Nikita Pan; Matvey Meshcheryak - all known for their rare daring. After having heard how they terrify with their audacity not only peaceful travelers, but all the surrounding uluses<sup>9</sup>, clever Stroganov brothers offered those five brave men service of honor: they sent gifts and wrote a kind letter (on April 6, 1579) urging atamans to renounce deeds unworthy of Christian *vityaz*; to be not robbers, but soldiers of the *White Tsar*; not to look for inglorious dangers, but to be reconciled with God and with Russia. They wrote: „We have fortresses and lands, but few people in a squad. Come with us to defend the Great Perm and the eastern edge of Christianity.”<sup>10</sup> As written in the Karamzin’s work, Yermak and his comrades shed tears out of emotions - the idea to cast down disgrace by honest deeds and by state service, to exchange the name of brave robbers for the name of good

<sup>8</sup> N. Karamzin. *The History of Russian Government*, v. 9. 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Ripol Classic, 1998, St. Petersburg. P. 255.

<sup>9</sup> *Ulus* means a nomad camp.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* P. 265.

warriors of the motherland touched rude hearts that were yet not devoid of remorse.”<sup>11</sup> Atamans gathered 540 brave warriors and arrived to meet brothers Stroganov. Karamzin writes a lot about various achievements of the squad under Yermak: not only did they protect the fortresses; they also stopped the surrounding tribes from attacking Russian settlements.

In 1581 brothers Stroganov ordered Yermak to start settling the lands to the East of the Ural Mountains and to kick out the impious Khan Kuchyum. That is how ataman Yermak became the pioneer in taming of new lands. After his death in 1582, settlement of the lands to the East of the Ural Mountains stopped. However, in the middle of the XVII century the second wave of settlement began and stretched farther to Siberia and the Far East. Following the tsars’ orders, Yermak’s descendants were moving slowly to the East constructing small fortresses and frontier posts along the way. Those fortresses later became strongholds of the Cossack stanitsas. That is how the history of those lands unfolded for many decades: Russian tsars ordered Cossacks to explore new lands and to build fortresses that were later inhabited by common people. The Cossacks protected settlements, so their inhabitants could dedicate themselves to crafts, gold mining, fishing, fur production etc.

The Ural region back then was the main destination of the runaway peasants, who either staid there or moved on to Siberia, where chances to be caught were almost zero. Many of the runaways had a distinctive feature – they could read and write, some even sophisticated things with calligraphic handwriting.<sup>12</sup> Naturally, their landlords wanted to get valuable human resources back. It made impossible for those peasants to hide in the central part of the Russian Empire, where administrative apparatus of the legal system was active and effective. Thus they would either settle in the Urals or move further to the east, where bureaucratic hand was too short to reach. Those who settled in the Urals have brought their literacy to the benefit of the local communities and following generations. Historians know case when whole literate families ran away and settled on the eastern side of the mountains. These people, sure, contributed to the general level of literacy in the area. Literacy, in turn, played a big part both in trade and in the relationships of the Cossacks with the local and foreign authorities. My grandfather has always said that „our, Orenburg Cossacks have always been the most literate of all other Cossack communities [in Russia and

---

<sup>11</sup> N. Karamzin. *The History of Russian Government*, v. 9. 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Ripol Classic, 1998, St. Petersburg. P. 265

<sup>12</sup> A. Preobrazhenskiy. *The Urals and the Northern Siberia in the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries*. Science, 1972, Moscow. Chapter 2.

Ukraine]”. Indeed, almost every Cossack in the Urals was literate, which allowed to speak to the authorities on the legitimate level. Not only did they defend the right to self-govern, but also avoided paying state taxes. In return, they were to protect the borders from the aggressive neighbours.

Many Cossacks moved to new lands not by free will, but out of need. First, old settled lands slowly filled up with peasants who ran away from the serfdom of landowners. They were fleeing from the central part of Russia (Moscow, Tula, Ryazan etc.) and inhabited eastern lands, including areas round Don. Today it seems to be rather close, only 800km away from Moscow, yet back then it was a far-fetched piece of land almost never visited by the tsar’s straps. Fugitive peasants would gather around existing Cossack villages there. They worked, married local women, built houses and worked in fields. It lasted for generations, so eventually there was less and less land for everyone, and people had to move farther to the east. Second, tsars started to push Cossacks to be more obedient, not everyone in the capital liked their frivolous spirit. So some people preferred to move away from the beholding eye of the authorities to distant lands. Third, the state was chopping down hectares of forests for export, local construction, fuel and expansion of fields. It required many workers, who were sent from other areas and who occupied the land. According to my great-great-grandfather, all those reasons led to limited freedom of the Cossacks in the Don region and pushed them to move away. He would also mention: Cossacks have always valued most their freedom and wide spacious lands. Thus, many Cossack families from the Don region left to seek better fate. Besides, the tsar needed new fortresses in the East, so the state financed those willing to relocate.<sup>13</sup>

History of my family’s life in the Southern Urals goes back to XVIII century. According to my great-great-grandfather, Gorbunov Stepan Vasilyevich, his great-grandfather came with his family to the Southern Urals from the Voronezh region (upper Don). Back than the Bashkir tribes, who were mainly nomads, occupied those lands. No wonder, the first Cossack stanitsas<sup>14</sup> were named after the Bashkir names for mountains, rivers etc.: Chebarkulskaya (after the lake Chebarkul), Kundravinskaya (after the lake Kundrava), Ujskaya (after the river Uy) etc. Those villages were located along the eastern side of the Ural Mountains. Cossacks from the areas around

---

<sup>13</sup> A. Preobrazhenskiy. *The Urals and the Northern Siberia in the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.*

Science, 1972, Moscow. Chapter 2, „Migrations of peoples in the Urals and the Northern Siberia in XVII-XVIII c.”

<sup>14</sup> *Stanitsa* means „village”, „settlement”

Don, Volga and even Kuban came there. It was the stronghold of the Russian eastern lands. Cossacks received land from the tsars and were free from paying taxes, yet they had to serve their motherland faithfully and loyally.

My ancestors fell for that. They received a bit of money and „Road papers” so that nobody stopped them along the way. Around 1780-1790, after a short prayer, Gorbunov family embarked on a journey to far lands. After crossing Volga, several small rivers, and grey Urals mountain chain covered with forests they reached a small settlement called Zlatoust. This town was known for its iron smelting and was located by a big road stretching through all the region. After Zlatoust, they crossed the Miass River and stopped in a small village called Miasskaya. There local ataman set them for permanent settlement in stanitsa Kulakhtinskaya, which was around 70km away from the southern border of the stanitsa Miasskaya. A small string of two carts with oxen left to see their new home. Five Cossacks accompanied the family on horses to protect women and children, who sat on carts holding small sacks with basic things. As my great-great-grandfather said, all Cossacks needed on the road were pots to cook, spoons to eat, and a piece of lining to protect women and children from the rain. Men wore homespun coats (*zipuns*) that they used as blankets and protection from rain and cold. That is how Gorbunov family ended up in the Southern Urals, where it lived for more than 150 years – until the beginning of the Soviet collectivization.

## II. Development of the Ural Cossackdom and ethnic belonging of the Ural Cossacks

### When did the Cossack communities start to appear and why?

The word *Cossack* itself is a borrowing from the Turkic languages. Here is what the Dr. of philological studies, A. Superanskaya, writes in one of her articles: „The word *Cossack* is of Turkic origin. Its original meaning is „detached from its kind”. It should be noted that the Turkic peoples leading a nomadic way of life were distinguished by a strict tribal organization. Some were burdened by this, so they left their kind and formed small squads that participated in military actions. In Russian manuscripts, the word *Cossack* had been used since 1395. Already at that time, the Cossacks were seen as a military class, obliged to serve on call on their own horses, in their own clothes, with their own weapons.”<sup>15</sup>

The origin of the Cossacks as people is still a subject of debates. Most of the historians agree though that initially Cossacks were free or escaped roamers. Russian historian S. Solovyov suggested that the word *Cossack* in the XIV-XV centuries meant someone, who was free, not bound by any obligations, ready to work for hire and freely moving from place to place. It must be noted that such person would be called a Cossack regardless of their language, faith and ethnic origin. In the XIV-XVI centuries such people were hired by the nobility and wealthy merchants to hold expeditions to remote, sparsely populated regions of Russia. „The dukes sent crowds of their industrialists to the White Sea and to the Northern Ocean, to the land of Tersk and Pechersk for fish, animals and poultry: we know from the letter of the Grand Duke Andrei Alexandrovich that already then he had three squads in the sea with their own *watamman* (watagaman , ataman<sup>16</sup>).”<sup>17</sup>

Eventually, Cossacks grew up from occasional roaming squads to free self-governing military communities located by the borders in different regions - Cossackdoms. According to Britannica, in the 16th century there were six major Cossackdoms: the Don, the Greben (in Caucasia), the Yaik (on the middle Ural River), the Volga, the Dnieper, and the Zaporozhian (mainly west of the Dnieper).<sup>18</sup> By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the number of Cossackdoms

---

<sup>15</sup> A. Superanskaya. „From the History of Surnames”. *Science and Life* magazine, vol. 7, 2008. P. 1 of the section „Correspondence with the Readers”.

<sup>16</sup> *Ataman* also comes from the Turkic languages. It means a „war chief”. In peaceful times he would also be something like the local governor. Ataman has always been elected. (acc. to the information from my relatives)

<sup>17</sup> S. Solovyov. *The History of Russia since the Ancient Times*. Vol. 4, Common Benefit, 1851-1879, St. Petersburg. Chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. «Cossack”. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 Apr. 2020,

grew manifold. Local self-government was developed in the Cossack districts. In their free time, the Cossacks worked the land (30 desiatina\*<sup>19</sup> per 1 male head). They enjoyed free education and medical care. In peacetime, [the following Cossacks] were at constant service: 17 regiments and 6 separate hundreds of the Don Cossack army, 11 regiments and 1 division of the Kuban army, 4 regiments and 4 local teams of the Terek army, 6 regiments and 1 division and 2 hundreds of the Orenburg army, 3 regiments and 2 teams of the Ural army, 3 regiments of the Siberian army, 1 regiment of the Semirechensky army, 4 regiments of the Trans-Baikal army, 1 regiment of the Amur army, 1 division of the Ussuriysk army, 2 hundreds of Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk Cossacks. The Cossack regiments were part of the cavalry divisions along with the regular army regiments, and also formed six completely Cossack divisions. During the First World War, the number of Cossack troops more than quadrupled.<sup>20</sup>

The Ural Cossacks are among the oldest Cossackdoms, which occupied vast territories around the Ural Mountains and south-eastern edge of European part of Russia along the middle and the lower reaches of the Ural River (known as Yaik before 1775). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century they all were called Yaik after the river, but by the 18<sup>th</sup> century they split into two groups – Yaik Cossacks and Orenburg Cossacks (after the city). Despite receiving different names, those two Cossackdoms have similar culture. As mentioned above, there is no one and clear answer to where Cossacks come from. Most of the researchers agree that the starting point for the Ural Cossacks was around the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The theory is supported by the manuscript as of 1584-1585 addressed to Ivan the Terrible and informing him that a large group of Cossacks built a town at the Ural River.

Historian A. Karpov writes about earlier dates, 1520-1550, based on the archive note as of 1720 saying: „...there gathered the Russians from the Don River and other towns, and Tatars from the Crimea and from Kuban, and other Mahommedan peoples... their arrival to the Yaik River was more than 200 years ago...”<sup>21</sup> There are also evidences in the folk songs about the Cossacks’ participation in the siege of Kazan in 1552. Thus it is impossible to firmly state the exact date when the Ural Cossacks appeared, we can only suggest the late 15- early 16 centuries as the starting period in the Ural Cossacks’ history.

---

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cossack>

<sup>19</sup> One desiatina accounted to 1.092 hectares (def. from Kamentsova, E. I., and N. V. Ustiugov. *Russkaia metrologiia*. Moscow, 1965)

<sup>20</sup> N. Komarov. *Social strata and nations of the Russian State during the reign of the Romanov*, GBU MDN, Moscow, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> A. Karpov, *The Uralians*, Uralsk, 1911. P. 76

## Who are the Cossacks ethnically?

### *Introduction*

Another open issue is about where the Cossacks come from. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many Cossacks came from the Don or Volga Rivers, as well as from the Central part of Russia. A Karpov mentions the state decrees that note many of the Cossacks being from the northern lands. Thus the Ural Cossackdom developed from the mixture of Russian ethnoses from the north and from the Central part of the country.

According to some researchers, the Ural Cossacks themselves didn't consider themselves coming from the Don or Volga Cossackdoms. They believe that all three Cossackdoms appeared independently from each other. L. Masyanov provides multiple examples of it based on the oral history evidence he collected.<sup>22</sup> Yet there are historical documents as of the 18<sup>th</sup> century making it clear that the Ural Cossackdom grew thanks to migrations from the Don River area and other territories. This fact is also confirmed by the history of my family that move to the Urals in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Ethnic belonging of the Cossacks is consequently also an open issue for researchers. In the Soviet literature ethnic belonging of the Cossacks wasn't mentioned at all, they were rather described as a military stratum of the Russian Empire. Today researchers approach this issue differently with many calling the Cossackdom not just a stratum, but „An ethnic group, since it is firmly linked to the specific territory, has established governing system, clearly developed culture (material and spiritual)... In the ethnographic language – it is a people, a pre-national [social] formation.”<sup>23</sup> Besides, some researchers underline that Cossacks are not just a historical and ethnographic phenomenon, but also a socio-psychological one, because the Cossacks had specific mentality different from the rest of the population. „They had a specific behavior type, which forged specific personality traits.”<sup>24</sup> The main three reasons why more and more scientists call Cossacks a separate ethnic group are: 1) specific traits of the daily life, 2) unique type of behaviour, 3) the right to be autonomous amidst the strictly centralized government system. „Any of those three characteristics, let alone all three, is enough to distinguish the Cossacks from the general

---

<sup>22</sup> L. Masyanov. *Death of the Ural Cossack Army*. Kazachy Krug #1, 1991.

<sup>23</sup> V. Vyrelkin. *Philosophical Problems of the Cossack revival*. Socio-political journal #3-6, 1994. P. 210

<sup>24</sup> S. Gavrilyachenko. *Serving Without Being a Servant*. Rodina, 1995. P. 11

mass of the Russians as an original people without breaking general ethnic connections...”<sup>25</sup>

The topic of the specifics of the ethnic belonging of the Cossacks is also an open issue. Modern researchers along with the pre-revolutionary ones provide opposite viewpoints. Some call the Cossacks a polytechnic community. For example, A. Karpov, a Cossack and a researcher of the late 19th century, believed that the Ural Cossacks consisted of many different nationalities, from Tatars and Kalmyks, living in neighbouring territories, to the Germans, Swedes, Finns, and Czechs, who had been initially taken prisoners during military campaigns and were later accepted to the Cossack rows.<sup>26</sup> We can see the same ideas in the works of other historians. For example, we can find the following words in the work of an 19<sup>th</sup> century historian, ethnographer and a politician, A. Levshin: „... by origin they are Russians, Tatars, Kalmyks; [there is] a small number of the Turkmen and Persians who baptized and mixed with Russians... there are also among them the baptized Kyrgyz...”<sup>27</sup> At the same time, some researchers state that the Cossackdoms were ethnically homogeneous with foreigners accounting to only several percent.<sup>28</sup>

### *Early stages of the Cossackdoms*

In order to understand and clarify this issue, it is necessary to see through 300 years of the Ural Cossacks' history. Unfortunately, there are no historical documents regarding the ethnicity of the Ural Cossacks in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Researchers suggest that the Cossackdoms were initially formed as multi-ethnic communities. Most of the foreigners were from the neighbouring areas, i.e. the Kazakhs, the Kalmyks etc. Turkic features in the anthropological type of the Ural Cossacks are considered to be the result of mixed marriages in the early years of the Cossack history. Johann Gottlieb Georgi, author of one of the earliest ethnographic descriptions of Russia, noted anthropological closeness of the Ural Cossacks and Tatars, Kalmyks. He wrote: „Appearance of many of them showed a mixture of Russian, Kalmyk, and Tatar blood”.<sup>29</sup> Later, when whole families started to move to the Urals, the Cossacks had marriages only within their own ethnic group. Widespread of the Old Believers' tradition among the Cossacks in the 18<sup>th</sup> century only favoured such exclusiveness. N. Borodin believed that the Cossacks also took wives from the

---

<sup>25</sup> V. Zotov. „Cossackdom – the Russian phenomenon”. *Liberal Thought* journal, issue #10, 1994. P. 68

<sup>26</sup> A. B. Karpov. *The Uralians*. V. 1, Uralsk, 1911. P. 28

<sup>27</sup> A. Levshin. *Historical and Static Review of the Ural Cossacks*. SPb, 1823, St. Petersburg. P. 54.

<sup>28</sup> V. Darienko. *Class War at the Yaik in XVII – beginning of XVIII cc*. Moscow, 1966, Moscow. P. 16

<sup>29</sup> J. G. Georgi. *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian State, Their Everyday Rituals, Customs, Clothes, Dwellings, Fun, Religions*. Part 1, SPb., 1799. P. 204.

surrounding areas, from Samara above all, where they sold fish and bought bread.<sup>30</sup>

As for the ethnic composition of the Ural Cossacks in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there are already more source and documents. For example, there is a protocol on the interrogation of the Ural Cossacks who arrived to the capital in 1721 on the military business. According to the Cossacks, their „great-grandfathers and grandfathers ... i.e. the first Ural Cossacks, came and settled here, on the Ural River ... many Russians gathered from the Don area and other cities. And the Tatars from the Crimea and the Kuban, and many other peoples...”<sup>31</sup>

At first, there were merely 40 Cossacks<sup>32</sup>, then the army started to grow. Escaped peasants, „Russians and foreigners, who had poor lives in Rus’ either because of their dissolute nature, or because of poverty, or because of the oppression from the military chiefs and the government; later also because of the persecution of the Old Believers.”<sup>33</sup> Thus the Cossack army included people from many areas across Russia and neighbouring territories: Don Cossacks, Moscow archers, Samara Cossacks, Voronezh cannons, Belgorod Cossacks (Cherkasy), Samara nobles, Poltava and Greben Cossacks, Kalmyks, Tatars, Mordovians, Chuvash, Votyaks. Additionally, there were also Swedes, Poles, Germans, Finns, Bashkirs, Turks, Kyrgyz, Kalmyks, etc., and „it is difficult to name any people who would not have given at least a small bit to the [Ural Cossack] army”<sup>34</sup>. Vitevsky is not the only researcher stating multi-ethnic nature of Cossackdoms. Many others researchers of the early history of the Ural Cossacks also note ethnic heterogeneity of the Ural Cossackdoms in the first centuries of its existence. There can be highlighted two main reasons. First of all, many people found the Cossacks’ free and independent position attractive. Second, it was relatively easy to join the army of all newcomers.

#### *Influence of the neighbouring peoples and admission to the rows of the foreigners*

Egodocuments can be used as another historic source to characterize the Ural Cossacks as a multi-ethnic community. Along with the works and travel notes by J. G. Georgi mentioned before, there is also an evidence by P. S. Pallas as of 1768-1769, where he stated that there were 15 thousand Cossacks in the Urals. He also mentioned that many of those 15 thousand were non-

---

<sup>30</sup> N. Borodin. *The Urals Cossack Army*. Uralsk, 1891.

<sup>31</sup> State Russian Historical-Military Archive, fund 13, op. 1/107, case 10, sheet 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. sheet 24

<sup>33</sup> V. Vitevsky. *Yaik Army*. Russian archive, №3, 1879. P. 288.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 289

Christian Tatars, Kalmyks and the so-called Kizilbash, who descended from the Turkmen and from the Persians. Of those Kalmyk that had left their horde, many have already turned into the Christian faith.<sup>35</sup>

Interethnic contacts of the Cossacks and their neighbours were not limited to military service in the army, but intertwined into all aspects of everyday life. Economic and cultural cooperation between the Ural Cossacks and other peoples (especially, the Kazakh and the Kalmyk) was partially based on the similarity of their life styles (communal), geographic remoteness from the center and life at the border, which resulted in a special types of relationships (*kunaks*, *tamyrs*, etc.). *Kunak* comes from the Turkic languages and means „guest”. It was a social institute between two men (*kunaks*), who were obliged to be hospitable to each other. Having a *kunak* in a foreign land meant not only food and shelter, but also help and material support in all issues (e.g. trade, search of blood enemies etc.). *Kunak* relationships were passed from one generation to another. Modern researchers state that this institute existed until the 1920-1930s.<sup>36</sup> Another type of relationships called *tamyrs* (from Turkic „friend”) was also widespread. According to S. Sagnaeva, „a *tamyr* was a Kazakh, who [a Cossack] had maintained friendly relationship with throughout his life. *Tamyr* assisted in his Cossack friend’s affairs on the trans-Ural side: he could be an intermediary in trade and economic operations, he would also take care of him during his stay in the village, provided transport and food. Just like a Cossack enjoyed the hospitality of his *tamyr*, the *tamyr* would also receive the same treatment during his stay in the Cossack’s village (*stanitsa*).<sup>37</sup>

Long-lasting swelling in adjacent territories and various forms of interaction (economic, cultural etc.) were reflected in language, folklore, material culture, rituals, etc. In regard to the topic of interethnic communications, it is important to highlight the Ural Cossacks’ religious tolerance. It is known from many historical sources that the newcomers were allowed to live in their own faith. Non-baptized Kalmyks and other peoples received the right to reside on the Cossack territory, yet they couldn’t become the Cossacks officially.

It has been already mentioned that the Cossack rows received people that had been taken prisoners during the military campaigns. According to the Cossack customs, war prisoners

---

<sup>35</sup> P. S. Pallas. *Journey Across Different Provinces of the Russian Empire*. Vol. 3, SPb, 1773-1788.

<sup>36</sup> S. Sagnaeva. *Material Culture of the Ural Cossacks in the late 19 –beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Issue #11, Russian Ethnographer, 1993, Moscow. Pp. 92-98.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. P. 96.

belonged to the stanitsa that had captured them. War prisoners were sold as slaves within the frames of stanitsa. Rich Cossacks could buy them for household works. For example, according to the documents stored in the State Russian Historical-Military Archive, a Cossack called Vasily Arapov had a Swedish worker from Kayani town taken in 1710, as well as a Finn from Korely town conquered during one of the military campaigns.<sup>38</sup> War prisoners were provided with food and shelter, as well as paid for their job. They didn't have freedom to refuse to work or to leave their master.

Yet common Cossack disapproved of slavery. After several mass protests many military prisoners were granted freedom and accepted to the Cossack community as equal members. This fact comes as no surprise taken the freedom-loving spirit of the Cossacks, many of whom had earlier escaped from serfdom of landlords and strictly segregated society of the 18th century Russia. Emergence of hired prisoners-workers was rightly seen as the beginning of social stratification within the community, where everyone was supposed to have equal rights and duties. The consequences of this stratification would have inevitably led to arguments and conflicts and destabilize the entire army. Besides, the Cossacks' famous free spirit and independent nature made it possible for the whole community to live under their own unwritten laws developed back in the early years and forbidding any form of exploitation up until the revolution of 1917. Among the evidences of this fact is a document as of 1898 that states: „We must remember firmly that we, the Cossacks, are one large family, a community; all of us, as equal members of the community, are to the same right of the property of this family-community... and shall use them equally, as per the holly Commandments, without offending each other.”<sup>39</sup> G. Potanin gives a matching description following a visit to Uralsk in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: „... you will not find such a solidarity of the population in any other Russian community... Such [social] system might seem ideal to an outside observer.”<sup>40</sup>

### *Influence of the internal migrations of fugitives and the role the authorities to the settlement of the Urals*

Fugitive peasants and legally relocating families (like mine) played another important part

---

<sup>38</sup> State Russian Historical-Military Archive, fund 13, op. 1/107, case 28, sheet 348.

<sup>39</sup> *Collection of minutes of meetings of the conventions of the elected representatives of the Ural Cossack stanitsas for 25 years (1874-1898)*. Uralsk, 1900. P.535.

<sup>40</sup> G. Potanin. *Community-region*. Journal for All #2, 1901. P. 507.

in the ethnosocial formation of the Ural Cossackdoms. There were several reasons to leave for distant lands at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: reduction of land use by peasants, growing amounts of duties imposed by landlords, a sharp increase in tax oppression, extremely hard labour mobilizations and army recruitment. Even official historians noted that „the arbitrariness and cruelty of the landlords sometimes reached an extreme,” and a peasant „was reduced to the level of a mute pack-animal.”<sup>41</sup> All of this forced representatives of the lower strata seek freedom far from the centre of the country, where the autocratic hand could not yet reach. Thus we can firmly say that in the 17<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Ural Cossack community consisted mainly of the feudal-dependent Russian people. Their escape to join the Cossacks was a social protest caused by the violence and oppression of the landlords and the tsarist authorities.

After they had arrived to settle in the free lands, the former peasants started their own household with fields and cattle. It was positively influencing not only for the peasants themselves, but also the country's economy as a whole. Internal migration of the population thereby ensured settlement and economic development of the once marginal territories. Considering the issue of internal colonization, such researcher as D. Bagaley names the following types: 1) state (creation of villages and local police service), 2) military with the purpose of protection, and 3) Cossack<sup>42</sup>.

Economic development of the marginal south-eastern outskirts the Russian Empire by the Cossacks was truly progressive. It is difficult to overestimate the role of the Cossacks in the colonization of the steppe outskirts. It was through them that the still forming Russian Empire could fulfil its internal colonialist policy. Cossack settlements were the main and sometimes the only outposts in the conquered territories. Cossack colonization led to the settlement of huge areas and their economic development.

The Ural Cossacks kept for a long time the right not to extradite fugitives. The influx of fugitives to the Urals made it possible to replenish the local Cossack population. It was especially important, since the Ural Cossacks were few in number compared to, for example, the Don Cossacks. When defending the right not to extradite fugitives before the government, the Cossacks appealed to the fact that their losses in military campaigns could be covered only by admitting new members to the Cossack ranks.

---

<sup>41</sup> V. Vityevsky. *I. I. Nepluyev and the Orenburg Area in its former composition before 1758*. Kazan, 1889, Kazan. P. 320.

<sup>42</sup> D. Bagaley. *Essays on the History of Colonization of the Steppe Outskirts of the Moscow State*. Moscow, 1887, Moscow. P. 132.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the population of the Ural Cossackdom skyrocketed. If in 1723 there were 6.124 Cossacks in the army (incl. children as future warriors), by the end of the 1730s there were already more than 50 thousand.<sup>43</sup> It is necessary to note that the growing scale of the Ural Cossacks was smaller compared to other Cossackdoms. The main reason was constant clashes with the neighbouring Nogai Tatars and Qarakalpaqlars.

Initially, the government supported the increase in the number of the Ural Cossacks, which benefitted the strengthening of the south and south-eastern borders. Therefore, the Cossacks were exempted from all taxes and financial duties, but had to carry military service. Later on, as the country got more control over the border areas, the government started to actively interfere into the Cossacks' internal affairs aiming to make them more obedient. Eventually, the government banned to accept fugitive peasants and ordered to return them to their landlords.

It should be noted, though, that this ban was also beneficial for the Cossackdoms. From the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, multiple appeals to the authorities were filed by the Cossacks stating lack of food sources to feed the army. Given this circumstance, the government decided to refrain from the mass relocation policy it was pursuing in regards to all other Cossackdoms.<sup>44</sup>

Taken all mentioned above, it is no surprise that the Ural Cossackdom became more ethnically homogeneous in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, also in comparison with other Cossackdoms. Since then the Ural Cossackdom started to turn into the closed military community.

Summing up, in order to understand the nature and ethnic place of the Ural Cossackdom, it is vital to go through all changes in the tendencies of different epochs. Thus, the Russian were the ethnic core of the forming Ural Cossackdom. Changes in the ethnic composition of the Cossackdom were linked to such factors as the influx of fugitives to the region and free admission of people from the neighboring territories. More homogeneous ethnic composition since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century stemmed from the limited internal migration (because of the state ban on the admission of the fugitives). Speaking of the social stratification among those willing to join the Cossack rows, the main stratum was peasants, yet there were also representatives of all social strata, even the nobility. Internal migration of peasants occurred because of the long-lasting mistakes in the internal political affairs: the statement of absolute monarchy, increased oppression by the landlords, poor control over the Urals area by the state due to its remoteness.

---

<sup>43</sup> N. Borodin. *The Ural Cossacks Army*. Uralsk, 1891. P. 4.

<sup>44</sup> V. Vityevsky. *I. I. Nepluyev and the Orenburg Area in its former composition before 1758*. Kazan, 1889, Kazan.

## Religious peculiarities of the Ural Cossacks

### *The Great Schism and the position of authorities towards the Old Believers*

Among the distinctive cultural traits of the Ural Cossacks is that most of the community belonged to the Old Believers. Old Believer (Russian *Starover*) member of a group of Russian religious dissenters who refused to accept the liturgical reforms imposed upon the Russian Orthodox Church by the patriarch of Moscow Nikon (1652–58). Numbering millions of faithful in the 17th century, the Old Believers split into a number of different sects, of which several survived into modern times.<sup>45</sup> The role and influence of the big Schism (Russian *Raskol*) of the middle of 17<sup>th</sup> century is another key to understand the specifics of the Cossack life and mentality.

The history of the Schism in the Urals has old roots. Researchers have expressed different points of view regarding the timing and reasons for its occurrence. According to S. Zenkovsky, Astrakhan Cossacks fled to the Lower Volga in the early 90s of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and contributed to the spread of the Schism ideas on the banks of the Ural River.<sup>46</sup> A. Shchapov claimed that the Schism was brought to the Urals in 1702 by the exiled military troops that belonged to the Old Believers.<sup>47</sup> Other researchers associate the rapid spread of Schism with the activities of the Irgiz monasteries in the 70s of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From historical archives we also know that at the end of the 17th century, despite the strictest prohibitions by the state, an Old Believer priest Andrian was invited to a Cossack village to perform services. Despite serious persecutions of the Old Believers, which took place in almost all regions of the country, the Ural Cossacks were not afraid to invite an Old Believer priest. This circumstance was explained by the fact that the churches were the property of the troops, so the Cossacks considered themselves entitled to call those people whom they considered necessary.

However, the wave of persecution reached the region eventually. Among the historical documents there is a letter as of 1688 from the Kazan metropolitan demanding to hand over priests Andrian and Peter, as well as all other Old Believers living in the community. The Cossacks used their right not to extradite the fugitives and refused. Runaway clergymen felt relatively free in the Urals - they could hold services with old printed books, while the central part of the country shifted

---

<sup>45</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. „Old Believer". Encyclopedia Britannica, 15 May. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Old-Believers>.

<sup>46</sup> S. Zenkovsky. *The Russian Old Believers*. Moscow, 1995. P. 419.

<sup>47</sup> A. Schapov. *Russian Schism of Old Believers*. Kazan, 1859. P. 546.

to new books „corrupted and filled with Roman heresies”<sup>48</sup>.

In the 40s of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Military Collegium (the highest military command institute of the Russian Empire) was investigating Old Believers' hermitage and praying places in the Urals. Hermits were engaged in agriculture and gardening, bees keeping, i.e. could provide for themselves. Schism hermitages along the downstream of the Ural River hosted more than 200 elder men and women. There was also a monastery in the area, which was destroyed in 1741. Persecution by the government led to the Old Believers moving further to the Cossack lands.

After the beginning of the Seven Years' War, persecution of the Old Believers temporarily stopped. The reason was simple: the government did not want to aggravate relations with the Ural Cossacks, so that they fought at war. Persecutions of the Old Believers continuously caused discontent of the Cossacks, so they could simply refuse to serve, which was not a scarce case at that time.

In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the position of the Old Believers didn't get worse either. We know that there was a church in one of the Cossack settlements along the Ural River, where all services were performed by two Schism priests Sergius and Abraham. In addition, any fugitive could come to hide in the hermitage places - anyone who wanted to hide from the persecution could find refuge here, but only if he or she declared readiness to join the group. Besides, the Ural Old Believers also maintained constant contact with the like-minded clergymen from other regions of the country, in particular, with the monasteries in the Irgiz area.<sup>49</sup>

After the formation of the Irgiz monasteries, the Schism ideas spread among the Cossack troops even greater. The number of the Old Believers' churches started to rise, more and more hermitage places appeared and were known to common public.

State policy towards the Old Believers changed in different periods of Russian history. Beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had definitely brought positive shift. During the first years of reign, Peter the Great was more loyal towards the Old Believers than any of his predecessors. In 1702 he announced that all Christians of the Russian Empire could exercise their responsibility to care about their soul without being disturbed. In 1714 he allowed all Old Believers to freely settle in any village and city with the condition of double payment. In the following decrees as of 1719,

---

<sup>48</sup> O. Merzlikina. *Along the Ural banks...* SGPU, 2007, Samara. P. 147.

<sup>49</sup> Y. Rykov. *The Newly Found Story of the Destruction of the Irgiz Middle-Nikolsky Monastery in 1837*. Moscow, 1999. P. 301-311.

1720, 1722 Old Believers were allowed not to go to confessions, not to get married in church, to wear beard and Old Believers' clothes, if they paid a preliminary fine for that.<sup>50</sup>

However, subsequently, Peter's attitude towards the Old Believers worsened. In 1722 special missions organized by the state Orthodox Church were sent to fight Old Believers in various regions of the country, including the Urals. This is confirmed by documents stored in the Russian State Military Historical Archive. These documents also indicate that the Schism ideas were quite popular among the Cossack army, despite the measures taken by the government.

Peter's successors' policy towards the Old Believers continued to be aggressive. During the reign of Peter's daughter Empress Elizabeth (1741 - 1761), special commissions were sent to the Urals in order to capture and return runaway Old Believers. According to the testimony of some participants from those commissions, ways of Old Believers were wide spread in the army ranks and in daily life. The Russian State Military Historical Archive has the list of „false elders caught in the Urals” submitted in 1752 to the State Military Collegium by lieutenant Lobanov.<sup>51</sup> The list contains information about the real names of the caught people, information about their age, and information about when and from where they had come to the Urals. Speaking of the social strata, most of the fugitives were peasants who had fled from the central regions. Some of the detained had been on the run for quite a long time – even 30-40 years. Thus the Old Believers had relatively quiet life in the Urals under the protection of the Cossacks, who stuck to their right not to give away the fugitives. Yet the commission managed to catch and send away many people. The same file also mentions that many people refused to give up their faith.

The privy councilor of Empress Elizabeth I. Neplyuev wrote to her that there were a lot of Old Believers in the Cossack ranks. After he had analyzed the situation, Neplyuev concluded that violent measures against Old Believers couldn't bring the desired results. Eventually, he turned to the Military Collegium with a petition to end persecutions of Old Believers in the Urals, which was granted in 1756. As a result, the number of Old Believers in the army began to increase.<sup>52</sup>

In the early years of her reign, Catherine II (1762 - 1796) issued a decree that allowed all fugitive Old Believers to return to their homeland and settle in any places they wished. In addition, they were exempted from all taxes for 6 years and could choose any occupation, wear a beard, Old

---

<sup>50</sup> O. Merzlikina. *Along the Ural banks...* SGPU, 2007, Samara. P. 148.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* P. 148.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* P. 150.

Believers clothes, etc. Subsequently, Old Believers were freed from all extra payments imposed by Peter the Great and could take public service jobs. In 1783 it was forbidden to call Old Believers „the schismatic” both on paper and verbally.

Yet the state still was holding a grasp on the religious life of the country. It was recommended to the Cossack atamans to conduct explanatory work among people based on the Holy Bible. Atamans were ordered to keep an eye on the religious life of their community and prevent religious disrupt within the army rows and common people. Unfortunately, explanations usually didn't work. Back then bishops from Kazan were in charge of the territory occupied by the Ural Cossacks. They undertook a number of additional measures to combat schismatic ideas: replaced the Cossack priests with those from other regions, withdrew old books and Old Believers' icons from circulation, conducted discourses and polemics with Old Believers in order to convert them to the „true faith”. Those polemics remained regular part of the Cossack life up until the very Revolution on 1917.

#### *Life of the Old Believers and their role in the Cossack mentality*

Yet there was no unity among the Ural Old Believers. Just like most of the Russian Old Believers, they were divided into different groups, or creeds. Most of the Cossacks belonged to the group that would have priests and services. Yet there were also those who did not accept any priests. Yet despite differences, very strict adherence to religious norms was a distinctive feature of the Cossack daily life. The severity of many Old Believers caught the eye of some travelers who visited the Southern Urals. I. Georgi described the character of the Ural Cossacks as follows: „...schismatics ... hate people.”<sup>53</sup>

Constant persecution of the Old Believers in pre-revolutionary Russia, the continuous need to defense their views, the struggle under the banner of the Great Schism made people strict and resilient, yet also outright stubborn. The Orenburg military governor V. Perovsky described them as people distinguished by „stubbornness alien to all prudence and compliance”.<sup>54</sup>

As already mentioned, Old Believers strictly followed all the religious rules and were much attached to the rituals (even the creed that denied priests would choose one of the old men in the

---

<sup>53</sup> J. G. Georgi. *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian State, Their Everyday Rituals, Customs, Clothes, Dwellings, Fun, Religions*. Part 1, SPb., 1799. P. 224.

<sup>54</sup> V. Vitevsky. *Yaik Army*. Russian archive, №3, 1879. P. 78.

village and ask him to conduct a ceremony or a ritual). Adherence to rituals as a way to manifest religiosity was observed among the Old Believers in their attitude to certain issues of everyday life - to clothing, to food, etc. Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ural Cossacks several times refused to accept the new uniform of military clothing. Old Believers did not drink tea from a samovar (old Russian urn with a spigot at its base used to boil water for tea), because from their point of view it was a thing from the Devil.<sup>55</sup> According to the recollections of my grandfather though, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century samovars were widely used in the Urals. Yet during those times people drank herbal teas (oregano, mint, chamomile etc.). Samovar was prepared every day in the morning, when the oven had been heated up.

According to A.E. Katunsky: „...adherence to the ritual among the majority of Old Believers has a very clear similarity with a person's adherence to a well-mastered instrument of production, with the help of which one can independently, without relying on any outside forces, perform this or that work.”<sup>56</sup> Yet in case of the Ural Cossacks, this circumstance may also be due to other factors. Adherence to traditions, including religious ones, strict observance of rituals is nothing more than an attempt to keep intact the old foundations, and, consequently, the “ancient” rights and privileges. In this regard, I’d like to cite V. Vitevsky, who believed that „old times have always been dear and attractive for the Ural army, because the idea of old times reminded them of the golden age of the Cossacks, the Cossack liberty, freedom and rule of the people”<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, gradual limitation of this liberty gave rise to rejection and „intolerance to all kinds of innovations: the Cossacks met every new measure, every order with distrust and tried to counteract them as much as possible.”<sup>58</sup>

The Ural Cossacks were defending their „old” rights and privileges repeatedly, and it always came under the banner of the Old Belief. For example, persecution of Old Believers played an important part in the decision of the Cossack army to support Peter III (ruled for six months in 1762). Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, state policy in regards to the Old Believers was repeatedly changing. As a result, measures taken against the Old Believers were either a punishment or an attempt of persuasion.

To conclude, appearance of Old Belief among the Ural Cossacks was caused by the same

---

<sup>55</sup> O. Merzlikina. *Along the Ural banks..* SGPU, 2007, Samara. P. 153.

<sup>56</sup> A. Katunsky. *Old Belief.* Moscow, 1972. P. 89.

<sup>57</sup> V. Vitevsky. *Yaik Army.* Russian archive, №3, 1879. P. 89.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

reasons as in other regions of the country – disagreement with the religious reform of Nikon. Yet in case of the Ural Cossacks, there were also a number of distinctive features that occurred due to the local specifics that allowed Old Belief to prosper in the area. The specific conditions included remote geographical location, relatively independent manner of the Cossack self-government, and inability of the state to provide appropriate measures to eradicate old traditions. Moreover, religious schism was often under the disguise of struggle for the rights and privileges gained back in old times. Such circumstances led to the fact that until the revolution of 1917, majority of the Ural Cossacks remained Old Believers and the tradition itself served as one of the main factors that determined cultural and historical uniqueness of the Ural Cossacks.

### III. Cossack household, families and daily life

#### Main types of the economic activities

According to the researchers, the most active settlement and economic development of the region by the Ural Cossacks began in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was facilitated by the final transition from a semi-nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle. The choice of the main types of economic and household activities was determined, first of all, by the natural and climatic characteristics of the region. Stable economy and strong households were vital for the Cossack army, since every Cossack had to have his own equipment, uniform, weapon and horse.

Information about the main occupations of the Ural Cossacks can be found in I. Neplyuev's note dd. 1748. According to his observations, the main types of economic activities were: 1) fishing; 2) agriculture; 3) salt extraction; 4) cattle breeding; 5) gardening; 6) craftsmanship<sup>59</sup>.

#### *Fishing.*

However, the main type of activity, which largely determined Cossacks' economic life, was fishing at the Ural River and in multiple lakes and ponds, Southern Ural Cossacks were also finishing in the Caspian Sea. The famous scientist-ichthyologist N. Borodin noted that the Cossacks acquired the exclusive right to fishing in the lower reaches of the Ural River not at cheap price and not at the whim of one of the Russian sovereigns or empresses who handed out valuable places and waters to private ownership in other areas of the country. According to him, this ownership of the rich waters was an act of political importance and was consolidated as a result of: 1) the initial acceptance of the region conquered by the Cossacks themselves by the Moscow Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich, who granted the area and the Ural River to them; 2) the subsequent confirmation of this right by later head of state, in particular, by decrees issued during the reign of Empress Elizabeth; 3) the final consolidation of the historically acquired rights to do fishing „produced by the established historical order - imperial decrees and legislative acts”<sup>60</sup>.

The specifics of fishing in the Urals were described in detail by P. Pallas. According to his description, fishing was carried out four times a year, and each of these fishing times had its own name. Winter fishing was carried out in January. It was called gaffing, since the main tool for it

---

<sup>59</sup> V. Vitevsky. *Yaik Army*. Russian archive, №3, 1879. P. 221.

<sup>60</sup> N. Borodin. *In defense of the Ural fishing*. St. Petersburg, 1910. P. 11

was the hook. Gaffing began in early January. The day before, a meeting was assembled to decide on the beginning of the fishing period. It was also important to make sure all Cossacks had returned from where they had to go. In addition to fishing devices, each Cossack had to have a gun to fight back possible attacks by the local peoples like Kazakhs or Karakalpaks.

Spring fishing was carried out in May and was called spring floodplain. In spring it was forbidden to catch sturgeon. Caught sturgeon was thrown back into the water. Violators of this prohibition were severely punished by deprivation of all caught fish.

The autumn floodplain was in September. This fishing period was not considered so important, because there was not much fish. Finally, there was fishing carried out in December with nets. For that Cossacks would go to other rivers than the Ural River or lakes. It was the period of small fish, so it was solely for domestic use and not for sale.

There were special devices for fishing: a) a hook - a device consisting of an iron hook attached to a smooth stake, b) yaryga (a net bag) - used for local types of fishing, etc. Success or failure of fishing directly depended on the quality of the fishing equipment. All fishing equipment cost a huge sum of money. Often it happened that the funds invested in the equipment did not pay off. P. Pallas noted that fishing was associated with significant material costs, which was beyond the financial capacity of some Cossack households. Thus they preferred to engage in cattle breeding or some other type of activity.<sup>61</sup>

Fishing process was marked not only by strict observance of the rules, but also by some signs and superstitions. For example, the first fish caught, regardless of its size, was intended „for the tsar's table”.<sup>62</sup> There was also a custom to give fish to a person who held fishing tackle, even if that person did not belong to the Cossack word. The Cossacks also secretly brought fish to poor families and left it in the yard. Such actions were viewed as godly deeds, a kind of charity, which was given not only openly, but also secretly.

Fishing was carried out not only for own consumption, but also for sale. It was sold to merchants who came to the Urals. Prices varied depending on how rich the fishing season had been. Fish sale was widespread and earned money was enough for the entire Cossack army.<sup>63</sup> Part of the fish and caviar was sent to Orenburg (main city of the region) and to the capital.

---

<sup>61</sup> P. S. Pallas. *Journey Across Different Provinces of the Russian Empire*. V 3, SPb, 1773-1788.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> J. G. Georgi. *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian State, Their Everyday Rituals, Customs, Clothes, Dwellings, Fun, Religions*. Part 1, SPb., 1799.

Since the Ural Cossacks had a monopoly on the Ural River, in June they would block the river with the trap net so that fish would not leave their waters. According to A. Izyumov, the use of the trap net was „a phenomenon of the national Cossack culture - material and spiritual”, a kind of a symbol of the army, „a rare monument of antiquity that had retained its moral and economic significance until modern times”<sup>64</sup>.

A distinctive feature of fishing at the Urals was that it was organized on a communal basis with strict observance of the principle of equality. The reasons for this situation, according to a number of researchers, were the communal principles inherent in all fisheries in general, as well as the ancient customs of the Cossacks dating back to „the first Cossack-thieves, who were the first settlers in the Urals”<sup>65</sup>. One can agree with the statement that this principle had a long tradition dating back to the beginning of the Cossackdom. Living in the outskirts territories was linked to constant danger of attack from armed nomads. Therefore, at first fishing periods were mixed with military expeditions. This initially became the reason for personal involvement of all capable men and the ban on the participation of foreign employees or other people. Yet by the 19th century, the participation of hired workers in fishing became normal.

### *Salt production*

Fishing, the main economic activity of the Ural Cossacks, contributed to the development of some other types of activities associated with it, in particular, salt production. The Cossacks needed salt to preserve fish and caviar. According to P. Pallas, the Ural Cossacks had „the freedom to stock up on [salt] themselves”<sup>66</sup>. The steppes along the Ural River were so rich in salt, that it was enough for generations to come. There were 32 salt lakes on the territory of the Ural Cossack army, about 150 smaller places in the Kazakh steppes. Any Cossack had the right to extract salt, but not all Cossacks were able to do this due to large expenses associated with the extraction process. Besides, salt mining far in the steppe was an unsafe business, since attacks by the Kazakhs were not uncommon.

Salt production was hard work. According to the Cossacks themselves, the salt lakes were located far their settlements and it could take several weeks to go to the lake and back. It was no

---

<sup>64</sup> A. Izyumov, *Geography in the Ural Cossack Army*. Moscow, 1997. P. 69.

<sup>65</sup> O. Merzlikina, *Along the Ural banks..* SGPU, 2007, Samara. P. 69.

<sup>66</sup> P. S. Pallas. *Journey Across Different Provinces of the Russian Empire*. V 3, SPb, 1773-1788. P. 443.

less difficult to transport salt for sale, since there were frequent attacks on caravans.

Since the 1730s the Cossacks started to have difficulties with the salt trade because earlier in 1720 salt was declared a state-owned commodity. The Ural Cossacks were forbidden to sell it in Russian cities. The Cossacks could not sell salt to visiting merchants either, since the authorities didn't allow anyone to go to the Urals to buy salt. According to the state order, the Cossacks were supposed to bring salt to certain dedicated cities, where it was handed over to shops at a very low price. Since it was not always profitable for the Cossacks to sell salt to the shops, they would at times take it to the cities bypassing the salt shops. By the decree of 1752 it was forbidden to export salt secretly to the Great Russian cities, but this decree was often violated.

### *Cattle breeding and agriculture*

From the 1740s - 1750s the Ural Cossacks start to concentrate more on cattle breeding. Development of this economic activity occurred due to a number of factors, including the abundance of pasture lands, example of the neighboring Kazakhs, Cossacks' military life and the resulting need to breed horses.

According to P. Pallas, cattle breeding in the region was well developed: „In this warm country good cattle is born, great in stature, and especially horses are in no way inferior to the Russian ones in vigor, strength, and goodness”.<sup>67</sup> Almost all year round, cattle and horses were grazed. Stables weren't massively used until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, starting from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Ural Cossacks began to stock up hay. Hay bailing also reflected communal principles inherent in the Cossackdom. So, it was ordered to all of the Cossacks to mow hay at the same time to avoid injustice.

In addition to horses and sheep, camel breeding took place in the south of the Ural Cossackdom, closed to the Caspian Sea. In the northern areas of the Ural Mountains, people bred cows, sheep, and poultry. Unfortunately, camel breeding didn't become widespread and eventually almost stopped. P. Pallas wrote that this activity could have become a great source of income since there were all the conditions for this, especially food: „the local thorny and salty grasses overgrown steppes provide pleasant food for camels”.<sup>68</sup> Some of the livestock was intended for sale - mainly horses, cattle and small ruminants, and livestock products. According to A. Levshin, in the first

---

<sup>67</sup> P. S. Pallas. *Journey Across Different Provinces of the Russian Empire*, V 3, SPb, 1773-1788. P. 421.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

half of the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Cossacks annually sold up to 150 thousand heads of sheep.<sup>69</sup>

As for the development of agriculture in the Ural Cossackdom, opinions differ. Most experts, including P. Pallas, claim that this activity was poorly developed. We can also find similar information in the documents of the Cossacks themselves. For example, in December 1720 during an interrogation in the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, the Cossacks said that „they had neither arable land, nor grain salary, thus they couldn't plow”<sup>70</sup>. P. Pallas explaining this circumstance saying that the Cossacks „did not have time for that... and besides... their salty and thin land was not good for arable farming”<sup>71</sup>.

However, a number of documents contain information of the opposite nature. So, in the report of Captain S. Durnovo addressed to Catherine II on February 6, 1772, it is said that the army „has been granted from ancient times with glorified and fertile lands and has everything necessary for good households and cattle breeding with excess”.<sup>72</sup> According to I. Rozner, Cossacks' statements about the impossibility to grow grain were dictated by the desire of the Cossacks to receive from the government as much grain salary as possible. Other documentary data, on the contrary, emphasize that the Cossacks grew bread. In the complaint of the Ural Cossacks against their ataman filed to the Military Collegium in 1740 it is indicated that under the former ataman „many foremen and Cossacks plowed a lot in convenient places of arable land, and good bread was born...”<sup>73</sup>

Data from my family also confirms that there were vast lands to plow. My grandfather told me during my visit in December 2020: „All the family went to take care of the fields. They would also sleep there in a small cabin because home was too far away. I remember my grandfather told me that while he was still small, he would stay with grandmother in the house and they would be collecting honey from bees. He said she never wore any protection and bees never bit her. Of course, they would use smoke to expel most of the bees before collecting, but even so some would be always flying around.”<sup>74</sup>

Thus I suggest that in the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century and forward there was arable farming in the Urals, though maybe less developed in some areas at the beginning. It is no coincidence that throughout

---

<sup>69</sup> A. Levshin. *Historical and Static Review of the Ural Cossacks*. SPb, 1823. P. 138.

<sup>70</sup> P. Pallas. *Journey Across Different Provinces of the Russian Empire*. V 3, SPb, 1773-1788. P. 445.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. P. 445

<sup>72</sup> O. Merzlikina. *Along the Ural banks..* SGPU, 2007, Samara. P. 73.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. P. 73.

<sup>74</sup> From the conversation I had with my grandfather in winter 2020.

the entire 18<sup>th</sup> century the Cossacks went to the capital with a request to the government to give them salaries not only with lead and gunpowder, but also with bread.

Peculiar feature in the development of agriculture in the Urals was the fact that the Cossacks had developed collectivist, egalitarian values. This was manifested, in particular, in their lack of family land plots and collective farming. Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Ural Cossacks, unlike other Cossackdoms, didn't divide land as state and personal. All the lands were in the indivisible use of the Cossackdom, and all people could use it, but only with their own manpower. Cossacks on military service could not personally use the land, so a special fee was established to provide for their families - the so-called „helping fee”, which was collected from all the Cossacks who remained in the settlement.

Gardening was another type of agriculture widespread among the Ural Cossacks. The first notes on it can be found in the works by P. Pallas. Yet in the 18<sup>th</sup> century this type of economic activity was not yet appreciated as much, as later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gardens were located in many villages (*stanitsas*). Cherry, apple, and plum were in the greatest demand.

P. Pallas even saw melon and watermelon gardens and „an unspeakable multitude of watermelons sold at a very low price”<sup>75</sup>. He added though that the watermelons were smaller than those in the southern areas, but tasted no worse<sup>76</sup>.

### *Craftsmanship*

Craftsmanship in the Urals was well-developed. I. Rozner notes that there were „locksmiths, blacksmiths, joiners, carpenters, tailors, and shoemakers” among the Cossacks<sup>77</sup>. In Pallas's opinion, there were all “the most needed artisans” in the Urals. Products that were not produced on the territory of the Cossackdom were purchased from travelling merchants. I. Zheleznov also noted that the craftsmanship was well developed in the Urals. According to him, the army included masters of saddlery, the so-called *archashniks* who made saddles (*archaks*). There were also craftsmen who made *boudars* - special wedge-shaped boats. They were made from poplar trunks. Some Cossacks specialized in the manufacture of weapons, especially rifles, but this type of craft ceased to exist after the introduction of carbines and rifles of a new caliber. Weapon was intended

---

<sup>75</sup> P. Pallas. *Journey Across Different Provinces of the Russian Empire*. V 3, SPb, 1773-1788. P. 411.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. P. 420.

primarily for hunting. Finally, silversmiths manufactured ornaments for weapons and saddles.

My grandfather's recollections could provide some additional information to that<sup>78</sup>: „People would usually buy pottery in the local shops or at the market. But every Cossack knew some craft and would learn new things as well. Many houses, for example, had carved shutters and eaves – usually it was work of somebody from the family, but not always. My grandfather carved all himself.” When talking about clothes, he assured me that „the Cossacks have always had the best clothes and shoes. While common folk in Russia wore the best shoes, the Cossacks wore leather boots only. Women, too, have always been well-dressed and wore nice boots.” During one of our talks, I asked him about the leisure time in the Urals, he told me then: „In winter, when there wasn't any work in the fields, women would takes some oil lamps and spin wool – both, sheep and goat. Remember Orenburg scarfs, they're still produced.” He then added with a laughter: „Your grandmother actually has one from our last trip.” I recall he mentioned that the Cossack women also worked with flax, hemp from the local market. Many clothes pieces also had embroidery, especially the scarfs. Women would usually gathered with their neighbors and sang along working or talked sipping hot tea. Men would involve in carpentry, dressing of hides, rolling *pimy* (sg. *pim*)<sup>79</sup> – felt boots. Musical instruments were also usually purchased. The most popular ones were: small accordion, balalaika, rattles, and bells.

After I heard about the bells, I asked about the manufacture of those things. Grandfather said those were usually purchased, exception was only the whistles that people carved out of wood with a simple knife. My grandfather then added: „Of course, there wasn't much jewelry either those days. Gold things were only for big events. But those were also purchased, of course. There were smiths, but not jewelers really. Same for toys, those were mainly bought at the markets or from travelling merchants.” I asked him then about the types of toys they had, he recalled he played with old toys when he was a little boy: „We had a bit of toys. The most common ones were dolls, whistles, horses made of hay. I remember we shared our toys with the neighbors' kids. We would always play all together, while grandma was cooking something nice or working in her favorite garden.”<sup>80</sup>

Speaking of gardening, based on the information I have got from my relatives, in the 19<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> From the conversation I had with my grandfather in winter 2020.

<sup>79</sup> As my grandfather said, it's a local word for the common one – *valenki*.

<sup>80</sup> From my conversation with him in December 2020.

century it was an omnipresent activity. My grandfather recalled: „We had different vegetables: carrots, cabbage, beans, cucumbers, beetroot, poppies, peas, turnip, and radish. As for the sweet stuff, it would come from the forest: wild strawberries, blueberries, cranberries, cherries, currants (red and black), rose hips, and hawthorn. In early spring we would gather also sorrel and wild lily bulbs. Grandpa Stepan also grew tobacco, dried it and smoked. He used special tobacco cutter with one row of knives installed stationary and the other one is moving on an axis.” He also listed the main alcoholic beverages after I had asked: „As for alcohol, there was home-made beer, mead, and purchased alcohol. Of course, mostly people drank locally produced spirits.” When asked about the frequency of usage, he said: „Well, as I know men drank on the sauna day (Saturday) and during celebrations or other big events.”<sup>81</sup>

Thus, the main economic activities of the Ural Cossacks in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were fishing, cattle breeding, partly agriculture. The specifics of the economic activities development of the Ural Cossacks consisted in the dominant development of fishing combined with less developed activities and crafts. Such branches of the economy as cattle (and especially horse) breeding, agriculture works, gardening, and craftsmanship developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and provided the Cossackdom with stable economic well-being. Eventually it became one of the leading Cossackdoms in terms of economic development and strength.

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

## **Family and principles of upbringing in the Cossack families. Household duties**

Taken all peculiarities of the Cossack life explained in the previous chapters, it will be not difficult to see parallels between the rules and norms of the community and one separate family. As I will demonstrate below on the basis of my family's records and works by different researchers, a Cossack family was different from an average Russian family of that time. First thing that attracts attention is the position of a woman as of an equal partner and a shoulder to lean on in the darkest hour. Women also had to be literate and educated at least on the minimum level. Arranged marriages were also a lot less frequent across the Cossackdom than in the Central part of the country, for example. That logic of equal share that was used when collecting hay or embarking on fishing trips was present also by the fireplace in each home. Equality in attitude towards the partner has always been present in all couples of my family, including my grandparents. It somehow survived together with love for land and freedom.

Thanks to deep strong roots, Cossack values have survived even the 20<sup>th</sup> century turmoil. My grandfather, like his cousin, was brought up by their common grandparents and siblings. Yet their lives started years after the Soviet government had forbid Cossacks to have weapons, battle horses, and exist as a democratic community. They didn't have the military training like their grandfathers. They couldn't have access to religion either. The Soviet Union applied tremendous effort to exterminate any religion or religious tradition present on its territory. Christianity, of course, was the main priority in this crusade. As a consequence, my grandfather has no proper connection to Christianity, yet he respects the values brought by the religion of his ancestors. His readiness to accept these values bases on his love and respect for family and homeland, same – for his cousin, who conducted huge work to write his book. These love and respect became a canal that didn't let the stream of tradition dry out. As my grandfather and his cousin, they were definitely inspired by their grandfather Stepan, whose life I will describe below to illustrate the mentality of a Cossack family, position of women, and principles of upbringing.

### *Relationships in a traditional Cossack family*

We know that Stepan's childhood years were full of fun.<sup>82</sup> He spent much time with numerous relatives of the same age – siblings, cousins, nephews and nieces. As he would say, he

---

<sup>82</sup> M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*. 2014, Astana.

was brought up mainly by the elder brothers and cousins. The Gorbunovs had a big household: fields, meadows, edge of the nearby birch tree forest. When my great-great-grandfather's eldest brother got married, the new family moved into a freshly built side wing of the house. The wing consisted of one room. It was three by four meters and had a brick oven inside. After the second eldest brother got married, the family built another side wing for him and his wife. So the house was slowly getting bigger to accommodate growing family. The main house had five walls and was built from thick and solid pine trunks. The main house was divided into two areas. The first one was kitchen with a big Russian oven. During dark and cold winter evenings, all the children would climb on top of it and enjoy comforting warmth. Adults and teenagers slept at the plank beds right below the ceiling. Those plank beds occupied half of the kitchen space. The second area was a ben. There were wooden beds made by the local artisans. Later those beds were replaced by iron ones with big shiny knobs. Other furniture consisted of a big table, a wooden wardrobe and a cabinet; family photos in frames decorated the walls.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner in the Cossack families were a special ritual: all the family would gather around a big table with wooden benches. The table would be covered with sackcloth. If there wasn't enough space to fit all, people would place another table that would be always tightly attached to the first one. Placing another table separately was not even considered, because eating was, first of all, a ritual of sharing. Eating at one table meant the family was one, it was a way to show respect to the family members, to their hard labour, to the traditions people had followed for centuries.<sup>83</sup>

Dr. of cultural studies I. Murzina gives the following description of a traditional Cossack family: „Strong patriarchal Cossack families are considered as the basis of the stanitsa lifestyle. A Cossack family resembled the whole Cossack community in miniature. Usually families were large, with several adult married sons. Its head was the eldest, father or grandfather. He was responsible for everything happening in the house. Strict, demanding, hardworking, he was an indisputable authority in the family. The father embodied law, duty and honour... [He] solely controlled the family budget, made decisions on separation of sons and daughters when they got married.”<sup>84</sup> Yet it doesn't mean that women were voiceless or passive. When the head of a family was out of the

---

<sup>83</sup> M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*. Astana, 2014. P. 20.

<sup>84</sup> I. Murzina. „The Tradition of the Cossack Education: the Ethical Aspect.”, *Culturological Approach in Education*, Moscow, 2015. P. 25.

village, his wife replaced him and was in charge. Women were busy not only with housework and raising children, they also took care of the old relatives. Taken the huge amount of work, it was a standard practice to teach children from early age to take care of others, be it a toddler or an old man.

*Values and principles of upbringing. Life of my great-great-grandfather and his family*<sup>85</sup>

My relatives put Christian values and loyalty to tradition on the first place when it comes to raising future generations. Here is what M. Gorbunov (my grandfather's cousin) writes about his childhood years with grandmother: "Grandma Lyuba... was everything for me – conscience, honour and great human love... It was her, and foremost her, who was bringing me up in childhood and adolescent years, who raised me to be who I am. Grandmother was religious, had deep faith in God and in his deeds through humans on Earth. Thus she would teach me to strictly follow evangelical commandments: „thou shall not murder”, „love thy neighbour”, „help the neighbour”. Yet most often she would say „don't repine”, if something goes wrong in life. She would also add: „Remember, grandson, all that happens in life is for better.”... Yet the most important part of being brought up by her, I think, was linked to developing love for nature, motherland, home, family, for the loved ones. All of it formed my personality and is in my blood. I believe that such values [and love] shall be present in the soul of each human. I think today her work could be classified as the work of a professional educator.”<sup>86</sup>

Culturologist and sociologist I. Murzina write the following on the role of tradition and Christian values: „What traditions are we talking about in relation to the Cossack culture? The ten commandments of Christ are the basis of moral and ethical principles. The key concept is *tradition* (from Lat. *traditio* - transmission, legend), which is a social and cultural heritage, passed down from generation to generation and reproduced over a long time. What traditions are we talking about in relation to the Cossack culture? The ten commandments of Christ are the basis of moral and ethical principles. „From childhood, parents would teach their children: do not kill, do not steal, do not fornicate, work with conscience, do not envy another and forgive the offenders, take care of your children and parents, cherish girlish chastity and feminine honour, help the poor, do not offend orphans and widows, defend the Motherland from enemies. But, first of all, strengthen

---

<sup>85</sup> Based on M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traced for the Descendants*, Astana, 2014.

<sup>86</sup> M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*. Astana, 2014. P. 26.

the Orthodox faith: go to church, observe fasts, cleanse your soul through repentance, and pray to One God Jesus Christ; and [parents would] add: we toe the line when others dodge, for we are the Cossacks.”<sup>87</sup>

Parents and elder siblings were not the only ones responsible for proper upbringing of children. Every child would also receive godparents during the first year of life. If parents were responsible for the child because of blood and family ties, godparents took responsibility for it in front of God. Usually godparents were chosen from relatives or close friends and neighbours. As my grandfather explained to me, it was important to choose a kind-hearted and wise person with dignity and strong spirit. Godparents’ duties differed depending on the gender of a child.

„If a boy was born in the family, then the godfather was responsible for making him a Cossack warrior. At the same time his godmother made sure to cultivate in the young Cossack respectful attitude towards women, mothers and housewives. The godfather was mainly responsible for the boy’s Cossack military training. Godfather and father complemented and balanced each other: if father was too soft to his son, then godfather would be more strict and severe.”<sup>88</sup>

Back in the old days, the Don Cossacks had a custom that has survived to this day. When a boy was one year old, he would have his hair cut for the first time in his life. In the female half of the house where men couldn’t enter, his godmother would cut off the first strands of hair, which were then kept behind a personalized icon all life. After the child had had a haircut, his godfather would ask at the door: „Is the Cossack ready?“. The answer would follow: „Ready! Accept!“ Godfather would take the boy then and carry to the church.

There the boy was put on a bareback horse, and godfather carried him around the church. The little Cossack’s behaviour showed the fate of the future warrior: if he grabbed the mane of the horse – he was destined to stay alive; if he cried, tried to get off or fell off the horse – he was destined to be killed.

Instead of a saddle, the horse was covered with a silk scarf, which was carefully kept all life. Subsequently, things that were memorable to the Cossack were wrapped in it: the first shoulder

---

<sup>87</sup> I. Murzina. „The Tradition of the Cossack Education: the Ethical Aspect.”, *Culturological Approach in Education*, Moscow, 2015. P. 25.

There quotation from: P. Akimov. „Orthodox Christianity and Traditions in the Cossack Education”, *Summaries of the Reports of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Practical Scientific Conference as of September 20, 1995*, Ryazan, 1995. P. 15

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. P. 26.

straps, awards. Boris Almazov recalled, that his grandmother's chest contained several wraps like that - the memorabilia of her dead brothers.

After the horse riding around the church father would accept the child from the hands of godfather and take the boy to church for the Holy Communion. After the Communion godfather would put a saber belt on the boy and carry the saber itself since the baby could not yet do it.

At home, in the gates, father would hand the child over to mother and say: „Mother, accept the Cossack!" And his wife thanked him for „granting her a son". Godmother removed the harness from the boy and handed it over to godfather with the wish to keep it until the time is right for „our Cossack isn't even a year old yet, he still needs to grow". Godfather would accept the weapon, kiss the saber blade and promise to keep it, as well as to teach his godson military science. When godson was seventeen years old, he was assigned to the regiment. Then his godfather would give him weapon.

If a girl was born, her godmother played the main role in her upbringing. She taught her to be a faithful wife able to wait, a patient mother, and a kind host. The child's godfather made sure that she saw a Cossack man as a warrior-defender, a father, and head of the family.<sup>89</sup>

Unfortunately, I don't have information about my ancestors following exactly same tradition during the First Communion, but one thing is sure – every boy in every Cossack community around the country received military training and education from an early age. According to my grandfather: „each Cossack started his training at the age of 10 following a special program similar to the first year military training we have in the army today.”<sup>90</sup> Boys were taught horse riding, marching in formation, shooting, horse riding stunts, vine branches chopping. The last one is a type of combat horse training. There is a bunch of branches that a Cossack has to cut while riding a horse. Today it is part of the sport competition in horse riding. Sometimes the aim would also include small soft clay balls or rings 10cm in diameter. For an error-free cutting when riding a horse, the rider needs such qualities as ideal feeling of the horse, good coordination, sharp eye, quick reaction, agility and physical strength. The rider must be extremely careful and precise in his actions. Any mistake can cost a horse part of its ear, split croup, and even a hock injury. The Cossacks worked with both arms sitting and standing in the saddle. Strike at stance on the stirrups

---

<sup>89</sup> I. Ya. Murzina. «The Tradition of the Cossack Education: the Ethical Aspect.”. *Culturological Approach in Education*, Moscow, 2015. P. 25-26.

<sup>90</sup> From my conversations with him in winter- spring 2021.

gives the fighter a tremendous advantage over the enemy, it increases the speed and power of the strike, allows to reach farther. Along with chopping moves, saber piercing is an integral part of horse fighting. There are three types of piercing movements: forward, half-turned right, and half-turned left. Piercing is an active combat technique and works well in close combat, when there is no space for cutting movement. Cossack boys would train in play, yet over years they would turn into real masters of horse riding and saber fighting. By 18, a boy would be a professional warrior ready for service.

One of the very old traditions of the Ural Cossacks, associated with preparing young men for military service, was the tradition of war games. Unfortunately, we don't know much about their diversity, character, and individual elements of the process. S. Danshov, a historian of the Urals region, writes: „War games were regularly held in the Urals and some of their elements remained in stanitsas for a long time. Nineteen-year-old boys (from this age the Cossacks were enrolled in the service) out of twenty, thirty, and more villages, led by atamans and „wise old men”, arrived at the appointed place. The youth would arrive on the best horses and with corresponding weapons (lance, long gun, saber (*shashaka*), bow, and other items). The camp was set up in the middle of the valley. Young Cossacks were divided into separate groups, each of them - engaged in different exercises.”<sup>91</sup> Some participated in races, others - in target shooting, and others - demonstrated the skills with a saber and a gun at full gallop. In these games, no attention was paid to wounds and injuries. Victory in fist fights was no less appreciated than in other types of competitions.

After the war games, shortly before the start of the service, a young Cossack would go from house to house and invited people to see him off to the army. Seeing off was arranged at the recruit's house. The most important thing was to receive parental blessing, when father gave instructions with the icon in his hands and mother hung a small icon and a bag with home land around the son's neck. Having received the blessing, the Cossack would go out to the yard and mounted his horse. Then would ride to the church, where the service was held. Everyone who went to the service gathered at the church for the same service. The whole village saw them off to the outskirts, sang songs, and sometimes served tables outside. Cossack's wife or bride would lead the horse to the outskirts.

---

<sup>91</sup> S. Danshov. „Traditions of the Southern Urals as a Method of the Spiritual and Moral Upbringing of the Rising Generation”. *Humanitarians as the School of Thought* magazine, Orenburg, 2020. P. 358.

Due to the peculiarities of military life in the South Urals, historically there has developed a special type of woman - a tireless worker able to take up all the work of the man. In order for such character to form, a woman required corresponding upbringing. Until 13 years old, girls played the same games as boys and learnt the basics of military art, including horse riding. Apart from playtime, they also helped with cooking and sewing. As years passed, a girl would become better and better in housekeeping. She was supposed to know how to sew *kubelek* (old holiday dress), to embroider a blanket or a caftan, to lace a shirt collar with various patterns (e.g. in the form of a curved line or a snake). As mentioned before the Cossacks have always love freedom and their homeland. S, Danshov writes that: „Their love for their Motherland was associated with love for the Native land, the Father-Ural, which they called affectionately “dear provider”<sup>92</sup>

It is important to note the relevance for young Cossacks of such a quality as tolerance. As mentioned in previous chapters, Cossackdoms were neighbouring many other ethnic groups, some of which along with war prisoners eventually settled across the Urals and entered the army rows. Thanks to Christian-based tolerance, those people could preserve their cultural habits. The very core of the Cossack faith is the idea of love and respect for one's neighbour. At the same time, the sense of personal faith or „God in the soul” did not prevent the Cossacks from living according to the laws of communal brotherhood.

Continuing about the life of my great-great-grandfather, it's has to be noted that every family member had his or her own scope of responsibilities. In summer all adults, including women and children over 12 years, worked in the field: ploughing, sowing, mowing hay, collecting wood for winter and grain to bake bread. Small cabins and barns were built nearby to accommodate workers, cattle, and to keep hay. Children over 12 years would also go to the forest to collect berries, edible herbs, and mushrooms, which were then dried or pickled. Small children stayed at home with grandmother and one woman, who took care of the cattle and worked in the garden. Thus, every member of the family worked and contributed to the common wellbeing.

„In winter, everyone was busy with housework and took care of the cattle and horses, which required a lot of time and effort. Since the family was big, there were three cows, calves, several dozen sheep, a flock of geese and chicken. Oxen were used as draught animals to plow the field and to carry heavy loads. There were also three plow horses to make hay and to do other

---

<sup>92</sup> S. Danshov. „Traditions of the Southern Urals as a Method of the Spiritual and Moral Upbringing of the Rising Generation”. *Humanitarians as the School of Thought* magazine, Orenburg, 2020. P. 359.

agricultural work. Yet the biggest pride of the Cossack families were combat horses, one for each Cossack. Those horses were kept, fed and walked separately from other animals.”<sup>93</sup>

Tsar gave relative freedom to the Cossacks, yet obliged them to serve their motherland faithfully and loyally whenever there was military conflict. In peaceful times, they had to stay ready to take part in any sudden battle. Apart from horse, every Cossack had his own ammunition and military hardware that was also used during annual Cossack gatherings. It was quite expensive even for well-off families, let alone poor ones. If the family couldn't provide all the necessary ammunition, then a Cossack would receive help from the «Community» (that's how the Cossacks called their annual gatherings, where all important decisions were made). Each Cossack's military service lasted for 32 years, from 18 to 50 years old. It was challenging for the Gorbunov family to provide for all military men, after all there were three elder brothers and their father, which meant the family had to have four combat horses, four sets of full ammunition – uniform, shoulder arms, sabers called *shashka*. *Shashka* is a slightly curved saber that is convenient to use while riding a horse. It was initially created and used by the tribes in the Caucasus (the original Circassian name is „seshhue” or „sashho”) and was later adopted by the Cossacks.

Based on the book *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*<sup>94</sup>, I can say that my great-great-grandfather Stepan went through all that. He was tall, full 190cm, and it helped him show great results in a fight and stay alive in various battles. He also won several competitions that Cossacks regularly held in peaceful times. He was a brilliant rider: he could pick up girls' handkerchiefs from the ground riding at full speed; he cut the branches so evenly that they would fall down and stick to the ground vertically; he could go under the horse croup and get up to the saddle on the other side while riding. Grandfather Stepan said many times that all the training helped him in a war with „the Germanic” (1914-1917). He could easily dodge enemy's attacks and won battle after battle. Yet let us go back to his childhood.

Along with other family members, Stepan had his scope of work determined by the elder. He worked enthusiastically, with a lot of love for land and artisanship. He made a good carpenter and would create beautiful items until his last days – rakes, door and window jambs, hayforks. He also knew how to lay bricks, how to build ovens. When he was mowing hay, others would watch him with delight – it looked like the scythe was moving on its own, lightly and effortlessly. By the

---

<sup>93</sup> M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traced for the Descendants*, Astana, 2014. P. 13.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. P. 13-20.

age of 50, he learnt how to keep bees and started a small apiary. Grandfather Stepan attended only primary school (three years), but he knew many things and always strived to learn more. In his later years, he had poor eyesight. His grandson and my grandfather's cousin Mikhail would spend long winter evenings reading aloud classical and scientific literature for him. He was also interested in the political articles and international news. Despite the absence of full academic education, he helped his grandchildren with math, geometry, and trigonometry – all thanks to logic and analytical thinking. That is to say, he was well educated for his time, which allowed him later (from 1933 to 1952) to work as an accountant and a field ranger.

Grandfather Stepan had to grow up early. In 1904-1905, three of his brothers took part in the Russian-Japanese war. All household was left in the hands of their father, Vasily Gavrilovich, and two 12-year-old boys, Stepan and his nephew. The family slogged their guts out trying to cope with all the work. By the time all brothers returned from war, the family lost several cattle animals. Because of hard work and illness, Stepan's father died in 1907, so the family had to decide on its future.

By that time, the family grew very big. Stepan's three elder brothers had own families with several children, some of them only 10-14 years old. As grandfather Stepan recalled, there were so many mouths to feed that there was enough space in the house to fit all of them. During the family gathering, it was decided to send Stepan to *stanitsa* to earn money. There were many well-off Cossacks there, who hired workers. Thus from 15 years old he started working for a family of one Cossack, Lavrenty Zakharov. Lavrenty had only one daughter, who would later become Stepan's wife and my great-great-grandmother. Cossacks have always valued community and equality among them, so Stepan was treated by his employers like a son. He was eating with them at one table, and I have already mentioned that sharing meals at one table was a special ritual for all Cossacks. Zakharov family also helped him with clothes and shoes. In 1910, when Stepan was 18 years old, he married the daughter of his employer, Lyubov (or Lyubushka, as he tenderly called her). Her parents were very happy with this marriage. They loved Stepan for his brave Cossack spirit and for his dedication to work. Stepan and Lyubov had six children and stayed in the house of her parents until the beginning of the collectivization.

In 1914 The First World War started, or how grandfather Stepan called it, „the war with the Germanic”<sup>95</sup>. He went to war together with the elder brothers as part of a 100 warrior battalion

---

<sup>95</sup> M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traced for the Descendants*, Astana, 2014. P. 16.

from the Kulakhtinskaya stanitsa. They arrived to the Chebarkul station, where they joined a Cossack army of 2000 people (each stanitsa provided 100 warriors). The Cossack corps was a powerful military unit: it also included several machine-gun companies and cannon battalions with draught horses, rare units that took care of and provided for Cossacks and their horses. After the war, all Gorbunov brothers received the Order of St. George, the most prestigious medal for any soldier given for undaunted courage. Grandfather Stepan was very proud of it all his life. Today many Russian historians are working on restoration of true events of the First World War. During the Soviet period, this war was almost never mentioned, only as a reason that led to the October Revolution. In reality, Russian soldiers led by the tsar fought bravely and heroically protected their motherland from the German and Austro-Hungarian invasion. Later the Provisional Government let the enemy in. Yet the memory and stories of our ancestors, who fought and gave their lives to protect Russia, remain in our hearts and family chronicles. This memory is a source of true patriotism and shall be transferred to the future generations.

Cossacks in battle followed the same principles as back home – they shared everything like one big family, good and bad. Not a single Cossack, dead or wounded, was left at the battlefield. If one of them was in a burning building, others would rescue him despite high risk of suffocating or receiving burns. It was indeed „one for all, and all for one”. Grandfather Stepan recalled how the enemy killed his horse while he was riding it. He managed to survive because he grabbed the stirrup of one of his brothers in arms. Loss of a horse was one of the deepest sorrows for any Cossack, including my great-great-grandfather. A horse was a friend, a companion, a family member. A Cossack would share with his horse all his meals to the last piece of bread. Stepan was tall, so it was difficult to find a new horse for him. Before the war, his father-in-law found a tall three-year-old chestnut horse in another stanitsa. Stepan called the horse by its colour, *Gnedoy* (*Chestnut*). Naturally, it was hard to find a decent replacement. After some time, during one of the battles with „the Germanics”, Stepan’s brother saw a big horse ridden by a German officer. He chased the officer and captured him together with the horse, which was given to the younger brother. The new horse, which they called German, served my great-great-grandfather until the end of the war. In 1915 Stepan was wounded and sent to the hospital. After two months in the hospital, he returned to stanitsa for rehabilitation. In 1916 he went back to war. Again, he was fighting with his brothers in arms, covered in dirt, blood and sweat. Again, there were victories and defeats. In 1917 Cossacks received news about the February revolution, about the Provisional

Government, about the controversial betrayal of the Royal family. All the news was brought to the Cossacks by the agitators of the new «Red» regime. The changes in the government led to disrupt of the army, and many Cossacks returned home, grandfather Stepan riding his German.

After the Cossacks came back home, they washed off dirt, rested their body and soul, celebrated their return loudly and with dancing, commemorated the fallen brothers, and went back to hard peasant labour. People hoped they could enjoy some peace, but in six months, in spring 1918 the Southern Urals turned into a hot spot. Bolsheviks, mensheviks, anarchists and other „odd” visitors would arrive and promote „heavenly life” – all the their own way. By summer, stanitsa had a local council (Selsoviet). A poor local Cossack under the surname Larin was put as the head of the council. Thus stanitsa was ruled by both, the ataman and the council. Naturally, many well-off Cossacks didn't need no change – they had their local democracy, their own way of life, big households and land. They continued to breed horses, cattle, to plow their fields. Yet new life was already there, new order was paving its way even to the farfetched areas. Cossacks were forced to give away excess of flour, meat and milk. There was an attempt to take away their lands and redistribute them equally per capita. Of course, many were not happy and didn't agree with this redistribution and confiscations of food. At some point, the White army came to stanitsa, which allowed local rich Cossacks to arrest the new councilor. They locked him together with his family in a barn. After a short court hearing, where ataman was traditionally the judge, Larin was shot. His wife and kids were released. The next day many Cossacks left as volunteers with the White army.

Grandfather Stepan would recall: „Good that I was living in a cabin in the field back then. I didn't go with the army, but my brothers and nephews were not as lucky, they were taken away to fight the Red army.”<sup>96</sup> In the absence of men, women and children had to do all the work. In autumn of 1918 a small group of Red army Cossacks arrived to stanitsa. They took the remaining men from 18 to 40 years old, including Stepan. He fought for two years (1918-1919) and even reached Baikal. Then he came back home. Soon after two of his brothers managed to return as well. They were captured by the Red army, but were released after they had signed a promise not to fight the Soviets ever again. One of Stepan's brothers and two nephews died in a battle and were buried somewhere near Irkutsk. It was a grievous loss for the Gorbunov family, everyone wept for a long time after the fallen.

---

<sup>96</sup> M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*, Astana, 2014. P. 19.

Yet time heals all wounds, washes away grief and sorrow. Slowly life turned back to its normal pace. As grandfather Stepan recalled, they lived like before for a long time, until 1931. People enjoyed freedom, they could finally „breathe”. Even though the new regime was still confiscating part of the produced food, there was enough for all. As Stepan said: „Those who worked - thrived.”<sup>97</sup> Over those years his own family with Lyubasha became bigger - they had one (eldest) daughter and two sons, who grew up and could help with housework. Of course, life in stanitsa wasn't exactly the same. Ataman was displaced and replaced by the council. The new head of the council opened a first-aid point, a small library, and a club where people would gather and read newspapers aloud. From time to time political agitators would visit stanitsa – the Soviet state was strengthening its positions across the land. Yet most of the Cossack families continued to follow their lifestyle despite the political changes. Children were still raised in the Cossack tradition: they were taught to breed and to take care of the horses, to respect the tradition and the elders, not to talk at the table, to venerate the ancestors, to live with dignity.

Most cultural theorists (M. Bakhtin, B. Erasov, D. Likhachev etc.) argue that the identity of a country's culture is the most important factor of national unity and solidarity. The promotion of the principle of cultural continuity, i.e. the connection of the present with the past traditions and social heritage, contributes to protection of the cultural heritage and to their connection with the needs of modern social development. Traditions appear as a result of repeated repetition and the test of time. Things that culture has preserved in the form of traditions have proved their importance for the society and usefulness for an individual. Any innovation in culture that has deep content and value is tested by time and is re-evaluated by each subsequent generation. One can also say that neither creativity nor innovation is possible without the support of tradition.

In the study of the Cossack cultural we can select the spiritual and moral component of the human life and integrate it into the programs used for upbringing of modern young people in the Southern Urals.

The identity of the national Cossack culture is based on Christian spirituality, on the harmonious combination of moral, aesthetic, and intellectual values. Determined by the worldview and reflected in the structure of the personality, the system of Cossack values is ethnically oriented, which can be used as the legitimate basis to use the Cossack traditions of the Southern Urals as the most relevant means of spiritual and moral education of children and the youth.

---

<sup>97</sup> M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*, Astana, 2014. P. 19.

#### IV. Revival of the Ural Cossackdom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Democratic transformations of the Russian society after the fall of the Soviet Union led to reappearance of the traditional Russian socio-political institutes with the Cossacks being especially notable. Its traditional lifestyle, its transformation from the military stratum into the sub-ethnos of the Russian people and into a unique socio-political institute were abrupt in 1920 by the new Soviet government because of the ideological reasons. Yet the descendants of the Cossacks have kept the „Cossack spirit”, which plays the main part in the self-identification and self-organization of those who belong to the Cossack revivals.

The revival movement started back in the 1980s and in 1991 it was legitimized as an institute. Today, more than 10 million people in various part of Russia consider themselves descendants of the Cossacks (Ural, Don, Tver etc.).<sup>98</sup> Over the last decade the revival has gone a difficult way from small informal groups of enthusiasts to the centralized system of the military Cossack communities enlisted in the state registry of the Russian Federation. In some republics of the North Caucasus, for example, the Cossack communities have special support of the local political elite.

In the Urals the Cossacks have formed the Cossack Union and have launched a web-site (<http://kazakural.ru/about/>). As stated on the main page of the website<sup>99</sup>, among the goals of the Union are: revival of the Cossackdom; protection of civil rights and freedoms, honor and dignity of the Cossacks, the Russian people, and the Russian Orthodox Church; unification of the Cossacks and Cossack organizations into a single organization, which will become a reliable support for the state. Ataman G. Kovalyov noted on the same page: „The idea of the Cossackdoms is a religious idea that matured in the spirit of Russian Orthodoxy. That is why it is available to all Russian [citizens] – be they Orthodox, Protestant, or Muslim.

A Cossack is a man of decision and action; a man of patience, of effort and accomplishment. Life for him is an action. Cossacks follow the line of the greatest resistance. A Cossack grows stronger in struggle and hardships. Cossack spirit is based on the power of personal character. A man of strong character will always find a frater.

---

<sup>98</sup> *Volumes of the official publications of the results of the All-Russian census 2010*, vol. 1. „Numbers and location of the population.” Official state electronic archive of the census results, [https://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](https://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm). Accessed 20.06.2021.

<sup>99</sup> Ataman G. Kovalyov. „Goals of the Cossack Federation.” Official website of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/about>. Accessed 20.06.2021

Russia is an altar and a temple for a Cossack, the hearth that keeps his grandfathers' blood. The motherland is a true sacred place for Cossacks.”<sup>100</sup>

This abstract demonstrates some of the values I write about in previous chapters – religiousness, love for motherland, acceptance and tolerance towards peoples of different faiths and ethnic belonging.

Difference from previous epochs is that today the Ural Cossacks do not fight the state, but depend on it in many ways. The government appoints the head of the whole Russian Cossack Unity, who then allocates the budget and reports on the situation to the President. On lower levels, the Cossacks still elect their own atamans. Atamans act as a decision-makers in such aspects as: military, economic, and social. Yet they do not influence the distribution of the state money among the Cossackdoms. Ataman doesn't possess juridical power any more either, the Cossacks have to follow the same federal laws as all other citizens and go to the same types of courts (arbitrary, regional, federal).

#### *Economic situation and new struggles*

Economic situation is also quite different from before, because the Cossacks no longer reign over water sources and lands, neither do they hold any monopoly on fishing areas. Financing comes from the state, like before, but today the Cossackdom is more dependent on it. Naturally, it doesn't go without problems and frictions. Article in the online newspaper *The Ural Cossack* as of 18.12.2020 notes that the level of corruption by those who are appointed by the state is so high that „the Cossacks themselves do not see any money”<sup>101</sup> Author of the piece Valery Rozanov calls for support for a particular candidate, who has to replace the appointed head of the Union following the democratic election. An article by ataman G. Kovalyov, „Fight with corruption”,<sup>102</sup> suggests to choose people for the anti-corruption structures by means of social elections held by corresponding commissions. I'd like note here that despite the difference in methods to fight corruption – be it change of the chief ataman or re-staffing controlling organizations – both authors

---

<sup>100</sup> Ataman G. Kovalyov. „Goals of the Cossack Federation.” Official website of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/about>. Accessed 20.06.2021.

<sup>101</sup> V. Rozanov. „The Cossackdom to be braced up.” *The Ural Cossack*, no. 1 (24), 18.12.2020, uploaded on the official website of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/nteresno/n24/>. Accessed 20.06.2021.

<sup>102</sup> Colonel B. Yanko. „Fight with the corruption – the main directions.” Official website of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/23nteresno/osnovnye/>. Accessed 20.06.2021.

vote for elective approach that will allow everyone exercise their civil right.

At times there can be noted traces of nostalgia over the lost monarchy. Article written by the Ural ataman G. Kovalyov for the official web-site of the Cossack Union has the following lines: „The Russian Orthodox Church suggests that the monument to Emperor Nicholas II be moved from the village of Taininskoye near Moscow to the center of the capital, in place of the monument to Karl Marx on the Teatralnaya Square. „It would be a very significant step to coincide it with the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the execution of the royal family...”, said Vladimir Silovyev, head of the Publishing Department of the Moscow Patriarchate.

A representative of the Moscow Patriarchate also supported the idea of renaming the Moscow metro station Voikovskaya, named after one of the tsar's assassins... The return of historical names and the rejection of the Soviet-era names, he said, would mean further deliverance of the Russian people “from the strange ambivalence that has persisted since the Soviet times.”

“It is surprising that the map of our homeland still keeps the names of tsar-killers, and the map of the capital still has many names that are strange to our ears, but even stranger to our souls,” said Father Vladimir.”<sup>103</sup>

I see in this piece not only as a manifestation of the desire to return to the past and hold on to it, but also as a desire to get rid of the fruits of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Apparently, for the Cossacks, respect for old monarchy is not a trigger for military uprising, but one of attributes that reminds them of where their roots are. This „clearing” off of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is meaningful for the Cossacks, because the Soviet state took away two most precious things from them – religion and freedom. Restoration of those things demands a fresh start and renouncing that page of our history.

Despite limited freedom, corruption, and a lost century, the Cossacks do not lose hope to grow a unified community and consequently gain more weight in the internal politics of the country. The pillars of this new community are: religious ethics and norms, shared territory and language, love for mother land and your kin. E. J. Hobsbawm in his book *Nations and nationalism since 1780* mentions that nations have been born based on such principles as: language, religion, common territory, past history, political views, ethnic belonging,<sup>104</sup> I believe we can firmly say that most of these principle of national constructions are present in the case of the Cossacks today.

---

<sup>103</sup> Ataman G. Kovalyov. „All Goals of the Cossack Federation.” Official web-site of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/23nteresno/krugi/>. Accessed 20.06.2021

<sup>104</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Yet those principle are not always exercised in the same way. For example, religion plays a very important part. Today the Cossacks are no longer Old Believers, most of them belong to the Orthodox Church. Yet they attempt to preserve strict attachment to the norms and embrace the virtue of non-judgment and acceptance. When nations are born bound by one religion, they unify people in one faith. When Cossacks build their Cossackdom, they try to unify people thanks to faith. Today, like before, Muslims account for a visible percentage among the Ural Cossacks. According to the population census of the Perm region as of 2004-2005, there was formed the first Muslim Cossack unit of 100 people. This act was praised by the local mufti, who called it „an act of patriotism that goes along the spiritual tradition of the ancestors”.<sup>105</sup>

As for the part history, it goes together with love for motherland for the Cossacks. My relative Evgeny, who is creating our genealogical tree doesn't call himself a Cossack, yet he knows many and they share their interest for the history of their homeland. History for a Cossack means memory of the ancestors, loyalty and attachment to tradition and values. Hobsbawm mentions that some nations in modern time have been formed „against rapacious neighbours”<sup>106</sup>. This „against” was always linked to past episodes and conflicts. In case of the Cossacks, negativity of the past encounters with neighboring peoples is not part of the present. First of all, many of those ethnic groups today wither live on the territory of the Russian Federation, or in neighboring countries and are thus subjects to local legislation. There are no more attacks and fights over the fishing spots.

Based on the efforts I saw my relatives making to bring the knowledge they'd gathered further, I also believe that one of the main purposes of the new Cossacks is the upbringing of the youth. The same is stated on the website of the Cossack Union among the goals of the organization: „ [Our aim is] to conduct active work on the spiritual patriotic education together with the Russian Orthodox Church. [We aim] to create special Cossack courses in the structure of existing educational institutions for ideological, moral, and physical training.”<sup>107</sup> Apart from creating educational courses by the universities, modern Cossacks try to teach their values and keep them intact. Even geography doesn't make much change here. The ataman of the American Cossacks says the following in one interview from 2013: „I'll tell you how it was. When a Cossack boy was

---

<sup>105</sup> V. Hodarev. „Muslim Cossacks: how it is possible?” *The Russian Seven*, October, 2017.

<https://russian7.ru/post/kazaki-musulmane-kak-takoe-vozmozhno/>. Accessed 20.06.2021.

<sup>106</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge University Press, 1990. P. 184.

<sup>107</sup> Ataman G. Kovalyov. „All Goals of the Cossack Federation.” Official web-site of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/23nteresno/krugi/>. Accessed 20.06.2021

born, he lived in the women's quarters. As soon as he was 7 years old, he was taken for the first time to the bathhouse; he was washed, his hair – cut. His things were transferred from the women's part to the men's part [of the house]. He also slept on the chest, and people would say: „You're already half a Cossack.” And that was the upbringing. They used to put him on the horse, the godfather would always take him around the church. It was very important, because Cossacks are the warriors of Christ. We are Orthodox after all.”<sup>108</sup> When asked if this way was still practiced, ataman answered: „Of course. How else? These are our Cossack laws. We live by them.”<sup>109</sup> He later also added that wants to undertake a project to create a text-book for the Russian immigrants and their children, who lose Russian language. Unlike in Russia, in the US the Cossacks are not considered to be an ethnic minority, so they do not receive any special funding. Nevertheless, they have private-funded schools and also attempts to gain weight in the internal political circle.

I wrote in the previous chapters that the Cossacks' values were the compass for living a life. „We toe the line when others dodge, for we are the Cossacks” – this line, already mentioned before, probably stands in the new light now that the complexity of the Cossack history and current position has been exposed. The Cossack values are passed on not only through modern educational institutes as sources (including online sources), but also through family.

I will provide a quote from the book *Leaving Traces for the Descendant*: „When describing my life, I'd like my children, grandchildren, and future generations to follow my example and continue the story of the Gorbunov family. Rephrasing one good saying, I could say that the one who doesn't honor history won't have future. Even more precisely, every person has to know his kin. It will help choose the direction in life wisely and stand firm on their feet. Life doesn't have a plot. It makes such zigzags at times that you think: „Can it be happening only to me?” Thus following life experience that my wife and I have, the experience of our parents, I can firmly give you some recommendations, my dear grandchildren. You'll have everything just fine in your lives only if you follow the rules. First, study well at school and then at university. Yet do not do it for parents or for marks, do it for yourself, try to understand what education gives you. Second, you must work hard in the area you chose. Chose it after advising with parents and friends taking into account circumstances. Yet what has to be there whatever you pick is responsible attitude to any

---

<sup>108</sup> O. Bychkova, „Interview with the Chief Ataman of the American Cossacks.” Official web-site of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/archiv2013/08082013/>. Accessed 20.06.2021

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

work and deep respect for your colleagues. And the third, remember that anything can happen in life, but if you are ready – you will win.”<sup>110</sup> With all honesty, I should say that my grandfather and his cousin, the author of those lines, indeed followed the recommendations written above. They deeply love / loved their occupations and achieved significant results praised by their colleagues. I guess, I might have picked that example, because I have always followed the work path that gave me satisfaction, development, and new knowledge. I believe that despite the „zigzags”, love for what you do always reflects in a silver lining of a cloud.

---

<sup>110</sup> M. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*, Astana, 2014. P. 80.

## Final remarks

The story of the Cossacks in the Urals is a long journey through centuries of changing rulers and regimes, through times of war and peace, through nations and ethnicities, through faith and disbelief. The story started with fugitive peasants and criminal squads roaming along the vast lands around the Ural Mountains. It then continued to see emerging stanitsas and fort posts (*kremlins*), growing community accepting people of all religions, ethnicity, and background. Economic sustainability was only a matter of time. Control over such economic sources as fishing places, land for agricultural purposes, meadows, and forests ensured thriving economy. Occasional disagreements with the state and even uprisings were followed by times of cooperation and non-involvement into the Cossacks' matters. Freedom, faith, motherland and values of the Cossacks have been guarded like treasures from anyone, even the government. Cossackdoms became shelters for the Old Believers and people, who came to seek better fate away from their homeland. As centuries went by, another treasure has been added to the box – education.

All together, the Cossack treasures became strong pillars that allowed for tradition to survive the turmoil of the 20th century. Almost a century of destruction, bloodsheds, and massacres, of prohibited religion and taken freedom didn't eradicate the Cossack spirit. Today the Cossacks are an official military socio-political institute in the Russian Federation. It aims to revive the Cossack values, to ensure corresponding upbringing of the future generation. Another goal is to serve to the motherland and protect it and its subjects from any foreign aggression. Promotion of the Orthodox faith is another important point of the modern Cossack agenda. Together with the Russian Orthodox Church they conduct Cross Processions, build new churches and educate new generation on the matter. As for horse-riding and saber use, today annual competition give a chance to any Cossack show his dexterity and skills. The Cossacks also take part in military parades like the one held annually in Moscow on May 9. Geography also doesn't prevent Cossacks from uniting. There are occasional conferences held for all the Cossacks from all countries. One of the strongest communities outside Russian is the American one, which has different sorts of troubles, but coincides in its aims with other Cossackdoms – to transfer tradition, to ensure the new generation follows old Christian values and holds on to Orthodox faith.

There are many problems to be solved and addressed, but the efforts made give hope that it is possible. Cossack spirit lives in the discussions about ways to fight corruption, it's in the

charity educational and historical projects, it's in the choices people make every day. I consider myself lucky to be connected to such a strong unity. This connection hasn't been developed by my family members on purpose, it came naturally through talks, jokes, stories, and books. I do not consider myself a Cossack, yet I rely on the knowledge (or „Recommendations”) shared with me and respect it. For actions speak louder than words.

## Bibliography

1. D. Bagaley. *Essays on the History of Colonization of the Steppe Outskirts of the Moscow State*. Moscow, 1887
2. N. Borodin. *The Urals Cossack Army*. Uralsk, 1891.
3. N. Borodin. *In defense of the Ural fishing*. St. Pteresburg, 1910.
4. S. Danshov. "Traditions of the Southern Urals as a Method of the Spiritual and Moral Upbringing of the Rising Generation". *Humanitariastics as the School of Thought* magazine, 2020, Orenburg.
5. V. Darienko. *Class War at the Yaik in XVII – beginning of XVIII cc.*, Moscow, 1966.
6. S. Gavrilyachenko. *Serving Without Being a Servant*. Rodina, 1995, Moscow.
7. J. G. Georgi. *Description of All Peoples Living in the Russian State, Their Everyday Rituals, Customs, Clothes, Dwellings, Fun, Religions*. Part 1, SPb., 1799, St. Petersburg.
8. E. J. Hobsbawm. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.
9. A. Izyumov. *Georgraphy in the Ural Cossack Army*. Moscow, 1997.
10. A. Katunsky. *Old Belief*. Moscow, 1972.
11. A. Karpov. *The Uralians*. Uralsk, 1911
12. N. Komarov. *Social strata and nations of the Russian State during the reign of the Romanov*, GBU MDN, 2003, Moscow.
13. A. Levshin. *Historical and Static Review of the Ural Cossacks*. SPb, 1823, St. Petersburg.
14. L. Masyanov. *Death of the Ural Cossack Army*. Kazachy Krug #1, 1991, Moscow.
15. O. Merzlikina. *Along the Ural banks...*, SGPU, 2007, Samara.
16. V. Mosin. *The Southern Urals in the Stone Age. Vol. 1 of Hisotry of the Southern Urals*. Comp. by S. Botalov. Publishing Centre JuUrGU, 2019, Chelyabinsk.
17. I. Murzina. „*The Tradition of the Cossack Education: the Ethical Aspect.*” *Culturological Approach in Education*, 2015, Samara.
18. S. Sagnayeva. *Material Culture of the Ural Cossacks in the late 19 –beginning of the 20th century*. *Russian Ethnographer* #11,1993, Moscow.
19. A. Schapov. *Russian Schism of Old Believers*. Kazan, 1859.
20. N. Shuvalov. *From Paris to Berlin: Toponym*. The Southern Urals Publishing House, 1989, Chelyabinsk.

21. S. Solovyov. *The History of Russia Since the Ancient Times*. Vol. 4, Chapter 3. Publishing House Common Benefit, 1851-1879, St. Petersburg.
22. A. Superanskaya. „From the History of Surnames”. *Science and Life magazine*, vol. 7, 2008. P. 1 of the section „Correspondence with the Readers”.
23. P. S. Pallas. *Journey Across Different Provinces of the Russian Empire*. V 3, SPb, 1773-1788.
24. G. Potanin. „Community-region”. *Journal for All* #2, 1901.
25. A. Preobrazhenskiy. *The Urals and the Northern Siberia in the end of the 16th – beginning of the 18th centuries*. Science, 1972, Moscow.
26. V. Vitevsky. *Yaik Army*. Russian archive, №3, 1879.
27. V. Vityevsky. *I. I. Nepluyev and the Orenburg Area in its former composition before 1758*. Kazan, 1889.
28. V. Vyrelkin. „Philosophical Problems of the Cossack revival”. *Socio-political journal* #3-6, Moscow, 1994.
29. S. Zenkovsky. *The Russian Old Believers*. Moscow, 1995.
30. V. Zotov. „Cossackdom – the Russian phenomenon”. *Journal Liberal Thought* #10, Moscow, 1994.

***Magazines and archive sheets:***

31. State Russian Historical-Military Archive, fund 13, op. 1/107, case 10.
32. Collection of minutes of meetings of the conventions of the elected representatives of the Ural Cossack stanitsas for 25 years (1874-1898), Uralsk, 1900.

***Online resources:***

33. O. Bychkova, „Interview with the Chief Ataman of the American Cossacks.” Official website of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/archiv2013/08082013/>. Accessed 20.06.2021
34. V. Hodarev. „Muslim Cossacks: how it is possible?” *The Russian Seven*, October, 2017. <https://russian7.ru/post/kazaki-musulmane-kak-takoe-vozmozhno/>. Accessed 20.06.2021.
35. Ataman G. Kovalyov. „Goals of the Cossack Federation.” Official website of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/about>. Accessed 20.06.2021.

36. V. Rozanov. „The Cossackdom to be braced up.” *The Ural Cossack*, no. 1 (24), 18.12.2020, uploaded on the official website of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/nteresno/n24/>. Accessed 20.06.2021.
37. Colonel B. Yanko. „Fight with the corruption – the main directions.” Official website of the Ural Cossacks Federation, <http://kazakural.ru/23nteresno/osnovnye/>. Accessed 20.06.2021.
38. Volumes of the official publications of the results of the All-Russian census 2010, vol. 1. „Numbers and location of the population.” Official state electronic archive of the census results, [https://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](https://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm). Accessed 20.06.2021.

**39. *From my family’s collection:***

40. M. A. Gorbunov. *Leaving Traces for the Descendants*. Astana, 2014
41. Recollections I wrote down during my visits in winter-spring 2020-2021.
42. Notes taken from my message history with relative Evgeny.