

EQUINE EMPIRE:  
HORSES AND POWER ON THE KAZAKH STEPPE, 1880s-1920s

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **EQUINE EMPIRE: HORSES AND POWER ON THE KAZAKH STEPPE, 1880s-1920s**

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Located in the north of Kazakhstan and extending the entire width of the country, the Kazakh Steppe is a temperate grassland ideal for the mobile pastoralism Kazakhs had practiced for thousands of years prior to the Russian Empire's encroachment on the region. An occupation naturally inclined toward the use of horses, Kazakhs developed an economy, culture, and society in which ownership of and access to these animals played a central role. Their reverence for the horse, coupled with the suitability of the region toward horse breeding resulted in the Kazakh Steppe claiming the world's largest horse population by the end of the nineteenth century. However, their use of horses and understanding of the land differed fundamentally from that of the growing numbers of Slavic peasant settlers making their way to the region in the aftermath of Russian serf emancipation. The collision of these two societies and ecologies drastically altered the landscape of horse breeding in the steppe as well as Kazakh horse culture itself. During this same period, Russian authorities were witnessing a steep decline in horse breeding throughout the traditional hotbeds of the empire and began to look toward the Kazakh Steppe as a potentially limitless supply of horses for their military, agricultural, and even industrial sectors. Their vision of the steppe's potential is evident in the various campaigns to count, categorize, and "improve" the region's horse population. This imperial gaze was subsequently embraced by Soviet authorities who feverishly attempted to revitalize a decimated breeding industry throughout the 1920s and restock a depleted economy in dire need of horse power. Throughout these processes, the horse occupied a central role at the intersection of state, settler, and Kazakh power relations.

Increasingly, however, Kazakhs were alienated from their animals and traditional means of subsistence. Ending with the collectivization campaigns of the late 1920s, this study of horses and horse culture in the Kazakh Steppe uncovers a tumultuous period for the Kazakh people who were, in many ways, stripped of their very identity.

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*To my world travelers, Melissa and Shealyn*

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## INTRODUCTION

In her expansive and influential work on horses in human history, anthropologist Pita Kelekna argues that the “analysis of man’s symbiosis with the domesticated horse necessarily takes the reader to regions remote from urban centers and pays special attention to mobile elements of nomadic society, too often deemed marginal or transitory.”<sup>1</sup> Though this study is not intended as a comprehensive investigation of the symbiotic relationship between humans and horses, it is an aspect of the work that seeps through within the contextual framework of the overall project. Unquestionably, what this study does do is take the reader to a remote region of the world far removed from urban centers and most certainly pays special attention to the mobile pastoralist societies that inhabited and, in some respects, continue to inhabit the region.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I analyze the centrality of horses to the convergence of Russian and Soviet state power with both Slavic settler and indigenous societies in the Kazakh Steppe over an approximately fifty-year period ending in the late 1920s. This timeline brings into focus three distinct periods within the history of the region: that of increased migration and resettlement; World War I, revolution and civil war; and the years of early Soviet power. Throughout each period, the horse occupied a central role at the intersection of state, settler, and Kazakh power relations.

Located in the north of Kazakhstan and extending the entire breadth of the country, the

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<sup>1</sup> Pita Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History* (Cambridge, 2009), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Carole Ferret’s recently published article examines mobile pastoral communities in a mountainous district south-eastern Kazakhstan and reveals “remarkable” historical continuity over a period of more than a century (1910-2012) – this in light of the “political, social and economic upheavals of the twentieth century.” While she acknowledges that “significantly fewer” people continue to practice mobile pastoralism, “those who move don’t cover any less distance than their predecessors.” See Ferret, “Mobile Pastoralism a Century Apart: Continuity and Change in South-Eastern Kazakhstan, 1910 and 2012,” *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 4 (2018): 503-525. The particular quotes used here appear in the article on page 521.

Kazakh Steppe is a temperate grassland where natural conditions drove animal herders throughout the year from one seasonal grazing spot to the next. Often traversing great distances in search of fresh water and bountiful pasture, Kazakhs relied on mobile pastoralist techniques for thousands of years prior to the Russian Empire's encroachment on the region. Because their occupation was naturally inclined toward the use of horses, Kazakhs developed an economy, culture, and society in which ownership of and access to these animals was of paramount importance. Their reverence for the horse, coupled with the suitability of the region toward horse breeding resulted in the Kazakh Steppe claiming the world's largest horse population by the end of the nineteenth century. However, Kazakhs' use of horses and understanding of the land around them differed fundamentally from that of the Slavic peasant settlers increasingly making their way to the region in the aftermath of Russian serf emancipation in 1861. The collision of these two societies and ecologies drastically altered the landscape of horse breeding in the steppe as well as Kazakh horse culture itself.

During this same period, Russian authorities were witnessing a steep decline in horse breeding throughout the established hotbeds of the empire and began to look toward the Kazakh Steppe as a potentially limitless supplier of horses for their military, agricultural, and even industrial sectors. Their vision of the steppe's potential is evident in the various campaigns to count, categorize, and organize the region's horse population and eventually install oversight via the Department of Horse Breeding (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosudarstvennogo Konnozavodstva*). This imperial gaze was subsequently embraced by Soviet authorities who feverishly attempted to revitalize a decimated breeding industry throughout the 1920s and restock a depleted agricultural sector and military which were both in dire need of horse power. Ending with the collectivization campaigns of the late 1920s, my research sheds light on a period of history during which

Kazakhs – a people who so strongly identified with their horses – were increasingly alienated from them. That this took place during a time which saw the world’s horse population reach its apex in response to an unprecedented need for horse power perhaps makes the events throughout this period all the more troubling. But beyond a story of Kazakhs and their horses, this study is one that tracks the immense changes that migration brought to the Kazakh Steppe, the change and continuity that Soviet power brought with it, and how the process transpired of sedentarizing the largely mobile pastoralist inhabitants of the region. Doing so takes this study from being a strictly Russian, Soviet, or Kazakh one and places it squarely amongst a greater narrative involving late nineteenth and early twentieth century empire.

Work on horses has predominantly been the domain of anthropologists who have typically discussed human-horse interaction over the *longue durée*. Scholars David W. Anthony and Pita Kelekna have been major recent contributors to the field through their analysis of the cultural ramifications of horse domestication on human civilization.<sup>3</sup> Roughly fifty years ago, John C. Ewers examined the role of horses in Blackfoot Indian culture, but few works since have been so extensively focused on horses in one particular setting.<sup>4</sup> Margaret Derry’s 2006 work, *Horses in Society*, is that rare work of history to focus specifically on horses and addresses the interrelationship between technology and the equine world in the west from 1800 to 1920.<sup>5</sup> Hers was followed closely by an edited volume investigating the role of horses as imperial agents in Southeast Asia and Southern Africa whose editors argue that the animals “constituted an

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<sup>3</sup> David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History*.

<sup>4</sup> John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture: With Comparative Material from other Western Tribes* (Washington, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Derry, *Horses in Society: A Story of Animal Breeding and Marketing, 1800-1920* (Toronto, 2006).

important part of Alfred Crosby's 'portmanteau biota' that followed European colonies and settlement across the globe from the late fifteenth century."<sup>6</sup>

On the topic of the horse's role in Kazakh culture, perhaps no scholar rivals the depth of knowledge nor the body of published work as the Kazakh historian Akhmet Toktabai, whose works in both the Kazakh and Russian languages should be considered the authoritative works on the subject.<sup>7</sup> But according to Carole Ferret's 2009 article on horses in the Kazakh Steppe, "no study [until hers] has been devoted to the Russian exploitation of Central Asian horses."<sup>8</sup> No studies since – until this one – has been devoted to the subject either. Her work, however, which has yet to be translated to English from its original French, is one rooted firmly in the Russian Imperial period. Thus, this work is rather distinct amongst western scholarship in both its subject matter and temporal scope.

Bridging the anthropological and historical divide, this study of horses in the Kazakh Steppe uniquely adds to an existing body of literature which stresses the imperialist vision of the Russian resettlement process. However, it alters the story of Russian colonization by focusing not solely on how Kazakhs lost power throughout this period, but also how a subsection of Kazakh society gained power through their accumulation of horses and with what success those individuals navigated the revolution and civil war years to wield influence in the 1920s.<sup>9</sup> Further,

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<sup>6</sup> Greg Bankoff and Sandra Swart eds., *Breeds of Empire: The 'Invention' of the Horse in Southeast Asia and Southern Africa 1500-1950* (Copenhagen, 2007), 1. Crosby argues that along with a physical invasion of imperial powers on their colonial holdings, a "biological imperialism" followed. This "portmanteau biota" consisted of their domestic plants, animals, pathogens, etc. and in the case of this study would apply to the horses which, as will be shown, were brought from European Russia to Kazakhstan in order to cross-breed them with horses in the Kazakh Steppe as a way of "improving" the breed. For more on the portmanteau biota, see Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge, 1986), 89-90.

<sup>7</sup> In particular, see Akhmet Toktabai, *Qazaq zhylqysynyng tarikhy* (Almaty, 2010); *Kul't konia u kazakhov* (Almaty, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Carole Ferret, "Des chevaux pour l'empire," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale*, 17/18 (2009), 253.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Pierce writes that during the Russian Imperial period in Central Asia, "herds of horses became the monopoly of the rich and powerful, while cattle, sheep, and goats became the mainstay of the poor

it illuminates threads of continuity between the Russian Imperial and Soviet periods through both powers' pursuit of horse power in the region.<sup>10</sup> By bridging this other divide – that of the 1917 Revolution – this study ties the three periods under consideration, to borrow Peter Holquist's phrase, into one long “continuum of crisis” for the Kazakh people.<sup>11</sup> In his work, Holquist's aim was to reinsert Russia's revolutionary experience into a broader European history and highlight the roots of Soviet power consolidation in the pre-1917 landscape, a novel concept when the work was published. In similar fashion, this dissertation pays particular attention to the trends of the late nineteenth century within the Russian Empire and the factors which led authorities on various levels to increasingly intrude on and attempt to influence the Kazakh horse-breeding industry. Particularly evident in chapter two, the Russian Imperial project in this regard is tied directly to broader trends of European colonizing practices and sets the stage for the Soviet consolidation of power later, bringing greater clarity to how the imperial period informed its successor state and the ways in which this divide was not a clean break.

## **The Horse**

It is necessary here to first lay the groundwork regarding the reasoning behind this study and thus to address the importance of the horse within the particular time and space under examination. Few would disagree that the horse has played a critical role in the construction of

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and semisettled people.” See Pierce, *Russian Central Asia: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 1960), 156.

<sup>10</sup> Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, 2004); Anatolii Remnev, “Colonization and ‘Russification’ in the imperial geography of Asiatic Russia from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries” in Uyama Tomohiko ed., *Asiatic Russia: Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts* (London and New York, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Holquist's study of Russia's Don region identifies the years 1914-1921 as a “continuum of crisis” during which many aspects of the imperial war effort were co-opted, in often extreme fashion, by the Soviet successor state. See Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, 2002).



cultures and societies since its domestication on the Eurasian Steppe sometime around the fourth millennium BCE.<sup>12</sup> From that time forward, horses have been used as draft animals, for transportation, sporting purposes, and a key resource of militaries the world over. Horses have served as indicators of wealth, power, and prestige, and their value is seen in the terrible punishments meted out to the scourge of times gone by – the horse thief. They have served as the most powerful bargaining chip in trade negotiations, and in some cultures to this day (in addition to that of the Kazakhs), horse meat and mare’s milk are considered not only culinary delicacies, but also prized for their purported medicinal qualities. Finally, the horse’s significant historical presence in folklore, literature, and art speaks both to its importance as a commodity as well as to the special relationship humans have built with the animals throughout history.<sup>13</sup>

The economic and strategic advantages provided by horses were realized not long after initial domestication – or, perhaps, these were the very advantages that the first horse domesticators wished to exploit. In either case, steppe sheep herders were able to maintain herds several times larger when mounted on a horse than on foot and led to a general growth in herding practices.<sup>14</sup> Beyond economics, horse transport significantly changed social dynamics between different groups of people. “The rapidity and reach of mounted raiders,” David W. Anthony writes, “would have changed raiding tactics, status-seeking behaviors, alliance-

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language*, 221.

<sup>13</sup> In the Russian context, for example, Dr. Evgeniia Petrova, Deputy Director of the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, writes that “scenes depicting horses are among the favourite subjects of Russian artists of all periods.” See Petrova, *Horses in Russian Art* (Bad Breisig: Palace Editions, 2001), 7. Thomas G. Winner speaks to the common presence of horses in Kazakh oral art and literature and notes that “as man’s most trusted friend, [it] is depicted in almost all epic songs.” See Winner, *The Oral Art and Literature of the Kazakhs of Russian Central Asia* (Durham, 1958), 51.

<sup>14</sup> David W. Anthony writes that accompanied by a dog, an unmounted herder can maintain two hundred sheep but if mounted, and with the same dog, a herder can maintain a herd of five hundred sheep. See Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language*, 222.

building, displays of wealth, and settlements patterns.”<sup>15</sup> Horses quickly assumed the top position amongst other domesticated animals. Even as superior technology began to appear in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the horse maintained its important position in society and the military. Regarding the growing popularity of farming machinery, the *Breeder's Gazette*, a weekly publication in the United States devoted to livestock breeding, reported in 1915 that “the auto is convenient, the horse is indispensable.” And though this period witnessed the vast expansion of railroad networks, rail transport did not immediately end reliance on the horse either. In fact, Margaret Derry argues that, counterintuitively, the train created an “insatiable need” for horses at the beginning of the twentieth century as people on the move needed transport both to and from rail terminals. Thus, the worldwide equine population only reached its peak somewhere between 1910 and 1920 at around 110 million – a number about twice that as a century before.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout this study, one particular type of horse occupies the majority of the discussion – the Kirgiz horse (fig.1). As will also be noted later, until the 1920s, Russians typically employed the moniker “Kirgiz” when referring to those people now known as Kazakhs and “Kara-Kirgiz” when referring to those people now known as Kyrgyz. The Kirgiz horse was by far the most popular amongst the Kazakhs and, as far as can be ascertained, named such by Russians simply due to this affiliation. According to an early twentieth century Russian publication, the Kirgiz horse was the predominant breed in the oblasts of Turgai, Ural'sk, Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk, and Semirech'e, as well as the northern parts of Turkestan and even in the Ferghana region – “in other words, in all those areas where the Kirgiz [people] comprise

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<sup>15</sup> Anthony, *The Horse and the Wheel*, 222.

<sup>16</sup> Derry, *Horses in Society*, 46-47.

the dominant population.”<sup>17</sup> To the Kazakhs, the horse was the quintessential animal for their world – though not what many Russians or western Europeans of the time would describe as a necessarily beautiful animal, it was sturdy, durable, and provided Kazakhs the mobility on which they depended. To the Russians who increasingly looked to appropriate these horses, it was an animal that first needed to be molded, according to their standards, into something “better.”



Figure 1: “The Kirgiz Horse”  
Source: *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, vol. 2, 303.

Both Kazakh and Russian standards in terms of their horse’s appearance, temperament, and characteristics were dictated by their respective needs. For Kazakhs who practiced mobile pastoralism, horses were an efficient means for tending livestock, transportation to seasonal grazing grounds, and the general mobility necessitated by the wide open expanses of the steppe. The often harsh environment of the region required that their animals be sufficiently prepared to physically withstand periods of drought, famine, and extreme temperature shifts. As a people primarily engaged in sedentary agriculture, Russian farmers required work horses capable of

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<sup>17</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Aziatskaia Rossiia* t. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1914), 303.

pulling a plow or cart but not necessarily one that exhibited the same agility or long-term endurance as those that a Kazakh would prefer. In contrast to this, Russian cavalry horses were animals of great agility and speed but never tasked with carrying much more than the cavalryman saddled atop it. Contemporary military professionals, particularly those of the late Russia Imperial period, most often believed the Kirgiz horse could be best employed as a general draft animal tasked with pulling supply carts and heavy artillery equipment. Agricultural professionals of the time and those of the early Soviet period believed the Kirgiz horse to be a vital component toward the success of the industry both in the Kazakh Republic and beyond. The ways in which professionals and commentators of both periods discussed the Kirgiz horse, its supposed shortcomings, and the ways in which it could be improved to their liking typically mirrored the kind of language they also used when describing both the Kazakh people and the Kazakh Steppe in general. The process through which Russian and Soviet officials attempted to remold the Kirgiz horse in their image and for their own use in many ways highlights their respective imperial projects in the Kazakh Steppe. Outside of Russia and the Soviet Union, this period also witnessed other European colonial powers – namely England and France – embarking on similar projects of their own in their overseas territories, processes which speak to the greater narrative of the continent’s history and of empire in a broad sense.<sup>18</sup>

The ways in which Kazakhs bred, cared for, and used their horses represented additional points of contention for those outsiders who looked to modify and “improve” the Kirgiz horse. For most Russians, horse breeding was a selective process paying special attention to the particular attributes they would like to see exemplified in the offspring. Though these calculated

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<sup>18</sup> Though this study does not engage deeply in the particular ways that Russian or Soviet equine experts attempted to physically alter the Kirgiz horse through selective breeding, Carole Ferret does an excellent job in her article “Des chevaux pour l’empire,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale*.”

breeding measures caught on later in Russia than the rest of Europe, small circles of Russian breeders quickly excelled at the practice and in some instances even surpassed their western counterparts. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, a handful of Russian breeders were producing horses of renowned quality throughout Europe and beyond. Breeding was carried out in the controlled environment of a stable, the mares closely observed and cared for while pregnant, and the offspring likewise looked after so as to ensure their health and viability. This selectivity typically resulted in a breeder maintaining only as many horses as their stables could hold. Kazakhs, on the other hand, had the open expanses of the steppe on which to allow their horses to roam and they accordingly kept as large a herd as the land could sustain. Stallions were placed amongst a group of mares, allowed to freely breed, and if impregnated, the mares would not be subjected to any special treatment unless visibly distressed. This dependence on nature meant that herd numbers could fluctuate greatly from year to year based upon the environmental conditions but it also meant the horses that survived would be those most well-conditioned to the steppe and the work required of them. Thus, Kazakhs not only relied on nature to physically sustain their horses but also to raise them. Kazakhs also relied on their horses for sustenance much more than a typical Russian, drinking mare's milk and relying on horse meat as a staple of their diet rich in protein and fat necessary to withstand the long steppe winters. In these ways, in-depth discussion of the horse as the focal point of the collision of these two societies in the Kazakh Steppe uniquely lends itself to studies of migratory versus sedentary forms of living and the consequences of these two practices meeting in a particular place and time.

## The Kazakh Steppe

Just as the horse was an object of the Russian, and later, Soviet imperial gaze, so too was the land they occupied. The vast Eurasian Steppe is comprised of separate but similar topographic zones. The Ponto-Caspian Steppe stretches from the northern shores of the Black Sea in Moldova and Ukraine, east through southern Russia, and into parts of Kazakhstan where it meets the Kazakh Steppe. This particular section of the greater Eurasian Steppe – and the geographic focal point of this work – occupies vast stretches of northern and central Kazakhstan with significant portions extending into the parts of southern Russia lying adjacent to Kazakhstan’s present-day border. Further to the east, the Kazakh Steppe gives way to the grasslands of western China, Mongolia, and Manchuria. Within Kazakhstan, the steppe region lies primarily north of the Aral Sea in Kazakhstan’s southwest and to the south of the forest zones of western Siberia. Traveling from north to south, the steppe zone transitions to semi-arid desert before fully giving way to the deserts located in the southernmost reaches of the country. As the world’s largest landlocked country, Kazakhstan’s climate is largely unaffected by the influence of large bodies of water – most importantly, oceans. Its steppe zone, located deep within the country’s interior, is consequently characterized by its significant seasonal variations in temperature with hot, dry summers and often frigid winters. Temperatures can range from -40 degrees Fahrenheit or lower in the winter while summer temperatures can reach over 100 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of the Kazakh Steppe in particular, see Sarah Cameron, “People Arrive but the Land Does Not Move: Nomads, Settlers, and the Ecology of the Steppe, 1870-1916” in Nicholas Breyfogle, ed. *Eurasian Environments: Nature and Ecology in Imperial Russian and Soviet History* (Pittsburgh, 2018), 43-59. For reference, Kazakhstan’s capital city (since 1997), Astana, is the world’s second coldest capital trailing only Mongolia’s – Ulaanbaatar – which lies in the eastern stretches of the Eurasian Steppe. For Americans who may have trouble grasping such temperatures, David W. Anthony puts them in some perspective when he writes “think North Dakota.” Anthony, *The Wheel and the Horse*, 136.

Generally speaking, the soil of the Eurasian Steppes is quite fertile. According to historian David Moon, it “comprises various types of black earth (*chernozem*) and dark chestnut soils (*temno–kashtanovye pochvy*), with some areas of salty soils (*solontsy*).<sup>20</sup> Rainfall in the steppe is sparse and unreliable, often varying a great deal from year to year with evaporation levels exceeding total precipitation levels.<sup>21</sup> The vegetation of the steppes is characterized most prominently by the lack of trees and “virtually continuous cover of grasses” which, though varied in “type and quality...have provided an abundant and easily utilized fodder base for pastoral nomadism.”<sup>22</sup> The particular climactic conditions of the Eurasian Steppe and the vegetation it produces creates the ideal habitat for horses. The open stretches of grassland provide for ample grazing throughout the spring and summer months and horses, unlike cattle or sheep, are well adapted to handle the challenges presented by the harsh winters of the steppe.<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps no wonder, then, that the earliest evidence of horse domestication appeared in the Ponto-Caspian steppes. Exactly where and when, Kelekna writes, is up for debate but Anthony puts the earliest evidence for domestication around 4800 BCE.<sup>24</sup> The first horses to be domesticated, however, were not actually for riding but for a source of meat. It was not until much later, perhaps 3700-3500 BCE that evidence suggests the first horses were domesticated

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<sup>20</sup> David Moon, *The Plough that Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grasslands, 1700-1914* (Oxford, 2013), 7. Sarah Cameron explains that the salty soils occur when groundwater seeps to the surface and evaporates, “leaving white salty patches across the surface of the soil.” See Cameron, “People Arrive but the Land Does Not Move,” 48.

<sup>21</sup> Moon, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Denis Sinor, ed. *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (New York, 1990), 34.

<sup>23</sup> David W. Anthony notes that during the winter, horses will instinctually break through snow and ice with their hooves in order to reach the grasses or water beneath. Cattle will not graze where they cannot see the grass and sheep have only limited ability to do so. Because of this, he writes that “horses are supremely adapted to the cold grasslands where they evolved.” 200

<sup>24</sup> For an excellent discussion of the scholarly debates on the earliest date of horse domestication, see Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History*, 29-39. For Anthony's claim, see his *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language*, 200.

for riding purposes by the Botai people in a region of present-day northern Kazakhstan.<sup>25</sup> Despite the uncertainties surrounding the exact location and period of domestication, the Eurasian Steppe and its natural suitability for horses “made possible the appearance of a unique historical phenomenon: the horse-breeding, highly mobile Eurasian nomad.”<sup>26</sup>

As the Russian Empire slowly incorporated the Kazakh Steppe throughout the nineteenth century, officials became increasingly preoccupied with the land and its uses. Throughout much of the world, the nineteenth century was marked by rapid industrialization and urbanization accompanied by drastic increases in population. For Russia, this process appeared a bit later than the rest of Europe but occurred nonetheless and, from a state perspective, the increase in population meant, in the words of Margaret Derry, “more mouths to feed.”<sup>27</sup> Most immediately, this meant more grain production and authorities of both the imperial and Soviet eras saw the boundless steppe region as an untapped resource with limitless agricultural potential. This mentality was especially prevalent in the case of the Soviet period when grain production was a state-run enterprise and was highlighted by the Virgin Lands Campaign initiated by Khrushchev beginning in the 1950s. In addition to grain production, population growth also spurred an increase in cattle and sheep production. By and large, both animals are rather inexpensive to raise, easy to maintain (both require far less land than do horses), and have myriad uses beyond being harvested for their meat – for example wool, milk, and cow hides for leather. Because of this, cattle and sheep farms increasingly displaced horse farms all across Europe and the United

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<sup>25</sup> Anthony, 220.

<sup>26</sup> Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge, 2000), 1. Soucek goes on here to write that “to be sure, nomads have also existed in other parts of the world, but the scale of the habitat, the role of the horse, and the relative paradoxical proximity of great agricultural or urban civilizations made it possible for the Inner Asian nomad to play a historical role as unique and often as grandiose as was his homeland.”

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Derry, *Horses in Society: A Story of Animal Breeding and Marketing, 1800-1920* (Toronto, 2006), 6. To quantify the growth, Derry reports that the population of England and Wales grew from six million in 1750 to 18 million in 1850 and reached 33 million by 1900.



States beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Russian and Soviet officials also looked to the steppe for horse production – both to acquire horses to replace those being lost to cattle and sheep production and as a location to which they could transplant existing breeding enterprises which were in danger of being overrun by the other, less intensive breeding industries.

To Russian and Soviet authorities, the Kazakh Steppe represented limitless possibilities but with their respective expansions into the region and confrontations with the indigenous Kazakh population, they were burdened by the same “nomad question.”<sup>29</sup> Mobile pastoralist land usage was predicated upon seasonal movements from one pasture to the next, ensuring optimal herd fodder for the given time of year and to reduce the risk of overgrazing an area and leaving it barren. These land use strategies were in complete contradiction to the sedentary agriculture practiced by the waves of Slavic settlers who began pouring into the region beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. In ways that will be discussed in greater detail below, Russian, and perhaps to a greater extent, Soviet officials attempted to reorganize the Kazakhs in order to organize the land in accordance to their own vision.

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<sup>28</sup> A greater discussion of this displacement takes place in chapter 3: “The State of Horses: Science, Culture, and ‘Correct’ Horse Breeding in the Steppe.” An example of changing land use strategies not used in the chapter, however, comes from the United States in 1928. In the famed “Meriam Report” on the condition of indigenous Americans, Lewis Meriam wrote of the “worthless horses” he witnessed throughout his research trip. “Many reservations are now overrun with worthless horses,” he wrote. “These consume much grass that could be utilized by cattle and sheep. Yet the Indians love horses and are often reluctant to get rid of them.” See Lewis Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration: Report of a Survey Made at the Request of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and Submitted to him, February 21, 1928* (Baltimore, 1928), 507.

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe: Soviet Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Famine, 1921-1934,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 2010), 26-27. Though Cameron writes specifically about the Soviet period, the “nomad question” while perhaps not articulated as such by Imperial officials, was very much a focal point of their concerns regarding the Kazakh Steppe.

## The Period

When Tsar Alexander II emancipated Russia's serfs in 1861, he forever altered the social landscape of the empire. The Emancipation Statute left millions of ex-serfs in search of land of their own and those most daring made their way east into Siberia and the Kazakh Steppe during the second half of the century.<sup>30</sup> Largely traveling overland on foot or by cart in the decades immediate following emancipation, the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway which began in 1891 significantly increased the rapidity with which travelers could make their way east and thus brought the migratory movement to a fever pitch. During the last century of the Russian Imperial period, writes Donald Treadgold, some 7,000,000 Russians migrated eastward crossing the Ural Mountains dividing European Russia from Asiatic Russia.<sup>31</sup> In the early twentieth century, write Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, over half a million peasants settled beyond the Urals in 1907 alone with "even more migrat[ing] in each of the next two years."<sup>32</sup>

Peasant migration to the Kazakh Steppe signaled a new era for Russia in terms of its role in the region. In 1864, Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandr Gorchakov articulated what one historian has described as "his version of a Russian manifest destiny," arguing that Russia's position in Central Asia was that "of all civilized states which are brought into contact with half-savage nomad populations possessing no fixed social organization." Attempting to demonstrate

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<sup>30</sup> Seasonal – typically rural to urban – highlighted this period as well. See, for example, Jeffrey Burds, *Peasant Dreams and Market Politics: Labor Migration and the Russian Village, 1861-1905* (Pittsburgh, 1998); Chapter Two – "Seasonal Migrants" in Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca and London, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the First World War* (Princeton, 1957), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad is My Native Land*, 16. To be clear, Russian peasants were migrating prior to serf emancipation and the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad but both events served to exponentially increase the numbers. For an earlier history of migration throughout the Russian Empire see David Moon, "Peasant Migration and the Settlement of Russia's Frontiers, 1550-1897," *The Historical Journal* 4, no. 4 (1997): 859-93.

Russia's imperial prowess to other powers, he wrote that Russia's fate in this regard was similar to "every other country which has found itself in a similar position" including the United States, France in Algeria, Holland and its colonies, and England in India. "All have been irresistibly forced," he wrote, "less by ambition than by imperious necessity, into this onward march, where the greatest difficulty is to know when to stop."<sup>33</sup>

While Gorchakov's address perhaps implied that Russian authorities had a calculated and informed strategy to guide a Russian presence in Central Asia, the reality is that it was a very fluid situation in which strategies had to be continually rethought, altered, and reimplemented in response to the ever-changing conditions. And this was true throughout the entirety of the period under investigation in this study – from the 1880s through the early Soviet period of the 1920s. A focal point of much of this process is both powers' desire to harness, in a figurative sense, the power of the Kirgiz horse and the land of the Kazakh Steppe. Paula Michaels observes that this process was a similar pattern to those that "took shape across the colonial world, where in the guise of 'civilizing' the natives, Western powers sought to destroy the traditional patterns of life in territories they hoped to make economically and politically useful to themselves."<sup>34</sup> This story is filled with instances of both Russian and Soviet officials – primarily those of the Department of Horse Breeding – attempting to change Kazakh horse breeding practices in order to bring

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<sup>33</sup> Document no. 341, "Zapiska ministra inostrannykh del A. Gorchakova i voennogo ministra D. Milyutina na imia imp. Aleksandra II o politike v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane" in Akademiia Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, *Kazakhsko-russkie otnosheniia v XVIII-XIX vekakh* (Alma-Ata: 1964), 518-21.

<sup>34</sup> Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (Pittsburgh, 2003), 38. In her discussion, Michaels draws on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism but argues that Russia's position in Central Asia differs slightly than the traditional cases of British and French Orientalism. She contends that while these powers "constructed the Near East and North Africa as feminine, exotic, and sexually untamed, Russian Orientalists [did] not present Kazakhstan as the site of unconstrained sexual expression and decadence, but of physical weakness and childlike ignorance." Regardless of this differentiation, Russian and Soviet domination of the Kazakh Steppe are classic illustrations of Said's argument that "colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact." See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1995), 39.

them in line with the western practices outlined above. In stark contrast to the proposed changes, however, what can be seen in the Kazakh Steppe regarding horse breeding and maintenance, particularly in the Soviet period, was a situation in which cultural exchange was not a unilateral process from colonizer to colonized but was seen in reverse as Russian breeding experts began to see the advantages of Kazakh methods and increasingly adopt them into the 1930s and even beyond.

The societal effects of the Russian and Soviet presence in the steppe were, to put it lightly, profound. In most instances, each state was overly concerned with Kazakh mobility – an aspect that speaks directly to their use of horses – and each made varied direct and indirect attempts to limit that mobility. From “Russification” through resettlement during the late imperial period to Soviet programs in the late 1920s intent on sedentarizing the “nomadic” population, the fifty-year period from the 1880s through the 1920s (and even beyond) exemplifies most directly James Scott’s argument that “the state...[was] the enemy of ‘people who move around.’” To pacify this “enemy,” then, Russian and Soviet methods aimed toward reorganizing the Kazakh Steppe were a clear “attempt to make [the] society legible, to arrange the population that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion.”<sup>35</sup> To varying degrees of success, programs aimed at Kazakh societal reconstruction and reorganization were implemented throughout the late Russian Imperial and early Soviet periods. The Soviet state was, however, still addressing the “nomad problem” well into the 1930s.

State policies ranging from Imperial Russian resettlement to the Soviet New Economic Policy (NEP) had far-reaching effects on the Kazakh economy which were visible through a

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<sup>35</sup> This was, in his own words, “to put it crudely.” See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998), 1.

multitude of phenomena but most prominently seen through the rise of the rich *bais* in the Kazakh Steppe. Bais were Kazakh elders who often held positions through hereditary privilege and though they were a mainstay within Kazakh society well before any Russian or Soviet state presence, many were uniquely positioned to benefit rather than suffer from their colonial subjugation. Specifically, they were able to increase the size of their horse herds as a direct result of other, less affluent herders being driven out of horse breeding altogether. This economic shift resulted in hostility against the bais from seemingly every direction – fellow Kazakhs, settlers, and the state. While a certain level of disdain towards the bais existed during the late imperial period, they became targets of state persecution in the years following the NEP as exploiters and agents of anti-Soviet agitation throughout the Kazakh Steppe. Like the “nomad question,” the fight against the bais was one that steadily gained momentum during the 1920s and reached a particular level of tenacity in 1928, resulting in an all-out confiscation and, in some cases, deportation, campaign against individuals who appeared to be bais.<sup>36</sup>

With some exceptions, this study is largely rooted in a period of time beginning with mass resettlement to the Kazakh Steppe in the late Russian Imperial period and ending in the late 1920s during the initial phases of collectivization and bai property confiscation. Though the story of horses in Kazakhstan surely has life both before and beyond this timeframe, I chose it for quite specific reasons. The late nineteenth century represents a period during which Imperial Russian officials expressed increasing interest in the land and resources of the Kazakh Steppe and strengthened an environment of coercion over the Kazakh people. Throughout the final years

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<sup>36</sup> Niccolò Pianciola discusses the “debaization” campaigns in his article “Famine in the Steppe: The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazakh Herdsmen, 1928-1934,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 45, no. 1/2 (2004): 137-191. See further Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe”; Isabelle Ohayon, *Le sédentarisation des Kazakhs dans l’URSS de Staline: Collectivisation et changement social, 1928-1945* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2006).

of Imperial Russian power in the steppe and into those of the Soviet period, coercion transformed in many regards to outright repression. For all Kazakh people, this repression manifested itself most clearly during the years of famine in the early 1930s – a period which represents a significant break with the past and deserving a study all its own.<sup>37</sup> Beyond this shift, the entire breeding industry of Kazakhstan was devastated during the years of famine and the methods employed throughout the years under investigation here were largely nullified.<sup>38</sup>

### **Sources and Chapter Organization**

This dissertation is the fruit of months of field research conducted in Almaty, Kazakhstan and St. Petersburg, Russia and relies predominantly on primary and secondary sources collected in either location. In Almaty, I utilized the Central State Archives, former Communist party archives – now the Presidential Archive - and the National Library of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Work at each institution was focused primarily on the Soviet period and was guided substantially through a laborious investigation of the documents collection of the Kazakh People's Commissariat of Agriculture at the Central State Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan (TsGARK f. 74). This collection contains a wealth of material on the Kazakh Department of Horse Breeding from 1919 through the 1920s and opened fertile avenues of inquiry that the general disarray of the years of early Soviet power in Kazakhstan could often stymie. Research in St. Petersburg was subsequently dedicated to the late Russian Imperial period and I conducted the bulk of my research at the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) and the National Library of Russia. Because of the level of popularity that horse breeding had

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<sup>37</sup> For the most comprehensive work in English on the years of famine, see Sarah Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (Ithaca and London, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> In some estimates, over 90 percent of the animals in Kazakhstan had perished by the end of the famine in 1933. See Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe*, 3.

assumed in Russia toward the end of the nineteenth century and the attention which the Kazakh Steppe had garnered throughout the period, there exists a plethora of printed works dedicated to either subject. The National Library possesses holdings of nearly every volume of the *Journal of Horse Breeding* as well as those reports and monographs penned by intrepid researchers of horses, the Kazakhs, or both.

My work is organized in thematic units that each proceed chronologically. Chapters two through four proceed chronologically beginning in the late imperial period of the 1880s and extending through the 1920s. Chapter one covers only the late Russian Imperial period as it serves to highlight the migration and resettlement process that so drastically altered the Kazakh Steppe and set the stage for Soviet power in the region.<sup>39</sup> Specifically, it examines the importance of the horse to both settlers and Kazakhs alike as well as the myriad ways in which resettlement affected the horse-breeding industry of the indigenous population. The chapter argues that this process went far beyond simply denying Kazakh herders access to the land they had used for generations and was paramount in altering the existing social order through this disruption. Chapter two examines the role of the Russian and Soviet military in pacifying the Kazakh Steppe and bringing it under the control of central authorities in Moscow. It argues, however, that this process was not initially one of force but one which was rooted in the collection of information regarding the land, its people, and most importantly, their horses – vital knowledge that officials then used to exert their influence and power over the region. Chapter three follows up on this information-gathering process by demonstrating the various ways Russian and Soviet authorities attempted to mold the horse-breeding industry of the Kazakh

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<sup>39</sup> Parts of chapter 1 appeared in a peer-reviewed article, “‘Our Greatest Riches’: Horses at the Intersection of Settler and Kazakh Society in the Late Imperial Period” in the *Journal of Migration History* Vol. 3, No. 2 (2017): 210-228.

Steppe in a way that was more in line with western modes of sedentarized breeding. Beyond the methods employed in breeding and raising the animals, authorities likewise attempted to alter the very physical makeup of the Kirgiz horse through efforts that seemingly highlighted more about their views toward the region in general than the animals in particular. The chapter argues that despite these efforts, Soviet authorities were faced with a stagnating breeding industry throughout much of the 1920s and eventually deferred to, and even lauded, many of the techniques practiced by Kazakhs in attempts to salvage what was to be the primary horse-producing region of the Soviet Union. While chapters two and three approach the situation in the steppe much more from a state-centered perspective, chapter four returns to the social upheaval inflicted on the area through a study of horse theft. It argues that the crime – an especially reprehensible one given the context – was categorized very much along ethnic lines throughout the late imperial period and typically portrayed as a peculiarly Kazakh act. With the introduction of Soviet power to the region, however, this categorization increasingly shifted to emphasize class rather than ethnicity which helped authorities carry out their assault on the *bais* toward the end of the decade. This fight is highlighted in the fifth and final chapter which argues that the Soviet assault on the *bais* and the collectivization of horses for use on communal farms struck a significant blow to Kazakhs' identity in terms of their connection to their horses, as demonstrated rather convincingly in the poem "Red Horse" by the famed Kazakh poet, Saken Seifullin. Though this chapter includes introductory material from the late imperial period, it is a story of Soviet power in the Kazakh Steppe and, along with chapter one, serves to bookend both the entire study and the period under investigation. An epilogue places this study and its focus – the horse – into a broader discussion of a modern Kazakh identity and the future role of the horse in Kazakhstan.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Colliding Ecologies, Divergent Economies

In the wake of a rebellion that shook Central Asia in 1916, famed Russian military general, Aleksei Kuropatkin, sent a letter to P.A. Stakhovich, then director of Russia's Main Department of State Horse Breeding. Serving as the Governor General of Turkestan from 1916-17, Kuropatkin was keenly aware of the problems that had been plaguing the region and, in the letter, offered a solution which he believed would at once ease anti-Russian sentiments throughout Turkestan and the Steppe oblasts as well as prove materially beneficial for all parties involved. The solution Kuropatkin put forth was simply to allow the people of Central Asia greater access to horses. "The last thirty years," Kuropatkin wrote in his letter, "instead of using the Kirgiz and his horse in favor of the state, we began to consider this as a nomadic remnant of the past which we had to get rid of quickly." He explained to Stakhovich that the native inhabitants of Russian Central Asia had been "pressed on all sides," deprived of grazing land, and largely cut off from their pastoral agricultural livelihood. "It should be recognized," he implored, "that Russia needs the Kirgiz nomad because it is precisely as a nomad that he will be of the greatest service, live comfortably, and again consider himself a happy man." Due to his very occupation, it is perhaps no surprise that the "service" Kuropatkin referred to in his letter was of that to the military in the form of "horses, meat, and wool."<sup>1</sup>

During the second half of the nineteenth century, millions of peasants throughout the Russian empire were on the move and they did so, as Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch have argued, for the "most basic of reasons – 'land hunger.'"<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of serf

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<sup>1</sup> Ferret, "Des chevaux pour l'empire," 235-36.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, 2014), 16.

emancipation in 1861, peasants in European Russia were often forced to pay exorbitant sums for small plots of land that yielded little in the way of sustainability and even less in the way of hope. By the end of the century, peasant migrants began flooding the Kazakh Steppe in search of more abundant land and greater opportunity. Rather than finding the territory empty as contemporary sources often portrayed it, settlers frequently encountered the mobile pastoralist Kazakhs who inhabited the region.<sup>3</sup>

Reports on the general welfare of the peasantry, understood within the context of the state of horse breeding throughout European Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century suggest that, in tandem with “land hunger,” peasant settlers also set out due to “horse hunger.” This is not to say that they had an appetite for horse meat – although Russians have historically, but sporadically, indulged in the cuisine. What is meant by “horse hunger” is that while the population of horses in European Russia was falling throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, two other trends were occurring simultaneously; the number of peasants requiring horses for agricultural purposes was increasing and the overall population of the peasantry was increasing. Taken together, these factors led the state and the peasantry alike to look toward the Kazakh Steppe, the richest region of the empire in terms of horse population, as a solution to their problems.

This chapter examines interactions between Slavic peasant migrants and mobile pastoralist Kazakhs within the setting of the Kazakh Steppe during the period of heaviest resettlement to the region beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing into the early twentieth. Specifically, it analyses the effect that settlement had on Kazakh horse breeders, the

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I refer to the native inhabitants of the Kazakh Steppe as “Kazakhs” rather than the term “Kirgiz” used by Russians of the Imperial period. When quoting contemporary sources, however, I simply transliterate from the Russian and use the term “Kirgiz” as they did.

economy surrounding their business, and the on the animals themselves. The greater presence of settlers in the region increased both the frequency of horse trading and the price per head, creating a premium for these already prized animals. With the expanded horse market, issues regarding land use became commonplace and many Kazakhs were forced out of the practice. Land disputes highlight the ways in which Slavic settlers increasingly cut large segments of the Kazakh population off from migrational grazing routes forcing many into poverty while simultaneously benefiting a subsection of Kazakh society - rich herders called *bais* - which led to a drastic restructuring of the steppe society.

Once settlers arrived to the steppe, many purchased horses at railroad terminals, markets, and directly from local Kazakhs or some of the Cossack regiments who were amongst the first to settle in the region. The influx in demand created an equivalent, upward shift in the price of horses and many newly arrived peasant settlers were forced to purchase oxen at cheaper prices rather than the preferred farmstead livestock, horses. This was, to the alarm of state officials, a trend they had already witnessed occurring throughout parts of European Russia in the aftermath of emancipation. Not only were the majority of peasants who were settling in the steppe already in varying states of destitution, but as travel became easier via the Trans-Siberian Railway, the lowest strata of the peasantry, the *bedniaki*, began migrating at increasing rates. By the beginning of the twentieth century, according to historian Leonid Goryushkin, the *bedniaki* comprised the majority of peasants settling in the Kazakh Steppe.<sup>4</sup> In terms of the effect that migration and settlement had on the region, Goryushkin notes that it “naturally encouraged the development of agriculture” and because of this, the peasantry played a “major role in the economic

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<sup>4</sup> Leonid M. Goryushkin, trans. Alan Wood, “Migration, Settlement and the Rural Economy of Siberia, 1861-1914” in Alan Wood (ed.), *The History of Siberia: From Russian Conquest to Revolution* (London and New York 1991), 141.

development” of the region.<sup>5</sup> Many historians, like Goryuhkin, have written about the colonization of the steppe through the lens of economic “development.” This is understandable. The environmental historian J.R. McNeill notes that, historically, “most of the things people do that change environments count as economic activity.”<sup>6</sup> A study of horses in the steppe, however, adds nuance to our understanding of this process by demonstrating that this process was as much a collision of ecologies and societies as it was a collision of economies.

From the perspective of the Russian state, settlement was likely to lead to the sedentarization of the mobile pastoralist Kazakhs. Because horses were both a means for Kazakh mobility and the very representation of it, they were thus intimately tied to these sedentarization efforts. Martha Brill Olcott, one of the foremost western experts on Kazakhstan and its history, writes that, as it concerns nomadic societies, to study sedentarization is to study not only economic but “political and social transformation” as well.<sup>7</sup> The Russian Imperial government was no stranger to dealing with issues of what it viewed as disorder and illegibility on the peripheries of the empire and its holdings in Central Asia were simply another arena in which it would have to deal with these perceived problems. Though a more direct connection between the state and horses will be made in subsequent chapters, Siegelbaum and Moch note that while migrants who settled in the steppe were not state actors, “state officials had fond hopes that their sedentary way of life and civic-mindedness would set an example for the Kazakhs.”<sup>8</sup>

The example state officials had hoped settlers would set was one tied specifically to sedentary forms of agriculture and livestock breeding. This placed a greater premium on the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 144, 140.

<sup>6</sup> J.R. McNeill, *Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2000), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, “Socio-economic Changes and Political Development in Soviet Central Asia” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad is My Native Land*, 376.

physical land being utilized – an emphasis distinctly different from mobile pastoralist perceptions of land use. Virginia Martin argues that within the mobile pastoralist Kazakh communities of the steppe, “land was not ‘owned’; it was only loosely identified with the clan for as long as its members pastured there.”<sup>9</sup> The difference can be seen quite clearly from the following statement in a 1907 publication by the Russian Resettlement Administration titled *The Effect of Colonization on the Kirgiz Economy*:

Supporters of the pastoral life, ready to be moved by the sight of stray wandering herds, can mourn the times when all the master's work consisted of milking mares, cutting sheep and cooking meat, but one cannot seriously defend the inviolability of the lying land and the preservation of space: the land is too expensive and there is too much need for it to squander its wealth.<sup>10</sup>

In the face of the resettlement drive and Russian conceptualizations of the physical landscape of the steppe, many Kazakhs were still encouraged by state officials to maintain their livelihood as livestock herders. The catch to this was simply that they were pushed to engage in “cultured” breeding practices associated with sedentism which were reliant on strategies Kazakhs were wholly unaccustomed to. “Private property and settled farming,” historian Tony Emmett writes, “demand conservation strategies based on planned stocking and the strict limitation of stock numbers. These are diametrically opposed to pastoral strategies which emphasize the accumulation of stock as a compensatory mechanism against droughts and epidemics.” The

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Curzon, 2001), 1. Martin likewise argues that the Russian colonial state was using peasants to “russify” the Kazakhs – “even though they were uneducated and impoverished.” See Martin, *Law and Custom*, 42-43.

<sup>10</sup> Pereselencheskoe upravlenie, *Vlianie kolonizatsii na kirgizskogo khoziaistva* (St. Petersburg, 1907), 15-16.

differences are such, he maintains, that the two forms of production are “inherently incompatible and antagonistic, so that the survival of one system is dependent on the destruction or strictly-enforced limitation of the other.”<sup>11</sup>

The transition from a pastoral landscape to one composed of a greater number of arable fields brought with it environmental consequences as well. Writing about peasants who settled in the fertile steppe regions of Russia’s south and southeast since the sixteenth century, David Moon argues that peasant farmers “removed native vegetation, mostly wild grasses, and felled much of the small areas of woodland that did exist in parts of the region.” Thus, the altered landscape became inhospitable to some of the wildlife that it had once supported. Amongst the few examples of the larger fauna that were driven away by the settlers, Moon notes, were the wild horses that inhabited the area.<sup>12</sup>

The horse population of the Kazakh Steppe declined in its relation to other livestock as settlement increased in frequency toward the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. And although technological innovations of the time – particularly steam travel in the way of trains and boats – served to move people farther faster, the horse remained as important as ever in terms of transportation. This is particularly true in the context of the vast steppe region where settlers often traveled great distances to their final destination even after de-boarding a train that carried them the majority of their trip. In fact, according to Margaret Derry, the

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<sup>11</sup> Tony Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Basel, Switzerland, 1999), 50. In the American context, Collin Calloway writes about the stark contrast between settled farming and mobile pastoralism amongst native people of the country’s western plains regions and indicates that there was very little middle ground shared between the two forms of subsistence. Speaking to the “revolution” brought about by the introduction of corn, Calloway writes that “When corn came, some Indian peoples gave up a mobile hunting life and adopted a sedentary farming existence; when horses came, some people gave up a sedentary farming existence and adopted a mobile hunting life.” See Calloway, *One vast winter: the Native American west before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln, 2003), 267.

<sup>12</sup> David Moon, *The Plough that Broke the Steppe: Agriculture and Environment in Russia’s Grasslands* (Oxford, 2013), 4.

worldwide equine population only reached its peak somewhere between 1910 and 1920 at around 110 million, number that was twice as many as a century before.<sup>13</sup>

Derry's discussion of the "insatiable need" for horses fits within a certain context of sedentary living, albeit a sedentary form of existence in temporary movement. Kazakhs perhaps had an even greater "insatiable need" (if this is possible) for horses than those living within an industrializing society. The effect that settlement had on the horse population of the steppe therefore had a deeper impact on the Kazakhs and their society than had this situation played out between two settled societies of people. Guldana Sarbassova argues that "while for other peoples, horses are just for riding and transport or for sport, for Kazakhs, horses are part of their cultural heritage...The horse provides a special key for understanding the culture of the Kazakhs – a culture of nomads."<sup>14</sup>

### **The Importance of the Horse in Kazakh Society**

Perhaps no other culture's history is tied to the horse quite like that of the Kazakh people. The sixteenth century Kazakh leader, Kasym Khan, spoke to this importance when he succinctly stated "we are residents of the steppe; our possessions and goods are not rare and they are not valuable. But our greatest riches are our horses."<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the twentieth century Kazakh memoirist, Mukhamet Shayakhmetov reminisced that,

"for as long as anyone could remember, a stock-breeder's entire life in the steppe had been bound up with his animals. Our people always looked after them with great care, because, they were our main livelihood...and the whole family would mourn the loss of a

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret E. Derry, *Horses in Society: A Story of Animal Breeding and Marketing, 1800-1920* (Toronto 2006) xii.

<sup>14</sup> Guldana Sarbassova, *Ethnolinguistic Description of Horse Culture in Eurasia* (The Hague, 2013) 11.

<sup>15</sup> Chockan Laumulin and Murat Laumulin, *The Kazakhs: Children of the Steppes* (Kent, 2009), 16.

favourite horse or camel, because they were the main means of transport and work force in a nomadic household. The Kazakh nomads could not imagine an existence without their livestock: they knew of no other kind, and believed that to be left without their animals would mean certain death.”<sup>16</sup>

In the case of Kazakhs being left without their horses, death could be interpreted in a very literal sense. Horse meat has historically been, and continues to be, a favorite dish amongst Kazakhs. Indeed, anthropologist Pita Kelekna notes that horse meat was first eaten by steppe inhabitants who required a high consumption of fat to insure sufficient caloric intake over the course of long and arduous winters often seen throughout the steppe.<sup>17</sup> Even as diets became more varied, horse meat remained a staple of the Kazakh diet. According to a Russian statistical report from 1894, some 70,000 horses were slaughtered each year in Turgai oblast’ alone for consumption purposes.<sup>18</sup> Kazakh preference for horse meat – and apparent skepticism of those who do not indulge in the delicacy – is evident in proverbial sayings such as the one which warns to “...not mind the person who does not eat horse at least once a year and does not drink kumys.”<sup>19</sup>

Like horse meat, kumys – fermented mare’s milk – is also considered a delicacy. Famed ethnologist V.V. Radlov, who traveled extensively in the steppe throughout the late nineteenth century wrote fondly of his experiences drinking kumys noting that, served properly, it

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<sup>16</sup> Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad under Stalin* (London, 2006), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Pita Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History*, 39, Harold Barclay writes that “a young, fat mare is considered the best delicacy” and that “the best part of the horse is the fat from the belly, which may be salted and made into sausages and smoked.” In *The Role of the Horse in Man’s Culture* (London, 1980), 318-319.

<sup>18</sup> A.I. Dobrosmyslov, *Konevodstvo i ego znachenie dlia kirgizskogo naseleniia Turgaiskogo oblasti* (Orenburg, 1894), 48.

<sup>19</sup> Akhmet Toktabai, *Qazaq zhylqysynyng tarikhy* (Almaty, 2010), 231.



simultaneously quenched hunger and thirst. Highlighting the drink's status in Kazakh culture, Radlov described kumys as being served in almost ritualistic fashion by a wife who would set before her husband the best house bowl, cleaned to shine. With a tin or silver-handled ladle, she would first serve her husband and then the guests. "To give an important guest any other drink than kumys," Radlov wrote, "would mean an insult to the guest."<sup>20</sup>

For Kazakhs, horse products have served purposes beyond simple dietary necessity. The leading scholar of Kazakh horse history, Akhmet Toktabai, writes that Kazakh folk medicine utilizes nearly all the products obtained from horses "ranging from kumys and meat to horsehair and manure."<sup>21</sup> In his 1894 study of Turgai oblast', A.I. Dobrosmyslov wrote that horse manure which had been left to dry on the ground for a year, but better yet two or three, would be collected and cooked with water and salt to form a paste which could then be applied to tumors on horses or their limbs in the case of lameness.<sup>22</sup> Speaking to horses' medicinal qualities for human patients, Toktabai cites a Kazakh proverb which states that "kumys cures 40 diseases" and that both kumys and fresh mare's milk (*saumal*) dilate blood vessels increasing circulation aiding patient recovery time.<sup>23</sup>

Horses, too, served an essential role within everyday social and cultural life for Kazakh nomads. Within this realm, Kazakhs who lost their horses faced a reality potentially as devastating as physical death. On this, Dobrosmyslov noted the following:

The wealth of the Kirgiz is expressed by the heads of horses, and the price of horses is calculated and paid as the *kalym* [dowry] of the bride; they gift horses to one another;

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<sup>20</sup> V.V. Radlov, *Iz Sibiri: Stranitsy dnevnika* (Moscow, 1989), 283. Barclay uses Radlov's work extensively in his discussion of Central Asian horse culture, see *The Role of the Horse*, 312-325.

<sup>21</sup> Akhmet Toktabai, *Kul't konia u kazakhov*, 88.

<sup>22</sup> Dobrosmyslov, *Konevodstvo i ego znachenie*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Toktabai, *Kul't konia u kazakhov*, 88.

horses serve as ransoms for unintentional or intentional killing, for mutilating members, either in the fight or for the broken eye, for any crime or deed: one hundred horses releases a man's murderer from exile, fifty for the murderer of a woman, and thirty for the murderer of a child; horses are paid as fines imposed by biys [judicial] for harm caused to someone's person or possessions; for the sake of a horse, sometimes even a respectable man becomes a thief. The horse carries a young man to his beloved, the groom to the bride; man and woman - from one tent to another; an old man and a child, the first time freely sitting in the saddle. The value of a horse is estimated by the rich owner of its herds; without a horse, the Kirgiz is a homeless man; without a horse, they consider themselves the most unhappy creature in the world.

Given their everyday reliance on horses, the Kazakh people developed very personal and caring relationships with their animals. Thus, Kazakhs described horses as “wise” or “human” animals and often gave to them affectionate nicknames or even human names.<sup>24</sup> In his discussion of this horse culture, Radlov observed that to the Kazakhs, the horse was “the pearl amongst all animals” and he was not alone in mentioning that the Kazakh men appeared to love their horses more than anything – often including their own wives.<sup>25</sup> Reflective of this reverence, Kazakh folklore and customary epic songs are filled with references to horses.<sup>26</sup>

Horses were likewise important to the peasant farmers who flooded the Kazakh Steppe toward the end of the nineteenth century. Fundamental differences, however, between sedentary

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<sup>24</sup> Toktabai, *Kul't konia u kazakhov*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Radlov, 275. A correspondent to the newspaper *Sibirskie Vedomosti* in 1909 wrote that “the Kazakh loves his horse more than anything.” See Volkovich. “Akmolinskaia Step'.” *Sibirskie Vedomosti* no. 130, 1909. Also in *Turkestan'skii Sbornik*, t. 505, 70-72.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas G. Winner, *The Oral Art and Literature of the Kazakhs of Russian Central Asia*, (Durham, N.C., 1958), 3, 51.

and nomadic forms of living placed a much different importance on the horse within sedentary communities – one less tied to social and cultural capital and more to economic necessity. Compared to their Kazakh neighbors, peasant settlers utilized horses primarily as beasts of burden. As one peasant correspondent to *Riazanskii Vestnik* in 1909 put it, “A peasant who loses his horse is, as they say, without hands.”<sup>27</sup> Though a grim outlook indeed, this saying hints more toward destitution rather than some of the more severe consequences – including death – of a Kazakh being left horseless.

### **A Beast of Burden**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the provinces of European Russia contained some of the highest numbers of horses in the world. Horses served as the principal draft animal throughout the region which speaks not only to the number of animals it contained but to the predominantly agricultural economy of the empire as well. According to an 1893 publication from the Russian Department of Agriculture, horses and oxen served as “laborers” throughout the Black Earth region and, in the oblasts to the north, were bred “exclusively for work purposes, and in such numbers as the local methods of agriculture require.”<sup>28</sup>

For sedentary agricultural purposes, horses are expensive animals to maintain, particularly when compared to oxen.<sup>29</sup> In fact, concerted efforts toward breeding horses for

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<sup>27</sup> Quote in Stephen P. Frank, *Crime, Cultural Conflict, and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856-1914* (Berkeley 1999), 127.

<sup>28</sup> John Martin Crawford ed., *The Industries of Russia*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1893), 204.

<sup>29</sup> On this disparity, John Langdon writes “One of the characteristics of horses is that, compared to oxen, they are grain rather than grass consumers. This made them more expensive animals to feed, but when meadow and pasture were in short supply this consideration became less important. On the other hand, when grass and hay were in plentiful supply, then for economic reasons the ox became, in theory at least, the more sensible animal to keep...”, see Langdon, *Horses, Oxen and Technological Innovation: The use of Draught Animals in English Farming from 1066-1500* (Cambridge, 1986), 96.

agricultural work were something of a novelty in Russia prior to the second half of the nineteenth century primarily due to economic considerations. As one contemporary observer argued, before serf emancipation in 1861, when landlords had plenty of free hands at their disposal, horses were less of a necessity in the field. As a result, stud farms were rarely profitable endeavors.<sup>30</sup> Despite the expenses associated with it, historian John Langdon suggests that two factors helped the horse sustain its dominance in the hierarchy of farm animals: speed and stamina. “The most obvious of these is speed,” writes Langdon, “and it has widely been asserted that, when exerting the same pull, the horse can do so 50 per cent faster than the ox.” Regarding a horse’s stamina, Langdon quotes Lynn White Jr. as stating “a horse has more endurance than an ox, and can work one or two hours longer a day.”<sup>31</sup>

Beyond workforce considerations, the horse’s strengths outlined by Langdon and White could be utilized in activities wholly unassociated with agriculture – a factor particularly important considering Russia’s short growing season relative to the cost of the animal.<sup>32</sup> Long into the twentieth century and to a degree even the present day, horses have been used for leisure, sport, and general transportation throughout much of the world. The traditional *troika*, or sleigh pulled by a team of three horses harnessed abreast, may come immediately to mind as the quintessential form of Russian transport depicted in wintery scenes. In the American context, journalist William Cobbett addressed this aspect of horse ownership when he quipped that, although he found horses “neither convenient or necessary,” his family objected to be driven

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<sup>30</sup> L.F. Kostenko, *Turkestanskii krai: Opyt voenno-statisticheskoe obozrenie Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga*, t. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1880), 123-24.

<sup>31</sup> Langdon, *The use of Draught Animals*, 160, 163. Here he quotes Lynn K. White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford, 1962), 62.

<sup>32</sup> On this, A.V. Chayanov writes “Because the number of horses depends on the critical period in their labor organization, which is extremely unevenly distributed through time, for the greater part of the year the peasant farm horse has no work and is, in general, little used.” See Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerbaly, R.E.F. Smith ed., *A.V. Chayanov on the Theory of Peasant Economy* (Madison, 1986), 155.

around behind oxen. “Horses may be kept for the purposes of going to church, or to meeting, or to pay visits,” he wrote, “This may be not only convenient, but necessary to a family. ‘What!’ the ladies will say, ‘would you have us be shut up at home all our lives; or be dragged about by oxen?’”<sup>33</sup>

### **On the Move for Horses**

Serf emancipation in 1861 had dramatic consequences for the Russian economy and amongst these was a rather drastic shift in horse distribution. Many government officials became alarmed at the number of horseless households throughout Russia<sup>34</sup> – something that was addressed in the empire’s first official horse census in 1882. The report stated that “the proportion of horseless households in Russia is growing rapidly, the number of horses on farms is greatly reduced, and this surely proves the decline of the welfare of households and general rural empowerment in the last 20 years.”<sup>35</sup>

The census was commissioned by the Main Administration of State Horse Breeding and therefore may contain a bit of bias meant to serve its own ends but, nevertheless, it reported that the issue had nothing to do with the plight of the peasantry but rather market changes brought on by emancipation and industrialization. Data had begun to show that many peasant families were opting to purchase oxen for their farms or, worse yet, replacing their horses with oxen in order to save money. The administration scoffed at this and argued that households replacing horses with

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<sup>33</sup> *American Farmer* 1, no. 6 (1819), 36. Quoted in Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Harvard, 2008), 11.

<sup>34</sup> Lenin addressed this in *On the Development of Capitalism in Russia*.

<sup>35</sup> Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosudarstvennogo Konnozavodstva (GUGK), *Konskaia perepis' 1882 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1884), XXV.

oxen were localized to but a few areas of European Russia while in many others the reverse happening, that is, peasants replacing oxen with horses.<sup>36</sup>

Census takers did admit, however, that in the twenty years following emancipation, the number of horseless households rose appreciably and that some peasant farmers were directly affected, granting at least some legitimacy to the argument regarding the decline in welfare.<sup>37</sup> One such case was that of the peasant settler Ivan Beliakov and his fellow inhabitants of the village of Pushkin, just southeast of Moscow. Their economic troubles began directly after emancipation when their landlord refused to allocate enough land per household according to the stipulations of the emancipation decree. Shortly after this, the land payments increased significantly and many within the community began to struggle. For twenty-five years - from 1861 to 1886 - the peasants of Pushkin petitioned the Tsar to rectify the ills perpetrated by their landlord and even spent some 2,000 rubles hiring lawyers to aid them in the process.<sup>38</sup>

With no progress in the way of more land or reduced payments, many of the villagers had had enough and began expressing their desires to resettle in Siberia. Skeptical of such a move, Beliakov warned his friends and neighbors that Siberia was much colder than Pushkin, that

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Vladimir Timoshenko addressed this briefly in his 1932 work on agricultural organization in Russia and agreed with the census. "In some regions," he wrote, "mostly in Ukraine and the southeastern steppe, oxen were of some importance. But in the two or three decades before the war the importance of oxen diminished greatly. Horses replaced oxen to a considerable degree in the southern regions." See Timoshenko, *Agricultural Russia and the Wheat Problem* (Stanford, 1932), 227.

<sup>37</sup> GUGK, *Konskaia perepis' 1882 goda*, XXV.

<sup>38</sup> I.E. Beliakov, "Pereselents o sibirii," *Russkoe bogatstvo* no. 3 (1899), 2-3. In one of his several articles on late imperial resettlement, Lewis Siegelbaum addresses the peasant settler mentality in regards to their desire to pick up and move thousands of miles from their homes. Using the metaphor employed by "Imperial Russia's leading expert on peasant migration to Siberia," A.A. Kaufman, Siegelbaum describes the "settlement fever" that spread throughout rural Russia during the late nineteenth century and argues that peasants often viewed Siberia as a "utopia" where they could find "salvation" provided for them by the "tsar-deliverer (*batiushka-tsar*). While some of this was wishful thinking – he cites the fact that peasant folktales and art are "rich in utopian visions of social justice and abundance" – Siegelbaum notes a contemporary economist who wrote that many peasants also set off because they simply had nothing to lose. See Siegelbaum, "Paradise or Just a Little Bit Better? Siberian Settlement 'Fever' in Late Imperial Russia," *The Russian Review* 76 no. 1 (January 2017), 23-25.

rainfall was less frequent, and there were no forests like those around their own village. His warnings were met with retorts from prospective resettlers who based their knowledge of Siberia on government publications, letters from friends or relatives who had already made the long journey, and even rumor mill material. “The Tsar has already prepared everything,” they told him, “just go, children, to the land from God.” Wealth would be abundant, they promised. “Go and live there - like in paradise! Even the very poor have 40 horses...”<sup>39</sup>

The horse wealth of the Kazakh Steppe is a topic that had been covered rather extensively by the end of the nineteenth century. Though the steppe was not included in the earliest versions of the horse censuses, the region appeared later on in the military census of 1912 and, compared to European Russia, the numbers were quite remarkable. Census takers reported 18.2 horses per 100 people – a number which had been falling for some time – while in Siberia and Central Asia, where the Kazakh Steppe is located, that number jumped to 52.2 and 36.4, respectively. Steppe horse breeding, and the sheer volume of animals in the area, had steadily gained the attention of Russian officials throughout this period. Throughout the eighteenth century, these officials viewed the steppe not as an important area for trade in its own right, but rather simply as a trading route to the east and thus sought to ensure the safe passage of caravans through the region. Cossack soldiers, stationed at outposts and tasked with this duty, engaged in limited trade with indigenous Kazakhs. Amongst other things, Kazakhs engaged in trade with the Cossacks looking to acquire fabric, metal items, and bread. For trade, Kazakhs typically brought sheep, and, especially important for the Cossacks, horses.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Yuriy Malikov, “Formation of a Borderland Culture: Myths and realities of Cossack-Kazakh Relations in Northern Kazakhstan in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of California, 2006), 316.

As trade between Cossacks and Kazakhs gradually increased, however, Russian officials turned their attention toward it and the customs payments that could be collected. Yuriy Malikov traces this increase through duties collected by the customs officials in the settlement at Semipalatinsk beginning with the establishment of an official customs office in 1754. During that year, officials reported a mere 90 rubles collected but fifteen years later, in 1769, that number had increased to 4003 rubbles.<sup>41</sup>

Realizing the potential of this growing trade, regional officials began establishing trading fairs (*iarmarki*) in larger centers of the steppe oblasts. The first trade fair was established in 1849 in Nikolaevskii. As of 1853, only three of these fairs existed in the steppe, one in the settlement of Kokchetov and two in the settlement of Akmolinsk. Within only a year, the amount of goods in rubles sold at the fairs in Akmolinsk alone almost doubled the total throughout the entire steppe in 1820. By 1868, nineteen fairs were in operation throughout the steppe. That number continued to increase reaching 23 by 1874, 25 by 1875, and 30 by 1876. The amount of goods sold in rubles hit 1,240,758 in 1876.<sup>42</sup>

F. Usov, who reported these numbers in his work from 1879, also noted that while the amount of goods traded increased, so too did the profit margin for Kazakh traders who initially had been at the mercy of the Cossacks when it came to setting prices. Early on, Usov wrote, Kazakhs did not realize the worth of their animals compared to the Cossack goods for which they traded. The Cossacks, taking advantage of this, often charged triple what they would have normally asked and some became rather wealthy in the process. Over time, however, Kazakhs came to understand how much they could actually obtain for their animals and raised their prices as a result. What is more, as peasants made their way to the steppe, Cossacks acted as go-

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<sup>41</sup> Malikov, "Formation of a Borderland Culture," 316.

<sup>42</sup> F. Usov, *Statisticheskoe opisanie sibirskogo kazach'iago voiska* (St. Petersburg, 1879), 253.



betweens, mediating trade between settlers and Kazakhs for a fee. With the greater frequency of trading at fairs, settlers and Kazakhs came into contact more regularly and Kazakhs, beyond trading solely in those locales, began doing so directly with peasants in the villages without any payments going to the Cossacks. In fact, Usov observed that trading began to take place in the villages, “uninterrupted, all year round.”<sup>43</sup>

Beyond trade with settlers, Kazakh horses were being sold and shipped to various parts of Russia as well. Turgai oblast, due to its proximity to major trade points within Russia, became one of the largest producers of horses for export in the region. A publication from 1894 reported that during a four-year span from 1888-1892, an annual average of 3,282 horses from the area were brought to market with an average sale of 3,080 horses. Indicative of the market increase, the numbers for 1892 alone were 3,881 horses brought to market with 3,581 of them sold. From the markets, these horses were then taken to different cities such as Samara, Saratov, Simbirsk, Ufa, and Yekaterinburg.<sup>44</sup>

It was also around this time that the Russian government began to increase its purchases of horses from the steppe. In the wake of the 1891-92 famine, horse numbers in European Russia had dwindled and supply for the peasantry was exceedingly low. Between the horse censuses of 1888 and 1894, the so-called “Central Horse Breeding Oblasts” of European Russia, consisting of Voronezh, Tambov, Orlov, Kursk, and Saratov, lost some 677,692 horses. From the 3,200,512 horses reported in the 1888 census, the number was still down 174,973 heads when yet another census was conducted in 1900.<sup>45</sup> To help relieve the famine-stricken peasants, the Main Administration of State Horse Breeding purchased some 9,022 horses from various points within

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<sup>43</sup> Usov, *Statisticheskoe opisanie*, 248-250.

<sup>44</sup> Dobrosmyslov, *Konevodstvo i ego znachenie*, 45- 46.

<sup>45</sup> Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del, *Voenna-Konskaia Perepis'* (St Petersburg, 1902)

Turgai Oblast during the spring of 1892. Totaling 276,357 rubles for an average price of 30 rubles, 62 kopeks per head, the newspaper article reporting the sale noted that the purchases were made at an unfavorable time as many Kazakh herds had been experienced severe losses due to famine as well.<sup>46</sup>

From available accounts, it can be gathered that, in general, the Kirgiz horse proved quite capable in its replacement of the typical Russian peasant horse.<sup>47</sup> In an 1899 news article, Ia. Polferov touched on questions regarding the prices of the animals as well as their suitability as work horses. “All of the numerous studies of steppe horse breeding speak to the fact that the Kirgiz horse represents amazing workmanship and, in this respect, far surpasses the peasant horse,” he wrote. Polferov specifically referenced those horses purchased from the steppe in 1892 and quoted one peasant’s praises stating that the Kirgiz horses takes well to being both ridden and worked and that in either task, the horses are tireless. Affirming these reviews, the author noted a Viatka zemstvo poll taken in 1898 reporting that of the horses received from the steppe, 69 percent were put to work immediately with no problem, while 23 percent required 2-4 weeks of training, and a bit longer for the remaining 8 percent.<sup>48</sup>

All of this was at a time when horse numbers in European Russia were continuing to fall while the population was continuing to increase. Though this problem was casually rejected by the Administration of State Horse Breeding, a 1902 study conducted by the Russian Department of Customs paid particular attention to what it believed was becoming a difficult situation for the empire. Reviewing statistical data from the period directly following emancipation, the

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<sup>46</sup> A.E. Alektorov, *Ukazatel' knig, zhurnal'nykh i gazetnykh statei i zametok o kirgizakh* (Kazan, 1900), 608-609; Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 1960), 159.

<sup>47</sup> While potentially confusing, the “Kirgiz” horse is a breed which was the most prominent throughout the steppe. The name is not to indicate that they belonged to the Kirgiz (Kazakhs).

<sup>48</sup> Alektorov, *Ukazatel' knig*, 679.

Customs Department found that in 1864, the average agricultural family, which consisted of approximately six people, owned an average of 1.6 horses for agricultural work. It noted that this number was far too low to conduct the necessary workload required to sustain the family. The numbers continued to fall and a famine in 1891-92, which claimed some 1.6 million horses, or 9.63% of the total population in European Russia, exacerbated the situation. “As a result of such losses,” the department reported, “horse breeding in Russia over the past thirty years has hardly moved forward with regard to its numerical development and, moreover, lags behind the growth of the population more and more.” In all, over a 31-year period, the population of Russia rose by 50% while the number of horses only increased by 9%.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the Kazakh Steppe, to where migration was already well under way by 1902, gained much more importance as a destination not only for land but for horses as well. In his 1898 article in *The Journal of Horse Breeding*, Lieutenant Colonel N. Reviakin argued the merits of the Kazakh Steppe regarding horse breeding and the importance the region could serve in supplying the Russian military with horses. Beyond this, he noted, an improved horse breeding industry in the steppe would become a necessity for the growing numbers of Russian peasants settling there. “Since the question of colonization of the Kirgiz steppes is on the waiting list,” he wrote, “[horse breeding] is naturally and inextricably linked with it and the question of supplying these pioneers of agriculture with appropriate working horses.”<sup>50</sup>

Migration to the steppe had steadily increased throughout the last half of the nineteenth century but for long was hindered by the vast travel distances required, lack of infrastructure, and, of course, lack of horses. Having witnessed the slow-moving flow of migrants over a period

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<sup>49</sup> *Sbornik svedenii po istorii i statistike vneshnei torgovli Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1902), 154.

<sup>50</sup> N. Reviakin, “Stepnoe konevodstvo Turgaiskoi oblasti i mery k ego uluchsheniiu,” *Zhurnal Konnozavodstva*, no. 3 (1898), 119.

of two years – from 1882 to 1884 – I.A. Gurvich compared the situation of peasant settlers to that of higher-class travelers. Gurvich reported that, in general, one horse was required for each passenger of a wagon or coach. Thus, he noted, a coach carrying three to four higher-class passengers driven by a coachman would be pulled by a team of three to four horses. Gurvich observed, however, that only 11 out of 1,000 settlers enjoyed these standards while the rest, instead of three to four horses, made do with only one. The speed of an adequately equipped wagon could reach 10-12 *versts* per hour while the average migrants were not exceeding 30-35 *versts* per day. “It is clear,” he wrote, “that such crowding with a lack of horses has a direct consequence on the extreme slow going.”<sup>51</sup>

The flow of migrants increased significantly in the last decades of the nineteenth century when settlers were able to utilize the Trans-Siberian Railway to transport them eastward. Constructed over a twenty-five year period beginning in 1891, the railway formed a new and lasting link between European Russia and Siberia and represents what Siegelbaum and Moch describe as “perhaps the premier example of migratory regimes coinciding with migrant repertoires.”<sup>52</sup> Riding by rail not only made the journey faster but significantly decreased the cost as well, allowing poorer peasants to make the trip they may have been unable to otherwise.

Despite this technological achievement, however, horses remained a necessity. Writing in 1898, F.P. Romanov, pointed out that one of the main concerns of migrants was their ability to acquire livestock and agricultural implements once they arrived at their point of destination. “Some settlers (few indeed),” he wrote, “who come from the Russian provinces not by rail,

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<sup>51</sup> I.A. Gurvich, *Pereseleniia krest'ian v sibir'* (Moscow, 1889), 3.

<sup>52</sup> Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad is My Native Land*, 6. For other works on the Trans-Siberian Railway and its effect on the settlement movement, see Steven G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850-1917* (Ithaca, 1991); Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the First World War* (Princeton, 1957).

usually do so with horses and bulls and bring their own ploughs. The rest are buying horses in place for 25-30 rubles and bulls for 20-25 rubles.”<sup>53</sup>

When Ivan Beliakov first arrived in Omsk on his way east, his first duty was to check in with the local resettlement official. In his case, he met A.A. Stankevich, about whom he spoke kindly. Stankevich assigned Beliakov and a few of his travel companions from Pushkin land plots to the east. Thinking the plots were possibly two or, at most, twenty *versts*<sup>54</sup> away, Beliakov was surprised to find out that he and his group would be traveling another 220 *versts* (!) - a journey unlikely to be made by foot. Thus, they were inclined to purchase horses to complete the remainder of their journey.<sup>55</sup>

Migrant letters are filled with references to horses - as wealth indicators, as to the availability of animals, and frequently as to where family and friends back home should purchase them during their journey eastward. Highlighting both the precarious economic situation of many migrants as well as the importance of the horse, one letter writer who had migrated east from Poltava wrote home with great news of his progress on his new land. At the time of the letter, he had six horses and one cow but no house as he had just begun farming and had no time to build one.<sup>56</sup> Another settler wrote that after a long journey and, with only twenty rubles left, he spent nearly all of what remained on a horse and cart “because without a horse it is hard to live.”<sup>57</sup>

Apart from friends and family, the Russian government’s Resettlement Administration also did its best to inform migrants about the cost and importance of horses once they reached

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<sup>53</sup> F. P. Romanov, *Sibirskii torgovo-promyshlennii i spravoshnyi kalendar’ na 1898 god* (Tomsk, 1898), 116.

<sup>54</sup> A verst was a unit of measurement equal to approximately 1.07km or 0.66 miles.

<sup>55</sup> Beliakov, “Pereselents o sibir,” 8.

<sup>56</sup> Statisticheskoe biuro Poltavskogo gubernskogo zemstva, *Pereseleniia iz Poltavskoi gubernii s 1861 goda po 1 iulii 1900 goda* (Poltava, 1900), 397.

<sup>57</sup> Statisticheskoe biuro, *Pereseleniia iz poltavskoi gubernii*, 396.

their destinations. For Akmolinsk, as an example, a guidebook for land scouts and settlers, printed by the Resettlement Administration in 1911, encouraged travelers to have at their disposal 300-400 rubles in order to have a good chance of success. Horses were listed as costing between 35-75 rubles while a cow cost 25-45 and a pair of bulls 70-100 rubles. However, the entry notes, due to recent poor harvests, those prices had likely increased.<sup>58</sup>

Horses were not only purchased by newly arriving settlers to the steppe but also by mining operations, which often exported them over long distances. The same publication discusses the desirability of horses from Tomsk, describing them as some of the best of Siberia. These horses were reportedly bought and sent to work in gold mines as far off as Yakutsk and other operations in far eastern Siberia. Pricier than even those in Akmolinsk, horses from Tomsk were fetching anywhere from 40-110 rubles at market, according to the publication.<sup>59</sup>

Writing in regards to the availability of horses for the military, General of the Infantry A. A. Polivanov warned in 1912 of the competition that both settlers and industrial operations presented. Also citing the growing prevalence of sheep and cattle herders, Polivanov wrote of the “wave of immigrants” who were not only settling the land but who had also purchased “several million horses for agricultural needs.” Apart from this competition from the private sector, the military also had to compete with large, state-operated enterprises such as the gold mines in the region and the Amur Railway construction which required 4,000-5,000 horses per year.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Pereselencheskoe upravlenie, *Spravochnaia knizhka dlia khodokov i pereselentsev* (St. Petersburg 1911), 44-45.

<sup>59</sup> Pereselencheskoe upravlenie, *Spravochnaia knizhka*, 52.

<sup>60</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2125, l. 202.

## **Ecology and Economy**

Settlement and the subsequent expansion of industry in the steppe had a two-fold consequence concerning the price and availability of horses. On the one hand, the greater market for horses had done nothing but heighten demand and drive prices up. On the other hand, the reduction of grazing pastures coupled with the changing roles of horses within the transitioning economy served to reduce the number of Kazakhs actively engaged in horse breeding.

To the first point, Russian officials – particularly those of the Horse Breeding Administration and the military – had long been fascinated by the number of horses in the steppe but wary of both the Kazakhs and their methods of breeding. Both were considered to be uncivilized and uncultured, a topic which will be discussed at length in chapter two. What many mulled over in their writings on the matter was the possibility of bringing together the enormous horse resources of the region with more “cultured” (read “European”) breeding methods. Most of all, this meant sedentary breeding practices rather than the mobile, herd-style employed by the Kazakhs. Their visions typically included horse breeders from the European reaches of the empire relocating to the steppe, establishing new, expansive horse farms, and mixing various breeds to develop horses fit to their likings dependent upon the proposed task to be performed. Very rarely, unsurprisingly, did their discussions involve help from the Kazakhs themselves.

In his article cited above, Lieutenant Colonel Reviakin argued for an increased Russian horse breeding presence within the steppe. He, like others who were writing on the issue at the time, pointed toward this “cultured” breeding presence more closely resembling methods employed by horse breeders in European Russia. “Feathered grasslands,” he wrote, “stretching thousands of versts and completely unused by the number of cattle available to the nomads, can fully provide for the support of several tens of thousands of horses...[and] the close proximity of

the steppes to the European borders, their colonization and, finally, the gradually increasing network of railways will be the best allies of innovation in the eventual destruction of the inert, age-old customs of the nomad.<sup>61</sup>

In the years following Reviakin's article, dwindling reserves in areas of the empire long associated with horse breeding – namely the Caucasus and Don regions – alarmed those same officials who began writing about the rich horse reserves available in Siberia. Already in 1880, General L.F. Kostenko warned of this problem when he wrote:

True, we still have a huge source for repairing cavalry in the Don, but who will guarantee that in the very near future, the production of a cheap horse in this region will not become unprofitable? On the contrary, there is every reason to think that Don will soon experience the fate of Southern Russia, and there, in the shortest time, horse breeding will be squeezed out by other branches of the economy.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, within a quarter century, large swaths of land in the empire's traditionally horse-rich regions had been turned over to the more lucrative business of agriculture and tilled for crops. This, in turn, reduced pasture land and drove up rent prices of what land was available. Even methods employed by sedentary horse breeders were unable to compete, it seems. To alleviate these problems, many horse breeders began actively looking toward the steppe as an area to which they could transplant their operations and, by 1913, the Russian Department of Agriculture began designating special plots for lease in the steppe for the sole purpose of "cultured" horse and cattle breeding.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Reviakin, "Stepnoe konevodstvo Turgaiskoi oblasti," 101-102.

<sup>62</sup> Kostenko, *Turkestan'skii krai*, 124.

<sup>63</sup> Pereselencheskoe upravlenie, *Konevodstvo i skotovodstvo na kazennykh zemliakh v aziatskoi rossii* (Petrograd, 1917), 1.



All of this is not to say that the idea of a Russian horse breeding – and cattle breeding more generally – presence in the steppe was to be the pursuit solely of professional breeders. On the contrary, publications made frequent mention of the prospect of peasant settlers engaging in animal husbandry once they arrived to the steppe. This, officials surmised, would be not only beneficial in an economic sense but also further their aim of sedentarizing the indigenous Kazakh population. One such publication, produced by the Resettlement Administration in 1917, included a section titled “Renting of horse and livestock breeding sites for the purpose of colonizing the region.” In it, the administration pointed out that leasing designated areas to “wealthy horse breeders and pastoralists” would be a significant step toward further colonization of the region, future settlement, and, by attracting more private enterprises, be in line with the “most consistent use of state lands.”<sup>64</sup> Toward this end, the administration established 148 sites throughout the steppe in 1913 to be leased and used specifically for livestock breeding. Of the total area, measuring just over 700,000 *desiatini*, the administration noted that 20 sites, measuring some 84,000 *desiatini* had already been leased and from those sites the government was collecting an annual rent of 11,500 rubles.<sup>65</sup> These numbers, they confessed, were rather modest compared to their goals but, given the wartime circumstances, they were pleased with the results after only one year. By 1915, the number of livestock breeding sites had increased to 250 with the number leased jumping to 63. The total expected rent income of these sites for the empire, given the lease period of 36 years, was calculated at 2,120,332 rubles.<sup>66</sup>

A 1913 publication indicated that livestock breeding sites were available for rent to the local Kazakhs but there is no evidence to suggest that they were renting any state land for this

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>65</sup> A *desiatin* was a measurement of land, used during the tsarist period, approximate to 2.7 acres.

<sup>66</sup> Pereselencheskoe upravlenie, *Konevodstvo i skotovodstvo na kazennykh zemliakh*, 3.

purpose.<sup>67</sup> Judging from the Resettlement Administration's 1917 publication, the application process alone was likely enough to dissuade any interested Kazakh from applying for land or, even if they prepared the necessary documentation, they likely would have been denied by the local authorities. For starters, applicants would have to pay an upfront fee of 2 rubles for the application and then required to produce an economic plan in relation to the desired area to be rented. Among other issues to be covered, the economic plan was to address the size of the initial herd as well as expected number of head by the end of the first year and each subsequent year up to the fifth. Officials also wanted information relating to the method of feeding, how and where the animals would be wintered, and whether or not agriculture was planned for the site in question. All of this was intended to promote "cultured" breeding practices which the administration only a few pages later discussed as being quite the opposite to those employed by the Kazakhs.<sup>68</sup>

Though these activities should hardly come as a surprise given the empire's track record in the region leading up to the Resettlement Administration's report, a noteworthy point was its desire to increase the number of horse breeding sites in the southern zones of the Kazakh Steppe. This area, in the foothills of the Altai mountains, was far less suited for agriculture and thus attracted fewer settlers than the more fertile tracts to the north. Conceding to the knowledge and experience of the Kazakhs – a rare instance, indeed – the Resettlement Administration argued that if the Kazakhs had utilized the land almost exclusively toward cattle breeding, then settlers

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<sup>67</sup> A reference book (*spravochnaia kniga*) for people wishing to rent state lands for horse and cattle breeding indicated that "rental is closed to foreigners and all, except for the natives, persons of non-Christian faith." See Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Zemli dlia konevodstva i skotovodstva v aziatskoi rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1913), v.

<sup>68</sup> Pereselencheskoe upravlenie, *Konevodstvo i skotovodstvo na kazennykh zemliakh*, 3-7.

should too. This, it argued, was a pursuit which would “be the best way to use the vast territory of the still unsettled southern part of the steppe region.”<sup>69</sup>

Along with the Resettlement Administration, many settlers had begun to see the profitability of livestock breeding in the region. In fact, the administration noted that settlers had increasingly come to find that livestock breeding was more profitable than the agricultural work most had intended to take up upon their arrival. As evidence of this, the administration noted that in a handful of Russian settlements, the population was “predominantly and even exclusively engaged in livestock breeding.”<sup>70</sup> Even in the more fertile stretches of the northern steppe, where the majority of migrants settled, at least initially, success in farming was never guaranteed. Rather than easily tillable and profitable soil, they often found a dry, unforgiving landscape, which lent itself more toward the mobile pastoral lifestyle of the Kazakhs rather than agriculture.<sup>71</sup> In fact, the natural conditions were so unfavorable in some areas that many peasant farmsteads failed and their occupants left to relocate again in search of better land. In 1913, for example, approximately fifteen per cent of the newly arrived settlers to Akmolinsk oblast’ found their conditions so poor that they chose to move further east.<sup>72</sup>

Faced with uncertain agricultural conditions in what many had been led to believe was paradise, some settlers simply went home. In 1907, a group of migrants made their way to the steppe on the word of scout who had presumably surveyed the land they were to settle and either

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ian Campbell discusses the skepticism of scholarly and travel writers as well as that within accounts of government officials in regards to the sustainability of sedentary farming in the steppe region. From one government report, Campbell cites the author as noting “I also cannot fail to note that the Kazakhs too, as yet, will hardly start to take up grain cultivation, because they better know their lands, suitable only, with few exceptions, for animal husbandry.” See Campbell, “Knowledge and Power on the Kazakh Steppe, 1845-1917” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Michigan, 2011), 311, fn. 24.

<sup>72</sup> Goryushkin, “Migration, Settlement and the Rural Economy of Siberia,” 143.

wrote or told of its potential. Upon arriving, however, the group found the plot completely unfit. “In Pavlodar,” the account goes, “they sold their Russian carts, brought by rail, and their horses which they rode from the city of Omsk, for next to nothing, and decided to return home. They came here with their families, having done away with their own farms at home, hoping to find land wealth in Siberia. What awaits them?”<sup>73</sup>

What the region lacked more than anything was reliable water sources necessary for the irrigation of farmers’ fields. The correspondent to the newspaper cited above, wrote that irrigation conditions throughout Akmolinsk oblast were “in general very unfavorable.” On plots of land chosen by the authorities for resettlement, he wrote that the conditions were even more unfavorable and that on some, “settled life [was] utterly impossible.”<sup>74</sup> The scarcity of water coupled with the steady stream of settlers created an arena of contestation over the precious resource. The writer who described the plight of a newly arriving group of migrants to Pavlodar also noted how Kazakhs had begun complaining that the authorities responsible for dividing up the land had taken from them the “comfortable lands with fresh water.”<sup>75</sup> Even those water sources from which nomadic Kazakh herders were not cut off still represented a source of contestation. In 1910, complaints came into the local police in Petropavlovsk, about a mass of Cossacks who had, without permission, stopped with their horses by a lake. According to the report, the Cossacks had not only allowed the horses to bathe in the lake, but also graze about the area while the men washed their dirty clothes in the water.<sup>76</sup>

Disputes over land use often made their way into official channels for adjudication. For example, in 1909, the Kazakhs T. Baimukhametov and O. Kopabaev rented land to one I. E.

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<sup>73</sup> “G. Pavlodar,” *Sibirskaiia zhizn’* 26 (1907), in: *Turkestanskii sbornik*, 428: 24.

<sup>74</sup> “Kolonizatsiia stepi,” *Tovarishch* 293 (1907) in: *Turkestanskii sbornik*, 428: 84.

<sup>75</sup> “G. Pavlodar,” 24.

<sup>76</sup> TsGARK, f. 639, op. 1, d. 21, l. 80.

Korolev for the purpose of grazing horses he intended to sell at market. Because of the greater premium horses demanded, the rental fee, per head, came in at fifteen kopeks compared to six kopeks per head of cattle and two kopeks per head of sheep. Korolev agreed to the terms and rented the land until such time that he sold 36 horses at market but then neglected to pay his land rental fee. Baimukhametov and Kopabaev were forced to take their case to local officials and, although the documents do not make known the whereabouts of Korolev - whether he fled or simply refused to pay his rent is unknown - they decided in favor of the plaintiffs and asked that they be facilitated in their recovery of five rubles, 40 kopeks.<sup>77</sup>

Situations similar to that which Baimukhametov and Kopabaev experienced were frequent in the steppe throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Luckily for them, their case came to what would seem a desirable outcome and perhaps their experience navigating the Imperial legal structure made them less wary about to whom they might lease their land in the future. This case was far from typical, however, and for the majority of Kazakh herders, the problems they encountered only worsened as migration and settlement increased. Kazakhs – both individuals and as part of larger groups – regularly lodged complaints with local authorities regarding the availability of, and their access to, sufficient land for raising their animals. In 1908, a complaint from Kokchetav uezd in Akmolinsk oblast addressed this very issue. The complainant, Shaimardan Koshegulov, told authorities that when they came to be citizens of the empire, the government had promised not to touch the lands of his people who had for long peacefully engaged in livestock breeding. However, he went on, authorities surveyed the best plots for resettlement and left for the Kazakhs only the worst locations of mountainous

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<sup>77</sup> TsGARK, f. 639, op. 1, d. 21, l. 76, 79.

terrain and salt marshes. Concluding his complaint, Koshegulov asked for the termination of all new settlement on Kazakh land.<sup>78</sup>

Koshegulov's complaint was forwarded to the Minister of Agriculture, Aleksandr Krivoshein, who quickly dismissed it and others that had been brought to his attention. Krivoshein concluded that all of the complaints submitted by Kazakhs were from a "small, but rich and cohesive" group of nomads who had themselves seized the lands they used "under the guise of common ownership." Indeed, Krivoshein argued that a study of the Kazakh economy, carried out by the Resettlement Administration, confirmed that rather than upsetting the welfare of the native population in the steppe, Russian settlers benefited it. "Therefore," Krivoshein wrote, "the Kirgiz steppe and the steppe region of Tomsk oblast have been and still must be the first stages of Siberian colonization and the preferred place of the Russian settler searching for land."<sup>79</sup>

The guidebook for resettlers and land scouts from 1911 noted the damage that new settlements could pose to the Kazakh herders. "Not all Kirgiz," the Resettlement Administration warned, "who as a people are primarily pastoral and nomadic, can exist if they are cut off from their vast pastures where they graze their herds of cattle and horses in the summer and winter months."<sup>80</sup> This danger was particularly acute for horse breeders whose animals naturally required more sizeable grazing areas than either cattle or sheep, a reality that is reflected in land rental fees during this period.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 3, d. 910, l. 1.

<sup>79</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 3, d. 910, ll. 4-6.

<sup>80</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Spravochnaia Knizhka*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> For rental prices throughout Semipalatinsk oblast, see N. Konshin's report "Ocherki ekonomicheskogo byta kirgizov Semipalatinskoi oblasti," in Semipalatinskii Oblastnoi Statisticheskii Komitet, *Pamiatnaia knizhka Semipalatinskoi oblasti na 1901 g., vyp. V* (Semipalatinsk, 1901), 57-58.

Demanding rental payments far higher per head than the other livestock, horses often became too expensive for some Kazakhs to maintain even if they had access to private rental plots on which to graze their herd. Fundamental differences in sedentary versus mobile pastoralist breeding strategies resulted in the latter maintaining much larger herds which then translated to expensive rental payments. Keeping as large a herd as the land would support was a defense against natural disasters such as *dzhut* - the rapid freezing, thaw, and refreezing of the ground which kills the grass - a condition seen often throughout the steppe. Particularly devastating instances of *dzhut* in the winter of 1879-80 and in 1891 wiped out large portions of the horse stock (upwards of 50 per cent).<sup>82</sup> Those who could not support themselves were often forced into sedentary farming. A report from Omsk uezd detailed the growing numbers of settlers in the region and the effect it was having on the Kazakhs. The loss of land was so severe, the report stated, that Kazakh herders - even those of cattle, sheep, and goats – were forced to grow crops for the supplemental feeding of their animals, a practice to which they were typically unaccustomed. Leaving their regular seasonal encampments, the report stated, many Kazakhs resettled in areas better suited for agriculture than livestock breeding, a shift that resulted in some Kazakhs abandoning livestock breeding altogether.<sup>83</sup>

Livestock numbers from Omsk uezd during a seven-year period from 1901-1908 are indicative of the changing ecology of the steppe region. As shown in the table below, though the number of horses increased during the period under consideration, their percentage respective to the overall makeup of livestock in the region fell. The most obvious reason for this decline, when taken into consideration with the rather large percentage increases of both cattle and sheep, is the

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<sup>82</sup> Romanov, *Sibirskii torgovo-promyshlennyi*, 131.

<sup>83</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo, v Akmolinskoi oblasti* vol. II, Omskii uezd (St. Petersburg, 1910), 36.

horses' upkeep costs relative to the other animals – this, particularly as it applied to a sedentarized, agricultural lifestyle.<sup>84</sup>

Livestock	1901		1908		Increase	
	Number	Percentage of overall livestock	Number	Percentage of overall livestock	Number	Percentage
Horses	123,468	36.1	157,545	31.7	34,077	27.6
Cattle	90,158	26.4	145,824	29.1	55,666	61.7
Sheep	113,866	33.3	179,429	35.8	65,563	57.6

Table 1: Livestock changes from 1901 to 1908, Omsk uezd.

Source: Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo, v Akmolinskoi oblasti*

Figures such as these were common throughout significant parts of the steppe region during the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> While the greater numbers of both cattle and sheep could serve as an indicator that the demand brought about by increased migration was pulling some Kazakhs, otherwise occupied in horse breeding, into the market, the Shcherbina Expedition's study of neighboring Semipalatinsk oblast indicates otherwise; that rather than being pulled into the cattle and sheep market, many were simply being pushed into it.<sup>86</sup> In

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>85</sup> For examples of these numbers in Akmolinsk oblast, see Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo*, vol. III, Petropavlovskii uezd, 70; *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo*, vol. IV, Atbasarskii uezd, 76; and *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo*, vol. V, Akmolinskii uezd, 80.

<sup>86</sup> Led by F.A. Shcherbina between 1896-1903, the Shcherbina Expedition was perhaps the most ambitious and comprehensive state-sponsored study of the steppe region during the late Imperial period. Tasked with gathering data on the region and its inhabitants, the multi-volume report contains a wealth of information on Kazakh animal breeding practices and trade.



Pavlodar uezd, the expedition reported that cattle and sheep remained the primary livestock of middling breeders and that information collected “reflected the desire of the Kirgiz, once they got out from the mid-level breeding...to breed horses in preference to all other types of livestock.”<sup>87</sup>

A 1911 report from the oblasts of Turgai and Ural'sk shows similar numbers to those from Omsk while also noting the preference toward horse breeding amongst Kazakhs. In Ural'sk, horses comprised roughly 27 percent of the livestock population, cattle nearly 40 percent, and sheep and goats comprised about 28 percent. While cattle breeding, the report reads, was confined to agricultural needs, “horse breeding and, in part, sheep breeding make up the privilege of the richer groups.”<sup>88</sup>

The report further demonstrates the difference in reliance upon the horse within sedentarized and mobile pastoral modes of living. Noting the herd percentages, the Resettlement Administration argued that the numbers speak to the sedentarization of the Kazakhs in the region who did not require “distant migrations and extensive pasture lands.” As if Kazakhs were given some kind of choice in the matter, the administration went further to report that while horses still maintained their spot as the majority within livestock herds in other regions, the Kazakhs of Ural'sk “reduced their number and adapted their livestock toward a settled, agricultural life rather than a nomadic one.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Departament gosudarstvennykh zemel'nykh imushchestv, *Materialy po kirgizskomu zemlepol'zovaniuu*, Vol. IV, Semipalatinskaia oblast (Voronezh, 1903), 37.

<sup>88</sup> LN. Tsabel', *Ocherk raboty Turgaisko-Ural'skoi pereselencheskoi organizatsii* (Orenburg, 1911), 220-221.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

## Case Study of Arakaragai

The distant migrations and extensive pasture lands addressed in the study of Turgai and Ural'sk were discussed in contrast to the "Siberian regions" and Kustanai uezd where, according to the Resettlement Administration, mobile pastoralism was still the primary occupation of the local Kazakhs.<sup>90</sup> Only a few years prior, however, the administration used a seven-year study of one *volost* in Kustanai uezd, to highlight what it deemed to be the positive effects of colonization in the steppe. According to the study, Arakaragai *volost* was chosen as a sample case specifically because of the significant land seizures which the administration had carried out over a seven-year period from 1898 to 1905. If land seizures, as many had argued, would be detrimental to the economic well-being of the Kazakhs, the administration argued, then surely Arakaragai *volost* would be demonstrative of this.<sup>91</sup> The study is significant in that it underscores the reduced role of horses within the changing ecology of the region.

To justify its extensive seizures of land in Arakaragai *volost*, the Resettlement Administration contended that the land allotments set aside for Kazakhs after the Shcherbina expedition were considerably high given the fact that they were designed solely for livestock breeding rather than agriculture or even some combination of the two. According to its investigation, a typical land allotment for a Kazakh was five to eight times higher than one belonging to a peasant settler.<sup>92</sup> Those who were opposed to the land seizures, according to the administration, cited poor soil and climactic conditions which were the determining factors in the Kazakhs' choice of mobile pastoralism rather than agriculture, to which the report gave little credence.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> *Vliianie kolonizatsii na kirgizskogo khoziaistva* (St. Petersburg, 1907), 5.

<sup>92</sup> The report noted that the smallest group of farmers has no more than 50 *desiatini*. Ibid., 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 3-5.

Presenting numbers of overall livestock in the *volost* – horses, cattle, camels, sheep, and goats – the administration noted that although the number of head had risen by about 0.3 percent, the increase was negligible and it was happy to report that livestock numbers had remained nearly unchanged during the seven-year study period. However, the breakdown of the livestock makeup showed dramatic shifts in the types being bred. The overall number of horses had fallen by 10 percent and sheep by 22 percent while mature cattle – those 2 years and older – increased by 69 percent, “an extremely sharp and characteristic change on the part of sedentary cattle breeding (*osedlogo skotovodstva*).” The administration added that, for such a short period of time, such a significant change in the composition of the herd was unlikely to have been caused by any natural phenomena and concluded that, “obviously, a quite normal economic phenomenon” was observed in the region.<sup>94</sup>

The “normal economic phenomenon” witnessed by the Resettlement Administration caused a significant shift in the breeding practices of the local Kazakhs who would otherwise have preferred to breed horses. “Thus, the horse breeder (*konevod*),” it was noted “which is usually represented by the Kirgiz, becomes a cattle-breeder, and the type of cattle whose strength, according to local conditions, is to be used in the cultivation of the soil, is of primary importance.” Disregarding the importance of horses within Kazakh society, the administration simply compared composite livestock numbers to overall economic wealth of the *volost* and deduced that, despite the significant land seizures, “neither welfare nor security had undergone any changes.”<sup>95</sup>

Changes in herd composition were accompanied by equal changes in land use and agricultural practices. Over the seven-year period, hay consumption in the *volost* doubled,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

harvests increased by 141 percent while the amount of hay purchased from elsewhere increased by “only” 41 percent. These numbers, the administration argued, served as evidence that land seizures and subsequent distribution to settlers were not forcing Kazakhs, deprived of pasture lands, to buy hay for their herds rather than produce their own. By its calculations, hay production doubled and the average farm became twice as large which would lead to greater sustainability of cattle breeding in the region.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the knowledge that Kazakhs revered their horses, that horses served as indicators of wealth and social standing, and that, even as work animals, they were used in an altogether different fashion than within a sedentary agricultural setting, imperial authorities painted a picture of progress and wealth throughout the steppe. This progress, however, was one tied to the value of the land rather than the value of the livestock. Having traveled to the region in 1910 to observe the resettlement process and its effect on the land and people, Minister of Agriculture Aleksandr Krivoshein wrote that while resettlement encroached upon the Kazakhs, it did the no disservice. “Losing millions of desiatini,” Krivoshein wrote, “they are rewarded by the fact that the land which they do have, for the first time, receives market value.”<sup>97</sup>

## **Social Stratification**

As noted above, horse breeding throughout this period was increasingly becoming the privilege of wealthier Kazakhs who could withstand the onslaught of settlement and its subsequent alterations to the land. While contemporaries often wrote about Kazakhs measuring their wealth by the size of their horse herds, A.A. Kaufman noted in 1908 the lessening reliance

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 14-15

<sup>97</sup> Aleksandr Krivoshein, *Zapiska predsdatelia soveta ministrov i glavnoupravliaiushchago zemleustroistvom i zemledeliem o poezdke v sibiri i povolzh'e v 1910 godu* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 88.

on horses by a growing segment of the population and indicated that price was a growing factor. He observed that amongst the poor Kazakhs, cattle were of the greatest importance given their low cost and usefulness but even amongst middling Kazakhs, he wrote, cattle “still compete with horses.” Kaufman went on to write that “it is not surprising that in the steppe there is even a saying: ‘horses are for luxury, camels are for decoration, sheep are for generosity, cattle for satiety.’”<sup>98</sup> And because horse breeding was becoming the privilege of richer Kazakhs, they were benefitting the most from the situation. In the same text, Kaufman wrote that rich Kazakhs were taking in the horses of less prosperous owners who could not afford to keep them on their own. “Such rich people” he contended, “usually contain 2 or 3 annual shepherds and have flocks of 500-1,000 horses; the addition of 200-300 heads to their herds requires no new expenses but at the same time gives considerable benefits, namely the right to graze their entire herd on the land of those Kirgiz who [loan their horses out].”<sup>99</sup>

The distance between rich and poor in the steppe grew as many Kazakhs were pushed out of not only the horse market but the entire livestock market altogether. In Petropavlovsk, poor Kazakhs were described as being, in one way or another, dependent on the relationship between themselves and the rich bais, typically migrating with them and their families in order to take care of the horses or cattle.<sup>100</sup> The situation in Akmolinsk was much the same, as a report stated that the economy had been altered to such a degree, there existed only “two totally different

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<sup>98</sup> A.A. Kaufman, *Russkaia obshchina v protsesse eia zarozhdeniia i rosta* (Moscow, 1908), 77. Here, Kaufman also quoted the Shcherbina expedition in noting Kazakhs preference to “breed horses in preference to all other types of livestock.” See footnote 88 above. Kaufman was quite the remarkable figure and worthy of note here. He was an economist and statistician who traveled extensively beyond the Urals during the last decade of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. He compiled an absolute wealth of knowledge and data on Russian settlement and the indigenous communities where he traveled. For more on Kaufman see Siegelbaum, “Paradise or Just a Little Bit Better?”

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>100</sup> V.K. Kuznetsov, *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo v Akmolinskoi oblasti*, t. III, *Petropavlovskii uezd* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 47.

economic elements: the richest households in need of outside labor and the poor and disadvantaged households who have nothing but ‘available working hands.’”<sup>101</sup> Reports similar to these came out of neighboring Semipalatinsk oblast from the journalist and ethnographer Nickolai Konshin who travelled to the steppe at the beginning of the century. Remarking on the nature of Kazakh society, Konshin noted that rather than witnessing a social structure heavily reliant on mutual aid and assistance, the villages he visited were “characterized by a sharp individualism.”<sup>102</sup> Often unable to find work even from the *bais*, he claims many poor Kazakhs were forced to look for work from Russians and quotes one destitute laborer as saying that the “poor Kirgiz among the Russians are nevertheless better off.”<sup>103</sup>

Contemporary observations of the *bais* paint them in a similarly unflattering light. In Akmolinsk, it is reported that they left all of the work in and around the yurt to their wives and the poor wage workers they employed. “The *bais* do almost no work,” one observer states, “nor do the sons of the rich landowners (sleeping up to twelve hours, they then eat, drink mare’s milk, talk, take visits, and spend all their time engaged in pleasures).”<sup>104</sup> It is important here to understand the position of potential bias from which these accounts come but at the same time see a growing trend within the society and economy of the steppe. Abai Kunanbayev, the famed nineteenth-century Kazakh poet, in similar fashion described the highly competitive colonial society when he wrote the following:

*The bai has many shepherds  
And his tent is very fine;  
The poor man freezes in the steppe*

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<sup>101</sup> V.K. Kuznetsov, *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo v Akmolinskoi oblasti*, t. V, *Akmolinskoi uезд* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 48.

<sup>102</sup> Konshin, “Ocherki ekonomicheskogo byta kirgizov Semipalatinskoi oblasti,” 158.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>104</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo*, vol. V, 44.

*While guarding rich men's kine.  
He tans the hides in icy tubs,  
His hands are cold and numb;  
At home his wife spins yarn, poor soul,  
And counts each sorry crumb.  
No fire to warm their little child,  
Nor felt the roof to patch,  
Though all the warmth there ever is  
Goes out through the torn thatch.*<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1900, the secretary of the Ural'sk Regional Statistical Committee, N. Oganovskii, addressed the effects that further colonization of the steppe would have on the Kazakhs. He argued what many other Russian officials had in regards to settlers tilling steppe land into arable fields and setting positive examples of sedentary life in hopes of persuading Kazakhs to adopt similar practices. He also addressed the topic of cattle breeding in the region and argued that, as it stood then, there existed enough land to satisfy the needs of Kazakh breeders but, if they did not transition to more "intensive forms" of breeding, the amount of land would not suffice. He concluded by writing that "the admission of immigrants will lead to an acceleration of the transition of the Kirgiz to a settled life. And this transition will lead to a reduction in cattle breeding and will, although not immediately, create a revolution in the Kyrgyz economy, in which agriculture gradually comes to the fore."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> P. Alampiev, *Soviet Kazakhstan* (Moscow, 1958), 36-7.

<sup>106</sup> Ural'sk Oblast' Statistical Committee, *Pamiatnaia knizhka i adres-kalendar' ural'skoi oblasti na 1900 god* (Ural'sk, 1900), 269.

In the years leading up to World War I and the 1917 Revolution, Oganovskii's words would prove largely prophetic. Agricultural production throughout the steppe had increased by a significant margin and many Kazakhs had (albeit with little choice) transitioned to a settled, agricultural lifestyle. Though overall livestock breeding had not suffered the predicted reduction, it can be argued that horse breeding did as a greater reliance on cattle and sheep pushed would-be horse breeders out of business and the growth of the steppe horse population had subsequently slowed by comparison.

Reports such as Oganovskii's and others regarding the effects of colonization on the horse breeding industry of the steppe were reason for consternation to some. Russian officials, particularly those of the military and the Horse Breeding Administration, concerned about the reduction of horse herds in the once rich Caucasus and Don regions, were excited about the prospect of utilizing the Kazakh Steppe as their primary horse supply. In the face of falling numbers of horses, however, these officials pushed to expand the breeding industry and, at the same time, transition Kazakhs to the more "cultured" methods addressed above.

Along with transforming the breeding industry in the steppe, officials discussed at length the suitability of the Kirgiz breed of horse - by far the most populous in the steppe - toward the various uses they would require of it. In language that often reflected their descriptions of Kazakhs themselves, Russian, and later Soviet experts, attempted to change the very animal that Kazakhs had used for generations to carry on their traditions. This process, which officials carried out in the steppe all the way up to the collectivization drive of the late 1920s, served to further alienate Kazakhs from their horses and elicit responses ranging from outrage to often violent resistance against both political regimes.



## CHAPTER TWO

### **Counting (on) Horses: Military Censuses and the Natural Productive Forces of Russia**

In 1874, Tsar Alexander II made sweeping changes to the empire's military forces. It was on 1 January of that year that he signed a decree calling for universal conscription to the military. Long in the coming, the conscription decree was in part a response to Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, an event Alexander referenced in his proclamation. "The latest events," he wrote, have proven that the strength of states is not in the number of troops, but mainly in its moral and mental qualities, reaching higher development only when the cause of defense of the fatherland becomes a common cause of the people, when everyone, without distinction of titles and states, is united in this holy cause."<sup>1</sup> Universal conscription had by that point been implemented by other major European powers and Alexander's minister of war, Dmitrii Miliutin, was for years prior to the decree steadfast in urging the tsar to consider the same. By instituting universal conscription, however, the Russian military took on a logistical nightmare which would require it to gather and analyze an enormous amount of information on the fighting capabilities of the empire's subjects. And as any empire's success throughout history has been closely linked to the success of its military, the fate of the Russian Empire was thus dependent on its knowledge of its subjects. But not only would the military have to compile information on the availability and condition of its troops, it would also have to equip them with the instruments of war – most vitally, horses. Two years after the conscription decree, Alexander signed a subsequent proclamation calling for universal conscription of the empire's horses and just as the 1874 decree reshaped how the government understood and utilized its citizen-subjects, the 1876 decree

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<sup>1</sup> *Ustav o voinskoi povinnosti vysochaishe utverzhdennyi 1 ianvaria 1874 goda* (Moscow, 1874), 4-5.

equally reshaped the government's relationship to its horse population in general, and in its relationship to the Kazakh Steppe in particular.

Following the emancipation of serfs in Russia in 1861, the imperial government faced a rather significant information deficit in terms of knowledge of its own subjects. Prior to the reform period, local governing bodies had limited census data for purposes of taxation but they were woefully inadequate to properly gauge the population of the empire. In fact, the imperial government only conducted one empire-wide census and that did not occur until 1897. Russia's lack of detailed information on its population is illustrative of James Scott's argument that "the premodern state was, in many crucial respects, partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their identity."<sup>2</sup> When Alexander II signed the decrees for universal conscription, military officials understood that they would require a great deal of statistical data on both the empire's human and horse populations. To address the latter, military horse censuses were carried out at regular intervals from the time of the decree until the end of the imperial period. The data from these censuses were instrumental in Russia's ability to not only wage war effectively, but also to govern its people and territory. In his study of British political intelligence in north India, C.A. Bayly asserts that "the quality of military and political intelligence available to European colonial powers was evidently a critical determinant of their success in conquest and profitable governance."<sup>3</sup>

I argue that the Imperial Russian horse censuses were crucial to the empire's incorporation of the Kazakh Steppe and its rule over the region's people and natural resources in

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<sup>2</sup> James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998), 2.

<sup>3</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780-1870* (Cambridge, 1999), 1.

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>4</sup> Initially, the censuses did not cover the steppe region but many, including military officials, had a general understanding of the its considerable horse population from various expeditionary accounts. What the early censuses provided more than anything, however, was a rather accurate picture of the declining state of horse breeding in areas of the empire's southwest from where the military typically acquired service horses. Additionally, it provided information on the horse populations of the empire's southeast which indicated exponential increases in numbers the closer one came to the Kazakh Steppe. These factors pushed discussions regarding the numerous possibilities the steppe could serve for the empire moving forward and invited myriad information-gathering expeditions to the region often for the sole purpose of studying its horses.

My argument here bridges the 1917 divide to demonstrate a certain degree of continuity between the Imperial and Soviet governments. The horse censuses and the knowledge gathered during coinciding expeditions proved important tools of subjugation and governance during the pre-war period and continued to be an important area of focus for Soviet authorities moving forward. Lenin himself used the imperial military horse census data in his works on the economic conditions of the peasantry and understood their value in drawing conclusions about issues beyond simple horse numbers. By the time the Soviets took power, however, that material was largely useless. Years of war and revolution devastated the region and its horse population but, like the imperial military before them, Soviet officials envisioned the Kazakh Steppe as a limitless reserve of military horses. While the precarious economic conditions of the 1920s

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<sup>4</sup> My argument here is largely analogous to that of Ian Campbell who argues that “the story of conquest and rule on the Kazak Steppe is inseparable from the production of knowledge about it by Russians and Kazaks alike.” However, in the portions of this chapter addressing the Russian Imperial period, I focus almost exclusively on Russian information gathering apparatuses to demonstrate conquest. See Campbell, *Knowledge and the Ends of Empire: Kazakh Intermediaries and Russian Rule on the Steppe, 1731-1917* (Ithaca and London, 2017), 1.

certainly hampered efforts to establish a strong horse-breeding industry in the steppe, numerous expeditions to the region throughout the decade, particularly those of the Academy of Sciences, provided Soviet officials with a wealth of data they used to extend control over the region, intervene in its horse-breeding production, and draw on those resources as conditions dictated.

### **Military Horse Censuses**

Due to the necessity of supplying the military with a vast number horses in the event of a general conscription, Dmitrii Miliutin had already by 1875 discussed the potential of an empire-wide horse census with then Minister of Internal Affairs, Alexander Timashev. Under the supervision of Timashev and with the assistance of the military, the Department of Internal Affairs conducted a test census in only three provinces – Riazan, Mogilev, and Kovno. Not long after these initial tests, on October 24, 1876, Alexander II signed the horse conscription decree amidst escalating tensions with the Ottoman Empire. Foreseeing an eventual conflict (Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire only six months later), the war ministry called for an immediate, albeit abbreviated horse census which coincided with the decree itself. The first official horse census of the Russian Empire consisted of statistical information of only 33 provinces in the western strip (*zapadnaia polosa*). Reports indicate that the limited geographic scope of this initial census, the haste with which it was carried out, and the overall inexperience of the war ministry in conducting these types of assessments, combined to produce rather unsatisfactory results.<sup>5</sup>

With the experiences of 1876 behind it, the war ministry set out with the goal of conducting a much more thorough census in 1882. This time, however, it was accompanied in its

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<sup>5</sup> *Voenna-konskaia perepis' 1888 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1891), iii-iv.

efforts by the Department of Horse Breeding. As it came to be, the conscription decrees of the 1870s were not the only factors pushing the imperial government to learn more about its horse population. As discussed in the previous chapter, the emancipation decree of 1861 created myriad problems within the empire's agricultural sector and various government agencies expressed concern over the number of horses available to the newly freed serfs. After discussions, however, the war ministry and Department of Horse Breeding decided in early 1882 to conduct data-gathering operations in only those provinces in which zemstvo governing bodies had been established, a stipulation that would have increased the number of provinces reported on by only one from the previous census – from 33 to 34. Apparently unimpressed with this rather inconsequential increase, the government intervened and on 29 June of that year allocated some 107,000 rubles from the state treasury for the production of a census to be carried out between August and October in all 58 provinces subject to the provisioning of horses in the event of war which included the Kingdom of Poland and regions in the empire's southeastern edges. This expanded area was to include both Orenburg and Astrakhan, cities bordering the western stretches of modern-day Kazakhstan, home to Kalmyks and Kazakhs of the inner horde.<sup>6</sup>

The 1882 census far exceeded the military's first attempt in terms of success and provided the empire much needed data regarding its horse population. In total, census takers counted 19,637,624 horses of which 14,883,696 were of working age and thus fit for military service. These figures broke down to ratios of 25.5 and 19.3 horses per 100 inhabitants, respectively. In the forward of the printed census, chair of the statistics council P.P. Semenov noted that this worked out to almost one horse of working age for every able-bodied man of the same, an extraordinary and welcome revelation given the military's wartime reliance on the

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<sup>6</sup> *Konskaia perepis' 1882 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1884), iii.

general horse population in the wake of the 1876 decree. What is more, Semenov continued, Russia's numbers in terms of horses per able-bodied man far exceeded those of western European countries – Russia's most likely adversaries in the event of a conflict. The numbers to the west ranged from a low of two horses per 100 inhabitants in Spain and Portugal to a high of 17.6 in Denmark. Of note, Germany claimed 7.4 horses per 100 inhabitants, France claimed eight, and Great Britain nine. Only the United States, with its vast reserve of horses in the country's western plains contained numbers rivaling those of the Russian Empire. There, the ratio was 24.3 horses per 100 inhabitants.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most amazing feature of the 1882 census was not the number of horses that were counted – figures that alone exceeded western Europe and the United States – but the numbers of horses that were *not* counted. At the time, the census did not even extend particularly far into Siberia or Central Asia, regions where the 1882 data (and even previous knowledge) indicated there existed even greater numbers of horses. The two regions surveyed during the census that boasted the highest horse populations were Ural'sk oblast and an area identified as the Southeastern Steppe – both either containing portions of or bordering the Kazakh Steppe. Ural'sk was comprised of the provinces of Viatka, Perm, and Ufa while the Southeastern Steppe was made up of those of Samara, Orenburg, and Astrakhan. Combined, these six provinces alone contained almost 20 percent of the total horse population accounted for in the census – some 3,786,885 horses amounting to 38.4 horses per 100 inhabitants in Ural'sk oblast and an astonishing 55 per 100 inhabitants in the Southeastern Steppe.<sup>8</sup> Semenov wrote that these figures represented an “enormous deviation” (*gromadnoe uklonenie*) from the average numbers recorded in the rest of surveyed provinces and, in part, attributed this to the abundance of pasture land and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xiii.

low population density.<sup>9</sup> Of the Southeastern Steppe, specifically, Semenov wrote that “it goes without saying that the region occupies the very first place in European Russia in terms of the relative number of foals and stallions, as well as in the number of peasant horses per homestead, while the proportion of horseless homesteads is the smallest in the whole empire.”<sup>10</sup>

After 1882, the military carried out subsequent horse censuses with regularity – typically every six years. And while the scope of horse conscription regulations remained largely the same as they had when originally passed in 1876, the geographic reach of the horse censuses continually increased. By the census of 1900, which was actually carried out over a three-year period from 1899-1901, statisticians were given directives to include the Siberian and Turkestan military districts in their report. A. Syrnev noted in the foreword of the printed census that the command to survey those particular areas came directly from St. Petersburg and tasked to specially selected individuals “in light of the special conditions of the area.”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, those numbers were yet unavailable at the time of publication. When the Central Statistics Committee published the final census of the imperial period in 1913, the list of surveyed provinces had increased to 78 – a number made up of 50 provinces in European Russia, seven in Siberia, nine in Central Asia including each of the steppe oblasts, and 12 provinces in the Caucasus.<sup>12</sup>

The circumstances under which imperial statisticians continually expanded the reach of the horse censuses is quite clear even if the reasoning was never spelled out so matter-of-factly in the publications. The data had continued to confirm that not only did Siberia and Central Asia –

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>11</sup> *Voенно-конская перепись 1899-1901 гг.* (St. Petersburg, 1902), ii.

<sup>12</sup> *Predvaritel'nyi svod dannykh voenno-конской переписи, произведенной в 1912 году в 78 губерниях империи* (St. Petersburg, 1913), 1-3.

where the Kazakh Steppe was located – contain an abundance of horses, but the “special conditions” were such that the region could likely sustain more. Figures from the 1912 census demonstrated that while the number of horses per capita in Siberia and Central Asia was substantially higher than the average for the empire, the number of horses per square verst was lower, i.e. the horse-rich region with abundant pasture land could potentially be packed with many more horses.<sup>13</sup> This was a revelation that undoubtedly interested military officials for a few reasons. First, a full mobilization of military forces in time of war would require a significant number of horses and some of the historically horse-rich areas of European Russia were witnessing declining numbers in the post-emancipation period. Already by 1882, statisticians noted that in Novorossiisk oblast, a region of sprawling pasture land like the southeastern steppe and Ural’sk oblast, horse numbers were lagging as land was continually being turned over to agriculture and horses were being replaced by their cheaper farm counterpart – oxen.<sup>14</sup> Authorities also witnessed similar trends in the Don region which bordered Novorossiisk to the east, and the Caucasus, areas from which the military had typically acquired a great deal of their military remounts.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, the Kazakh Steppe would prove a strategic location for military horse reserves in the event of a conflict with an enemy to either the empire’s west or east.

In 1875, noted Russian cavalryman A.I. Garder wrote a substantial piece for the journal *Voennyi Sbornik*, the official publication of the Russian military. Covering some 84 pages – in

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<sup>13</sup> In terms of horses per 100 inhabitants, the 1912 provided the following breakdown of numbers: European Russia – 18.2, Siberia – 52.2, Central Asia – 36.4, Caucasus – 15.4, in general – 21.3. The number of horses per square verst was recorded as the following: European Russia – 5.3, Siberia – 1.4, Central Asia – 1.3, Caucasus – 4.6, in general – 2.9. See *Predvaritel’nyi svod dannykh voenno-konskoi perepisi, proizvedennoi v 1912 godu*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Konskaia perepis’ 1882 goda*, xv.

<sup>15</sup> The 1912 census recorded only slight increases in these regions. For the Don, the increase was only 0.7%. See *Predvaritel’nyi svod dannykh voenno-konskoi perepisi, proizvedennoi v 1912 godu*, 1.



two parts – Garder discussed Kirgiz horses, by far the most numerous in the Kazakh Steppe, and their suitability for the cavalry and artillery.<sup>16</sup> His writing covered a great deal of informational ground including the natural climate of the Kazakh steppe, the people and culture, and the Kirgiz breed's various attributes. In a particular segment, Garder drew on Russia's experiences in the War of 1812 when it was invaded by Napoleon's forces. Rather than continue a direct assault on what was, to that point in history, the largest army ever assembled, Tsar Alexander I and the Russian military instead retreated eastward to the interior of the empire. Napoleon ceased his advance at Moscow and occupied the city until his campaign was ultimately thwarted by the cold of the Russian winter. Garder posited that if an invasion were to occur again, it would surely come from the west. Any force from the east, he wrote, due to the distances it would be required to traverse, would not have reliable bases of operation from which to conduct an operation of any significance. In pondering an attack from the west, he asked the reader to assume that an invading army encountered little resistance in the western borderlands to the point that the Russian military would be left with no choice but to repeat the plan of the campaign of 1812. In this case, the retreating forces would be cut off from the horse producing regions of Russia's southwest and would be forced to "retreat inland until [it] could gather significant forces that would be able to put an end to the enemy's advance" and it would be in just such a situation that a significant horse breeding operation in the Kazakh Steppe would prove paramount.<sup>17</sup> In particular, Garder argued that Kirgiz horses would be "of great benefit" as they could always be obtained in large numbers, and, due to their upbringing and temperament, could be well-ridden

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<sup>16</sup> A. Garder, "Kirgizskaia loshadi i ikh prigodnost' dlia kavalerii i artillerii" *Voennyi Sbornik* no. 10 (1875): 324-354, no. 11 (1875): 212-244. The "Kirgiz" horse is a particular breed and does not denote ownership by the Kazakh people who, throughout the imperial period, were most often referred to as "Kirgiz" themselves.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

by even the most mediocre of cavalrymen. “Under such conditions,” he concluded, “Kirgiz horses can directly enter the ranks of the acting cavalry – a benefit no other horses can have on their side.”<sup>18</sup>

An invasion of Russia from the west would certainly have dealt a blow to the major horse-producing regions of the empire and created extreme difficulties in repelling such an attack. Though no plans had been considered at the time of Garder’s publication, Russia’s experiences in the early years of the twentieth century caused military officials to consider relocating their horse-breeding operations into the interior of the empire, albeit for slightly different reasons. Russia’s war with Japan, as brief as it was, presented serious issues to military strategists tasked with transport and supply to the far east, a journey often totaling more than 6,000 miles. In the aftermath of what turned out to be a rather clumsily executed land operation (this to say nothing of the terrible defeats suffered by the Russian navy), coupled with emerging threats from the east, military officials considered how they could better handle such a situation in the future. In a 1912 report to the Russian Ministry of War, General of the Cavalry N.A. Vintulov wrote that the establishment of a major military horse breeding industry in Siberia and the Kazakh Steppe was paramount to the defense of the state “in the event of an armed clash with our neighbors on the eastern outskirts of the Empire.”<sup>19</sup> Here, Vintulov’s argument shared some similarities to Garder’s from nearly forty years earlier in which Garder argued that an eastern power would have no reliable bases of operation from which to launch an offensive military campaign, Vintulov argued that Russia lacked the very same type of infrastructure. Having

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<sup>18</sup> Garder, “Kirgizskaia loshadi i ikh prigodnost’” *Voennyi Sbornik* no. 11 (1875), 240. When discussing a possible invasion in relation to the Kirgiz horse, it is important to note that Garder focused specifically on an invasion from the west rather than any eastern enemy who would, due to its general proximity, not have a reliable base from which to launch any significant or particularly threatening operations. See Garder, “Kirgizskaia loshadi i ikh prigodnost’,” 222-223.

<sup>19</sup> RGIA, F. 391, op. 4, d. 2125, l. 152-153 ob.

access to horses in sufficient quantities in Siberia and the Kazakh Steppe, he posited, would “free the railways of European Russia and the Siberian Railway from the need to transport horses from the interior provinces of European Russia and therefore, the opportunity will accelerate bringing the army to full military readiness.”<sup>20</sup>

## Colonial Resources

Russian military officials’ aspirations for a horse breeding enterprise in Siberia and the Kazakh Steppe were representative of a theme throughout Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century whereby imperial powers were increasingly exploiting their colonies for horse power in the face of industrialization which was pushing horse breeding aside. Famed British horse-breeder and advisor to the crown, Sir Walter Gilbey, reported on the significant problems facing the British Empire at the turn of the century. Most glaringly, the military was reeling from enormous horse casualties suffered during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) but technological and economic issues were also noted.<sup>21</sup> Gilbey blamed the growing use of motor vehicles within Britain as one explanation for the relative dearth of horses but also brought up what he called the “old story” of horse-breeders selling their stock to foreign buyers.<sup>22</sup> Here he specifically called attention to the French and German purchasers who were able to pay high prices for horses while

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Sir Walter Gilbey. *Horses for the Army: A Suggestion*, second edition (London: Vinton & Co., 1913), 12. Gilbey notes a total of 73,000 horses purchased “in this country” to send to the army during the war which was “largely in excess of the expectations formed by the Remount Officers themselves.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 10. In regard to greater use of motor vehicles, Gilbey compared horse import numbers for the periods 1895-98 and 1908-11 and estimated a reduction of approximately 27,000 horses per year coming into the country. This reduction considerably affected the availability of the “bus type” of horse used to transport artillery.

Britain's military representatives were restrained by monetary regulations and unable to compete. "And thus," he wrote, "a large proportion of our best leave the country."<sup>23</sup>

Gilbey's recommendation for the growth and maintenance of a standing military remount supply was a bit uncertain. On the one hand, he stated that government breeding would be impossible. Specifically, he cited the enormous price of pasture land and the cost needed for the care of the herds locally as being the biggest detriment in this regard. On the other hand, he drew attention to the failure - either for lack of requisite numbers or for the cost of production - of the various horse-breeding trials in India initially under the auspices of the East India Company and, from 1858 onward, of the crown itself.<sup>24</sup> However, Gilbey concluded his work by suggesting that the steps unsuitable within England could very well be applicable in the empire's colonies "where horse-breeding is an industry." "With such modifications as local conditions and prices suggest," he wrote, "the Permanent Remount Depot system might well be established in Canada, South Africa and Australia. It would, in point of fact, prove more profitable in countries where large numbers of horses are raised, horseflesh being necessarily cheaper."<sup>25</sup>

The large loss of military horses during the Franco-Prussian war from 1870-71 likewise resulted in a greater dedication to horse breeding throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century in France. Reporting to the *Corps Législatif* at the time, M. Bocher summed up the importance of horse breeding for military purposes by stating that "the subject immediately demanding our attention is not merely a question of agricultural and commercial importance, even that of increasing public wealth. We are called on to provide for the defense and security of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 34.

our Country itself.”<sup>26</sup> Like many of their counterparts, France also looked toward their colonial holdings to serve as horse breeding areas. By the late nineteenth century, France had not only increased the number of stud farms within the country, which stood at seventeen, but also maintained three in Algeria.

The stallions for army studs throughout France came from two sources: first, from the army breed farms in their African colonies and second, through regular purchase from private sellers. Two particular farms in Algeria, in Tiaret and l’Allelik, were of great importance to the French military as they furnished the government studs in both Algeria and Tunisia and eventually France itself. Here they were interested primarily in breeding Arabian horses for use as cavalry mounts but also cross bred Berber horses, native to northern Africa, in order to “improve the race.”<sup>27</sup> In 1906, M.H. Lecoq, Inspector of Agriculture for Algeria, reported no less than 4,500,000 horses in the colony including 800 Berber and Arab stallions for stud purposes along with 147 in Tunisia. “Add to these the Government horses in the French Sudan, Madagascar, Indo-China, New Caledonia,” a U.S. military reports noted, “and it becomes very apparent that the République Francaise is thoroughly impressed with the importance of maintaining an adequate horse supply as part of the scheme of National defense.”<sup>28</sup>

The Russian military’s interest in the Kazakh Steppe dates to even before the reform period and the Kirgiz horse later entered into consideration for the military. As early as 1852, the military’s Department of the General Staff published a statistical report in which it stressed the strategic importance of the steppe given its geographic “contiguity” with the empire. In addition

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<sup>26</sup> United States’ Cavalry Association, “Journal of the United States Cavalry Association” 24, no. 97 (July 1913), 48.

<sup>27</sup> United States Adjutant General’s Office, Military Information Division, *Target Practice and Remount Systems Abroad* (Washington D.C., 1902), 260-261.

<sup>28</sup> United States’ Cavalry Association, *Journal of the U.S. Cavalry Association* 24, no. 97 (July 1913), 55.

to “pacifying” the nomadic tribes whom it described as “prone to robbery and predation” of the merchant caravans in the region, the general staff argued that the steppe should be seriously considered as a convenient location for troop detachments and supply provisions.<sup>29</sup> Along with its geographic location, the general staff highlighted the cattle breeding industry of the Kirgiz and noted the unusually large herds that they tended to keep - particularly amongst the wealthier Kazakhs whose herds often grew upwards of “7,000 horses, 500 camels, 400 cattle and up to 3,000 sheep and goats.”<sup>30</sup>

Though the Kirgiz herds were large, military experts had to that point not considered the Kirgiz breed of horse for large-scale military use. One of the earliest people to broach this topic in any significant way seems to have been S. Vogak who, in 1873, wrote a lengthy article on the merits of the Kirgiz horse for *Voennyi Sbornik*, the same publication in which Garder’s work discussed above would appear a few years later.<sup>31</sup> Vogak began by pointing to the long history of the horse in Central Asia, calling the region the “cradle of the horse” whence they spread throughout Europe, Africa, and to the Americas. He intended the article to be a complementary piece to public lectures given by a Lieutenant Colonel Potto, head of the Orenburg Junker College. Potto, who had served with the military in the steppe region, lauded the merits of the Kirgiz horse and suggested its use for the artillery and cavalry units located in those military districts.<sup>32</sup> Having spent ten years in the Kazakh Steppe, Vogak wrote of his experiences with the Kirgiz horse and argued that although its reputation was often slighted due to its stocky

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<sup>29</sup> G.K. Sil’vergel’m, *Voенно-statisticheskoe obozrenie rossiiskoi imperii*. t. XVII ch. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1852), 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Little can be found on S. Vogak, particularly his affiliation, if any, with the military. Around the same time, there did exist a K.I. Vogak who went on to become General of the Cavalry but his date of birth is listed as 1859. Given S. Vogak’s background evidenced by the article, it seems obvious that the two are not the same person although perhaps related.

<sup>32</sup> S. Vogak, “Kirgizskaia Loshad” *Voennyi Sbornik* no. 9 (1873), 87.

appearance, it was more than adequate for military service. To verify this, he said that all one needed to do was observe the local Cossacks who, although they rode their own horses for official purposes in order to “show off their beauty,” preferred the Kirgiz horses in their daily routines for their stamina and hardiness. And because of their reputation amongst those unfamiliar with the breed, Vogak argued that they could be bought for much cheaper than horses of equal quality. He concluded by stating that an expanded horse trade with the Kazakhs would not only benefit the military but also the Kazakhs themselves. The Kazakhs, he wrote, jumping at the opportunity to sell their horses “would take up trade which would serve as the best basis for the development of civilization in them,” seemingly a win-win situation for the empire.<sup>33</sup>

The initial works on the Kirgiz horse drew several responses from within the military community. Shortly after Garder’s article appeared on the pages of *Voennyi Sbornik*, artillery Colonel K.I. Diterikhs called into question his strong appeal to consider Kirgiz horses for the cavalry. Above all, he argued that while the empire was rich in its number of horses bred in the herd method, which Kazakhs favored, rather than selectively, as was the preferred method of western breeders, little was known about the current state of that branch of the economy and it would therefore be impossible to answer requisite questions regarding the provisioning of troops with that type of horse.<sup>34</sup> He further called into question the physical nature of the Kirgiz horse and argued that they were of little more use than pack animals.<sup>35</sup> Despite the stocky appearance of the Kirgiz horse, however, Russian officials increasingly considered their use within the military due to the declining breeding industry in the Don and Caucasus regions, a result of serf emancipation and the agricultural transformations which it brought about. This was the exact

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>34</sup> K.I Diterikhs, “Po povodu ot g. Gardera” *Voennyi Sbornik* no. 2 (1876), 22.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 24-26.

issue that Major General L.F. Kostenko raised in 1880 when he wrote the following in an overview of the future of the Russian cavalry:

True, we still have an enormous source for repairing the cavalry in the Don but no one can guarantee that in the very near future, the production of a cheap horse will be profitable. On the contrary, there is every reason to think that the Don will experience the fate of southern Russia and there, in the shortest time, horse breeding will be forced out by other sectors of the economy.<sup>36</sup>

### **Incorporating the Steppe**

Spurred by the changing landscape in the empire's southwest and, as Diterikhs had argued in 1875, a reported lack of knowledge of the horse breeding industry in the Kazakh Steppe, Russia's Department of Horse Breeding and its military took steps to gather information on that region's horse population – not simply the numbers available, but their condition as it related to military readiness. Much like the censuses being carried out beginning around this time, the expeditions into the Kazakh Steppe signaled a greater Russian state presence in the region as the government continued its efforts to fully incorporate the steppe and its people into the empire. Specifically, the findings from these expeditions initiated government efforts not only to establish state-owned stud farms in the Kazakh Steppe but also encourage, through the promotion of favorable lease agreements and other financial benefits, private breeders to relocate their operations from European Russia into the steppe.

In 1884, the Department of Horse Breeding commissioned their chief consultant of veterinary practices, P. Medvedskii, to conduct an expedition into the steppe to study horse

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<sup>36</sup> L.F. Kostenko, *Turkestanskii krai: Opyt voenno-statisticheskogo obozreniia Turkestanskogo voennogo okruga*, t. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1880), 124.



breeding amongst the Kazakhs in the oblasts of Turgai and Ural'sk.<sup>37</sup> Traveling with him on the expedition was a senior officer of the Department of Horse Breeding, Lieutenant-Colonel Feikhtner, and the famed agronomist, P.A. Kostychev.<sup>38</sup> According to Medvedskii, the study of “precisely these steppe breeds” was to determine the extent to which they could be entered, in their current state, into the cavalry and, if they were unfit, the steps that could be taken to make them ready for service.<sup>39</sup> In Medvedskii's opinion, the horses he was sent to study were of no condition – especially “according to European notions” – to be incorporated into the military but through selective breeding practices, could be improved to the point of serviceability.<sup>40</sup> In partial response to this expedition, the Department of Horse Breeding constructed state-owned factory stables in the northern region of Turgai oblast; the Turgai stable near the city of Orsk in 1886, the Kustanai stable in 1888, and the Orenburg stable in 1890 which were all in part tasked with improving the Kirgiz breed, a subject to be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.<sup>41</sup>

The Department of Horse Breeding and the Russian military commissioned subsequent expeditions to the Kazakh Steppe to report on the condition of horse breeding in the region and the progress that was being made in the way of preparing Kirgiz horses for service. *Voennyi Sbornik* published reports from expeditions carried out in 1886, 1890, and another military publication – *Razvedchik* (Scout) – included a write-up from an official's trip to the Ural region

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<sup>37</sup> Beyond the Kazakhs in these two oblasts, the expedition was also tasked with studying horse breeding of the “Inner Kirgiz Horde” and the Astrakhan Kalmyks both of which resided to the west of Turgai and Ural'sk near the Caspian Sea. While they were to inspect the Kalmyk horse breeds in Astrakhan, their main priority was to obtain information on the Kirgiz horses. See P. Medvedskii, *Otchet po komandirovke v 1884 godu* (St. Petersburg, 1885), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Beyond his accolades on this expedition, Kostychev went on to serve as the director of the Department of Agriculture in 1894 and the Ryazan State Agro-technological University bears his name.

<sup>39</sup> Medvedskii, 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> Medvedskii, 100-101.

<sup>41</sup> Ferret, “Des chevaux pour l'empire.”; Dobrosmyslov, *Skotovodstvo v Turgaiskoi oblasti*, 163, Iu.N. Barmintsev, *Evoliutsiia konских porod v Kazakhstane* (Alma-Ata, 1958), 118-119.

in 1894.<sup>42</sup> Commissioned by the artillery in 1890, V. Berg's opinion of Kirgiz horses was almost certainly reassuring to the military officials who were hoping that steppe horse breeding could provide cheap and readily available horses years into the future. In his report on horses in the Ural region, he wrote the following:

Thus, the Ural horse, in only three years of service in cavalry, thanks to its strength, dressage ability and its remarkable, innate endurance, has earned the reputation of a sensible and very reliable service horse. According to reviews of cadre officers, cavalry units repaired by the Ural horses are very pleased with them, and although the Ural horse is inferior to the Don horse in elegance and height, it is superior to the latter in durability of forms and endurance, qualities more important to the previous ones. The lack of growth, coarse neck, and heavy head disappear rather easily with the proper selection of efficient producers, the beginnings of which has already been prescribed in many of the Ural herds. Thus, in a few years there will be a large selection of riding repair horses from the Ural herds which will give it a slightly different character, but due to the same severe upbringing, their endurance will be preserved.<sup>43</sup>

The activities of the GUGK had begun to pay great dividends during the first decade of the twentieth century. In a 1912 report to the Russian Ministry of War, General of the Cavalry N.A. Vintulov outlined the growing successes that the military had had in obtaining horses from the steppe. In particular, he identified a Colonel Burago, who was appointed chairman of a

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<sup>42</sup> See S. Belinskii, "Ob issledovanii konevodstva v Semirechenskoi oblasti i stepeni prigodnosti dlia nashei kavalerii kirgizskoi loshadi" *Voennyi Sbornik* no. 12 (1886), 270-277; V. Berg, "Ural'skaia loshad'" *Voennyi Sbornik* no. 7 (1891): 150-167; K. Skorino, "Komandirovka za kirgizskimi loshad'mi" *Razvedchik* no. 218, 219 (1894).

<sup>43</sup> V. Berg, "Ural'skaia loshad'," 164.

permanent commission established in 1909 in the steppe for the purpose of buying military remounts. The General glowingly described his impression of Colonel Burago and the work he was doing in the following:

The chairman of the commission, Colonel Burago, from the very first days of his activity, quite correctly understood all the tremendous importance that the development of horse breeding in Siberia would have, not only for supplying the army, but also for the interests of the state and resettlement, and he put the task entrusted to him on a lasting and a solid foundation. During my official trip to Siberia in the summer of 1909, I had a chance to personally see with what energy Colonel Burago led the business and with what authority he enjoyed among local breeders from the very first year of his activity. The works of Colonel Burago have not been in vain, and every year the number of horses bought by the Siberian Commission to repair the army is gradually increasing, reaching 970 horses in 1911, while in 1909 only 780 were purchased.<sup>44</sup>

Vintulov went on to note the recent excitement surrounding horse breeding in the steppe and praised Burago for instilling a love of this craft amongst the population. He noted the throngs of horse breeders who were arriving in Siberia from all reaches of the empire with the intention of opening new stud farms and, in regards to this, reported that the continued government support of private horse breeding in the steppe was paramount to the success of the military. On one hand, Vintulov noted the Donbas region, where the horse population continued to plummet, would likely soon close altogether. On the other hand, he argued that in the event of a conflict

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<sup>44</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2125, l. 152.

with “our neighbors on the eastern outskirts of the empire,” an ample supply of horses in the Kazakh Steppe would eliminate the necessity of transporting horses such long distances from European Russia and at the same time free up the railways to transport troops and other supplies.<sup>45</sup>

To avoid the same fate of the Don Steppe, Vinutlov made it clear that the Military Department needed to exercise the greatest authority possible in making sure that the lands of Siberia did not fall into the hands of sheep breeders. Towards this end, he suggested eliminating certain restrictions for leasing lands, extending lease periods, and lowering the lease payments for horse breeders who were interested in relocating their farms to the steppe. He even went so far as to forward the names of various people for whom he asked the war minister to make special considerations.<sup>46</sup>

One such name forwarded by Vintulov was that of a British subject, William Etches. In a slightly befuddling case, Etches, who resided in St. Petersburg, was the authorized representative of a dozen or so applicants who were all applying for lots in Semipalatinsk oblast. Mr. Etches, although a certified horse breeder, was not a Russian citizen which likely restricted him from renting land on his own – this according to the guidelines presented in the reference book for horse breeders and cattle breeders in Asiatic Russia.<sup>47</sup> For each of the applicants, Etches was asking for rent terms of 49 years at 10 kopeks per desiatina, the longest rental term agreement at the lowest cost. On top of these conditions, Etches petitioned for each tenant to receive an

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<sup>45</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2125, l. 153 ob.

<sup>46</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2125, l. 152 ob.

<sup>47</sup> The exact wording of the guideline in question is the following: “The rent is closed to foreign nationals and all, except for the natives, persons of non-Christian faith.” See Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Zemlia dlia konevodstva i skotovodstva v aziatskoi rossii: Spravochnaia kniga* (St. Petersburg, 1913), v.

interest-free long-term loan in the amount of 50,000 rubles. This was to help offset the start-up costs which, by the “most modest calculations,” would amount to at least 138,000 rubles.<sup>48</sup>

### **An Increasing Market**

The fear of horse breeders being pushed out of the Kazakh Steppe, or kept from coming altogether, due to the presence of sheep herders was a real concern to the Russian Ministry of War. A 1912 report from the ministry noted the increasing amounts of land in the Don Steppe region that was being rented by sheep herders which not only decreased the amount of space for horse breeders but would inevitably drive up rent prices in the region. Already concerned about the low numbers of horses in the region, the ministry argued that perhaps a complete relocation of horse breeding farms and the construction of new ones all in the Kazakh Steppe was in order.<sup>49</sup>

According to the report, which cited a 1911 article in the “Journal of Horse Breeding” by Prince P.N. Trubetskoi, the budgetary considerations all made sense for moving the entire horse breeding industry from the Don Steppe to the Kazakh Steppe. The article revealed that the average horse from the Don was costing the military department 700 rubles. With the rising costs of rent in the region and new land contracts rapidly approaching, that number would increase to 1200 rubles. If the ministry rented subsequent plots in the Don region, which would be necessary to guarantee the number of horses they required, that amount could climb all the way to 2000 rubles. What is more, the ministry was unsure if the land to rent would even be available, as

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<sup>48</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2125, l. 170.

<sup>49</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op.4, d.2125, l.160.

aside from sheep breeders, the Don Oblast Administration was allocating large tracts of land “to meet the increasing need of an enormous number of landless Cossacks every year.”<sup>50</sup>

The report was clear in its suggestion. “Under such conditions,” it states, “the most expedient way out of this situation is the transfer of horse breeding to other regions, mainly state-owned.” For this relocation, the report identifies the southern areas of Semipalatinsk, Akmolinsk, and Tomsk oblasts as ideal for establishing a network of farms as the land covers mountainous areas which was “generally unsuitable for resettlement colonization.” Having already establish at least two dozen horse breeding plots in the regions identified, it was stated with certainty that the horse breeding locales in the Don Steppe and other areas of European Russia would disappear completely. Not only were the horses in the Kazakh Steppe, it was claimed, of better quality than those found in the Don, but with the best repair horses costing 550 rubles, and the others costing 175 rubles, the average price of 300 to 350 rubles per horse was far lower than the horses in the Don as well.<sup>51</sup>

The Ministry of Agriculture as well as the Administration of State Horse Breeding both supported rather favorable lease terms for the assistance of private entrepreneurs who wished to relocate existing horse farms or establish new ones on state land within the regions identified. The land tracts were to be quite large, anywhere from 8,000 to 12,000 desiatin, and would be leased for up to 49 years - a term far exceeding the typical 36 years for the typical settler leasing a plot for horse or cattle breeding.<sup>52</sup> Rent prices on the land were not only exceedingly low but per the understanding that a new horse farm would take at least five years to produce its first horses fit for military service, no rent payments were expected during that time. Further, private

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> RGIA f.391, op.4, d.2125, l.160 ob.

<sup>52</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2125, l.160 ob. For lease conditions according to the Resettlement Administration, see *Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, Zemlia dlia konevodstva.*

entrepreneurs were eligible to receive large, interest-free loans from the Ministry of War, could ship horses via rail at reduced rates, and even utilize a certain proportion of their land plots for other entrepreneurial pursuits so long as they maintained the minimum number of horses on the rest. Would-be tenants were subject to a few stipulations, however. They were to have two to three breeding stallions on site for the use, free of charge, by both the peasant population and Kazakhs, and, perhaps as an indicator of permanence, they were obliged to build their structures out of stone.<sup>53</sup>

The favorability of these lease conditions perhaps demonstrates the eagerness of military officials to foster breeding in the Kazakh Steppe in light of the dwindling horse supplies to the west. Unlike General of the Cavalry Vintulov, who boasted of the success of horse breeding in the steppe, General of the Infantry A. A. Polivanov, drafted a letter that, although containing many of the same figures as those in Vintulov's report, painted the situation in the region as one requiring a bit more urgency. In his letter, he noted that horse farms in the region had increased to 36 by 1911 and that the number of horses purchased by the military had also increased from 780 in the first year of the commission's existence to 970 the following year. "Nevertheless," he informed the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, V. N. Kokovtsov, "more than 800 horses had to be purchased again in European Russia and shipped to Siberia."<sup>54</sup> Even given the increase in the number of horses purchased, Polivanov believed the situation in the region to be in "general decay" citing not only sheep herders, but cattle herders, and the "wave of immigrants" who were not only settling the land but who had also purchased "several million horses for agricultural needs." Apart from this competition from civilians, the military also had to compete with large,

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<sup>53</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op.4, d.2125, l.160 ob., 161.

<sup>54</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op.4, d.2125, l.202.

state-operated enterprises such as the gold mines in the region and the Amur Railway construction which required 4,000-5,000 horses per year.<sup>55</sup>

In fact, beyond a steady supply for the military, the Russian government also turned to the steppe to purchase horses for farm work within European Russia. This was particularly the case in 1892 to help relieve famine-stricken peasants. Between the censuses of 1888 and 1894, the so-called “Central Horse Breeding Oblasts” of European Russia, consisting of Voronezh, Tambov, Orlov, Kursk, and Saratov, lost some 677,692 horses as a result of the famine. From the 3,200,512 horses reported in the 1888 census, the number was still down 174,973 heads when yet another census was conducted in 1900.<sup>56</sup> Initially, the government purchased 9,000 horses from Turgai oblast to supply the peasants, but when it was found that the Kirgiz breed of horses adapted quickly to farm work and often outperformed other breeds of horses, the government purchased some 40,000 more in 1899.<sup>57</sup>

### **Predatory Capitalism**

Potentially lucrative for entrepreneurial horse breeders, the evolving economic conditions in the Kazakh Steppe were a warning sign to others. The economist and expert on agrarian affairs, N. P. Oganovskii wrote an article for the newspaper *Russkie Vedomosti* attacking the “predatory” practices being applied throughout the steppe oblasts by the various imperial administrations. Noting the increase of settlers who had been arriving since the opening of the railways, Oganovskii also drew attention to the “large entrepreneurs” who appeared and drove the native populations from their lands. Among these entrepreneurs, he pointed out, were those

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del, *Voenno-Konskaia Perepis'* (St. Petersburg, 1902).

<sup>57</sup> Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 1960), 159.



who rented hundreds of thousands of desiatin for “army stock.” Citing numbers from a publication of the Russian Resettlement Administration, Oganovskii highlighted 81 such large farms that occupied some 455,000 desiatin.<sup>58</sup> Not only was the land incredibly cheap by normal standards, he argued, but they also hired local hands for much cheaper than would be possible elsewhere. He warned that the economic relations he witnessed gave nothing back to the land or the people, only to the treasury and this “predatory capitalism,” as he called it, was “likely to grow until our political situation changes.”<sup>59</sup>

One such entrepreneur who demonstrated all that Oganovskii believed to be wrong with the economics of the steppe was the horse breeder Captain Pianovskii who, in 1907, opened a horse farm at Issyk-Kul’ in southern Semirech’e oblast after a long career in the military. Having become quite interested in the sport of horse racing in 1895 while stationed in Turkestan, Pianovskii traveled back to Russia to purchase an English horse, still unavailable in Turkestan, for his own use on the track. After gaining relative fame for the numerous victories that he and his horse, Alberton, had accumulated, Pianovskii allowed his prized animal to be used for breeding purposes. Upon returning from the Russo–Japanese War and ending his military career, he decided to occupy himself full-time in breeding horses.<sup>60</sup>

After a lengthy search for a suitable site, Pianovskii settled in Issyk-Kul’ where, beyond the geography of the space, he believed it to be the perfect location given the surrounding Kazakh population. Echoing the sentiments of myriad other late imperial officials, Pianovskii wrote that Kazakhs cared little for the quality of their animals and were not breeders in their own right. He surmised that because of this fact, quality studs would be in high demand and he stood

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<sup>58</sup> *Zemlia dlia konevodstva i skotovodstva*, op.cit. The 81 farms occupied approximately 1,229,410 acres.

<sup>59</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2128, l. 119.

<sup>60</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2131, l. 88.

to make a considerable profit from his enterprise. Like other horse breeders in the region, Pianovskii was able to rent his plot cheaply and even received money from the government in order to purchase an initial stable of horses. His horses quickly became popular amongst the local population and even the Cossacks who, due to the quality of his horses and the convenience of their proximity, reportedly purchased in such numbers that Pianovskii wrote that he would not have been able to satisfy all of the requests even if he had been able to produce three times as many horses.<sup>61</sup>

A June 1913 article in the newspaper *Russkaia Molva* (Russian Rumor) highlighted some of the exploits of these entrepreneurs who were increasingly buying up land in Central Asia and Siberia. The newspaper correspondent titled his piece “The Gentlemen from Tashkent” in reference to author M.E. Saltykov–Shchedrin who wrote a piece by the same title which, according to one historian, “symbolized a tsarist empire that sought conquest and profit over culture and common good.”<sup>62</sup> The correspondent wrote that these “gentlemen” had been “resurrected” and were seeking to cheaply, or for no fee at all, acquire all the lands of Central Asia and the steppe for the “interests and benefits” of the state. One such gentleman was the artist P. Orlov who had reportedly acquired a substantial plot of land in the region but, rather than use it toward any agricultural pursuits, subdivided the land and constructed summer cottages to rent out. The article brought particular attention to Captain Pianovskii who, it was reported, acquired a 30-year lease for 134 desiatin of land in the neighboring oblast of Syr-Dar’ia which was part of Russian Turkestan – this in addition to his primary lease at Issyk-Kul’. In his petition for the subsequent land, Piankovskii claimed that he had a large horse breeding enterprise

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<sup>61</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2131, l. 90.

<sup>62</sup> Nicholas Breyfogle, et. al. *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History* (London, 2009).

already in place which held great national importance. The author reported, however, that shortly after being granted the lease terms, a new manager of state property was appointed to the district and found there to be no horse farm at all. Instead, Pianovskii had been renting the land out to third parties for the cultivation of cotton, rice, etc. “for which he earns more than 5000 rubles.”<sup>63</sup> Shortly after the story was printed, Captain Pianovskii was stripped of these lands.<sup>64</sup>

The Russian government’s reprisal against Captain Pianovskii was not uncommon and it had reportedly revoked the leases of several non-compliant landowners in the years leading up to World War I.<sup>65</sup> Their actions in the preceding decades, however, had already drastically altered the social, political, and in very real ways, the physical landscape of the steppe region. For years, Kazakhs had been reeling in light of these shifts and government efforts – both direct and indirect – to sedentarize them. The war further exacerbated these problems and Kazakhs, already suffering from military requisitions, rebelled against authorities when called upon to serve the military themselves in 1916. During the violence that spread throughout the region, Kazakhs used horses as a tool of rebellion while local officials attempted to limit their access to them and keep control of the animals and the region on which they were placing increased importance as a resource of the state.

## **War and Rebellion**

When war broke out, Kazakhs were initially not subjected to draft decrees and, as no changes had been made to the rules regulating horse conscription, they would have seemingly been safe from surrendering their horses to the war effort as well. The realities of the situation on

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<sup>63</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2131, l. 113.

<sup>64</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 4, d. 2131, l. 118.

<sup>65</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 24, l. 1-2.

the ground were quite different, however. According to the reports of General Aleksei Kuropatkin, governor general of Russian Turkestan at the time, Kazakhs were forced to contribute some 70,000 horses in the first two years of the war alone. This number was in addition to the large quantities of other daily necessities such as meat, felt, camels, and yurts Kazakhs had already been contributing to the war effort.<sup>66</sup> By 1916, the government had reversed course on its conscription limits and called for 600,000 Kazakhs to be called up immediately to assist front-line forces by digging trenches and perform other menial tasks. Massive unrest swept the region. In preparing for the conscription efforts, the Russian government sent statisticians to the steppe oblasts and Russian Turkestan to collect census data on the population.<sup>67</sup> Not only did the statisticians' presence represent the impending call-ups, but they almost assuredly reminded Kazakhs of the previous census operations and various expeditions to study their horse population – undertakings they had been feeling the consequences of during the first years of the war. According to Kuropatkin, the statisticians' efforts were regularly thwarted by Kazakhs who not only interrupted their endeavors with violence but also fled to the borderlands in attempts to hide from the state's census collectors.

The violence that swept the Kazakh Steppe and parts of Russian Turkestan in 1916 was exacerbated by further requisitions on behalf of local authorities who were attempting to suppress the rebellion. If the requisitions during the first years of war demonstrated how important Kirgiz horses were to the military effort, then the 1916 rebellion helps shed light on how important horses were to Kazakhs in resisting the intrusions of the Russian state in the region. In one particular case, Kuropatkin reported on the actions of M.A. Fol'baum, then

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<sup>66</sup> Edward Dennis Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia* (Baltimore, 2016), 68.

<sup>67</sup> A.N. Kuropatkin, "Vosstanie 1916 g. v srednei azii (iz dnevnika A.N. Kuropatkina), *Krasnyi arkhiv istoricheskii zhurnal*, t. 3, vol. 34 (Moscow; Leningrad, 1929), 47-48.

military governor of Semirech'e oblast. According to Kuropatkin, Fol'baum had confiscated upwards of 2,000 horses from local Kazakhs during the first months of the uprisings. Fol'baum's confiscation efforts no doubt came in light of reports throughout the region of Kazakhs raiding Russian settlements, stealing livestock, killing and eating their own animals (likely including horses), and in some instances even poisoning their livestock in order to keep them out of the hands of Russian officials. Kazakhs also utilized their horses to flee deep into the steppe or, in some instances, to China.<sup>68</sup>

Due to the importance of horses and the ways in which both the Russian state and the Kazakh population relied upon them, it seems important to note here a stipulation in the 1916 conscription decree that no other historians, to my knowledge, have considered. The conscription document, circulated to local officials, contained a list of individuals who would be exempt from the call-up. Those relieved of this burden included teachers, official translators, elected officials, public service employees, etc., essentially people paramount to the effective governing of the region. Included in the list, however, were also the heads of military equine sites and individuals hired to supply horses to the military as well as their herders and delivery drivers.<sup>69</sup> While there is currently no direct evidence pointing to this exemption as a particular point of contention amongst the Kazakhs, it almost assuredly played a role given the fact that many had been pushed out of their horse breeding enterprises as a direct result of Russian resettlement and general state presence throughout the steppe in the decades leading up to the 1916 rebellion.

Russia's years of involvement in World War I took an immense toll on the horse population of the Kazakh Steppe, to say nothing of the empire in general. Furthermore, the

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<sup>68</sup> Published Soviet-era documents collections are filled with reports of such behavior. For examples indicated in the text, see Akademiia Nauk SSSR, *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1960), 488-491, 501.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 28.

imperial government's actions during this time strained its relationship with the region to a breaking point which was clearly visible in 1916. But as the rebellion highlighted this strain, it also signaled a turning point in the relationship between center and periphery, particularly as Soviet forces came to power. Throughout the late imperial period, the prize of the Kazakh Steppe – as far as the government was concerned – was simply its natural resources; the land and the livestock, especially. Few contemporaries even considered the important role the Kazakh people themselves could play in the empire's future (beyond digging trenches during wartime, that is). Within the various reports of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarding the suitability of Kirgiz horses for the cavalry, few if any included discussions of Kazakhs serving within its ranks despite frequent mentions of their excellent riding skills. One of the few to broach this topic was Aleksei Kuropatkin who did so in his report on the 1916 rebellion and soon others followed.

In his report from 1916, Kuropatkin pointed to the previous forty years as ones that were meant to “wipe from the land” the Kazakhs whom he described as “simple, good-natured, naïve, but also wild.” He wrote that civilized society believed the nomads to be of bygone era; that in the face of civilization and progress, they would turn away from their ceaseless wanderings and transition to a settled way of life. In his view, however, this could not be allowed to happen. “The Kirgiz is a born cattle breeder and nomad...a born cavalryman,” he wrote. Highlighting Kazakhs' abilities as riders, Kuropatkin observed that they were “excellent, tireless riders, unusually keen, well-oriented in the area, and should eventually form a prominent, if not the main, strength for equipping our cavalry.”<sup>70</sup> Apart from their abilities as cavalymen, Kuropatkin contended that Kazakhs would make excellent horse breeders for the military. He acknowledged that the head of

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<sup>70</sup> Kuropatkin, 60-61.

the Department of Horse Breeding, P.A. Stakhovich was considering relocating the empire's entire breeding enterprise to the Kazakh Steppe but wrote to him urging a different course of action. "I am certain that the Kirgiz can be called to a new way of life," he wrote, but "as nomads and horse breeders, they will certainly be more useful to Russia than as poor farmers. With their introduction to military service, they will provide excellent material for staffing the cavalry and convoy units (*oboznye chasti*)."<sup>71</sup>

### **Civil War and Soviet Power**

After the autocracy fell in 1917 and civil war enveloped what was once the Russian Empire, some of the heaviest fighting took place in the Kazakh Steppe and Red Army forces were quick to recruit Kazakhs into their ranks. Already by May 1918, officials from Semipalatinsk, on the eastern edge of the Kazakh Steppe, informed officials in Moscow of the successful formation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Semipalatinsk company of the Red Army. Though the ethnic makeup of the company is unknown, it is likely that Kazakhs comprised at least a portion of the group which include horse-mounted scouts and cavalry units.<sup>72</sup> In the autumn of the same year, after heavy political agitation in the western reaches of the steppe, the People's Commissariat of National Affairs announced the formation of a Kazakh cavalry regiment in Urda. By the end of September, the unit had already registered 600 cavalymen into two separate volunteer units.<sup>73</sup> In

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<sup>71</sup> Kuropatkin, 61, 65.

<sup>72</sup> Akademiia Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, *Grazhdanskaia voina v kazakhstane: letopis' sobytii* (Alma-Ata, 1974), 34.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 85. See also, Akademiia Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsiia i grazhdanskaia voina v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane* (Alma-Ata, 1963), 149.

early 1919, the Red Army's volunteer cavalry recorded an additional 1,000 registrants from areas of the Kazakh Steppe and more Kazakhs soon enlisted.<sup>74</sup>

The numbers of Kazakhs enlisting in Red Army cavalry units in the early aftermath of the 1917 Revolution must have been music to Lev Trotsky's ears. Trotsky in 1919 was arguing for the necessity of a Red Cavalry to secure Soviet power. Though World War I claimed the lives of millions of horses across the continent, cavalries were often bogged down by the arduous and slow-moving style of fighting that quickly entrenched Europe's fighting forces. He asserted, however, that Russia's Civil War was one of a "maneuverable character" which would require the "highest mobility." Unfortunately, the Red Army lacked the very type of fighting force that could provide the maneuverability and mobility he desired. In fact, Trotsky stated that this was the Red Army's "main trouble." According to Trotsky, the Red Army was at no shortage of machine gunners, artillery and infantryman due to the urban setting of the revolution but that the homeland of the Russian cavalry had for long been the southern steppe regions comprised of the Cossack troops who lived there. "The workers' revolution," he wrote "must create a powerful red cavalry...The Communist must become a cavalryman...To horse, proletariat!"<sup>75</sup>

Some of the first Kazakh cavalry units garnered significant praise for their efforts on the front lines of the civil war – particularly in the battle for the city of Ural'sk in 1919 – but in the aftermath of the fighting, it seems, old tropes regarding the Kazakhs came back to the fore.<sup>76</sup> At the sixth All-Kazakh Party Congress in 1927, a *Tovarishch* Karataev from the Kazakh Cavalry School in Kzyl-Orda addressed the gathered plenum regarding the construction, to that point, of the Red Army. He told the party constituents that the process had been moving slowly in some

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<sup>74</sup> Akademiia Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, *Grazhdanskaia voina*, 85, 142. For original newspaper report regarding the 1,000 volunteers, see "Golod v Kirgizskoi Stepi" *Pravda* no. 28 (7 February, 1919), 4.

<sup>75</sup> Lev Trotskii, *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsiia*, T.2: 1919-1920 gg., Kn. 1 (Moscow, 1924), 287-288.

<sup>76</sup> Akademiia Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, *Inostrannaia voennaia*, 659.



part due to the prevailing notions surrounding the formation of national Kazakh units. Though he admitted to the congress that the Kazakh people and the Kazakh nation were “backward” - an assertion he said no one would deny - he claimed that the people were not to blame, rather, their condition was the fault of the tsarist bureaucracy which held them in “civilized bondage” (*tsivilizovannaia kabala*). Like Kuropatkin a little over a decade earlier, he argued that the Kazakhs were “natural cavalymen” and only needed “polishing.” For proof, he urged the congress to simply look at the work going on within the cavalry school and they would see that “it is exactly the same as any European military unit.”<sup>77</sup>

Of course, as Soviet military officials were trying to solve manpower issues in the 1920s and addressing questions regarding the effectiveness of Kazakh cavalry troops, they continued to acquire horses from the Kazakh Steppe. In fact, one of Trotsky’s main points of discussion regarding the formation of a Red Cavalry involved the supplies that would be necessary once sufficient troops were organized. He wrote that the easiest task would be provisioning the men with arms and general riding equipment such as saddles. Finding enough horses, however, would be a much greater problem but one for which Trotsky had a familiar solution. Indeed, he wrote that the problem could “be solved quite successfully. In the east our armies are entering steppe regions where horses are plentiful. Every advance that we make on the southern front will again present us with extensive opportunities to purchase horses.”<sup>78</sup>

Trotsky wrote these words roughly a year after Vladimir Lenin had signed into Soviet law a decree on supplying the army with horses, a document not completely dissimilar from the imperial horse conscription decree from 1876 but with perhaps a few notable differences. For

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<sup>77</sup> *VI-ia Vsekazakhskii s’ezd sovetov, 1-I sessii KaTSIK 6-go sozyva. 28 marta-3 aprelia 1927 g.* (Kzyl-Orda, 1927), 16-17.

<sup>78</sup> Trotsky, 288.

one, the Soviet version contained no exemptions, although the conditions included in the imperial version certainly did not stop the military from requisitioning horses from the steppe during World War I. While this may have drawn the ire of some who had suffered unduly from the past conscriptions, the Soviet decree included an article intended to relieve some of that burden in future cases. In the article in question, Soviet officials wrote that when recruiting horses for the military, all local conditions would be accounted for and horse conscriptions would be carried out accordingly so as not to excessively disrupt the economy of the area. And while the recruiting commission had the authority to take horses suitable for the army but which were also necessary for farming, it would, according to the decree, replace them with horses unfit for the army but “capable of working the fields.”<sup>79</sup>

Though Lenin’s signature officially authorized horse conscription throughout Soviet controlled political space in December 1918, horses of the Kazakh Steppe were already being mobilized for the Red Army. In a report from May 1918, only months after the revolution, the Council of People’s Commissars in Aktobe, Turgai oblast reported the mobilization of horses in their district.<sup>80</sup> Shortly after, military commissioners in the region released a statement on the necessity of a strong army detachment in the oblast. Because of the historical presence of Cossacks in the region, they surmised that the Kazakh Steppe could serve as a “convenient base for the sheltering of all sorts of counter-revolutionary gangs” while also noting the strategic location of the region as well as the significant amount of raw materials which it provides. In maintaining a stronghold in the steppe, the commissioners argued that the army there should consist primarily of cavalry units. An estimate of the required size force put the number of

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<sup>79</sup> “Dekret soveta raboche-krest’ianskoi oborony o snabzhenii armii loshad’mi,” *Sbornik dekretov i postanovlenii Sovetskoi vlasti po narodnomu khoziaistvu* (25 oktiabria 1918 g. – 5 marta 1919 g.) Vyp. vtoroi (Moscow, 1920), 459-460.

<sup>80</sup> Akademiia Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, *Grazhdanskaia voina v Kazakhstane*, 35.

cavalrymen at 7,000 which would be able to “at any time” assist not only Orenburg but even Turkestan. In organizing such a force, the commissioners noted that Kazakhs would be the best suited units and, in speaking to the presumed number of horses in Turgai – even after the losses of World War I – that finding the requisite numbers of horses would not be a problem.<sup>81</sup>

Military horse conscriptions continued throughout the Kazakh Steppe for the duration of the civil war, but reports indicate that the work was slower, and perhaps more expensive than some had expected. In late July 1920, the head of the horse and camel reserve of the region, A. Lazov, noted several “deficiencies” in his unit’s stock and supplies in a report to headquarters. Since October 15 of the previous year, he wrote, he had only 357 horses and 10 camels despite an advance payment of 300,000 rubles having been made for purchases. Even with these additions, he reported having on hand approximately only 900 horses.<sup>82</sup> In a subsequent report a month later, Lazov noted that while he had been tasked with purchasing 5,000 horses for the reserve forces, horse procurement had been “extremely slow.” With the funds available to him, he wrote, he was only purchasing about 20 horses per week. Believing there to be more state funds for his work in this pursuit, he asked for a hefty loan amounting to 20 million rubles.<sup>83</sup> But in addition to the difficulties of simply acquiring sufficient horse stock, one official noted the inability of the reserve department to even adequately feed 5,000 horses given the difficulties of the time.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, the military carried on with its conscription efforts.

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<sup>81</sup> TsGARK, f. 16, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 8-9.

<sup>82</sup> TsGARK f. 59, op. 1, d. 197, ll. 97-99.

<sup>83</sup> TsGARK, f. 59, op. 1, d. 197, ll. 125-125ob.

<sup>84</sup> TsGARK, f. 59, op. 1, d. 197, l. 117. The lack of fodder for the military livestock was addressed in greater length in a 24 August 1920 report by a commission of military officials who declared that harvest situation had become “unsatisfactory” and that emergency measures were required to stock 30,000 *pudy* (approximately 1,083,300 pounds) of hay for the animals. This work, they argued, would require approximately 2500 horses to complete. See TsGARK, f. 59, op. 1, d. 197, l. 114.

The difficulties Soviet military authorities faced in conscripting horses throughout the civil war years and into the 1920s went beyond questions of fodder stocks and funding. All of the census work and information from the numerous expeditions into the Kazakh Steppe during the late imperial period had essentially been rendered void from the chaos of World War I, revolution, and the initial years of civil war. To add to the disorder, institutions from which important data could be compiled by central authorities were severely lacking in the steppe region. The Kazakh Commissariat of Agriculture, Shakir Diveev, reported in November 1921 that due to the heavy fighting in the steppe, specialists of many occupations were evacuated and put to work in other areas which left the Kazakh republic “greatly impoverished” in this regard. He wrote that what little staff he had available were often poorly trained and unable to carry out work at an “appropriate pace” leaving many issues unresolved.<sup>85</sup>

In response to the shortage of professionals in the steppe and the slow rate of horse acquisitions there, the R.S.F.S.R.’s Central Executive Committee assigned the Department of Horse Breeding with the task of organizing and dispatching an expedition “for the mass purchase of horses in Kirgiziia and in the border of Mongolia.”<sup>86</sup> The expedition was officially commissioned in early March 1921 and later that year, Diveev noted the work it was doing in the region. In a report to the All Russian Central Executive Committee, he highlighted the fact that the Kazakh republic was “most affected by the civil war, which demanded the large confiscation (*iz”iatiia*) of horses for the Red Army.” Not only did he note the significant decline of horse numbers there but also in “Central Russia, Turkestan and other federations.” To help increase the supply of horses he wrote were so necessary to the both the economy and military, he assured the

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<sup>85</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 3-3ob.

<sup>86</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 10, ll. 54-54ob.

committee that republic officials were working closely with the RSFSR Procurement Commission in this regard.<sup>87</sup>

The 1921 procurement expedition came on the heels of a massive monetary dedication by central authorities toward purchasing horses. In November 1920, the R.S.F.S.R.'s Council of People's Commissars released a credit amount of 4.5 billion rubles to the People's Commissariat of Military Affairs for the purchase of 70,000 horses.<sup>88</sup> In general, this spending signaled an increase in efforts on behalf of the central government to study the horse population of the entire Soviet political space. And just as had been the case over the past several decades, the Kazakh Steppe was a primary location of interest. In November 1924, on the basis of an earlier decision by the Council of People's Commissars of the, by that point, USSR, the Kazakh Military Commissariat ordered a mass "recounting" (*pereuchet*) of the republic's horses, carriages, and harnesses as well as a census of camels owned by the Russian population of the republic. "The essence of the recount," the military commissioner wrote, was "to inspect each horse, determine its suitability for service in the Army and issue the horse owners an accounting document / book / for each horse."<sup>89</sup> Much like the censuses and various expeditions of the imperial era, Soviet

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<sup>87</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 2-2ob.

<sup>88</sup> *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti* t. XI (Moscow, 1983), 426. Though large, this figure must be seen in the financial context of the time. Wartime inflation had hit Russia toward the end of the 1915 and was exacerbated by Soviet control of the economy a few years later. According to Richard Pipes, an early aim of the Communist Party was the complete abolition of money and while leaders believed the situation in Russia was not ready to implement such an economy, they did little to stem the tide of inflation. In fact, they deliberately "flood[ed] the country with as much paper money as the printing presses were able to turn out." For perspective, Pipes argues that Soviet economic inflation from 1918-1922 "nearly matched the much more familiar inflation that Weimar Germany would experience shortly afterward." See *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1990), 236, 685.

<sup>89</sup> TsGARK, f. 5, op. 20, d. 24, l. 166. Due to the wording of the document, it appears at that the recounting of horses and the census for camels were both intended for those animals belonging to the Russian population of the republic. But the fact that the order was for a "recounting" of horses and a "census" of camels leads me to believe that the camel census was intended only for the Russian population whereas the horse recount – likely of previous census data – was universal. If both projects were intended solely for those animals of the Russian population, then it was possibly due to prevailing

efforts to count, study, and analyze the horse population of the Kazakh Steppe was instrumental in its control of the region. The knowledge gleaned allowed authorities not only to extract the resources they desired but also begin to shape their production as the decade wore on; this specifically as it applied to the improvement of the Kirgiz breed, an issue which remained prevalent throughout the decade and into the 1930s.<sup>90</sup>

Plans for the implementation of a large-scale operation for the production of military horses in the Kazakh Republic came shortly after the conclusion of the horse recount which was to be completed by January 1925. It was during this time that authorities of the Department of Horse Breeding began to realize the full extent of the damage the previous decade had inflicted not only within the Kazakh Republic but throughout the USSR as a whole. Because of this, and given the needs of the Red Army, when the first five-year plan for the improvement of horse breeding in the USSR was drafted in 1925, authorities took into account the needs of the military. The horses of the region were to be used for the annual repair of the regular cavalry and institutions of military higher education as well as the repair of local cavalry units and the stocking of the mobilization reserves. Toward this end, the five-year plan called for a target number of 11,000 breeding stallions to be kept at various military sites and breeding factories throughout the republic. And while the restoration of horse breeding for agricultural purposes was paramount to Soviet and Kazakh authorities, the second most “urgent task” of the Kazakh Republic was to “experiment with military repair horse breeding” which presumably meant the improvement of the Kirgiz breed.<sup>91</sup>

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notions regarding Kirgiz horses, their suitability for military purposes, and a belief that the Russian population presumably owned horses of better quality

<sup>90</sup> This subject will be discussed in much greater depth in chapter 3.

<sup>91</sup> TsGARK f. 196, op. 1, d. 174, ll. 126-126ob.

The urgency the Soviet government felt about military preparedness undoubtedly stretched back to Russia's experiences in World War I, the immense toll that the fighting took on the entire continent, and the new reality of what a future war could look like. In midst of these wartime pressures, in fact, the Russian Academy of Sciences established the Commission for the Study of the Natural Productive Forces of Russia.<sup>92</sup> Organized in the spring of 1915 by an initial panel of 13 members led by natural scientist V.I. Vernadskii, the commission was intended to study the empire's vast natural resources. Primarily, the commission was concerned with the availability and accessibility of natural elements necessary for the production of modern military weapons: pyrite, sulfur, lead, saltpeter, etc. To that point, these resources had been imported from Germany and other western countries which was obviously less than ideal going forward given that Russian authorities foresaw the possibility of subsequent conflicts.<sup>93</sup> In addition to researching these types of resources, the commission tasked itself with the study of, amongst other subjects, the "forces associated with the animal world."<sup>94</sup> Vernadskii wrote of the great importance this scientific research could have on the war effort and the future of the empire. He specifically noted that the commission's efforts should be pushed by the "questions requiring a quick response in connection with the mobilization of industry and with tasks of war."<sup>95</sup> Given the massive number of horses needed for the military, his words were undoubtedly intended to address this aspect of war mobilization as well. By the end of the war, the commission had

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<sup>92</sup> Hereafter "KEPS."

<sup>93</sup> V.I. Vernadskii, *O blizhaishikh zadachakh po izucheniiu proizvoditel'nykh sil Rossii* (Petrograd, 1915), 1.

<sup>94</sup> Komissiiia po izucheniiu estestvennykh proizvoditel'nykh sil Rossii (Hereafter "KEPS"), *Protokol zasedaniia komissii po izucheniiu estestvennykh proizvoditel'nykh sil Rossii 2 maia 1915 g.* (Petrograd, 1915), 3-4.

<sup>95</sup> Vernadskii, *O blizhaishikh zadachakh*, 2-3.

carried out a number of expeditions but were ultimately limited in their scope by the conditions under which they were working.<sup>96</sup>

The 1917 Revolution and the fall of the empire was not the end of the KEPS. Actually, the Soviets, and specifically Lenin himself, may have ended up supporting the commission's work more than imperial era authorities even would have. While there can be no definitive proof of this, Lenin was a staunch advocate of scientific research and an avid statistician. In his work on the development of capitalism in Russia, he even lauded the military horse censuses of 1888 and 1891 and used them extensively to arrive at conclusions regarding the general economic conditions of the Russian peasantry.<sup>97</sup> Recognizing the usefulness such information could have in the management of a state, Lenin set out in early 1918 – barely two months after the revolution – to establish a strong scientific research foundation for the construction a socialist national economy. In January of that year, he created the “Department for the Mobilization of Sciences” under the direction of the People's Commissariat of Education and later, in March, contacted the Academy of Sciences to ask for the assistance of the KEPS. The president of the Academy of Sciences at the time, A.P. Karpinskii responded positively to the request and the commissariat of education allocated 780 thousand rubles toward the work of the KEPS and its expansion.<sup>98</sup>

The support of the Soviet government enabled the KEPS to carry out several new expeditions. Within a few years of the funding, the Academy of Sciences published six volumes

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<sup>96</sup> For a review of the commission's work during World War I, see Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, *Otchet o deiatel'nosti komissii po izuheniiu estestvennykh proizvoditel'nykh sil rossii sostoiaashchei pri imperatorskoi akademii nauk za 1916 god* (Petrograd, 1917); Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, *Otchet o deiatel'nosti komissii po izuheniiu estestvennykh proizvoditel'nykh sil rossii sostoiaashchei pri imperatorskoi akademii nauk za 1917 god* (Petrograd, 1918).

<sup>97</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* t.3 (Moscow, 1971), 133-140.

<sup>98</sup> Iu. Osnos, “Iz istorii sovetskoi nauki (1917-1920 gg.)” *Istoricheskii zhurnal* no. 5-6 (1943): 18-25.



of work compiled by the KEPS including an entire volume on the animal world in 1919.<sup>99</sup> Much like the various expeditions of the imperial period, members of the KEPS turned a good deal of their attention to the Kazakh Steppe. In a 1921 publication for the Academy of Sciences the zoologist and KEPS member E.F. Liskun wrote of the conditions in the south and southeast of Russia that “the presence in these localities of primitive horse breeds allow us to hope that they can literally become the center of all Europe and Asia in the future.”<sup>100</sup> However, when it came to the areas of the Caucasus, Siberia, and Central Asia – all areas where the horse populations had been some of the highest in the Russian Empire – Liskun wrote that a lack of accurate data made it difficult to draw a reliable picture.<sup>101</sup> In a way, this seems odd given the wealth of data collected by both the Russian military and Department of Horse Breeding leading up to World War I but also may speak to the ruinous situation into which those regions were thrown in only a few short years. At the very least, it meant that Soviet authorities would need to collect a wealth of information themselves.

The Academy of Sciences commissioned various data-gathering expeditions to the Kazakh Republic throughout the 1920s. A 1926 expedition by the Academy’s Committee for the Study of Union and Autonomous Republics resulted in publications on myriad aspects of Kazakh life including livestock breeding in general and horse breeding in particular.<sup>102</sup> The detachment of this committee assigned to study livestock breeding in the Kazakh Republic was headed by Iu. A. Filipchenko who himself was head of the KEPS and thus some of the works published make

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<sup>99</sup> G.P. Blok, *Obzor naucho-izdatel’skoi deiatel’nosti komissii po izucheniiu estestvennykh proizvoditelnykh sil rossii 1915–1920* (Petrograd, 1920), 57-61.

<sup>100</sup> E.F. Liskun, *Bogatstva rossii: zhivotnovodstvo* (Petrograd, 1921), 10.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>102</sup> For specific work on horses, see Akademiia Nauk SSSR, *Kazaki: Antropologicheskie ocherki, Materialy osobogo komiteta po issledovaniiu soiuznykh i avtonomnykh respublik*, vy. 11 (Leningrad, 1927), 95-99.

note of military issues. Famed geneticist and biologist, F.G. Dobrzhanskii, formed part the livestock detachment and published works in 1927 and 1928 on horse breeding throughout Kazakhstan.<sup>103</sup> In his second work, which was the product of his travels throughout Semipalatinsk oblast in eastern Kazakhstan, Dobrzhanskii noted the great importance that horse breeding had in the region. On this, he noted the numerous researchers before him who brought attention to Kazakh horse breeding and the possibility of using Kirgiz horses in the military. He agreed with the sentiment that the “inexhaustible reserve of horse material [could] be used for the military” but did warn that the region was exhibiting signs of decline in both “quantitative and qualitative terms,” a situation that would certainly need to be addressed.<sup>104</sup>

The findings and publications from these expeditions informed both the central government in Moscow and local officials in Kazakhstan of the issues facing the horse breeding industry in Kazakhstan and how those issues were affecting the Soviet Union’s supply of military horses. A lengthy 1929 report compiled by Kazakh officials outlined the problems facing livestock breeding in the republic and noted that solving these problems was paramount to, among other things, “supplying the Red Army with horses.”<sup>105</sup> When addressing specific regions of Kazakhstan, the officials responsible for drafting the report identified central Kazakhstan as an area where it would be advisable to develop collective breeding facilities where work on the “improvement” of the Kirgiz breed could be carried out for producing a military repair horse.<sup>106</sup> Responding to these findings, the officials designated areas throughout

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<sup>103</sup> See F.G. Dobrzhanskii, *K voprosu nasledovaniia mastei u kirgizskoi loshadi* (Leningrad, 1927); *Domashnie zhivotnye Semipalatinskoi oblasti* (Leningrad, 1928).

<sup>104</sup> Dobrzhanskii, *Domashnie zhivotnye*, 24.

<sup>105</sup> Arkhiv Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan (APRK) f. 141, op. 1, d. 2474, ll. 1ob-2.

<sup>106</sup> APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 2474, l. 15.

Kazakhstan for the improvement of the horse breeding in part “to create a high-class military repair horse.”<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

The Soviets continued to focus on restoring the horse-breeding industry of Kazakhstan well beyond the end of the 1920s and while building a strong economy was paramount during those years, authorities continued to realize the importance of the region as a strategic location for the supply of military horses. In fact, a newspaper article from 1947 even highlights the Stakhanovism of one particular Kazakh breeder, Kartabai Atchabarov, who worked at the collective farm “Chkalov.” Not only was he responsible for raising a reported 610 horses and helping increase the farm’s overall number of horses by twelve times, but fifty first-class horses from his herd were sent off to the army to serve in the Great Patriotic War.<sup>108</sup> Though horses continued to play a role in war throughout this period, military reliance on the animals was dwindling and so too was Kazakhstan’s position as a primary military horse-breeding site.

The information that both Imperial Russian and Soviet agencies gathered – most notably in the steppe – on Kazakhstan’s horses, the land on which they were being bred, and the prospects for further expansion, was central to their abilities to more fully incorporate the region into their empires and exert control over it, the horses, and the people. In this regard, we are able to see a significant degree of continuity between the two governments and the pre and post-war periods. Additionally, as will be demonstrated in chapter 3, census information and expedition reports equipped the tsarist and Soviet authorities with much more than simply the data

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<sup>107</sup> S.P. Pospelov, “Puty uluchsheniia zhivotnovodstva.” *Sovetskaia step’* 1 April, 1929: 3.

<sup>108</sup> K. Atchabarov, “Kak ia vyrastil bez otkhoda 610 zherebiat.” *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda* 29 August, 1947: 3. There is more discussion on Atchabarov’s successes in the conclusion of chapter 3.

necessary to extract the animals from the region – it provided them the capacity to alter and mold the existing horse-breeding methods, the horses themselves, and the Kazakhs in ways which they felt could best serve their own interests.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The State of Horses: Science, Culture, and ‘Correct’ Horse Breeding in the Steppe, 1880s – 1920s.<sup>1</sup>

The 1867 Paris International Exhibition was a grand affair. It was the second world’s fair hosted by France under Emperor Napoleon III, included over forty participating countries, and reportedly drew upwards of 15 million visitors. Though the primary site for the exhibition was the Palais du Champ-de-Mars, the 1867 world’s fair was the first to feature several large-scale pavilions constructed outside of the main exhibition hall. For its display, Russian representatives built a small village typical of those that dotted the empire’s countryside. Additionally, they erected a large stable housing twenty-four of the finest horses from all across the Russian Empire. The horses present included such breeds as a Finnish trotter, a Karabakh from the southern Caucasus, and a Bashkir from the Urals region which were all paraded around the fairgrounds daily. Napoleon reportedly marveled at the stock of fine horses on display and proclaimed that because of the Russians’ obvious and advanced breeding acumen coupled with the wide variety of breeds available to them throughout their empire, that it would be possible for Russia to satisfy almost any horse needs one might require.<sup>2</sup> Russia’s growing reputation as a highly regarded horse-breeding region continued to draw the attention of other continental powers in the aftermath of the world’s fair. Appearing in front of the Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1873, Mr. Henry Richard Phillips, a horse dealer from London who held the contract for supplying horses for the cavalry of the British army at the time, was asked about the export of horses to Russia. He responded by saying that during his time he had witnessed almost

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, I will be using the word “breeding” to describe a process that goes beyond simply the mating of horses but instead addresses both the methods of mating, rearing, and keeping the animals.

<sup>2</sup> I.K. Merder, *Istoricheskii ocherk russkogo konevodstva i konnozavodstva* (St. Petersburg, 1897), 70.

no export of the kind but rather “in years to come,” he informed the committee, “we shall have all to go to Russia for horses, for I believe that it is the only country in Europe that has good horses.”<sup>3</sup>

These vignettes highlight the successes of Russia’s concerted efforts throughout the first half of the nineteenth century to improve horse breeding throughout the empire - a region of the world that was, up to that point, not necessarily recognized for its mastery in the field. After the numerous losses suffered in the wake of Napoleon I’s invasion of Russia in 1812, the Imperial Russian government sponsored several successive endeavors aimed at not only increasing the number of state horse-breeding farms in the empire (which expanded from approximately 100 in the first half of the century to upwards of 900 by the end) but also improve the empire’s existing stock of horses through education and various sorts of competitions.<sup>4</sup> As the Russian state pushed deeper into the Kazakh Steppe and Central Asia, the Department of Horse Breeding and the military focused a great deal of attention on the regions’ extensive horse herds. The Kazakh Steppe in particular has long served as an ideal locale for breeding horses and the Kazakh people have historically excelled at this practice. But as the Russian and, later, Soviet states steadily extended their control over the region, they aimed to alter existing horse-breeding methods among the Kazakhs which they deemed to be unproductive and irrational. Paralleling both states’ sedentarization efforts, notions of science and culture merged to form the basis of a “correct” horse breeding process. This was done, each state argued, not only to utilize land and resources more efficiently, but also to “improve” the Kirgiz breed of horse – by far the most populous

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<sup>3</sup> *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on horses: together with the proceedings of the Committee, minutes of evidence, and appendix* (London, 1873), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Merder, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 70.

amongst the Kazakhs – in order to make it more suitable for the needs of agriculture, industry, and the military.

In this chapter, I argue that both Russian Imperial and Soviet agents went to great lengths to mold the horse-breeding industry of the Kazakh Steppe, and by extension the very animals themselves, to their own liking while largely ignoring the knowledge of local Kazakhs who had spent generations breeding horses in a method most conducive to the local conditions and their own needs. These efforts were thus an essential element of the colonization process and because of the Kazakh people's reverence for and relationship to their horses, a crucial aspect in the history of the Russian and Soviet presence in the region. In this argument, I am largely in agreement with the relatively few historians who have used horses as the central theme of their discourse on colonization. In her work on the subject, Carole Ferret notes that until 2009, “no study [had] been devoted to the Russian exploitation of Central Asian horses” but argues the importance of such a study by arguing that “the horse is both an instrument and an objective of colonial conquest.”<sup>5</sup> Historians Greg Bankoff and Sandra Swart have likewise promoted the importance of the horse in this regard in their edited volume on horses in colonial Southeast Asia and Southern Africa. In the ways that colonizers often attempted to transform existing horse breeds into animals that more closely reflected their own understandings and standards, the two quite convincingly argue that while “empires are usually seen as exclusively human endeavors...the horse was very much an imperial agent.”<sup>6</sup> Ferret acknowledges that this process was not always a unilateral one, however, and that the exchange of methods and techniques could and did take place in both directions – both from colonizer to colonized and the reverse.

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<sup>5</sup> Ferret, “Des chevaux pour l’empire,” 253.

<sup>6</sup> Greg Bankoff and Sandra Swart eds., *Breeds of Empire: The ‘Invention’ of the Horse in Southeast Asia and Southern Africa 1500-1950* (Copenhagen, 2007), 1.

While her study does demonstrate a certain degree of this multidirectional exchange, it is focused purely on the imperial period. By extending the temporal scope into the Soviet period, a much clearer picture emerges of exactly how these exchanges evolved and the how much influence the Kazakh method of horse-breeding ended up having throughout the colonization processes.

## **Mobility**

From the European Russian perspective, both during the Imperial and early Soviet periods, Kazakh mobility was one of the primary flaws of their breeding industry. To those engaged particularly in horse breeding, the Kazakh seasonal migrations were seen as inefficient, illogical, and at their core, wholly unnecessary. For the Kazakhs, however, the seasonal migrations with their animals were not simply habits persisting out of tradition or custom, but they were precise pastoral methods developed over centuries and fine-tuned to respond to the environment and conditions of the steppe region. Through his memoir, the Kazakh Mukhamet Shayakhmetov offers us a glimpse of these intricate endeavors, the ways in which mobile pastoralists cared for and tended their herds, as well as some of the reasoning behind their methods. Thus, Shayakhmetov provides a counterpoint to contemporary views from outsiders who often complained of the erratic and unwieldy nature of yearly migration patterns.

Though he was not born until 1922, a point by which many Kazakhs were forced to give up their pastoral livelihoods in the face of increased settlement and government efforts to limit their mobility, Shayakhmetov's family still engaged in seasonal migrations. In fact, Shayakhmetov wrote that the pattern of their year was always dictated by the needs of their animals. "In order to provide enough grazing for them," he wrote, "we were always on the move



between pastures, following routes established by our forefathers.”<sup>7</sup> These routes varied in distance depending on locality – the topography and natural conditions of the southern and western reaches of the steppe often required camps to travel further as opposed to eastern regions, where Shayakhmetov’s family lived and distances were shorter. There, the seasonal journeys typically totaled 150-200 kilometers, a far cry from those that could stretch to over 1,000 kilometers elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

Shayakhmetov detailed the moves between each seasonal encampment which provided their livestock access to spring (*köktau*), summer (*zhaylau*), autumn (*küzeu*), and winter (*qıstau*) pastures throughout the year.<sup>9</sup> As soon as the snow melted in the spring, around early to mid-March, the Kazakh herders would move from their winter camps to the spring pastures typically not too far away. There they would stay until sometime in June when they would drive their livestock north toward more abundant water sources and lush grasslands. The autumn pastures, like those used in the spring, were situated closer to their wintering grounds and were utilized from mid-August until first snowfall.<sup>10</sup> Families typically lived in yurts from spring through fall but had houses for greater protection during the winter months. These were “simple affairs made from stones, clay bricks, or logs.” Each move followed the seasons exactly, according to Shayakhmetov, and were “developed to a fine art” so that the process of packing, dismantling the yurt, and loading everything on their animals “could be managed in an hour and a half.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad under Stalin* (London, 2006) 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>9</sup> For clarification, the transliterated words here are not simply the Kazakh words for each season but the names of the seasonal encampments themselves. They appear quite frequently in contemporary publications in Russified form but for these Kazakh transliterations see Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond, Surrey, 2001), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 19-20; Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 5.

For mobile pastoralist Kazakhs, winter was by far the most precarious time of year in terms of the health of their livestock. Given the nature of their seasonal migrations, they typically traveled as light as possible and thus carried with them very limited stocks of reserve feed for their animals. What little they may have had was strictly set aside for “the possibility of a couple of horses or animals falling sick.”<sup>12</sup> The herders relied almost completely on the land providing for their livestock. A horse’s weight would therefore fluctuate throughout the year depending on the season and in cases of severe winters or dzhut – the rapid freezing, thaw, and refreezing of the ground which kills the grass – large numbers of livestock could be lost to starvation.<sup>13</sup>

From an outside perspective, this method of livestock management may seem cumbersome and inefficient, but the horse’s long and well-established role in the Kazakh mobile pastoralist lifestyle is a very deliberate response to the climatic conditions they faced. The anthropologist David W. Anthony notes that horses, unlike cattle or sheep, are quite adept at grazing throughout harsh winter months - like those of the Kazakh Steppe - and therefore easier to maintain. To graze on their own during the winter, cattle and sheep push through the snow with their noses to reach the grass underneath. In areas of heavy snow or ice, the grass may be unreachable using this method and the animals can starve. Horses, on the other hand, use their hooves to dig through the snow to reach the grasses buried beneath. Likewise, horses use their hooves to break through iced-over water sources, something cattle and sheep will not do on their own. “Horses,” Anthony writes, “are supremely well adapted to the cold grasslands where they evolved. People who lived in cold grasslands with domesticated cattle and sheep would soon

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

have seen the advantage in keeping horses for meat, just because horses did not need fodder or water.”<sup>14</sup>

Horses were not only easier to maintain than cattle and sheep but, used strategically, even enabled Kazakh herders to better care for their other animals throughout the winter months. Because horses would clear snow and ice with their hooves, herd drivers would release cattle and sheep into the winter pastures only after the horses had fed or drank in the area. In times of heavy snow or ice, the pasture grasses and water sources would be more easily accessible for the cattle and sheep. Shayakhmetov highlights this strategy in his memoir when discussing winter encampments. He noted that pens were constructed around the winter houses for the sheep, camel, and oxen “but not for the horses, who stayed in their pastures all day and night throughout the winter, clearing the snow with their hoofs to reach the grass beneath.” The other animals, Shayakhmetov wrote, would be let out during the day but returned to their pens at night.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Concept of “Cultured” Horse Breeding**

To Russian state agents concerned with horse breeding in the steppe, however, Kazakh breeding methods were not what they considered “cultured,” a term (*kul’turnoe konevodstvo*) which was used quite frequently throughout Russian-language publications but rarely defined. Though it is not terribly difficult to gather what “cultured horse breeding” entails through contextual reading, one must consult a late nineteenth-century Russian encyclopedia for one of the seemingly few direct and definitive explanations. The encyclopedia entry describes three separate types of horse breeding in ascending order of culture. The first, and “most primitive”

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<sup>14</sup> David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-age Riders from the Eurasian Steppe Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, 2010), 200.

<sup>15</sup> Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 6.

form involves the simple maintenance of horses in herds with no consideration given to horse selection or herd makeup. The second, assumedly less primitive, form of breeding is one consisting of herd maintenance but in which the herd is separated into smaller divisions (*kosiaki*). Each herd division consists of one stallion for a given number of mares but beyond stallion selection, little concern is given to animal pairing for breeding purposes in what is described as an “arbitrary” process. “In these two ways,” the publication reads “the horses of our steppes are bred.” Finally, “cultured horse breeding” is described and its definition worth recounting in its entirety below:

The third kind of equestrian plants is a cultured one, where the selection is made by the owner of the plant, in accordance with the desire to raise a known breed, sort or type of horses. Here pairing is carried out exclusively by a manual method, i.e., of a known breed, type and so on. The female is joined to the same stallion-producer, and the breeder is guided by scientific selection knowledge, wanting to improve the breed or form a new one.<sup>16</sup>

Though considered by contemporary observers as more primitive than the *kul'turnoe konevodstvo* practiced by professional horse breeders in, say, European Russia, the Kazakh method of herd maintenance was far less labor intensive than its counterpart. In an 1883 article published in the *Journal of Horse Breeding* (*Zhurnal Konnozavodstva*), the Kazakh Seitkhan Dzhantiurin described the typical separation of a large horse herd into smaller groups called *kosiaki*.<sup>17</sup> Each would consist of one stallion and the mares assigned to it – usually from 10 to 20

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<sup>16</sup> F.A. Brokgauz and I.A. Efron, *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* tom XV (St. Petersburg, 1895), 942.

<sup>17</sup> Dzhantiurin is an interesting case as he is one of the few or perhaps the only Kazakh to contribute to the *Journal of Horse Breeding* on the topic of Kazakh breeding and maintenance methods. His father was a sultan who was one of the first Kazakh representatives to receive bureaucratic awards from the Russian

with little consideration given to age. Writing in no uncertain terms, Dzhaniturin noted that the stallion was the “sole master” (*polnyi khoziain*) of his group and the mares under his watch would never wander off. Grazing throughout the vast pastures, the kosiaki remained separate from each other and never mixed. This method allowed a herder to more easily identify each horse within a particular kosiak and in the herd overall. “For this reason,” Dzhaniturin wrote, “the herd is easier to graze, collect, and check when necessary.”<sup>18</sup>

Dzhaniturin likewise discussed Kazakh methods of providing feed for their herds and described them in much the same way that Shayakhmetov would decades later. Noting Kazakhs’ reliance on the land, Dzhaniturin argued that in no other location was horse breeding so dependent upon natural conditions as in the Kazakh Steppe. Both authors wrote that Kazakhs stocked very little fodder for their animals but while one could presume from Shayakhmetov’s writing that this was because of their mobile lifestyle, i.e. that the herders would be more reluctant to carry extra supplies, Dzhaniturin noted that it was due to the insufficient hayfields of the region and the sheer size of the herds for which the herders would have to provide.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the natural conditions dictated the mobile pastoralist lifestyle.

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government and was even invited to St. Petersburg in 1849 where he was received by Tsar Nicholas I. Seitkhan Dzhaniturin was educated, spoke Russian, and, according to one Kazakh historian, “an active conductor of Russo-Kazakh rapprochement (*sbliizhenie*).” He was a member of the Orenburg branch of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society and renowned as an expert on Kazakh society. Because of this, he was approached specifically by the head of the Department of Horse Breeding to produce the article for the journal (which was actually quite lengthy). This exchange is quite representative of Ian Campbell’s argument regarding the production of knowledge on the steppe whereby he asserts that though Russia’s encounter with the steppe was “certainly characterized by unequal power relations, [it] was thus an exchange of knowledge, whereby Kazak and tsarist actors represented themselves and one another to one another.” On Dzhaniturin, see G.S. Sultangalieva, *Zapadnyi Kazakhstan v sisteme etnokul’turnykh kontaktov (XVIII-nachale XX vv.)* (Ufa, 2002), 120-122. See Ian Campbell, *Knowledge and the ends of Empire: Kazak Intermediaries and Russian Rule on the Steppe, 1731-1917* (Cornell, 2017), 5.

<sup>18</sup> S. Dzhaniturin, “Ocherki kirgizskogo konevodstva” *Zhurnal Konnozavodstva* no. 7-8 (1883), 19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

While the dangers of winter were such that Russian breeders expressed grave concern regarding issues of fodder storage and animal shelter, Kazakhs employed this method of breeding to great success, producing horses of reportedly great quality. Of the Kirgiz breed, Dzhantiurin wrote that the “frequent and prolonged” exercise from the seasonal migrations aided in proportional strength development and developed horses that were “unusually fast-moving, tireless and powerful” with remarkably strong legs and backs.<sup>20</sup> Further, Dzhantiurin argued that winter pasturing, despite presenting certain challenges and dangers, actually played an important role in accustoming the horses to it to “work and deprivation, strengthening and tempering it without harming its formation or growth.”<sup>21</sup> Not only were the horses of great quality, but because of the reliance on the land for fodder, they did not cost as much to raise as horses that required stabling and fodder reserves. A recent publication on the history of the breed notes that the mobile pastoralist methods of the Kazakhs allowed them to raise “a cheap, exceptionally adapted, unpretentious horse.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Imperial Expeditions and the “Improvement” of Breeding**

The vast number of horses in the steppe, combined with the steadily declining production of the Don region and elsewhere in European Russia, pushed imperial agents, particularly those within the Department of Horse Breeding and the military, to consider the steppe as a future hotbed of breeding activities within the empire. Beginning in the final decades of the nineteenth century and continuing through the end of the imperial period, both institutions and their representatives published myriad works on the subject of steppe horse-breeding and measures

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>22</sup> I. Nechaev et. al., *Kazakhskaiia loshad’: proshloe, nastoiashchee, budushchee* (Almaty, 2005), 6.

aimed toward its improvement. Dzhandiurin himself was commissioned by the Department of Horse Breeding sometime in the early 1880s for this very purpose as well as to provide suggestions for the prevention of livestock loss due to winter starvation.<sup>23</sup>

In 1884, the Department of Horse Breeding commissioned its chief consultant of veterinary practices, P. Medvedskii, to conduct an expedition into the steppe to study horse breeding amongst the Kazakhs in the oblasts of Turgai and Ural'sk.<sup>24</sup> Traveling with him on the expedition was a senior officer of the Department of Horse Breeding, Lieutenant-Colonel Feikhtner, and the famed agronomist, P.A. Kostychev. The goal of the expedition was intimately tied the future needs of the military not only due to of the vast number of horses in the steppe but also because of the reputation of the horses themselves. According to Medvedskii, the study of “precisely these steppe breeds” was to determine the extent to which they could be entered, in their current state, into the cavalry and, if they were unfit, the steps that could be taken to make them ready for service.<sup>25</sup>

Concern over improving the breed became particularly acute given the large numbers of migrants beginning to settle in the steppe – as well as the understanding that many more would be making their way into the region – and taking up land that could be or perhaps even was being used for horse pasture. Addressing this issue, Medvedskii argued that it was a necessity to start considering the improvement of the Kirgiz breed in the “interests of a more or less imminent (*blizkii*) future, in which the reduction in the size of the horse breeding of each individual owner

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<sup>23</sup> Dzhandiurin, “Ocherki kirgizskogo konevodstva,” 1.

<sup>24</sup> Beyond the Kazakhs in these two oblasts, the expedition was also tasked with studying horse breeding of the “Inner Kirgiz Horde” and the Astrakhan Kalmyks both of which resided to the west of Turgai and Ural'sk near the Caspian Sea. While they were to inspect the Kalmyk horse breeds in Astrakhan, their main priority was to obtain information on the Kirgiz horses. See P. Medvedskii, *Otchet po komandirovke v 1884 godu* (St. Petersburg, 1885), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Medvedskii, *Otchet po komandirovke*, 3-4.

caused by an increase in the population must be offset by raising the qualities of the animals.”

Although a rational response to the problems brought on by increased settlement, Medvedskii reported that the realities of breed improvement, though possible, would be hampered by numerous obstacles along the way.<sup>26</sup>

To begin, Medvedskii argued that the sheer cost of improving their horses would be met with skepticism by the Kazakhs who were enjoying the expanded market that settlement to the steppe had brought. He reported that settlers were purchasing “respectable” horses at between 70 and 90 rubles while good specimens were fetching at least 100 – prices deemed quite high given the fact that breeding the horses required no “special material and labor costs.” The improvement of the breed, Medvedskii asserted, “can only be achieved by means of material inputs and increased labor.” He found, however, that “the conditions of the Kirgiz economy are, in fact, that all reforms and improvements are extremely difficult to achieve here.”<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, it is rather reasonable to understand why a Kazakh herder, already reaping large profits from his business with settlers, would be unwilling to fix what wasn’t broken. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, the material and labor costs suggested by Medvedskii would involve greater aspects of sedentary living, something antithetical to the modes of living and breeding to which the Kazakhs breeders were accustomed. Beyond the economic considerations required to

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<sup>26</sup> The quote here was taken from the 1885 report. See Medvedskii, *Otchet po komandirovke*, 15. The difficulties reported by Medvedskii will be discussed further but a brief description of the expedition’s findings was also reported in a 1908 publication outlining the work of the Department of Horse Breeding. In it, P.N. Lobygin wrote that “the results of the study showed that the Kirgiz mare uterus is a seemingly comfortable and malleable material, from which, by means of expedient crossings, a horse suitable for regular cavalry can be created, with more or less considerable effort. These data led to the conviction of the need for the Chief Administration of the State Horse Breeding to provide possible assistance to the nomadic horse breeding of the southeastern edge of the empire, as horse breeding can be viewed as a source of obtaining a cheap horse for a cavalry grade needed by the state.” See P.N. Lobygin, *Ocherk deiatel’nosti glavnago upravleniia gosudarstvennago konnozavodstva za poslednie 25 let* (St. Petersburg, 1908), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Medvedskii, *Otchet po komandirovke*, 15.



improve horse breeding to a level deemed acceptable to Russian authorities, Medvedskii indicated that Kazakhs were wary of both the Russian governmental institutions and the intended “improvement” to their horses. Even if some were accepting of such outside influences in their businesses, he postulated, Kazakh herders were sure to understand the importance that the Russian state had placed on these endeavors and, believing compliance to be inimical to their best interests, were likely to become “less compliant and perhaps more restrained and uncooperative.”<sup>28</sup> As for the animals themselves, he wrote, Kazakhs were afraid that the methods used to “improve” their horses would strip the offspring of the hardiness and strength that enabled their very survival in the steppe conditions they lived.<sup>29</sup>

One of the cheapest and earliest methods devised on behalf of the Department of Horse Breeding to improve breeding practices amongst steppe Kazakhs was to allow horse breeders access to state-owned stallions for mating purposes. This was a rather simple process whereby stallions of good stock would be selected from state breeding farms and transported to so-called “mating stations” (*sluchnye punkty*) located in areas more accessible to Kazakhs and their herds. For a small fee, horse-breeders could bring their mares to these stations to mate with the state-owned stallions. From the perspective of the state, this was seen as an inexpensive method of improving the herd makeup in the steppe while at the same time demonstrating the advantages of selective breeding techniques to the Kazakhs in hopes of encouraging them to maintain such practices on their own. Reports on the actual effectiveness of these mating points are sparse, but evidence suggests that authorities either believed they were achieving some success with them or that they required such minimal effort that continuing their use was, at the very least, not detrimental. Beginning in 1874, the department allocated six to ten stallions annually to various

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

sites throughout Turgai oblast'.<sup>30</sup> Later, in 1892, it distributed forty of the same to permanent sites throughout Semipalatinsk hoping to not only encourage breeders there but also in neighboring Akmolinsk in whom they had, according to a department correspondent, begun to "awaken the desire to improve their horse breeding."<sup>31</sup> This practice did continue throughout the late Imperial period but as the practice expanded, some state breeders complained that the horses were often driven too far to the mating stations and inadequately supervised while there. According to one observer, the stallions were often returned to the stables in need of a great deal of veterinary care and rehabilitation before they could be used in such a manner again.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, there were accusations that once Kazakh breeders integrated their newly impregnated mares to their herds, they did little to properly care for them and thus lessened or completely negated the desired results of the entire ordeal.<sup>33</sup>

Improving the quality of horse breeding was not only a focus in the Steppe but throughout the empire as a whole. To track the successes of these early endeavors, the Department of Horse Breeding began holding exhibitions in which breeders could showcase their finest offspring. As early as 1876, the department instituted prizes in the way of medals for the best horses entering the military as cavalry or artillery repair horses. To incentivize a greater number of private breeders, potentially those Kazakhs in the Steppe who then had access to state-owned breeding stallions, the department even began to award honorary citizenship on top of

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<sup>30</sup> *Istoricheskoe obozrenie piatidesiatiletnei deiatel'nosti ministerstva gosudarstvennykh imushchestv, 1837-1887. IV Sel'skoe khoziaistvo. Konnozavodstvo* (St. Petersburg, 1888), 25.

<sup>31</sup> RGIA, f. 412, op. 4, d. 1884, l. 24. The quote, along with the same information regarding stallion distribution from the Orenburg factory to Semipalatinsk and Akmolinsk oblasts is also found in P.N. Lobygin, *Ocherk deiatel'nosti glavnogo upravleniia gosudarstvennogo konnozavodstva za poslednie 25 let, 1881-1906 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1914), 102.

<sup>32</sup> Dobrosmyslov, *Skotovodstvo v Turgaiskoi oblasti* (Orenburg, 1895), 166.

<sup>33</sup> S.E. Dmitriev, "Zemskaia sluchnaia koniushniia v gorode Vernom." *Turkestanskii Vedomosti* no. 188 (1907).

medals and certificates.<sup>34</sup> Indicative of the importance placed on Steppe horse breeding during this period, the department began holding exhibitions specifically for Kalmyk and Kirgiz breeds beginning in 1886. Not only were the exhibitions limited to those two breeds but also primarily to Kazaks and Kalmyks to encourage “the development and improvement of the horse breeding of nomadic peoples.”<sup>35</sup> First, second, and third place awards were handed out to the best stallions, mares, and year-old horses in the way of official medals, cash prizes, and certificates. Making evident that “cultured” horse breeding went beyond the identification and selection of the animals to be mated, subsequent, unspecified awards were given to the breeders and herders who “distinguished themselves in caring for animals.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite concerns that Kazakhs did not care for their horses in the same manner as the Russians, it was during this time, too, that the Department of Horse Breeding began allowing Kazakhs to take stallions on loan to place directly in their herds. Like mating stations, this practice was thought to be a low-cost, and perhaps much more direct, method of improving the herd stock throughout the steppe. Seemingly a popular practice – the Kustanai stable reported of the 231 of their 349 stallions on hand in 1913 were on loan to the local Cossacks and Kazakhs – it faced problems of its own, at least in the beginning. For one, many Kazakhs were still skeptical of the “improvements” Russian officials were pushing on them. This was particularly the case for wealthy Kazakhs who, it was reported, took one to two factory stallions not to improve their herd but “in order to please superiors.” Others took none at all.<sup>37</sup> Russian officials were likewise wary for reasons of their own. Concerned about the health and safety of their horses while kept

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<sup>34</sup> Lobygin, *Ocherk deiatel'nosti*, 102.

<sup>35</sup> GUGK – “Polozhenie dlia vystavok kalmytskikh i kirgizskikh loshadei, uchrezhdaemykh glavnym upravleniem gosudarstvennago konnozavodstva,” 1. From the publication, it appears that Ural Cossacks were also permitted to enter the exhibitions on special conditions. See “Polozhenie dlia vystavok,” 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> Dobrosmyslov, *Skotovodstvo v Turgiskoi oblasti*, 166-167.

in the herds, they began prioritizing distribution of mating stallions whenever possible to areas nearby Cossack villages or Russian settlements where they would be more safely wintered.<sup>38</sup>

## **A Russian Permanence**

Throughout the late nineteenth century, the Department of Horse Breeding sought to establish a more permanent foothold in the horse-breeding industry of the Kazakh Steppe. Both in a literal and figurative sense, this permanence came in the way of several large, state-owned factory stables (*konskie zavodi*) in the region and breeding strategies that represented antithesis of Kazakh mobile pastoral order. In response to Medvedskii's expedition to the steppe in 1884, the department constructed the Turgai stable near the city of Orsk in 1886, the Kustanai stable in 1888, and the Orenburg stable in 1890.<sup>39</sup> Each were quite large – the Kustanai stable, for example occupied some 37,570 desiatin or slightly over 100,000 acres – and held up to 500 stallions of predominantly the Kirgiz breed. These stallions were handpicked by authorities based upon their physical attributes and represented the best that the breed had to offer. Some of them were kept in the stables year-round and mated with similarly acceptable mares to produce the best possible offspring. The majority of the Kirgiz horses, however, were loaned out to the local population for mating purposes within their herds. As the stables were not responsible for

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<sup>38</sup> Reviakin, *Stepnoe Konevodstvo*, 97. Access to safe and secure wintering was the prominent concern here as wintering near a Cossack, or Russian settlement for that matter, would offer no benefits outside of covered shelter for the horses. Only a few years earlier, in an article cited above from the *Journal of Horse Breeding*, the author argued that even Cossacks of the region had “no idea of proper horse breeding.” They were a step ahead of their counterparts in the fact that they had stables but presumably had to be educated in much the same way as the Kazakhs. See “Kirgizskia loshad’ v stepnom general-gubernatorstva,” *Zhurnal Konnozavodstva* no. 6 (1889), 82-83.

<sup>39</sup> Ferret, “Des chevaux pour l’empire.”; Dobrosmyslov, *Skotovodstvo v Turgaiskoi oblasti*, 163; Iu.N. Barmintsev, *Evoliutsiia konskikh porod v Kazakhstane* (Alma-Ata, 1958), 118-119.

feeding or tending to the animals, this was considered a rather cheap and efficient method of strengthening the region's herds.<sup>40</sup>

Larger and more ambitious plans followed these initial attempts to educate the Kazakhs in the ways of “cultured” breeding. Namely, the Department of Horse Breeding wanted more stables for greater outreach in the steppe. In 1898, a proposal by V. Kudashev for a project to build at least one but ideally several large horse factories in the steppe appeared in the pages of the *Journal of Horse Breeding*. The factory stable would be equipped to accommodate 1500-2000 mares and 120-150 stallions of purely the Kirgiz breed. Much like the descriptions of “cultured” breeding stables above, the proposal was quite precise in its plans for the number of buildings, construction methods, etc. but also took into consideration the scarcity of materials in the steppe. To staff such an enterprise, the proposal called for thirty individuals which included two veterinarians and three veterinary assistants. Sixteen of the thirty employees were to be herdsmen of whom “all...or a significant majority of them, at least, should be chosen from amongst the local Kirghiz” – this, presumably, to teach them how to care for the horses according to the Russian standards but perhaps also because they were to be paid less.<sup>41</sup>

Though Kudashev's specific plans went unrealized, his proposal points to the momentum that the Department of Horse Breeding was gaining in the steppe. From the late nineteenth century until the end of the Imperial period, numerous new mating stations and three more factory stables were constructed in Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk, and Semirech'e.<sup>42</sup> New

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<sup>40</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Zemli dlia konevodstva i skotovodstva v Aziatskoi Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1913) 50-55. A report from the Russian Resettlement Administration from 1913 reported that the returning horses had to be kept in “quarantine” (*karantin*) once returned from the stud points. See *Zemli dlia konevodstva i skotovodstva v Aziatskoi Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1913), 55.

<sup>41</sup> V. Kudashev, “Proekt organizatsii konskogo zavoda na 1500-2000 matok i 120-150 zherebtsov chistoi kirgizskoi porodi v stepnom general-gubernatorstve.” *Zhurnal Konnozavodstva* no.5 (1898), 144-155.

<sup>42</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, 308.

installations similar to what Kudashev proposed were also established at the Orenburg and Kustanai factory stables in 1902. Each was intended to accommodate 500 Kirgiz stallions to ensure the mating stations and stables throughout the region could be properly equipped with the “best representatives of a purely Kirgiz breed.” To maintain the very best qualities of the horses and insure their health and well-being, the stallions of these nurseries were to be stabled and fed year round but also “brought up in a harsh environment” similar to what they would experience in a Kazakh breeder’s herd albeit in as controlled an environment as possible.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the primary task of producing and raising horses that exemplified all the best attributes of the Kirgiz breed, officials of the Department of Horse Breeding were intent on factory stables serving as educational resources for both Kazakhs as well as local settlers interested in “cultured” horse breeding. Officials and observers of the horse breeding industry pushed for the new factory stables to include schools much like many in European Russia had.<sup>44</sup> From the time of its opening, the Kustanai factory included a ministerial school, a meteorological and bacteriological station, as well as a staff of veterinarians and assistants.<sup>45</sup> In his article from 1898, Lieutenant-colonel Reviakin recommended that factory stables “should be exemplary schools and nurseries of necessary information through visual experiments where the Kirgiz could see, along with crossbreeding experiments, the work of the stables and through comparison

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<sup>43</sup> RGIA, f.412, op.11, d.469, l.78-78ob. These nurseries were similar to Kudashev’s proposal in that he envisioned stocking strictly Kirgiz horses but the similarities also include the method in which Kudashev envisioned the horses being raised. According to Iu.N. Barmintsev, author of several works on horse breeding, Kudashev formulated a way to increase the size of the Kirgiz horse through breeding “while maintaining the rest of its attributes.” Presumably, hand-selecting the best stallions for mating and raising them on supplied fodder would offer superior growth results compared to their counterparts in the herds. See Barmintsev, *Evoliutsiia konskikh porod*, 119.

<sup>44</sup> An 1888 publication detailing a 25 year history of the Department of Horse Breeding noted that schools for training the children of horse breeders were in all but one state-owned factory and that by 1857, some 769 students were enrolled in courses primarily focusing on breeding and veterinary practices. See *Istoricheskoe Obozrenie*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Zemlia dlia konevodstva*, 55.

exclude factors adversely affecting their practices.” Reviakin’s only caveat to these practices was that the veterinarians and staff should be careful not teach the Kazakh breeders too many intricate methods which they would be unlikely to duplicate in the uncontrolled environment of the open steppe.<sup>46</sup>

The Department of Horse Breeding’s desire to educate the local population – be it Kazakh, Cossack, or settler – and build a stronger veterinary presence in the steppe continued into the twentieth century and throughout the final years of the Imperial period. Understanding the important role a strong horse breeding industry would play in further colonization of the steppe, Russian state officials concerned with resettlement likewise discussed this necessity. During their expedition through the steppe in 1910, Minister of Agriculture Aleksandr Krivoshein and Prime Minister Petr Stolypin noted the lack of veterinarians along their route and declared the situation to be “one of the urgent needs of Siberian livestock breeding.” The primary obstacle to staffing the steppe with competent veterinarians was the lack of educational institutions and they considered the establishment of a veterinary institute in Omsk to be a pressing need toward this end.<sup>47</sup>

The Resettlement Administration, too, wrote of the importance of horse breeding education in 1916 but specifically had settlers in mind when pointing out the need for more cultured farms in the steppe. It argued that due to settlers’ more settled lifestyle compared to the Kazakhs, – the presence of more “comfortable accommodations” for their animals – the bulk of new factory stables should be constructed in areas nearby organized settlements. Here, the administration posited, the horse breeds could be improved and at the same time the stables

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<sup>46</sup> Reviakin, *Stepnoe konevodstvo Turgaiskoi oblasti*, 114.

<sup>47</sup> P.A. Stolypin and A.V. Krivoshein, *Zapiska o poezdke v sibir’ i povolzh’e v 1910 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 116.

could “serve as the best demonstrative farms and practical schools of cultural livestock breeding for the surrounding population.”<sup>48</sup>

At the same time it was fighting for more factory stables to be built around settlement sites, the Resettlement Administration was incentivizing large masses of the peasantry from European Russia to migrate to the steppe, a practice which led to the wide-scale destruction – both purposeful and inadvertent – of Kazakh wintering grounds. At least on its part, however, there existed some understanding that without safe and sufficient wintering grounds, a Kazakh breeder would surely be ruined. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, local resettlement authorities petitioned the administration for assistance funds to pay displaced Kazakhs.<sup>49</sup> In some instances, the amounts requested were quite high. In one example from 1909, authorities from Akmolinsk, Turgai, and Ural’sk petitioned for some 91,000 rubles but funds were often slow to be procured, however, if they were received at all. The authorities of the three oblasts, for example, reported receiving only 27,000 rubles.<sup>50</sup>

### **“An Anachronism of the State”**

The results are difficult to quantify but imperial authorities continued trying to change Kazakh breeding methods and by extension the Kazakh horses through the end of the imperial period. Sources from the period demonstrate, however, that the exhibitions sponsored by the Department of Horse Breeding and its attempts to improve the horse-breeding practices amongst the Kazakhs did little to change the opinions of educated Russians describing life and culture in the region. The historian and ethnographer A.I. Dobrosmyslov, who traveled extensively

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<sup>48</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Pereselenie i zemleustroistvo za uralom v 1915 g.* (Petrograd, 1916), 78.

<sup>49</sup> RGIA, f. 391 op. 3, d. 798, l. 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 3, d. 799, l. 39.



throughout the steppe as a member of the Orenburg Geographical Society, provided the following account of the Kazakhs in Turgai oblast:

First, the low level of development of the Kirghiz people with all the shortcomings of the Eastern peoples. In the character of the Kirghiz, like many other Eastern peoples, it is unpleasantly struck by the lack of directness, their obsequious attitude towards the higher; the Kirghiz is not capable of any direct, open refusal or resistance. He resists passively, hypocritically and silently. He almost agrees with everything and will not directly refuse anything. Whatever you say to him, he assents and expresses every minute his most respectful surprise and intense attention to your words with a constant *duris ... duris ...* (true ... true ...). For anything you say, he has one answer *zhaksy!* (OK!) uttered in the tone of undoubted readiness to immediately execute everything according to your desire. But between agreement and execution lies a very, very long distance. With stubbornness he continues to work in his own way and responds to all objections with the same: *zhaksy!* Consequently, a lack of understanding of their direct benefits, a lack of confidence in everything new and, in particular, Russian officials, has no small effect on the success of the horse-breeding business.<sup>51</sup>

In a study of horse breeding amongst the Kazakhs of Akmolinsk oblast which appeared in the *Journal of Horse Breeding* in 1887, S. Belinskii noted the general “carelessness” of the Kazakhs in providing their animals with fodder throughout the winter, their selection of horses for breeding, and their maintenance of the herds overall. He wrote of one particular interaction with a breeder, Meiram Dzhainaidarov from Atbasar uezd in northern Akmolinsk, during which he

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<sup>51</sup> A.I. Dobrosmyslov, *Skotovodstvo v Turgaiskoi oblasti*, 166.

had come to find out Dzhainaidarov had acquired a rather “beautiful” and “elegant” stallion from Turkestan.<sup>52</sup> Belinskii wrote that the horse was “quite fit even for an officer’s saddle in any Guards Cavalry regiment” but it had unfortunately caught some disease and due to the “carelessness of the Kirgiz and their ineptness to treat it,” the horse had to be castrated so as not to pass the disease on to any potential offspring.<sup>53</sup>

Others writing throughout the late Imperial period recorded similar thoughts to Dobrosmyslov and Belinskii. Arguments persisted that the perceived carelessness on the part of the Kazakhs as they pertained to breeding led to low quality offspring, stunted and stressed development caused by the early and consistent milking of mares for kumys, and that the sale of the best stallions for quick profit were dooming the industry deemed so vital not only to the steppe Kazakhs but to the Russian Empire as a whole.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the most succinct statement that speaks to the vast differences between Russian and Kazakh breeding methods and motives, and which highlights the assumed superiority of “cultured” breeding to that of the Kazakhs was penned not long before the 1917 Revolution. The Russian horse breeder V. Pianovskii wrote simply that the Kazakhs “care not for the quality but for the quantity of their horses.”<sup>55</sup>

Seemingly one of the few non-Kazakhs to write understandingly, if not in a slightly positive tone, about horse breeding in the steppe was Medvedskii from his excursion to the region in the early 1880s. In the closing remarks of his survey on Kazakh horse breeding,

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<sup>52</sup> Belinskii wrote that Turkestan Sarts came to fairs in Akmolinsk every year for trading purposes. He observed, however, that although they regularly brought horses to sell, the Kazakhs did not purchase them as they were “not inspired by the improvement of their horse breeding.” A group Belinskii referred to as “Turkestan Kirgiz” however, wintered in the same region as the Kazakhs of Atbasar and this is how breeders such as Meiram Dzhainaidarov and others acquired the animals. See S. Belinskii, “Konevodstvo kochevnikov kirgizov v Akmolinskoi oblasti,” *Zhurnal Konnozavodstva* no. 2 (1887), 76-77.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>54</sup> “Kirgizskia loshad’ v stepnom general-gubernatorstva,” *Zhurnal Konnozavodstva* no. 6 (1889), 82-84.

<sup>55</sup> RGIA, f.391, op.4, d.2131, l. 89.

Medvedskii posited thoughts that were in keeping with the trends of the time – that given the environmental conditions of the steppe, there was no reason that the horse-breeding industry there should not have progressed to what was considered by Russians a much higher state. In fact, he wrote that upon seeing the landscape, reviewing the herds, and speaking with the owners, he would argue that Kazakhs could not “be called breeders in our sense of the word.” He followed this up, however, by informing his readers that he refused this opinion. His error, he wrote, was essentially that he considered Russian breeding standards to be universal, a goal toward which even Kazakhs strove. “If a Kirghiz has a horse that is sturdy to the stern,” he wrote, “...and fattened well, and becomes thick in the summer, - then its goal is achieved; he does not need a better horse. With such ideas about a horse you do not immediately understand that the Kirghiz look at it mainly as an animal for meat and dairy.”<sup>56</sup>

Medvedskii was far from the norm, however, and at the root of Russian complaints against Kazakh breeding methods was their negative views of mobile pastoralism in general and the dangers they felt not stabling horses posed, particularly in the winter. And as Kazakh horse breeding could potentially serve as the main supply from which the Russian Imperial Cavalry would secure their mounts, there was skepticism that the local Kazakh horse breeders were up to the task of producing the quality of offspring required. In a military publication from 1907, one contributor argued vehemently against the idea of Kirgiz horses in the cavalry stating that the Kazakh people are “not yet settled and are far behind the present century.” He expressed perhaps a bit of optimism, however, and wrote that they could still achieve primitive culture but at that time the “semi-savage nomads [were] an anachronism of the state,” a term – “anachronism” –

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<sup>56</sup> Medvedskii, *Otchet po komandirovke*, 116-117.

which was also used a few years later by the Resettlement Administration in its description of what it perceived to be excessive land use by the Kazakh breeders.<sup>57</sup>

## **War, Revolution, and Early Soviet Power**

Adding to the destruction of the wintering sites by the Resettlement Administration, the horse breeding industry of the Kazakh Steppe – and of the entire Russian Empire – fell under the massive strains of war. Russia fought a disastrous campaign against Japan in 1904-05 and was dragged into World War I less than a decade later. In the same publication in which the Resettlement Administration pushed for the construction of factory stables near settlement sites, it even urged the further development of state-owned sites in Asiatic Russia in order to address war-time considerations.<sup>58</sup> For Kazakhs in the steppe, Russia's clashes in the east and those during the first years of World War I were a prelude to the tumultuous period that was to come. The region was rocked by an uprising in 1916 and thrown into the 1917 Revolution and subsequent Civil War which laid further waste to the population and livestock breeding industry. Once the Civil War had subsided, a famine struck the region in 1920 which was exacerbated by a particularly harsh winter that year.<sup>59</sup> By the time the dust settled, Kazakh herd sizes were less than one-third the size of their numbers from the pre-war period, stud farms of the regions were nearly completely destroyed, and agricultural production was not much better off.<sup>60</sup>

The momentum that the Department of Horse Breeding had gained through its work in the steppe over the preceding decades was virtually lost and the department itself was even

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<sup>57</sup> For the 1907 publication, see RGIA, f. 412, op. 11, d. 469, l. 235. On the Resettlement Administration description see Tsabel', *Ocherk raboty Turgaisko-Ural'skoi pereselencheskoi organizatsii*, 161.

<sup>58</sup> Pereselencheskoe Upravlenie, *Pereselenie i zemleustroistvo za uralom*, 79-80.

<sup>59</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, 1995), 158-160.

<sup>60</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 22, l. 30.

temporarily disbanded, creating more problems for the future of horse breeding throughout the steppe. On April 25, 1918, Vladimir Lenin signed an order abolishing the department and placing all employees, horse plants, mating stations, and nurseries under the jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture.<sup>61</sup> In the wake of this declaration, the department's main publication, *The Journal of Horse Breeding*, ceased to be printed as well. The activities of what remained of the Department of Horse Breeding after Lenin's decree are hard to accurately pin down given the chaos of the time. Within a few years, however, republic-specific horse breeding departments were organized throughout Soviet political space. The Kirgiz Department of Horse Breeding – referred to in official documents by the acronym KirGUKon (*Kirgizskoe Glavnoe Upravlenie Konnozavodstva*) – was established in 1921 and responsible for all the duties the former, empire-wide department was tasked with in the region, including the “mass improvement of horse breeding.”<sup>62</sup>

The Kirgiz Department of Horse Breeding faced a stiff challenge improving the industry within the new autonomous republic. A joint report of the Kirgiz Council of People's Commissars and the Commissariat of Agriculture from late 1921, just prior to the establishment of the KirGUKon, calculated an estimated cost of four trillion rubles to save livestock breeding in the republic.<sup>63</sup> While this number was all inclusive in terms of types of livestock breeding in need of repair, it nonetheless demonstrates the dire situation that the horse breeding industry faced. Upon its creation, the KirGUKon declared that the economic revival of agriculture throughout the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (R.S.F.S.R.) and particularly in the

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<sup>61</sup> Institut Istorii Akademii Nauk SSSR, *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti*, t.II (Mosow, 1959), 174.

<sup>62</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 6, l. 1.

<sup>63</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 1, d. 139a, l 15.

K.S.S.R.,<sup>64</sup> “where the basis of well-being [was] horse breeding, [would be] possible only in the presence of the productive power of the horse.”<sup>65</sup> Amongst other items of note, the department called for the immediate return of former state factory stables to the Kirgiz Department of Horse Breeding, greater support for private – cooperative, artel, and individual – horse breeding initiatives throughout the republic, the implementation of provincial and county inspection boards, and the encouragement and staffing of breeding specialists in the K.S.S.R.<sup>66</sup> Of primary importance to all of these tasks was the renovation of the Kustanai factory stable which by 1921 was the only factory stable in the entire R.S.F.S.R. containing a large number of horses fit for riding, i.e. cavalry mounts. In a telegram on the issue of improving this stable, officials wrote that “the death of this plant is tantamount to the final death of the cultured breeding of the K.S.S.R. and will for many years deprive the R.S.F.S.R. of the mass production of war horses.”<sup>67</sup>

The Kustanai stables suffered from war time shortages much the same as others throughout the R.S.F.S.R. but was subject to a greater deal of disruption due to its proximity to Civil War fighting. In the autumn of 1919, the stables were evacuated to Karkaralinsk, a town far to the east in Semipalatinsk oblast’, when Admiral Kolchak was forced to retreat. During the long evacuation and subsequent return, the horses were subjected to the harsh winter of the open steppe and limited food supplies. The losses from these treks alone constituted one-third of the stallions and over half of the working horses. Returning to empty feed stock reserves, which were raided after the retreat, the stables continued to suffer even more losses into the spring of

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<sup>64</sup> The Kirgiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was formed in 1920. The republic was renamed the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1925 and finally the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936. In the majority of documents and publications, it is simply identified by the acronym “K.S.S.R.” and for reasons of simplicity, I will use the acronym “K.S.S.R.” exclusively rather than note the difference between “Kirgiz” and “Kazakh” throughout the chapter.

<sup>65</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 22, l. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 22, l. 29.

1920. Upon inspection of the stables in 1921, officials discovered that of the 27 thoroughbred stallions on site, only 3-4 were of satisfactory quality for breeding use. Compared to the animals, the buildings were still in satisfactory condition only requiring routine maintenance which was hampered by a shortage of both workers and materials.<sup>68</sup>

Problems facing the horse-breeding industry throughout the entire republic abounded. A 1921 report to the head of the KirGUKon warned that “currently, the Breeding Department is in a very difficult condition...There is a complete lack of experienced staff, absolutely no money to purchase breeding studs, none to purchase special equestrian equipment necessary to the department, and finally, the department has at its disposal over the territory of the K.S.S.R. only two stud farms.”<sup>69</sup> To solve the crisis at hand, the report advised the issuance of several far-reaching decrees. The first, in keeping with a theme seen throughout the early years of Soviet power, was the militarization of the Department of Horse Breeding in an attempt to “shock” the industry into full production.<sup>70</sup> Following up on this, the report called for the mobilization of all “specialists and amateur horse breeders,” the transfer of all former private breeding estates to the KirGUKon, the strict prohibition of removing breeding stallions from the K.S.S.R. as well as calling for the immediate removal of the same from all military and civilian institutions for state

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<sup>68</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 6, l. 5-5ob.

<sup>69</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 23, l. 37.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. The “militarization” of horse breeding did not mean that it would be placed under the control of the military or in any way be associated with it, necessarily. Lewis Siegelbaum writes that “the militarization of labor involved two main processes: converting military units into labor armies, and ‘mobilizing’ industrial workers to carry out particular tasks under quasi-military supervision.” He notes that the desire to implement this tactic was inspired by the Red Army’s successes during the civil war coupled with the disintegration of the economy. See Lewis Siegelbaum, “Militarization of Labor”, <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1921-2/militarization-of-labor/> (Accessed August 3, 2018).

use. Without such quick and decisive action, the report ended, horse breeding in the K.S.S.R. will see its “final death, and then it will be too late to talk about salvation.”<sup>71</sup>

## **The Soviet Response**

Soviet authorities from Moscow to Kazakhstan worked at feverish pace throughout the 1920s devising methods to revive the horse-breeding industry of the steppe. Given the devastation of the region from war and revolution, it was almost as if the KirGUKon was starting from scratch and thus had the ability to craft anew an industry that would be reflective of its vision of a Soviet socialist future. The logistics of such a revival, however, were easier discussed than implemented. The breeding infrastructure that had been laid during the imperial period was decimated, industry staff from vets to caretakers had witnessed extreme rates of turnover, and beyond manpower concerns, the KirGUKon was suffering from a lack of building materials. If one were to be surveying the state of the industry in the steppe for the first time, as likely many Soviet officials were, then perhaps it is not such a surprise – as I had initially thought – that some Kazakh official noted in late 1921 the “little attention” that the imperial regime had paid to horse breeding in the region.<sup>72</sup> In light of all of this, Moscow’s efforts, which were typically carried out by the KirGUKon, to revive horse breeding in the Kazakh Steppe tend to highlight the general disarray which was prevalent throughout decade. Perhaps more importantly, its efforts demonstrate certain degrees of continuity with the imperial period in its perception of Kazakhs, their breeding methods, and the ways through which “progress” could be

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<sup>71</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 23, l. 37. All of this was quite similar to decrees already passed by Lenin and the Council of People’s Commissars of the R.S.F.S.R. in 1918/1920. See TsGARK f. 74, op. 7, d. 2, l. 30.

<sup>72</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 1, d. 64, l. 2.



realized. Oddly enough, a key revelation from all their work was that Kazakhs knew what they were doing all along.

As the process to restore the steppe horse population began in the early 1920s, some – if not most – Moscow officials and those outsiders appointed to positions within the KirGUKon still held many of the same beliefs about both the Kazakh breeders and their horses as did their predecessors. In the report of the Kustanai factory stable from 1921, N. Mosolov wrote that Kazakh breeding techniques were still “extremely primitive and completely inconsistent with the modest requirements for the cultivation of a cultured horse.” Despite this, he noted that the region’s breeding potential could serve an important role in supplying the entire Soviet Federative Republics for years to come. He also reported on the general features of the Kirgiz horse, discussing its typical upbringing in a herd, unsheltered, and moved from pasture to pasture throughout the year which produced in it a sturdiness and strength which served as its best attributes.<sup>73</sup>

One way for Russians to improve horse breeding in the Kazakh Steppe, they believed, was to showcase what they considered the superior results of selective, cultured breeding through the organization of exhibitions in much the same fashion as had been done in the years prior to the revolution. Already by 1921, an all-Russian meeting of horse breeders adopted resolutions aimed at organizing exhibitions as well as establishing a network of racetracks throughout the R.S.F.S.R. in order to develop a “love of the horse amongst the general population” and instill in the masses the “importance for the care and upbringing” of the animals.<sup>74</sup> A separate resolution by the KirGUKon a few years later expanded the aim of its local exhibitions by arguing that it was necessary to involve “agronomists, livestock experts and veterinarians, and in general

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<sup>73</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 6, ll. 5-5ob.

<sup>74</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 2, l. 17.

anyone who can be useful in restoring horse breeding.” In keeping with pre-war practices, the department encouraged these exhibitions to be organized, whenever possible, in the same locations and during the same times as those of the past.<sup>75</sup>

Most important to the government’s endeavors in the way of promoting and professionalizing horse breeding was education. In reports from the early 1920s on the state of agriculture and horse breeding in the republic, authorities of the Department of Agriculture – who were often directly involved in questions regarding the livestock – and those from the KirgGUKon expressed the importance of educating the general populace as it concerned the economic revival and viability of the region. Members of each department were particularly concerned with the lack of agricultural training in the republic, something mobile pastoral Kazakhs were notably unaccustomed to and arguably uninterested in. The concern on their part was such that they wrote that the agricultural situation was at a “hopeless impasse” without better educational programs. Through simple workshops with visual study guides and other teaching aids, they claimed, advances could provide a great number of benefits beyond agricultural work. Turning their attention to horse-breeding, they reported that to achieve success in improving the local situation, “the business of horse breeding should be in the hands of persons with special training and those who have acquired experience and skill.” Toward this end, they advocated for the organization of demonstration farms which should include educational work on proper breeding methods as well as the care and maintenance of young horses, schools for riders and herders, the publication of literature on breeding, and various other measures intended to encourage what they viewed as the best breeding practices.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 7, d. 17, l. 81.

<sup>76</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 3, d. 192, ll. 2-2ob; 7-7ob.

Beyond horse breeding, Moscow authorities believed that education was a key component to the success of the broader cultural revolution throughout the entire R.S.F.S.R. This is an argument that has been well documented by historians but deserves special attention in the case of Central Asia and the Kazakh Steppe. Martha Brill Olcott argues that authorities saw education not only as the “principal agent of socialization” as the Kazakhs were concerned, but also “as a way to provide the technological base necessary for the construction of socialism.”<sup>77</sup> In addition to the planned factory stable schools and other stationary learning centers, government sponsored organizations attempted to take education *to* the Kazakhs. An offshoot of the “Red Caravan” campaigns operating in the region from the beginning of the 1920s, “Red Yurts” began to appear sometime around 1924. Both campaigns focused on various aspects of education including literacy, health, agronomy, etc. and almost always offered veterinary services.<sup>78</sup> While the caravans were mobile, they primarily traveled to villages and kolkhozes where they would set up in local schools or cultural centers. The Red Yurts, on the other hand, traveled deep into the steppe, meeting mobile pastoral groups at their seasonal encampments. The necessity of such mobile education centers likely goes beyond the mobility of the Kazakhs and strikes at the distrust and skepticism prevalent amongst many who had long been encouraged by state authorities to alter their breeding methods in order to “improve” their horses.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 171.

<sup>78</sup> TsGARK f. 930, op. 1, d. 1a, l. 4. The focus on veterinary care and instruction certainly has its roots in the factory schools of the imperial period and thus is representative in the campaigns of a much longer trend regarding horse breeding in the steppe. Alun Thomas writes of the Red Yurts that they “manifested both the continuities and differences in education policy from before and after the Soviet takeover.” See Thomas, *Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin* (New York, 2018), 143-144.

<sup>79</sup> In contrast to the Kazakhs, Yuri Slezkine discusses Soviet educational measures among the “small peoples of the north” and claims that while seemingly identical in their missions, educational centers amongst mobile pastoral groups in Siberia were stationary. By being so, he wrote, workers of the so-called *kul'tbaza*, “would not have to chase the nomads all over the tundra; on the contrary, attracted by the useful services the station had to offer, the natives would come by themselves.” Writing about the Kazakhs, Elizabeth Bacon contends that “some nomads seldom [went] to the kolkhoz center; in recognition of this, Red Yurts – mobile centers for adult education – [were] sent out to visit the nomads.”

## **“Rational” Breeding and the 5-year Plan**

Authorities believed that educating the Kazakhs would enable them to see the error of their old ways and enlighten them as to more civilized and “rational” practices which would not only improve their animals but keep them safer as well. One of the main concerns that carried over from the Imperial period to the Soviet was the issue of winter livestock feeding. A 1922 report from the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture specifically addressed the question of meadow production (*lugovodstvo*) in connection to the mobile pastoralist practices of the Kazakhs. Drawing on the theme of Kazakh backwardness, the report described the mobile pastoralism as simply “nomads...[chasing] cattle at different times of the year in different corners of the Republic.”<sup>80</sup> The report underscored the fact that there often existed problems related to foraging on the steppe where sufficient pastures could be sparse. It specifically brought up the issue of dzhut and the massive losses it could inflict on the horse population. The People’s Commissariat of Agriculture stated that “in a socialist state, these losses are not permissible.” Therefore, to properly resolve “foraging issues,” the commissariat deemed it necessary to improve meadows, wherever possible, utilizing improved grass sowing methods, planting root crops or tubers, and cultivating plants with “highly developed vegetative organs.”<sup>81</sup>

The discussions of livestock fodder and the dangers of dzhut carried on well into the 1920s. In a 1927 letter to Department of Agriculture, local officials from Semirech’e wrote that the absence of forage harvests represented the “main evil in preserving and improving” the quality of livestock in the region. The officials wrote that the Kazakhs, in particular, bothered very little to harvest hay for the winter months and had no harvesting equipment which would

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See Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, 1994), 157; Bacon, *Central Asians Under Russian Rule: A Study in Culture Change* (Ithaca, 1966), 127.

<sup>80</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 3, d. 192, l. 1.

<sup>81</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 3, d. 192, l. 1.

allow them to quickly harvest large areas. To this end, they issued a decree requiring compulsory harvesting of fields which they anticipated would not only increase fodder reserves but increase the total area of natural hayfields and sown herbs.<sup>82</sup>

During this period, the Commissariat of Agriculture released a five-year plan for addressing the inadequacies of livestock breeding in the K.S.S.R. It, too, brought attention to the “scourge” of dzhut and, like the report blaming the tsarist regime for paying little attention to horse breeding in the steppe, the commissariat wrote that the tsarist government almost completely disregarded the disastrous effects that dzhut continuously posed to the Kazakh economy.<sup>83</sup> The main task of the commissariat, according to the outline of the five-year plan, would be to create fodder stocks which could completely solve the problem of dzhut, a plan seemingly quite similar to that proposed by S. Dzhantiurin after his expedition to the steppe in 1883. Thus, the five-year plan called for the “rationalization of pastoral nomadic and semi-nomadic farms” in the region.<sup>84</sup> This, according to the plan, would require the complete reorganization of cattle breeding amongst these types of farms which comprised the bulk of farms within the region and held the largest concentration of livestock. Most of this reorganization centered on fodder stocks and extending Kazakh breeders credit for the construction of winter stables in which to keep their animals for protection from snowstorms and

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<sup>82</sup> TsGARK f. 30, op. 1, d. 725, l. 28-28ob.

<sup>83</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 16, d. 10, l. 6.

<sup>84</sup> By all indications, “rationalization” became the new catch word used by the Soviets throughout the 1920s when describing the process of sedentarization and “cultured” breeding practices. Though “cultured” was still used from time to time, the term “rational” seems to appear in Soviet documents much more frequently than it does in those of the late Imperial period. In terms of derogatory labels, perhaps “irrational” sounded better than referring to mobile pastoralist Kazakhs as an “anachronism,” as was noted above, and even denotes a greater sense of reformability. See fn. 34 and fn. 35 above.

winter cold. Beyond this, the commissariat planned for the establishment of new mobile veterinary points and creating a cadre of workers directly from the Kazakh population.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the five-year plan taking effect in 1926/27, complaints remained about the lack of funding at the end of the decade.<sup>86</sup> While some quantitative growth was experienced since the beginning of the decade, only three state stud farms continued to operate in the republic. By 1930, a fourth stud farm was expected to open but the number of breeding stallions was set to only increase to 290, still a significantly lower number than the pre-war period. And while quantitative growths were encouraging, officials still grappled with the deficiencies in qualitative improvement due to the continued lack of effective veterinary care.<sup>87</sup>

### **Breeding in the Kazakh Way**

Amidst their attempts to educate the Kazakh populace in the ways of cultured horse breeding, instilling in them a desire to “improve” the quality of their stock through the cultured breeding methods practiced in European Russia, Soviet authorities in Moscow were racing against the clock to improve the quantitative horse stock of the Kazakh Steppe. So much of their success – most prominently in the areas of agriculture and the military – depended on horse power and they had precious little time to right the struggling industry. Their haste in this regard led to a few results that had long-lasting effects on the region and the people. The first was that policies implemented in the first half of the decade contributed to the growth of a dominant social class that often worked exclusively in horse-breeding. Though antithetical to their proposed social restructuring of the region and a feature of imperial colonialism they railed

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<sup>85</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 16, d. 10, l. 1-1ob.

<sup>86</sup> TsGARK f. 30, op. 1, d. 1120, l. 14-15.

<sup>87</sup> TsGARK f. 30, op. 1, d. 1040, l. 29-29ob.

against the hardest, they nonetheless believed their policies to be in the best interest of both the republic and the entire R.S.F.S.R. These policies are important as they in part led to the massive, state-sponsored violence toward the end of the decade but perhaps more so were the effects on actual breeding practices that took place throughout the 1920s. What can be seen here, though, is not necessarily the effects of Soviet policies on Kazakh breeding methods but actually the reverse. In their fight to restore horse-breeding in the region, Soviet authorities increasingly turned to the cheaper, less labor-intensive methods of the Kazakhs, a practice that lasted well beyond the decade.

The Soviet New Economic Policy was particularly important in pacifying an increasingly restless Kazakh population which had been thrown into years of chaos. One historian on this period has rightly argued that “in failing to direct the economic recovery in the steppe, Moscow would lose its chance to gain control of the Kazakh’s economy and, with it, Kazakh society.”<sup>88</sup> Because the Kazakh economy was largely dependent on horses, Soviet successes hinged on their well-being. This desperation was emphasized to a degree in a 1921 report from the head of the KirGUKon who quoted Lenin as stating at the eighth Soviet Congress that it was “necessary to find the benefits for the Republic from wherever it is possible.”<sup>89</sup> This concession, the official stated, gave rise “the possibility of allowing private horse-breeding” in the republic which would make the salvation (*spasenie*) of the industry from its ruin an easier task.<sup>90</sup> The situation was so dire, in fact, that the same official argued not long after that any activities that can improve

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<sup>88</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 161-162.

<sup>89</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 7, d. 22, l. 14. The head of KirGUKon notes that this quote was from Lenin “on concessions” (*o kontsessiakh*) but the quote does not seem to appear in the transcripts of the eighth Soviet Congress.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

horse-breeding of the republic “must immediately be carried out, even at the expense of others.”<sup>91</sup>

Given the overall Soviet mentality toward the disastrous economic and social effects of imperial period, this shift in strategy is indicative of the grave importance of the horse-breeding industry. During this period, one A.M. Kavraiskii wrote on horse-breeding in the Urals region, including the oblasts of Turgai and Akmolinsk. In his document, he denounced the tsarist government’s “shameless exploitation” of the region in support of a class of “capitalist horse breeders” through legal provisions that favored them and their enterprises.<sup>92</sup> Despite their hesitations, authorities began granting land, loans, and other assistance to applicants looking to breed horses. Some applications came from individuals looking to start cooperatives like a group of Ural Kazakhs who in 1925 petitioned for 120,000 rubles to begin breeding horses on communal land plots left empty after the eviction of the previous Cossack tenants. With the money and land access, they claimed, they could purchase 350 mares and 20 studs to begin breeding horses specifically for the Red Army. Though this amount was already ten times what authorities considered loaning to an individual breeder, the applicants suggested that if the loan could be increased, they could even expand their business more widely.<sup>93</sup>

Legitimate concern over these policies in Kazakhstan remained and ultimately look to have derailed the Kazakhs’ application for a loan and land access to breed horses for the military. The People’s Commissariat of Agriculture, which forwarded the application, detailed the importance that such ventures could lend to the revival of horse breeding but also noted that the release of loans in this way, the benefits granted, as well as the access to communal lands could

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<sup>91</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 22, l. 30.

<sup>92</sup> TsGARK, f. 74, op. 7, d. 24,, l. 1.

<sup>93</sup> TsGARK, f. 196, op. 7, d. 174, ll. 103-104. Also TsGARK, f. 962, op. 1, d. 149, ll. 13-14.



lead to the creation of large horse-breeding proprietors.<sup>94</sup> The Central Executive Committee in Moscow agreed with this assessment and deemed loans to horse-breeding associations such as that proposed by the group of Ural Kazakhs to be excessive.<sup>95</sup> Committee members did get behind one aspect of the application, however. The petitioners looked to breed horses in the way to which they were accustomed – herd breeding (*tabunnoe konevodstvo*). The People's Commissariat of Agriculture wrote in its report to the committee that the military department attached great importance to “the breeding of mounted horses for the Red Cavalry precisely using the herd method.”<sup>96</sup> To this point, committee members considered adopting this method toward the restoration of horse breeding in the region “expedient.”<sup>97</sup>

Breeding horses using Kazakh herd methods represents a complete about-face by many horse breeding officials, government authorities, and commenters who for years, stretching back to the imperial period, had considered such practices as backward and irrational. Shortly after this declaration, some localities had already begun working toward restoring herd breeding as was the case in the city of Troitsk which lies in between the Kazakh city of Kostanai and the Russian city of Cheliabinsk. In September 1925, at the fourth plenum of the district party committee, members resolved to restore the everyday practice of herd breeding in the region which in addition to replenishing the horse population for the needs of the cavalry, would put many Kazakhs back to work.<sup>98</sup> By the end of the decade, support for herd breeding was not only endorsed for its inexpensive and non-labor intensive methods but also for producing horses of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> TsGARK, f. 196, op. 7, d. 174, l. 126.

<sup>96</sup> TsGARK, f. 196, op. 7, d. 174, l. 103.

<sup>97</sup> TsGARK, f. 196, op. 7, d. 174, l. 126. The committee members even put this in writing in a resolution to the Kazakh State Planning Commission on August 29, 1925. See TsGARK f. 962, op. 1, d 149, l. 7.

<sup>98</sup> Rossiiskaia Kommunisticheskaia Partiia (bol'shevikov), *Rezoliutsii 4-go plenuma Troitskogo okruzhnogo komiteta R.K.P.(b), 10-13 sentiabria 1925 goda* (Troitsk, 1925), 13.

great quality. In a 1930 work on herd breeding in Temir in western Kazakhstan, one particular party member beamed about this method and its products in his introduction to the study. He wrote that in solving the problems of horse breeding in the steppe, “the role of Kazakh herd breeding should be distinguished (*vydaiushchiisia*), since the Kazakh horse is surprisingly well adapted to the harsh conditions of the region.” He went on to write in amazement that the herds required little to no extra fodder – even in the “harsh, snowy winter of 1927-28” – and that during the four year period of the study, only a few of the weakest horses succumbed to death. Further, he wrote that horses born under these conditions did not “differ from peers born from mares who spent the winter in a more cultured setting – in the stable, feeding on hay.” In an excerpt that speaks directly to Shayakhmetov’s account at the beginning of this chapter, he even wrote of the “interesting aspect” that was the formations of kosiaki whereby a “strong family is created” and the mares are “protected by a good stallion from all dangers.” All of this, he wrote, produced “unpretentious” Kazakh horses with amazing features and endurance and he praised the work’s author for producing such a monumental study which would undoubtedly change the theoretical and practical work of horse-breeding.<sup>99</sup>

## Conclusion

The practice of utilizing herd breeding methods throughout Kazakhstan persisted well beyond the 1920s when central authorities, in conjunction with the Kazakh Department of Agriculture and the KirGUKon, were scrambling for answers to restore the industry and the economy in the republic. In the midst of World War II, the Soviet Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom) passed a resolution “on measures to increase the number of horses and

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<sup>99</sup> K.A. Ovchinnikov, *Tabunnoe konevodstvo: rabota dela zhivotnovodstva* (Moscow, 1930), 3-4.

improve their care and maintenance in collective and state farms.” The resolution noted the successes that the farms had been achieving in increasing the number of horses throughout the Soviet Union but also called attention to many of the shortcomings that could not be tolerated, particularly at a time when the Soviet people were embroiled in battle with fascist Germany. Once again, they turned their attention to those republics with “areas of significant natural grassland to increase the stock of horses” and to the wide-scale implementation of herd breeding methods.<sup>100</sup> To achieve this goal, the commissars called for the construction of a stud farm in Kazakhstan specifically to be used for herd breeding and the improvement of the Kirgiz horse.<sup>101</sup> The central authorities instructed collective farms throughout Central Asia and adjacent autonomous republics to transfer part of their horse stock to designated herds being organized, they consolidated grazing lands for herd use, and even temporarily released some collective farms affected by the consolidations from their grain delivery quotas.<sup>102</sup>

Though both instances in which the Soviet government relied heavily on herd breeding methods were periods of quite significant distress – the terrible economic conditions of the early and mid-1920s and the years of World War II – the herd method was utilized for much more than simply producing lots of animals at lower cost than could be done in a cultured farm setting. Writing about herd breeding in Kazakhstan a few years after the 1943 resolution, A.V. Misharev argued that such methods allowed breeders produce “extremely hardy animals” which was “especially valuable for a military horse who in combat situations often has to work in very difficult conditions with insufficient feeding and maintenance.”<sup>103</sup> Kartabai Atchabarov, the

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<sup>100</sup> Otdel propagandy i agitatsii, *O merakh po uvelicheniiu pogolov'ia loshadei, uluchsheniiu za nimi ukhoda i sodержaniia v kolkhozakh i sovkhozakh* (Vologda, 1943), 14.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>103</sup> A.V. Misharev, *Tabunnoe sodержanie loshadei v kolkhozakh Kazakhskoi SSR* (Alma-Ata, 1945), 3-4.

Kazakh herder who was praised in 1947 for his Stakhanovite-like work ethic in raising 610 foals, shared these same sentiments. He wrote the following:

The horses in the herds of our collective farm are very good. Take a look at any time of the year – the mares are full; their coats smooth, glistening like satin. And why are our horses good? Because we managed to organize the herd content correctly. This is a very cheap method which does not require much labor and by which the horses develop better, become hardier, and prove their worth entirely.<sup>104</sup>

Atchabarov further claimed that in the ten years he spent raising the horses, he never once fed them using stocked fodder during the winter – a practice which had been roundly criticized by both Russian and early Soviet observers. He did go to certain lengths to protect his herds from dzhut but otherwise mated and raised the horses in typical Kazakh fashion and to the acclaim of state authorities. Entering into competition in observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, Atchbarov wrote, he and other herders throughout Kazakhstan undertook “increased obligations” to increase the number of horses on their farms and succeeded to the tune of six percent above plan. “Yes, what horses,” he wrote in ending, “just look at them!”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> K. Atchabarov, “Kak ia vyrastil bez otkhoda 610 zherebiat.” *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda* 29 August, 1947: 3.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ***Konokrady: Horse Thieves, Ethnicity, and Class.***

*The thief steals, and the world grieves.  
(vor voruet, a mir goriuet)*

- Russian Proverb<sup>1</sup>

A publication of the Russian Resettlement Administration from 1914, printed and distributed free of charge to settlers intending to make their way to the steppe oblasts of Turgai or Ural'sk, informed its readers about the great wealth which could be had in the region. It likewise alerted them to the various dangers which lurked on the outskirts of the empire. The administration made sure to spell out some of the most immediate warnings in the work's initial pages. It warned migrants to not consider resettling if they had not had land scouted and secured beforehand, not to resettle if they could not build a farm with sufficient numbers to work it, and, amongst other things, not to count on state benefits or the availability of loans at their destination.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, given their importance to a settler's survival on the Kazakh Steppe, one of the most urgent warnings regarded horses. Because most settlers were unlikely to make the entire journey with their draft animals, particularly horses, the animals were typically secured upon arrival to the general vicinity of the settler's destination. In the booklet, the administration reported that livestock could be purchased throughout the year, either through private, local transactions or at the large fairs taking place every spring and autumn. It warned buyers, however, that "when purchasing livestock, especially horses, it is necessary to require a

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<sup>1</sup> The full source of this proverb is from a Soviet era discussion of the 1916 uprisings in Central Asia. In the work, the author was discussing horse theft throughout the region and, directly preceding the proverb, wrote that "among the Kazakhs, there are a lot of horse thieves." S.D. Asfendiarov, *Natsional'no-osvoboditel'noe vosstanie 1916 goda v Kazakstane* (Moscow and Alma-Ata, 1936), 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Turgaisko-Ural'skii pereselencheskii raion, 1914 god.* (Moscow, 1913), 2.

stamped certificate from the aul elder or stanitsa ataman, that the horse is not stolen; otherwise it can be taken away.”<sup>3</sup>

This chapter sets out to analyze the epidemic of horse theft within the Kazakh Steppe throughout the period under investigation. The crime of horse theft was a particularly acute problem during the late imperial and early Soviet periods and the methods which both regimes employed in an effort to combat the issue highlight both states’ increased presence in the region as well as their limitations in enforcing rule of law on the edge of the empire. Regarding horse theft in rural Imperial Russia, historian Christine Worobec has rightly pointed out that the study of the phenomenon and “background of the thieves, the limitations of government response, and above all the reactions of peasants themselves reveal much about rural conditions and outlook, and particularly the balance between state and self-government.”<sup>4</sup> In the context of the Kazakh Steppe, these features intensified in the face of interethnic relations. Shifting the focus away from regions dominated by a Russian majority (as was the case in Worobec’s study) allows us to view the problem and the states’ responses to it from a very different angle. Specifically, clashes between the predominantly Slavic settlers and the indigenous Kazakh population in the steppe bring to light the role that ethnicity, culture, and social status all played in people’s perception of horse theft as well as their and the state’s attempts to combat the phenomenon. Further, by increasing the temporal scope of the study to include the Soviet period, we are able to see how each state responded to the problem and the pretexts under which they did so. Both of these variations add to our understanding of criminality, punishment, and state control in a borderland region.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>4</sup> Christine Worobec, “Horse Thieves and Peasant Justice in Post-Emancipation Imperial Russia,” *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 2 (Winter, 1987), 282.

I contend that during the late Russian Imperial period, horse theft in the steppe was depicted by many state actors in European Russia as a crime mainly inflicted upon Slavic peasant settlers by the predominantly mobile pastoralist Kazakhs which was often despite indications by local authorities arguing otherwise.<sup>5</sup> Research on the nineteenth century United States reveals similarities to this in that within the contested landscape of the country's western territories, the word "thief" was often applied selectively depending on if the alleged perpetrator was a state official, settler, or Native American.<sup>6</sup> Within the context of the Kazakh Steppe, this type of differentiation can be seen most visibly through Russian perceptions of *barimta* – a Kazakh method of dispute resolution involving the temporary seizure of livestock. According to Virginia Martin, *barimta* was an accepted and sanctioned practice under Kazakh customary law (*adat*) but criminalized by both the Russian Imperial and Soviet governments.<sup>7</sup> The misunderstanding of such an act and misrepresentation of its nuances created an atmosphere in which wild rumors spread like wildfire and settlers perpetually feared Kazakh horse thieves in light of the fact that they were just as likely, or perhaps more so, to be victimized by others.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Here, my argument aligns with that of Stephen P. Frank who argues that "The variance between the reality of criminal activity and how it was explained by non-peasants provides a particularly useful framework for situating and analyzing broader cultural conflicts, for these important differences - which might better be termed arguments - serve as a constant reminder that 'crime' in imperial Russia, like appeals to 'justice' or 'the law,' stood as a contested metaphor about social order." See Frank, *Crime, Cultural Conflict, and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856-1914*, (Berkeley, 1999), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew S. Lockett, "Honor Among Thieves: Horse Stealing, State-Building, and Culture in Lincoln County, Nebraska, 1860-1890," (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, 2014), 55.

<sup>7</sup> A lengthier discussion of *barimta* is included below. The most thorough study of the custom can be found in Virginia Martin's work on the Kazakh Steppe. See Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond, Surrey, 2001), 140.

<sup>8</sup> In an evocative passage describing the use of the word *barimta* – along with its Russian derivative, *baranta* – and the fear often associated with it, Virginia Martin writes that "It served as a way to represent the Kazakh nomads as uncivilized and savage. For example, *barimta* was committed by a *barantach* who sought to *barantavat*' in order to reap the *barantuiushchie* divided the spoils amongst themselves. Such vocabulary, when used by literati and local officials instead of other words for robbery or plunder, served to demonize the act." See Martin, *Law and Custom*, 145-146.

These factors, coupled with an inability of imperial and Soviet police to curb the rampant theft throughout the region served only to heighten interethnic tensions and lead to violent reprisals from victims of the act.

I argue further that Soviet authorities worked to change the narrative of horse theft in the second half of the 1920s from an interethnic to a specifically class-based battle. Levels of horse theft remained unchanged with the institution of Soviet rule in the steppe and the problem assumed a more destructive reputation given the effects that years of war and revolution had on the entire cattle breeding industry of the region. Rather than depict Kazakhs as horse thieves, Soviet officials instead turned their attention to the *bais*. These individuals, they argued, used their wealth and influence to keep Soviet power out of the Kazakh auls enabling them to continue exploiting the poorest elements of Kazakh society. The *bais*, they insisted, employed poor Kazakhs in their “armies” of thieves and wreaked havoc on the entire steppe, regardless of ethnicity. In propagating this narrative, Soviet authorities worked to create a united front against the *bais* and exert greater control throughout the region.

### **Horse Theft in the Steppe**

Within the predominantly rural society of late imperial Russia, horse theft left very few of the empire’s peasant majority untouched. As other historians have previously pointed out, horse thieves typically preyed upon victims who had the least access to legal recourse and have thus historically been in the unique position that the number of their potential victims only increases the farther they travel beyond the purview of state agents.<sup>9</sup> Myriad articles and reports published in the wake of the serf emancipation in 1861 and throughout the remainder of the

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<sup>9</sup> See Worobec, 282.



imperial period point toward horse theft as a steadily increasing phenomenon throughout the empire. An 1899 article opened with the warning that “of all the crimes committed within Russia, horse theft deserves attention due to the prevalence of this evil, the number of crimes committed, and the harm which it inflicts on the people.”<sup>10</sup> A table provided within illustrates just how much these crimes tended to increase the further one traveled from larger city centers. During the five year period from 1888-1893, only 270 people were tried for horse theft in the guberniias of Moscow but in Samara, far to the southeast and in Orenburg on the Ural River, the numbers jumped to 789 and 1,110 respectively.<sup>11</sup>

The numbers of thefts in the empire’s southeastern borderlands should hardly be surprising. As had previously been established, the area of the Kazakh Steppe was one of the most horse-rich regions not only within the empire but the entire world. And though one of the first imperial horse censuses conducted in 1882 did not contain statistics for the steppe, it does demonstrate that as one approached the region, horse numbers – both total heads and in numbers expressed per capita – increased dramatically. Geographically speaking, the closest that census takers got to the steppe in 1882 was the guberniias of Astrakhan, Samara, and Orenburg, an area the census identified as the “Southeastern Steppe.” Here they counted a total of 1,726,816 horses which accounted for 55 horses to every 100 inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> Within a greater region designated “Industrial Moscow” (*promyshlennaia Moskva*), comprised of Moscow, Tver, and Vladimir guberniias, census takers recorded 818,946 horses, a number less than half that of the southeastern steppe and which equated to only 17.3 horses per 100 inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> In general,

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<sup>10</sup> A. Levinstim, “Konokradstvo s Iuridicheskoi i Bytovoi Storony,” *Vestnik Prava* 29 (February 1899), 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49. This table also included in Worobec, p. 285.

<sup>12</sup> *Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosudarstvennogo Konnozavodstva, Konksaia Perepis’ 1882 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1884), xiii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

census takers concluded that industrial regions tended to contain under 24 horses per 100 inhabitants and 26 or more in agricultural regions. By these standards the southeastern steppe was quite remarkable, something authorities rightly attributed to the abundant pastures and low population density of the southeastern steppe.<sup>14</sup>

The imperial government carried out subsequent censuses with greater geographical reach over the next thirty years. The final military horse census of the imperial period, published in 1912, included general statistics on Siberia (55 horses per 100 inhabitants) and Central Asia (36 horses per 100 inhabitants). Extraordinary in comparison to areas of European Russia, these numbers, census workers noted, were recorded after a particularly severe dzhut during 1910-11 which significantly reduced livestock numbers throughout the two regions. Only a few years after the census, the Russian Resettlement Administration published an atlas of Asiatic Russia which included a cartogram (included below) of horse numbers from 1910, just prior to the dzhut. Numbers for the Kazakh Steppe oblasts of Ural'sk, Turgai, Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk, and Semirech'e are striking in comparison to the rest indicated on the map. Though numbers in Ural'sk were only 45 per 100 inhabitants, the numbers in the remaining oblasts were significantly higher – 96, 97, 123, and 83 horses per 100 inhabitants, respectively, as seen in figure 2 below.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>15</sup> “Kartogramma sostoiannia konevodstva v Aziatskoi Rossii v 1910 g.,” *Atlas Aziatskoi Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1914), no. 52.



Figure 2: “Kartogramma sostoianiia konevodstva v Aziatskoi Rossii v 1910 g.” (Map of Horse Breeding in Asiatic Russia in 1910).

Source: *Atlas Aziatskoi Rossii*

While the sheer numbers of horses in the Kazakh Steppe certainly provided potential for occurrences of theft, the steady flow of migrants to the region toward the end of the nineteenth century served to create greater opportunity for all parties involved. It is true that migrants making their way to the steppe did so primarily in the face of the dire economic situations they faced back home in European Russia. But while most settlers were hoping to find fertile land and prosperous new beginnings, others, as has been noted, were seeking new beginnings for very different reasons. Count K. K. Pahlen, on his trip through Central Asia from 1908-1909 provided the following description of the types of settlers he encountered:

I need hardly say that these pioneers were a mixed and motley lot, deriving from the most varied strata of European Russia, many of them with records best left uninvestigated...In metropolitan Russia, police surveillance at the time was pretty thorough; out here the authorities were less inquisitive, prepared to accept anyone as a citizen and to register him under any name he chose to adopt. What he was called at home was not their business, neither was his marital status. Under these conditions many a shattered life was forgotten for good and a new life built up under the benign protection of a rapidly growing province.<sup>16</sup>

The troubles reported by Pahlen were hardly new to the region. In his surveys of the Tobol'sk guberniia in the 1890s, the Russian statesman Andrei Stankevich recorded numerous accounts of troubles caused by the exact type of people Pahlen described. In the 1890s, Stankevich and his associates surveyed approximately 100 settlements in Tobol'sk, which lies adjacent to Akmolinsk oblast and comprises part of the steppe region where a large percentage of migrants settled. The work was partially meant to serve as a reference guide for migrants and provide data points from which resettlement officials could improve settlers' chances of success at their chosen destination. One piece of information that he and his team gathered from nearly every family was the composition and state of their animals. In one particular settlement of 54 households surveyed in 1893, community members reported to Stankevich's team that at the moment they had 145 horses but had lost several to illness and 20 had been stolen. They blamed the thefts "exclusively" on exiled settlers who they claimed wandered the main road during the

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<sup>16</sup> K.K. Pahlen, *Mission to Turkestan, Being the Memoirs of Count K.K. Pahlen, 1908-1909* (London, 1964), 178.

winter.<sup>17</sup> Accusations closely resembling these were not uncommon amongst the numerous settlements surveyed. Villagers often attributed the thefts to their proximity to larger roads, wandering settlers, and gypsies – sometimes described as exiled themselves.<sup>18</sup>

Travelers and passers-through were certainly an easy target to blame for horse thefts. Even many officials related crime to the trend of “irregular” (*samovol'nye*) migrants who had begun arriving to the steppe oblasts shortly after serf emancipation and whose presence only grew as the resettlement drive picked up steam.<sup>19</sup> In Akmolinsk oblast, one of the most popular destinations for peasant migrants, the regional governor alerted superiors to the problems he was facing in a 1908 report to the Steppe Governor-General's office. In the report, he expressed grave concerns regarding the numbers of peasants who continually arrived to the region and noted that the masses tended to include “several unruly elements who do not immediately settle down.” Rather, they are “always moving from county to county, often illegally seizing the land of the natives.”<sup>20</sup> He went on to write that the nature of crimes had in recent years began to change dramatically. In addition to simple theft and other minor crimes, those of a violent nature, including armed robbery and murders resulting from these transgressions, were on the rise.<sup>21</sup>

When confronting problems of criminality in general and horse theft in particular, outside observers were likely to have believed Kazakhs to be the primary perpetrators. The Kazakhs'

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<sup>17</sup> Andrei Stankevich, *Materialy dlia izucheniia byta pereselentsev tobol'skoi gubernii za 15 let, s kontsa 70-kh godov po 1893 g.*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1895), 34-35. My many thanks to Dr. Lewis Siegelbaum for bringing this treasure trove to my attention and lending me the notes that he had.

<sup>18</sup> Accounts such as these are typical in Stankevich's work but for some individual cases see Stankevich, *Materialy dlia izucheniia byta pereselentsev tobol'skoi gubernii*, 65, 87, 107, 111. In other cases, villagers simply reported that they did not know who stole the horses and in a few more, “old settlers” (*starozhili*) were suspected. See *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>19</sup> F.P. Romanov states that some of the first instances of irregular settlement to the steppe were migrants who arrived in Akmolinsk from Tobolsk and Perm in 1866 and rented land from Kazakhs. See Romanov, *Sibirskii torgovo-promyshlennyi i spravochnyi kalendar' na 1898 god* (Tomsk, 1898), 114.

<sup>20</sup> TsGARK f. 369, o. 1, d. 3926, l. 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

mobile pastoralist occupations, constant “wandering” from pasture to pasture, and lives spent in yurts had long instilled imagery of laziness, disorder, and lives prone to crime within the collective Russian imagination. Like the numerous descriptions littering pages of contemporary ethnographic profiles of the Kazakhs, one observer noted in a letter to the *Sibirskii Vedomosti* that Kazakh males, were especially lazy individuals who “lived exclusively off the labor of their women” and who enjoyed lives of carelessness spent riding their horses from yurt to yurt getting drunk off kumys.<sup>22</sup>

A writer to the newspaper *Turkestanskii Vedomosti* in 1886 railed for pages about Kazakh horse thieves, asserting that the practice was a “hereditary mania” (*nasledstvennaia mania*) among the Kazakhs who, beyond perpetrating the acts themselves, would pass their knowledge down to their sons, take them along on expeditions, and allow them to participate in the harmful acts. The writer, identified only as P. Aleksandrov, even drew on the Kazakhs’ culture and their reverence of horses to invoke further imagery of “mania” or some kind of natural uncontrollability regarding horse theft by noting that nothing of value attracted Kazakhs more so than a good horse. According to Aleksandrov, Kazakh thieves left no corner of the region unaffected, plying their harmful craft both in the open steppe as well as in areas of settlement. Perhaps most at risk, he warned, were Russians simply passing through en route to their final destinations. Due to the “natural carelessness” of the Russian travelers, they would reportedly often neglect to keep careful watch of their animals at night, proving easy targets for the Kazakhs. In one instance he claims to have personally witnessed, three families – all with children – fell victims to thieves and were forced to live horseless in the steppes with only the

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<sup>22</sup> Volkovich, “Akmolinskaia step” *Sibirskie Vedomosti* no. 130 (1909) in *Turkestanskii Sbornik* t. 505, 70-71.

carts in which they were traveling as shelter. “In all likelihood,” he lamented, “such cases are not uncommon.”<sup>23</sup>

Adding to Russian fears of the Kazakh horse thief was likely the latter’s relative anonymity. An 1883 article published in the *Journal of Horse Breeding* explained that within rural Russia, horse thieves were typically known to the entire village in which they lived. Unwritten rules of horse theft, it seems, dictated that the thieves – who, like the description of Kazakhs above, were specialists in their own right – would not steal horses from their fellow villagers and in turn would receive protection from inquisitive authorities. At the root of this protection was the likelihood of revenge tactics which typically included setting the informant’s house ablaze but, according to the author, some sympathy for the thief likely existed as well.<sup>24</sup> Though descriptions of the actual thefts bear out no remarkable differences – both more often than not operated under cover of darkness, typically in teams, etc. – the fact that Kazakhs did not live amongst the Russians and made frequent seasonal migrations, would have only contributed to settler paranoia of falling victim at any time and from any direction. Making the threat of the Kazakh thief even worse was the assumption that the stolen horse would, often simply for the

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<sup>23</sup> P. Aleksandrov, “Konokradstvo v srede Kirgiz,” *Turkestarskii Vedomosti* no. 10 (1886) in *Turkestarskii Sbornik* t. 459, 9-13. In keeping with the presumption that they were naturally inclined toward horse theft, V.V. Radlov wrote of Kazakhs that their love of horses was such that the mere sight of a beautiful horse could “often turn honest people into thieves.” In perhaps muddling the difference between *barimta* (discussed below) and outright theft, Radlov also wrote that horse theft was considered a “great feat” amongst the Kazakhs while the theft of other livestock served only to arouse scorn. See V.V. Radlov, *Iz Sibiri*, 275.

<sup>24</sup> *Zakonodatel’naia postanovka*, 7. In a later publication, A.A. Levinstim also noted the fear that villagers had of retribution at the hands of accused horse thieves if they cooperated with authorities. Like the 1883 article, arson, which Levinstim colloquially called the “red rooster” (*krasnyi petukh*), was the primary tool of revenge. See Levinstim, “Konokradstvo s iuridicheskoi i bytovoi storony,” *Vestnik Prava* no. 2 (1899), 28-82, 29.

sake of dodging authorities, be eaten leaving no evidence of the crime even if the thieves were tracked down and identified.<sup>25</sup>

Real or imagined, the threat of the Kazakh horse thief was ever-present, and Andrei Stankevich's surveys are littered with such accounts. Upon questioning a group of villagers in 1893, surveyors were told of the original makeup of the settlement but that due to a famine in 1890, many villagers left for Barnaul, much further to the east. While some villagers returned, they relayed to Stankevich that those who remained in Barnaul did so to specifically to avoid the horse thieves that so often struck. Reportedly, they said that despite the crop failures, their original settlement was quite comfortable and it would be possible to survive if not for the constant fear of the Kazakhs and exiled settlers who targeted their horses.<sup>26</sup> In an almost identical case, villagers recounted how horse theft had driven many of the local families to ruin, and how in desperation they paid local Kazakhs a bribe of 50 rubles to not steal from them. Unfortunately for the villagers, they found that beyond the Kazakhs (allegedly) stealing their horses, so too were exiles and even Cossacks from the neighboring district of Ishim – the same district from which those settlers who fled to Barnaul claimed the Kazakhs and exiles came.<sup>27</sup> Still in other villages, settled Kazakhs were blamed not because they themselves stole horses from their neighbors but because they had “relatives from the steppe” who perpetrated the crime presumably in some sort of collusion with their settled kin.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A letter writer from Orenburg in 1880 described how catching thieves in the region was altogether more difficult given the Kazakhs' propensity for stealing horses for the meat alone. In the above cited article from the *Turkestanskii Vedomosti*, the author leaned more toward Kazakhs eating horses only if the stolen property could not be sold and therefore as a means of covering their tracks. See “Konokradstvo i kirgizskaia politsiia,” *Orenburgskii Listok* no. 4 (1880), 3 and Levinstim, “Konokradstvo s iuridicheskoi i bytovoi storony,” 11.

<sup>26</sup> Stankevich, *Materialy dlia izucheniia byta pereselentsev tobol'skoi gubernii*, 215.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-230.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.



The frequent occurrences of theft took on a much more serious dimension in the steppe where the consequences of being left horseless often entered the territory of life and death and therefore created an atmosphere of greater animosity between Russians and Kazakhs. And despite the uncertainty of exactly who was responsible for stealing horses (the vast majority of victims never caught the perpetrators and thus could never positively identify them), the standoffs that so often occurred between settlers and Kazakhs were very real. As was the case of the settlers who fled to Barnaul, some deliberately stayed as far away from the ever-feared Kazakhs as possible and those who lived in close proximity to the steppe natives did so in relatively constant unease.<sup>29</sup> In these circumstances, settlers made efforts to maintain a certain level of vigilance in protecting their horses. Villagers from the settlement of Chistovskii expressed to Stankevich the necessity of arming themselves against Kazakh horse thieves while others in Ivanovskii reported the same.<sup>30</sup>

Contrary to the narrative that Kazakhs were the primary perpetrators of the crime, however, a county chief of Atabasar, located in northern Akmolinsk oblast, informed his superiors that with the influx of migrants to the region, livestock thefts had steadily increased and that inquiries into the complaints revealed that the incidences were “committed not only by Kirgiz [i.e. Kazakhs], but also by the settlers who sell the stolen livestock to the Kirgiz for a cheap price.”<sup>31</sup> Like those settlers above who understood that Kazakhs were not the only individuals to blame for the plague of horse theft – but even Cossacks, exiles, and old-settlers (*starozhili*) – members of the settlement Matasy expressed concern regarding their “neighbors.” Apparently, 130 settlers of a particular group were registered to live in Matasy but only 20 did

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 279, 432.

<sup>31</sup> TsGARK, f. 369, op. 1, d. 3926, l. 86.

so. The villagers reported that horse theft was a problem inflicted upon the settlement “not so much [by] the Kazakhs, but by the settlers.”<sup>32</sup>

These cases quite rightly demonstrate that horse theft was not strictly a crime perpetrated solely by Kazakhs. Indeed, in his work from 1894, A.I. Dobrosmyslov described the particularly violent strain of these crimes plaguing Turgai oblast. Often resulting in deathly injuries and outright murder, horse theft, he wrote, had become the “scourge” of the region “from which Kirgiz and the residents of towns and villages” and even “neighboring Cossack and peasant populations in Orenburg suffer equally.”<sup>33</sup> Beyond creating animosity on behalf of settlers toward the Kazakhs, these situations had created an air of hostility that went both ways. In a correspondence from 1908, the district chief of Petropavlovsk, some 350 versts north of Atbasar, urged the oblast governor to consider strengthening the police forces in the region as an absolute necessity in curbing the growing tension between Russians and Kazakhs. “The colonization of the Kirgiz steppe” he wrote, “has not improved, but worsened Kirgiz attitudes toward the Russian population, and if earlier these relations were only suspicious, then at this time they can be unfriendly (*nedobrozhelatel’nyi*).”<sup>34</sup>

Even in light of the numerous reports suggesting that horse theft was a much more complex issue in the steppe, the image of the Kazakh horse thief remained a pervasive stereotype spread by both settlers and officials alike. A Soviet authority even brought this to light in the late

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<sup>32</sup> Stankevich, *Materialy dlia izucheniia byta pereselentsev tobol’skoi gubernii*, 285. Rather than, or perhaps in addition to, remaining armed against horse thieves, the villagers of Matasy employed a crafty defense which will be discussed later in the chapter. They hired local Kazakhs as herdsman in the belief that their relatives would be less likely to steal from them and that in addition they knew the other horse thieves in the area and could thus protect the herds against them as well. In other areas, however, throughout the imperial period and into the Soviet, this practice had been reported by some as a scheme by Kazakhs for the exact opposite purposes.

<sup>33</sup> A.I. Dobrosmyslov, *Konevodstvo i ego znachenie dlia kirgizskogo naseleniia Turgaiskoi oblasti* (St. Petersburg, 1894), 54.

<sup>34</sup> TsGARK, f. 369, op. 1, d. 3926, l. 79 ob.

1920s when he noted that the resettlement process of the late imperial period incited hatred amongst the indigenous population (a common assessment) and that Russian peasant migrants were specifically warned to beware the Kazakh who was a “horse thief, a robber.”<sup>35</sup> Neither did this image originate during the resettlement drive of the late nineteenth century. An 1854 statute resolved that Kazakhs who were not registered with the state as peasants, and thus living a correspondingly sedentary existence, were subjected to removal from settlement areas to “outer districts.” If any form of business were to require their presence within a city or settlement site, Kazakhs were required to obtain tickets, one for each person, from the local authorities permitting their presence for a specified amount of time. Once within city or settlement limits, however, Kazakhs were strictly forbidden to erect yurts as they could, in the view of imperial authorities, “serve as a convenient den for horse thieves.”<sup>36</sup>

The selective understanding of Kazakhs as thieves, both by imperial authorities and settlers, and their subsequent criminalization likewise stemmed from a Kazakh cultural practice called *barımta*. Referred to as *baranta* by Russians, the act involved the driving away and confiscation of another Kazakh’s livestock in the event of a dispute. Sanctioned under the Kazakh customary law known as *adat*, the offended party would hold the animals until such a time that the dispute could be resolved. Russian authorities, however, understood these acts as more proof of Kazakh backwardness and nomadic savagery. Though contemporary Russian discourse displays grave amounts of confusion and convolution regarding *barımta*, authorities

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<sup>35</sup> TsGARK f. 30, op. 1, d. 850, l. 51.

<sup>36</sup> Russia, *Svod zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* t.14 “Ustav o preduprezhdenii i presechenii prestuplenii” (St. Petersburg, 1876), 61.

outlawed the practice and demonized the act which served to further the portrayal of Kazakhs as being particularly dangerous enemies of the poor and honest Russian peasantry in the steppe.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Department of Horse Breeding**

Beyond the individuals immediately affected by the theft of their horses, the imperial government had begun to consider the problem a serious threat toward its own goals of improving breeding throughout the empire in general and the within the steppe specifically. The government's issue taken with horse theft resided in its belief that it was keeping many peasants – and even Kirgiz – from improving their breeding practices or expanding their herds in fear of falling victim to thieves and having their best animals taken. Petr Dobrotvorskii wrote of the problem in several letters published in the *Journal of Horse Breeding* throughout the 1880s. Regarding theft in Ufa province, an area bordering Ural'sk and Turgai oblasts to the north, Dobrotvorskii lamented that thieves had begun targeting expensive horses which was discouraging peasants from attempting to improve their herds and thus was undermining the primary goals of the state horse industry.<sup>38</sup> Writing to the Minister of Finance in 1899, a representative of the Department of Horse Breeding echoed these concerns and reported that horse theft had risen to such a level that it often “paralyz[ed] the activities of the Department of Horse Breeding, which [was] striving to bring such an important sector of the national economy to a proper level.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond, Surrey, 2001), 140-148.

<sup>38</sup> P.I. Dobrotvorskii, *Konokradstvo i konokradskii promysel (pis'mo iz Ufimskoi gubernii)* (St. Petersburg, 1886).

<sup>39</sup> RGIA, f. 573, op. 5, d. 6384, l. 5.

If the government was concerned about the general problem of theft throughout the empire because of its detrimental effect on breeding improvement, then the steppe represented a “ground zero” of sorts in that it was progressively being understood as the future breeding hotbed of the empire. And in dealing with the issue there, government agents demonstrated concern for at least a portion of the Kazakh population whom the Department of Horse Breeding was attempting to empower through the provision of resources toward better breeding practices. In his publication referenced above, A.I. Dobrosmyslov – rather than identify Russian peasants, who, rumors alleged, were the most frequent victims of horse theft – wrote that the increasing instances of the crime had created an unwillingness amongst the Kazakhs to produce good breeding horses. However, he still seems to have identified Kazakhs as the primary perpetrators when he noted that the Kazakh people’s court was flooded yearly with “hundreds of thousands of new cases.” He continued by arguing that the only way to reduce these crimes, in his estimation, was to transfer the cases of theft from the Kazakh courts and have them tried in Russian courts “on the grounds set out in the general laws of the Empire” and even advocated that Turgai oblast institute a law exiling Kazakh horse thieves, without a public judgment, to Siberia.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond exile, officials within The Department of Horse Breeding proposed several undertakings which they believed would “paralyze” horse theft throughout the empire. One particular plan forwarded by the department to the Minister of Finance involved instituting the use of government certificates assigned to a horse’s owner and stamped verifying the individual as such. Referred to by authorities as the horse “passport system,” this method would, it was hoped, allow officials to quickly ascertain a horse’s identity and belonging in much the same

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<sup>40</sup> The law regarding exile to Siberia was apparently one already in place in Astrakhan, a region bordering the Caspian Sea on its northwestern shore. Dobrosmyslov noted that the governor of Turgai had petitioned in 1893 for the law to be extended to Turgai. See A.I. Dobrosmyslov, *Konevodstvo i ego znachenie dlia naseleniia Turgaiskoi oblasti* (Orenburg, 1894), 54.

way they could an imperial subject. In most cases, each horse was to be issued a certificate once it reached one year of age or, in the case of breeders, a certificate from birth. Each certificate was to include such information as date of birth, sex, height, and any identifying features and the owner would be expected to carry the certificate at all times in the presence of the horse. If traveling, owners would be required to present their horse certificates to inn owners before the horse could be stabled and if being transported by rail or steamship, a certificate would be required prior to boarding. When selling the animal, the certificate was to be signed and recertified by a notary or police officer – who was to be present at all auctions, fairs, bazaars, etc. for the purpose of such duties. Beyond this, each county treasury would be required to keep log books containing information on each certificate issued as well as the general information regarding the horse and its owner.<sup>41</sup>

The passport system for horses was instituted sporadically throughout the empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, in general, was not received well by individuals who continued to be victimized by horse theft. A rather intriguing document regarding the shortcomings of the passport system and suggestions for a more effective approach to combating horse theft was submitted to numerous government agencies by one A.A. Merts in 1913. Merts was from Odessa and though far-removed from the Kazakh Steppe, his report addresses some of the very issues plaguing that region of the empire. He argued that the passport system accomplished nothing in the way of preventing horse theft in his area because thieves were rarely caught. For long, he argued, people had been convinced that horses were stolen by a fellow

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<sup>41</sup> RGIA, f. 573, op. 5, d. 6384, ll. 5-11. Two such projects were forwarded to the Minister of Finance and both quite similar except for minor details. Assumedly, they were forwarded to the Minister of Finance because his office would have the most to gain from the implementation of either project given that the certificates had to be purchased, though for a relatively small fee of 20 kopeks or re-registered during a sale for 10 kopeks.

villager, a person everyone already knew to be a horse thief, rather than by strangers – “by *your* horse thief, so to speak” (*svoi konokrad*), Mertts wrote. He argued that with the increased movement of people around the empire, vast networks were established whereby one villager could steal a horse and immediately transfer it to a “foreign thief” who would take the stolen property off to a distant province never to be caught.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Imperial Police Response**

Throughout much of rural Russia, both the people’s and government’s concern regarding horse theft was seemingly inversely proportional to the level of effective force being utilized to combat the matter. This was especially problematic in the empire’s steppe borderlands where most within the government circles of St. Petersburg held the conviction that Russian law and order would pacify an otherwise disorderly region. Reports from the steppe serve to highlight the insufficient nature of policing as well as the ineffectiveness of the local Russian judicial system in bringing horse thieves to justice and, as one petty officer put it in 1903, “eradicat[ing] one the of the greatest evils of the Russian land.”<sup>43</sup>

The difficulty faced by the government only increased with the numbers of migrants heading eastward into the steppe. By 1908, the year in which migration reached its peak, almost 700,000 people passed through the resettlement point in Cheliabinsk – a city lying just to the north and northwest of the steppe oblasts of Turgai and Akmolinsk, respectively.<sup>44</sup> Accounts from this time are filled with references to the growing insufficiency of the police forces. In a

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<sup>42</sup> RGIA, f. 395, op. 2, d. 2875, ll. 70-71. Unlike in the Kazakh Steppe where settlers blamed the indigenous Kazakhs for a majority of the horse thefts, Mertts suggests that the primary suspects in his region of Odessa were German colonists.

<sup>43</sup> TsGARK, f. 64, op. 1, d. 2297, l. 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Aziatskaia Rossia*, v. 1, 492; Alberto Masoero, “Territorial Colonization in Late Imperial Russia: Stages in the Development of a Concept.” *Kritika* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2013), 74.

report to the Akmolinsk governor, for example, the district chief of Petropavlovsk informed his superior that the provisioning of police forces stipulated by the Steppe Statute of 1891 was “completely unsuitable for either the Kirgiz or the Russian population” given how thoroughly colonization had changed the region.<sup>45</sup> Like other officials of the time, the head of Akmolinsk uezd wrote that the proportional increases of crime brought on by migration was heightening tension between settlers and Kazakhs, requiring police to be especially observant and attentive to “all manifestations of social life” which, of course, was only possible if there existed sufficient staff and equal distribution throughout the uezd.<sup>46</sup>

The concerns of the Akmolinsk uezd official prompted the governor of Akmolinsk oblast to secure more officers for the region in 1908. Writing to the steppe governor-general, he indicated that at the time, the oblast police force consisted of only five district chiefs, five assistant district chiefs, and 61 constables. To put these numbers in perspective, the governor reduced these numbers to a ratio of the number of persons in rural areas each constable was expected to police. In Omsk this amounted to one constable per 6304 persons, 16,286 in Petropavlovsk, 15,004 in Kokchetav, 15,962 in Akmolinsk, and 23,204 in Atbasar. Further, he reported, the numbers available did not take into account the “unsettled population” which he claimed accounted for more than 130,000 persons nor the urban residents of the district. He continued with the following:

The figures themselves speak eloquently (*krasnorechivo*) to the fact that, in the ordinary course of public life, the police guard in Akmolinsk is extremely scarce and that under such conditions the activities of this guard cannot be as productive in maintaining the personal and public safety of the population. Meanwhile, a particularly vigilant

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<sup>45</sup> TsGARK, f. 369, op. 1, d. 3926, l. 79-79ob.

<sup>46</sup> TsGARK, f. 369, op. 1, d. 3926, l. 5



supervision of the population is required due to the special conditions that are created in the region under the influence of various factors.<sup>47</sup>

The general lack of police enforcement and the overall difficulty in catching horse thieves after the crime had been committed appears to have had a rather negative effect on local officials who, according to the report from Akomolinsk uezd noted above, expressed an “entirely careless and indifferent attitude” when dealing with the crime.<sup>48</sup> Describing the typical process that would take place in the event of a theft, the district chief of Atbasar uezd detailed that once local officials passed their report on to district officials, it could take three to five days and even upwards of an entire week for a police investigator to show up.<sup>49</sup> Given the rapidity with which a horse thief would typically make off with the animals and the distances able to be covered in a night, let alone a week, it is unsurprising that so many expressed such hopelessness in fighting horse theft in the steppe.

If and when thieves were apprehended, they quite often escaped justice as was the case reported by a lieutenant-colonel Prishchepenko in 1903 who recalled a certain Konstantin Gvosdev who had been taken to court multiple times but never convicted.<sup>50</sup> A publication regarding horse theft legislation likewise noted the low prosecution rates of thieves and argued

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<sup>47</sup> TsGARK, f. 369, op. 1, d. 3926, l. 25-26ob. Similar to the limited number of policemen in Akmolinsk, Christine Worobec writes of the same issue from an empire-wide perspective. She cites William C. Fuller as stating that the empire “had less than 9,000 policemen for a peasant population of 90,000,000” and goes on to argue that policemen were regularly rendered ineffective in maintaining law and order because they were often occupied with myriad other duties. According to Worobec, “they collected tax arrears, carried out censuses and sanitation inspections, registered passports, and delivered summons.” As if their ineffectiveness was not enough, she also writes that, much like some accused police in the steppe of doing, “the police sometimes aided horse thieves in the disposal of stolen goods.” See Worobec, “Horse Thieves and Peasant Justice,” 284-285.

<sup>48</sup> TsGARK, f. 369, op. 1, d. 3926, l. 5.

<sup>49</sup> TsGARK, f. 369, op. 1, d. 3926, l. 86.

<sup>50</sup> TsGARK, f. 64, op. 1, d. 2297, l. 5.

that even if they did receive jail time, it did little to slow their ambitions once released. “On serving their sentence in prison,” it was noted, “and having there received a higher theoretical education in their craft, they do not hesitate to apply it in practice.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Kazakhs Policing Kazakhs**

While most residents of the steppe were less than thrilled with the effectiveness of the traditional police forces in the region, there appears to have been some interest in a native police force tasked specifically with combatting horse theft. An anonymous writer to the newspaper *Orenburgskii Listok* in 1880 noted that the problem in Orenburg was far worse than in other parts of the empire due specifically to the propensity of Kazakh horse thieves amongst the population. Like most others, the author conflated the act of *barimta* with theft which served to disproportionately criminalize Kazakhs over Russians and other Slavic settlers. And not only were Kazakhs categorically presented as thieves, the author also described the entire process as an ethnically non-Russian act. After the animals were taken, the author wrote, they were then sold to various brokers (*makleri*), described as being Tatar, Kazakh, Bukharan, Khivan, Bashkir, etc.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the most telling portion of the letter, however, was not the author’s portrayal of horse theft as a crime committed seemingly exclusively by ethnic non-Russians, but in its contention regarding who should be responsible for the capture and persecution of the thieves. Since the year prior, according to the letter, the local administration had “finally” taken steps to protect citizens from horse thieves by hiring a police detective force from the Kazakhs

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<sup>51</sup> *Zakonodatel’naia postanovka*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> “Konokradstvo i kirgizskaia politsiia,” *Orenburgskii Listok* no. 40 (1880), 3. This is the same letter noted above in which the author argued that catching horse thieves in Orenburg is especially difficult due to the propensity of the thieves – read “Kazakhs” – to kill and eat the stolen horses.

themselves. Sultan Nur-Mukhamed Makhmudov, an elder Kazakh, literate in Tatar with the ability to speak decent Russian was appointed to head the unit. Having a deep familiarity with “almost all of the steppe,” Makhmudov oversaw two senior horsemen (the author used the Kazakh word *dzhigit* meaning “young man”) and twelve junior horsemen who would not only patrol the trade yards keeping an eye out for the sale of illegal horses but also, upon being alerted to a theft, search for the missing animals and the thieves. With the establishment of this police unit, according to the letter, “peaceful Kirgiz rejoiced” while Kazakh “kulaks” and traders petitioned for its destruction. Thus, as the author alludes, horse theft was a Kazakh crime that could and should be controlled by the Kazakhs themselves.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Samosud***

In lieu of a competent police force and judicial system, steppe residents regularly sought justice through extralegal measures. The practice of *samosud*, regularly defined as “mob law,” was commonplace throughout rural regions of the empire and the steppe was no exception. Speaking to the propensity of this phenomenon in rural communities in general, the Russian lawyer E.I. Iakushkin wrote in 1896 that *samosud* existed in Russia “not only as a remnant of the primitive form of all people’s courts,” but that it was “also caused by the conditions of modern life, especially the deficiencies of our investigatory departments.” Although some regions of the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. While the writer had noted their desire to have more information on the establishment of the Kirgiz police and their actions in general, I have been unable to obtain subsequent issues of *Orenburgskii Listok* for further clarification. Police units in Central Asia comprised of native inhabitants do not seem to be rare, however. A 1910 work on the police force in Russian Turkestan includes a section detailing the native police force of Tashkent but notes that their services were primarily confined to the native districts of the city – a slight similarity to the Kazakh case in that the Kazakh police force was tasked with policing a crime portrayed as mainly or exclusively Kazakh. See Russia, *Otchet po revizii Turkestanskogo kraia, proizvedenoi po vysochaishemu poveleniiu senatorom gofmeisterom grafom K.K. Palenom: Politsiia bezopasnosti* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 27.

empire had demonstrated improvement in the fight against samosud as their police and court systems improved, Iakushkin noted that in Siberia, undoubtedly due to the shortcomings of both government branches, samosud was almost a daily occurrence.<sup>54</sup>

The administering of justice through samosud was reserved primarily for those crimes which local authorities had the most difficulty controlling. The crime of horse theft was not only one of the most damaging crimes inflicted on the rural populace but it was also one of the hardest, from the government's standpoint, to control effectively. Combined with the fact that horse thieves were generally known by the rural populace, as was the claim of numerous contemporaries, we begin to see that rural residents were in a unique position where the fight for their very survival often led to punishments meted out to legitimate or even suspected horse thieves. In an 1880 letter printed by a provincial newspaper in Orenburg, the writer opened by stating that as horse theft had developed everywhere in Russia, communities were trying to rid themselves of the thieves by any means necessary. "More than one horse thief," according to the author, "has paid the price of their life, thanks to Russian samosud."<sup>55</sup> In yet another publication from the period, one writer argued that samosud was, in fact, the "most common way to counteract horse thieves."<sup>56</sup>

Beyond the individual who suffered from the crime of horse theft, the act of samosud was often carried out by a large group of people and in often gruesome fashion. Petr Dobrotvorskii, identified above, wrote that with the increase in the number of cases of horse theft in his area, "the execution of horse thieves began." The thieves would be beaten very cleverly (*lovko*) so that no traces were left, according to Dobrotvorskii, and in most cases the entire village would

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<sup>54</sup> E.I. Iakushkin, *Obychnoe pravo: materialy dlia bibliografii obychnago prava* (Iaroslavl', 1896), vi.

<sup>55</sup> "Konokradstvo i kirgizskaia politsiia," *Orenburgskii Listok* no. 40 (1880), 3.

<sup>56</sup> L. Vesin, "Konokradstvo, ego organizatsiia i sposoby bor'by s nim naseleniia." *Trudy imperatorskago vol'nago ekonomicheskago obshchestva*, t.1 (St. Petersburg, 1885), 362.

participate in the murders.<sup>57</sup> Another writer noted as well that reprisals against horse thieves were “accompanied by unreasonable cruelty” and, for example, may sometimes have had mud poured down their throat or been impaled on a stake.<sup>58</sup>

That horse thieves were treated so severely speaks to the grave importance of horses in rural society and one’s reliance on them for all matters of survival. If thieves, who were reportedly known by villagers and, to some degree, accepted by them, could be subject to such harsh punishments, then those who were strangers were likely to have been treated even worse. The unrest between Kazakhs and Russians caused by resettlement throughout the steppe has been well-documented as have clashes between the two groups involving cattle, and specifically, horse theft.<sup>59</sup> The Russian belief that Kazakhs were horse thieves by nature undoubtedly led to even more extreme measures taken against them. One instance demonstrating this was reported from Semipalatinsk oblast when a newspaper described the “torture” by peasants of a Kazakh suspected of stealing a horse. “The peasants look at the Kirgiz not as people,” according to the story, “but as very low-level animals.”<sup>60</sup>

## 1916

In certain situations, Russian animosity toward Kazakhs and its various manifestations did in fact spur violence against them in the form of horse theft. Historian Virginia Martin argues that the act in general became “heroic within the Kazakh community, because it symbolized

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<sup>57</sup> Dobrotvorskii, 3.

<sup>58</sup> “Zakonadatel’naia postanovka”, 11.

<sup>59</sup> In one particular report from 1902, a state councilor (*statskii sovetnik*) informed his superior he had the honor to relay that there were no cases of unrest amongst the population of his district except for the “clashes of the peasant population with Kirgiz about theft of each other’s cattle” and other goods. Strangely, he wrote that the clashes had “no harmful consequences.” See TsGARK f. 369, op. 1, d. 3750, l. 33.

<sup>60</sup> E.I. Iakushkin, 77.

resistance to the imperial legal order that considered horsetheft criminal.” While here she is referring more to the act of *barımta* which was criminalized under the 1891 Steppe Statute as “harmful for social order and peace,” she also includes theft undertaken against Russians and Cossacks as a specific exhibition of this heroism.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps at no other point in the Russian Imperial period did horse theft reach the same level of breadth and intensity as it did during the Kazakh uprisings in 1916. For months beginning in the summer of that year, violence raged throughout the Kazakh Steppe and Central Asia as an immediate result to the imperial decree calling up Kazakhs to serve on the front lines of World War I. But while the draft decree was the proverbial spark that ignited the violence, the tension in the region had been brewing for some time and an analysis of the uprising through the lens of horse theft adds significantly to our understanding of the longer conflict being waged throughout the region.

For most Kazakhs, the Russian presence in the steppe had worsened their economic situation and slowly cut them off from their animals and primary form of livelihood. The general mood throughout the steppe was one of caution on the part of Russian officials but, if any violent disturbances were to break out, they were confident they could easily contain them.<sup>62</sup> In July 1916, however, violence spread throughout the region and accounts of Kazakhs stealing cattle from Russians were prominent.<sup>63</sup> This was the case in a report from Semipalatinsk where an official reported Kazakhs “stealing cattle for thousands of versts” or others fleeing “deep into the

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<sup>61</sup> Martin, 152-153.

<sup>62</sup> Martha Brill Olcott writes that “As early as 1913 the steppe authorities had warned that they could not guarantee the safety of the Russian settlers if Kazakh lands were seized and if the Kazakhs were treated inequitably” but her source seems to imply the opposite. The governor-general of Semirech’e wrote in 1913 that “from a police perspective, the situation is not dangerous (*ne opasno*), and if there are excesses it will be easy to suppress them.” See Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 119; S.D. Asfendiarov, *Natsional’no-osvoboditel’noe vosstanie 1916 goda v Kazakstane* (Moscow and Alma-Ata, 1936), 30.

<sup>63</sup> Richard A. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia 1867-1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 1960), 292; Edward Dennis Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Central Asia* (Baltimore, 1954), 109-11.

steppe” taking their animals with them and stealing more along the way.<sup>64</sup> In areas near the border of China, many Kazakhs fled east with livestock stolen from Russians.<sup>65</sup> Even more reports describe instances of large bands of armed Kazaks raiding Russian villages, stealing cattle, and taking horses specifically.<sup>66</sup>

## Soviet Power

In the wake of the devastation that swept the steppe region during the years of war and revolution, the entire cattle-breeding industry, and most alarmingly to the Soviet government, the horse-breeding industry, was left in ruins. Government attempts to revitalize that sector of the economy were being challenged at every turn by the threat of theft. To combat these issues, Kazakh officials met several times in late 1921 to formulate measures aimed at curbing the thefts which they claimed were “destroy[ing] the already undermined cattle-breeding” industry in the steppe. By November 3 of that year, the Kazakh Council of People’s Commissars ordered the establishment of an emergency department for the fight against cattle theft.<sup>67</sup> A week later, the Kazakh Central Executive Committee issued a decree “On the Fight Against Cattle-Theft” (*O bor’be so skotokradstvom*) which, in addressing the harm which it brings to the entire economy, intensified punishments against thieves as well as their accomplices.<sup>68</sup>

At issue in the early 1920s was the practice of issuing certificates (*uchetnaia kartochka*) to individuals denoting ownership of horses which were particularly important during the sale of

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<sup>64</sup> Akademii Nauk SSSR, *Vosstanie 1916 goda*, 488, 490.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Bacon cites that an estimated three hundred thousand Kazakhs fled to China in 1916. See Bacon, *Central Asians under Russian Rule: A Study in Culture Change* (Ithaca and New York, 1966), 116.

<sup>66</sup> Akademii Nauk SSSR, *Vosstanie 1916 goda v srednei azii i kazakhstane, sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1960), 501.

<sup>67</sup> TsGARK, f. 1393, op. 1, d. 2, l. 64.

<sup>68</sup> TsGARK, f. 1393, op. 1, d. 18, l. 1.

the animals. A 1922 article in the newspaper *Soviet Justice*, brought attention to what many saw as the deficiencies of the certificate system and how it not only didn't stop thieves but also resulted in innocent people being accused and arrested for the crime of horse theft. The author, who went only by the name Pavlovskii, opened the article by decrying the "epidemic nature" that horse theft had assumed in recent years. He went on to discuss how the issued certificates were often completed in a hurry by uninterested agents who would often fail to note important identifying features of the horse on the certificate. If questioned by an authority at the horse market, Pavlovskii claimed, an innocent peasant would often present the legitimate card only to be accused of theft and himself arrested. Worse yet, he argued, actual thieves, would escape justice by claiming that the owner of the horse, as identified on the certificate, had entrusted him to sell the animal on his behalf. In these instances, Pavlovskii wrote, other thieves would then flock to the scene arguing in favor of the suspected thief until the agent deferred to their stories and left.<sup>69</sup>

In response to Pavlovskii's article, an investigator wrote to the newspaper the following month arguing that the certificate system was flawed not because of the sloppiness on the part of the issuing agents but primarily because there existed no standard certificate format and, depending on locality, forged or counterfeit documents could be easily obtained from various sources.<sup>70</sup> A few years after these letters, a report from Aktiubinsk province pointed out the increase in horse thefts in the area and, in part, blamed the printing presses of the village councils which were old and printed easily faked certificates.<sup>71</sup> The shortcomings of this system were

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<sup>69</sup> Pavlovskii, "Uchetnaia kartochka i konokradstvo." *Ezhenedel'nik Sovetskoi Iustitsii* no. 39-40 (1922), 14-15.

<sup>70</sup> "Na stat'iu Pavlovskogo 'Uchetnaia kartochka i konokradstvo'," *Ezhenedel'nik Sovetskoi Iustitsii* no. 46-47 (1922), 15-16.

<sup>71</sup> GAAO, f. 155, op. 1, d. 43, l. 173. This source was found at <http://myaktobe.kz/archives/82417>.



especially troublesome for authorities in regards to the mobile pastoralist Kazakhs who often escaped the purview of such state-implemented control methods. In fact, a 1921 decree issued by the Kazakh People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), even excluded, temporarily, many Kazakhs from providing individual certificates during the sale of livestock due to their "nomadic living conditions" which prevented the wide introduction of the certificate system.<sup>72</sup>

Whatever the causes of horse theft, problems abounded with stopping this crime throughout the steppe. Notes from the 1924 Akmolinsk executive committee meeting indicate that livestock theft in the many parts of the region had reached levels of 65-70% of all crime. In an attempt to curb the problem, the committee resolved to send an inspector to the southern districts, where these crimes were particularly destructive, to identify the ringleaders of the theft operations as well as repeat offenders and begin the process of evicting those individuals from the province. To where they would be evicted was not made clear.<sup>73</sup>

### ***Bais and Barïmta***

The late imperial period witnessed the vilification of Kazakhs throughout the steppe by a government and people who painted them as almost natural born horse thieves. This vilification, coupled with continued confusion surrounding the Kazakh customary-law practice of *barïmta*, continued into the early years of Soviet rule leading to further concern on behalf of government agents looking to quell conflict in the region. To fight *barïmta* in the early 1920s, the Kazakh Central Executive Committee established a commission on the elimination of the practice. The chairman of the commission, Sh.M. Bekmukhamedov, reported that he had sent a detachment of three men to the oblasts of Semipalatinsk, Akmolinsk, and Turgai to begin work toward this end.

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<sup>72</sup> TsGARK, f. 1393, op. 1, d. 19, l. 18.

<sup>73</sup> TsGARK, f. 5, op. 5, d. 116a, l. 2.

What they had found, however, further muddled the problems they faced. Bekmukhamedov wrote that the revival and growth of *barimta* which had, he alleged, occurred between 1918-1923 was a “completely legitimate phenomenon, elucidated by custom and completely legitimate” in the eyes of the population. In recent years, however, he argued that horse theft and *barimta* had become “so intertwined that it [was] difficult to distinguish them.”<sup>74</sup>

Bekmukhamedov provided examples of excessively violent instances of *barimta* which had been reported to the commission. In many cases, whole groups of riders attacked their unsuspecting victims armed with pikes, swords, and rifles. These assaults were often lengthy affairs as well. Bekmukhamedov recounted a report from September 1923 in which 95 armed *barantachi*, set upon a group of migrating Kazakhs and their herd at dawn. In a “battle” (*boi*) that lasted until noon, a total of five people were killed and the men made off with all of the cattle – approximately 500 sheep and a small number of horses – as well as some household property.<sup>75</sup> And while, according to Kazakh customary law, *barimta* was not to be carried out for individual gain or against non-Kazakhs, these types of violent clashes, their subsequent retelling, and the confusion between actual horse theft and *barimta* served only to further the socially destabilizing trope of the violent, greedy, Kazakh within steppe society.

Soviet authorities understood that administering greater control over the steppe would involve creating some form of unity between the Kazakhs and the predominantly Russian settlers who had inhabited the region in growing numbers since the late Imperial period. Paramount to this task was the easing of interethnic tension and horse theft resided at the very center of this tension. The Soviet approach to the problem differed from that of the Imperial Russian authorities in that they attempted to dispel the belief that Kazakhs were, in general, the primary

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<sup>74</sup> TsGARK, f. 5, op. 20, d. 24, l. 46-47.

<sup>75</sup> TsGARK, f. 5, op. 20, d. 24, l. 47.

instigators of horse theft in the region and, more specifically, targeting Russians first and foremost. At the sixth All Kazakh Party Council in 1927, Kazakh Sovnarkom chairman, N.N. Nurmakov, told his constituents that cattle theft had “recently begun to play a rather large role in relation to interethnic (*mezhnatsional’nyi*) friction” in the Kirgiz (Kazakh) Soviet Socialist Republic. He argued that Russian peasants believed that Kazakhs stole horses and cows specifically from the Russians in order to drive them out of the region. Beyond this, Nurmakov continued, they blamed local Kazakh authorities for dragging their feet in bringing thieves to justice for the same reason. He countered, however, by dispelling these “rumors” and contended that honest working Kazakhs suffered equally from cattle theft and that the government would go to any measure necessary in order to catch the leaders of these groups. Underlining the Russian fear, Nurmakov ended his statement by saying that peasants, in particular, needed to understand the message that he had just communicated.<sup>76</sup>

The Soviet agenda, not just in Kazakhstan but throughout the entire RSFSR, revolved around creating an equal, classless society and thus, increasingly targeted rich Russian *kulaks* and the Kazakh *bais* as enemies of the Soviet order. In a 1928 publication on Kazakhstan’s “path to socialist construction,” M. Riadnin wrote that the 1917 Revolution had very little effect on the socio-economic relations in the Kazakh village due primarily to the persistent influence of the *bais*. Despite the expanding presence of the Soviet state in the steppe and even attempts to take political and cultural education directly to the mobile pastoralist Kazakhs via mobile agitation centers called “red yurts,” authorities complained that party influence in the *aul* – from the councils to the social and political life therein – remained weak. This, according to Riadnin, was a result of *bais* controlling their local soviets, using the position of the *aul* foreman as an

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<sup>76</sup> *Vsekazakskii s’ezd sovetov: 1–ia sessiia KAZTSIK’a 6-go sozyva* (Kzyl–Orda, 1927), 47.

“instrument” for “enslaving” poor Kazakhs, and remaining “open allies” to the aul clergy who held great influence. Beyond this, Riadnin argued that the *bais*’ individual lineages, a factor holding extreme importance in Kazakh culture and society but roundly scorned by Soviets, was perhaps the most significant factor within this power dynamic. “It is necessary for the poor to look at the *bai* as a *bai*, regardless of what clan they belong to,” Riadnin wrote, “to look at the *bai* as a kind of exploiter, as a class enemy.”<sup>77</sup>

The classification and description of the *bais* as exploiters and class enemies evolved somewhat throughout the decade. Sh. M. Bektukhamedov, in his report on *barimta* in the early 1920s, accused the “richest elements” of the *bais* as being the foremost “leaders, instigators, and initiators” of *barimta* as they looked to expand their herds and add to their riches by any means possible. Included in his report was a list of 65 names which the commission to eliminate *barimta* had compiled from its work on the ground. The list of names was subsequently printed in the region’s newspapers and 10 of the individuals were deemed so damaging to public order that the commission filed petitions for administrative expulsion. The commission believed that the removal of these elements would break up the worst *barimta* “armies” due to their perception that the poor Kazakhs were “huddled around the rich, armed at their expense and supplied with horses” in order to carry out these raids.<sup>78</sup> Here again, however, we see a gross misinterpretation of the act of *barimta* as one of unquestioned theft and one which, given the belief that Kazakhs were stealing from Russians as some form of punitive reprisal for their presence in the steppe, could easily – if it hadn’t already – spill over from a strictly Kazakh cultural phenomenon to one directly affecting Russians.

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<sup>77</sup> M. Riadnin, *Kazakhstan na putiakh k sotsialisticheskomu stroitel'stvu (Otvety na vystupleniia oppositsii po natsional'nomu voprosu)* (Kzyl-Orda, 1928), 18-20.

<sup>78</sup> TsGARK, f. 5, op. 20, d. 24, l. 47-48.

Even if Russian peasants knew to draw a line between acts of *barimta* and those of actual theft, evidence remains that *bais* were increasingly blamed for the latter as well. In his 1929 publication addressing union-wide cattle theft and the fight against it, N. Lagovier outlined a case from the district of Kustanai in Turgai oblast in which *bais* were not only involved in organizing the theft of cattle but also extorting peasants for the protection of their livestock. The scheme reportedly involved *bais* using Kazakh shepherds as their henchmen in either the collection of the “thief tax” (*vornalog*) or, if not paid, the arrangement of the theft. Unsuspecting Russians would hire the Kazakhs, believing them to be honest shepherds, only to be swindled into paying the protection fee or suffering the repercussions. Such a case was reported from a peasant who refused to pay and subsequently had his horse stolen by a Kazakh of the same village where the “imaginary shepherds” originated. “In essence,” Lagovier wrote, “we have here the extortion of horse thieves.”<sup>79</sup>

The presence of the “*bai* guarantor,” as Lagovier called them, in these reports is telling. Earlier reports of this exact same type of behavior existed but did not directly implicate the *bais*. A report from Semipalatinsk described bands of thieves from the oblast engaging in theft with intermediaries from Altai, a province adjacent Semipalatinsk oblast. At first, it seems, the two groups engaged strictly in theft until the villagers became so frightened that they willingly paid the horse thieves to insure themselves against further losses. “Usually this is done under the guise of payment for a shepherd,” the report detailed, “but, in fact, this is criminal extortion.” Other forms of payments were made under the pretense that the thief was simply returning the stolen horses with the expectation of compensation for his troubles.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> N. Lagovier, *Skotokradstvo i bor'ba s nim* (Moscow, 1929), 23.

<sup>80</sup> TsGARK f. 5, op. 20, d. 40, l. 57-57ob. These reports have marked similarities to the case of the Russian settlers in the village of Matasy in the 1890s above. There, villagers hired Kazakh shepherds believing that their relatives would be less inclined to steal horses under their watch and would be able to

The evolution of the horse theft narrative to the point that Soviet authorities directly incriminated *bais* as the primary instigators of the phenomenon within the steppe speaks to the “revolutionary methods” that Riadnin argued was necessary to change the relations between the poor Kazakhs and their *bai* exploiters and was necessary in uniting poor Kazakhs with Russian peasants in order to establish a Soviet, non-ethnically centric, identity in the region. Lagovier well understood the limitations of the Soviet state apparatus in combating horse theft and argued for positive change in that respect but also urged local communities to do their part in the fight in the absence of effective law and order. He wrote that “for a more successful fight against crime in general, and cattle theft in particular, the assistance of the broad working masses is needed, the assistance of the Soviet public is necessary.”<sup>81</sup>

### **The Soviet State Response**

Despite the acknowledgement that public assistance was necessary in successfully combatting horse theft, the Soviets staunchly condemned acts of *samosud* in the villages. Lagovier noted that while public assistance in fighting theft had not reached its desired levels, *samosud* was “completely unacceptable” and that putting an end to cattle theft would be done “only in ways permitted by Soviet law.” While acts of *samosud*, he claimed, were reported less and less each year, they were still to be found – particularly in relation to horse thieves. Referencing a letter submitted to the newspaper *Bednota* (The Poor), Lagovier agreed with the author that acts of *samosud* were equally as detrimental to the local populace as they were to the

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keep the animals safe from other thieves of whom they had knowledge. But while the villagers of Matasy reported no problems concerning a “network” of Kazakh thieves and members of which who would embed themselves as shepherds in Russian herds, it can be presumed that the practice was an effective measure against horse theft.

<sup>81</sup> Riadnin, *Kazakhstan na putiakh k sotsialisticheskomu stroitel'stvu*, 21, 28.

accused or suspected horse thieves. Without strict condemnation of these acts, “irresponsible citizens,” the author wrote, would attack one another based on rumor, speculation, or as reprisal to accusations, leave more injured than not, and result in the necessity of the state to build more shelters for orphans.<sup>82</sup> And if authorities were fearful that the heightened animosity toward horse thieves in general would result in acts of *samosud*, then they must have been even more so in regards to locals’ anger toward *bais*. In a 1929 report, a poor resident from the Aktiubinsk region in Turgai oblast said that “if I had a rifle, I would kill all of the *bais*.”<sup>83</sup>

How Soviet authorities envisioned public assistance in fighting horse theft varied. With the growth in the 1920s of the secret police, head of the People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs (NKVD), V.N. Tolmachev, argued that the only way to stop theft in the village was with secret agents. He was quoted as saying that “the village knows its criminals, knows the thieves, knows the horse thieves, knows the arsonists. It knows them but cannot name them and give them away because it is afraid of revenge...Secrecy is necessary here.”<sup>84</sup> The effectiveness of this strategy and need for greater support was echoed at local levels within the steppe as well in the latter half of the decade.<sup>85</sup>

In an effort to engage more of the citizenry, however, rather than employ only a select few as secret agents within the community, authorities argued for a greater presence of trained prosecutors and people’s courts within the more remote villages. Regarding this, Lagovier wrote the following:

It is useful to hear cases of malicious cattle thieves in front of the local peasant audience and with the participation of sufficiently trained public prosecutors who, with their own

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<sup>82</sup> N. Lagovier, *Skotokradstvo*, 29-30.

<sup>83</sup> APRK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 2118, l. 8.

<sup>84</sup> N. Lagovier, *Skotokradstvo*, 12.

<sup>85</sup> TsGARK, f. 1393, op. 1, d. 34, l. 2-2ob.

personal example of courageous and open protest against the horse thieves, will show other citizens an example of active assistance in fighting cattle raiding...Such, roughly speaking, directions can and should go the assistance of the peasant masses and the village community in this fight.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

The Imperial Russian state's propensity to portray Kazakhs as horse thieves was a reflection of its disdain toward their mobile pastoralist lifestyle, a viewpoint which was then espoused by peasant migrants who perceived their neighbors to be lazy, irrational, and inclined to the acts of theft that so damaged a settler's ability to survive on the edge of the empire. This perception, coupled with an ill-equipped police and legal structure in the region, led to peasant retaliation via violent acts of *samosud*, often referred to as "mob law." At issue in this fight was a skewed interpretation from both the Russian state and the settlers of the Kazakh customary form of dispute resolution known as *barimta* which was categorized simply as theft and outlawed as such. The resulting interethnic tension that permeated the steppe proved a significant obstacle in the imperial state's ability to establish effective order amongst the population and protect an expanding breeding industry in which they invested a great deal and hoped for significant returns.

The Soviet government faced many of the same problems that its predecessor did but with unique challenges all their own. It was tasked with fighting the horse theft epidemic but was doing so in the wake of war and revolution which took a drastic toll throughout the steppe. Bouts of *dzhut* and famine in 1918-1919 decimated the horse population in Kazakhstan which, despite

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<sup>86</sup> N. Lagovier, *Skotokradstvo*, 29.



the various campaigns Soviet authorities instituted, floundered for the better part of a decade before returning to pre-war numbers. As the 1920s progressed with little improvement in the economy and ethnic relations, however, the Soviets increasingly turned their attention to the *bais*. Not only did authorities blame them for a general resistance to Soviet rule in the Kazakh auls, but they focused their attention on the *bais*' roles as ringleaders of large horse-theft networks who, through *barımta* and outright theft (two very different undertakings which Soviet authorities admittedly conflated), wreaked havoc throughout steppe communities. Thus, by shifting blame directly onto the *bais*, Soviet authorities pinpointed a common and visible enemy of all steppe inhabitants rather than attempting to fight the specter of the much more anonymous "horse thief" and in so doing fought a much larger enemy of the state.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **The Red Horse: Confiscation, Collectivization, and the Fight against the Bais.**

The Kazakh memoirist, Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, wrote that the “age-old nomadic way of life” enjoyed by him and his ancestors for centuries had come to an end by the winter of 1930-31. He blamed much of the destruction on Feodor Goloshchekin, the first secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party and a man Shayakhmetov – and many others – described as “brutal.” The problem, he noted, was that Goloshchekin and party officials charged with running the country “were mainly strangers to it, and neither knew nor particularly wanted to find out about the customs and mind-set of the nomadic population.” The custom most important to the Kazakhs, their way of life, and their livelihood, was the very thing that Soviet authorities such as Goloshchekin wanted to change the most – livestock breeding.<sup>1</sup> On this particular subject, Shayakhmetov wrote that these men had “no understanding of the difference between stock-breeding in nomadic Kazakhstan and the agricultural districts of their homeland” and in resolving to carry out collectivization in Kazakhstan at the same pace as in Russia, “totally ignored the interests and wishes of the peasants.”<sup>2</sup>

Shayakhmetov’s words address a period of culmination in the Soviet fight against mobile pastoralism in the steppe, a fight that was waged often haphazardly throughout the first part of

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted here that within Soviet government documents throughout the 1920s, a great deal of space was devoted to the discussion of “livestock breeding” (*zhivodtnovodstvo*) in general terms. After general remarks, these discussions would typically assume greater specificity regarding individual breeding sectors, including horses, cattle, camel, sheep amongst others. But as will be demonstrated, the Kazakhs who migrated the farthest distances were those engaged in horse and sheep breeding. So while some of the authorities noted below did not always specify horses when proposing to change livestock-breeding practices and sedentarize the greater Kazakh population, I argue that the horse was almost always at the forefront of these discussions as it was the Kazakh’s primary mode of transportation which allowed them to be mobile.

<sup>2</sup> Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad under Stalin*, (New York, 2007), 31.

the 1920s. Soviet tactics became much more direct with the promotion of Feodor Goloshchekin to the position of First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party. Intent on restoring an economy still reeling from the destruction of war and revolution, Goloshchekin sought to “Sovietize” the population and collectivize the most important segments of the Kazakh economy – namely grain production and livestock breeding. Much of this work was centered around the destruction of the what Soviet authorities perceived as the most harmful element of Kazakh society, the *bais*. Authorities understood this particular social class to be the antithesis of a Soviet, socialist future. In addition to their seasonal migrations, which many had deemed “irrational wanderings,” commentators of the 1920s believed that the *bais* were an exploitative class, holdovers from the imperial period preying upon the region and its people in order to maintain control. Therefore, the fight against the *bais* and their forced sedentarization was paramount to the success of these efforts and the transformation of the region.

In an article on the Kazakh Famine of the early 1930s, historian Niccolò Pianciola argues that during that period, sedentarization was a “low priority policy, which no local organization actually put into practice and which even official propaganda ignored.” He claims that the idea existed nearly exclusively in “bureaucratic documents and official speeches” and agrees with the historian Sh. M. Mukhamedina who wrote that “in reality, sedentarization, as a mass campaign, never existed.”<sup>3</sup> In her work on famine, Sarah Cameron cites historian Norman Naimark’s claim that sedentarization policies destroyed the Kazakh nomadic economy which led to the famine but notes that Pianciola’s article “convincingly argues quite the opposite point” and agrees with his

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<sup>3</sup> Niccolò Pianciola, “Famine in the Steppe. The Collectivization of Agriculture and the Kazakh Herdsmen, 1928-1934,” *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol 45, no 1/2 (Jan.-Jun., 2004), 188-189. The quote from Sh. M. Mukhamedina is included in fn. 250 on page 189.

and Mukhamedina's conclusion regarding sedentarization.<sup>4</sup> In opposition to these arguments, I argue that sedentarization policies, while perhaps not continuously overt in practice, were a persistent and multifaceted feature of Soviet efforts toward reshaping Kazakhstan's economy and society. In fact, the direct assault against Kazakh mobility and the *bais* actually had its roots in the late Russian Imperial period. But while imperial authorities believed that settlement policies would eventually eliminate the figure of the *bai*, the Soviets utilized the opposite approach – attacking the *bais* in order to promote settlement. Ultimately, Soviet authorities directed much of this fight on the very aspect of a *bai*'s life that was both their reason for being mobile as well as their means of transport – their animals. The culminating point of this chapter, and an overarching theme of the dissertation, is that the Kazakhs' loss of mobility, to which Shayakhmetov referred, was felt most acutely with the loss of their horses.

### **Imperial Aims to Sedentarize**

Throughout the Imperial period, the sedentarization of mobile pastoralist Kazakhs was an issue that arose rather often in official discourse and printed literature on the region and people. Even if ideas concerning sedentarization and the necessity of such a program were not terribly overt, the overall feeling was typically made apparent in the language used and the ways in which Kazakh methods of livestock breeding were compared to their Russian or European counterparts. Descriptions including the words “backward” or “irrational,” as seen in previous chapters, were certainly indicative of this. And while Kazakh sedentarization never entered the fore as an official program of the Imperial Russian state, considerations certainly gained

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe: Soviet Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Famine, 1921-1934” (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 2010), 16-17. See fn. 29. On Norman Naimark's work to which Cameron referred, see Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton, 2010).

momentum as Slavic settlement steadily increased in the steppe region. Perhaps no man was a more persistent in pushing this agenda than Minister of Agriculture Aleksandr Krivoshein. In 1908, Krivoshein's first year in the position, he wrote to Tsar Nicholas on the state of settlement in the Kazakh Steppe. As a result of reconfigured land allowances for mobile pastoralist Kazakhs (which further reduced previous land norms), Krivoshein informed the tsar of new settlement sites that had been established throughout the region and also reported on a new policy granting permanent residency to all Kazakhs who wished to settle in these new locations. He claimed that new land policies were of urgent necessity in order to continue and increase Russian colonization of the steppe, a task he considered both economically and politically important, and also for ensuring the future of the Kazakhs themselves. Though the former could seemingly be achieved through land and settlement policies, the latter, Krivoshein wrote, required "the accession of the Kirghiz tribe to the common cultural life of the nationalities that make up the great Russian state, because otherwise it cannot avoid the sad fate of other nomadic tribes everywhere exterminated, as shown by the example of foreign countries, settled culture and statehood."<sup>5</sup>

Krivoshein's report to the tsar was based on the conclusions of a study drafted earlier in the year which discounted the findings of the Shcherbina expedition from around the turn of the century. The expedition established land allotment norms for mobile pastoralist Kazakhs which Krivoshein deemed excessive in light of increased settlement. In a May 1908 correspondence from the Department of Agriculture to the Resettlement Department, officials addressed the need for such revisions and postulated that allowing Kazakhs "200 or more desiatin" per family would be an "injustice towards Russian peasants who receive no more than 15 desiatin per person, or 45 per family." Such measures, they argued, would not only promote and preserve mobile

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<sup>5</sup> RGIA, f. 391, op. 3, d. 910, ll. 4ob-5.

pastoralism in the region, but also delay the transition of the indigenous population from the “lower forms of culture to more perfect ones.” Within the same document, this transition was referred to as a “process,” which certainly denotes the Department of Agriculture’s intentions. And though officials were at least nominally concerned about the general mood of the Kazakhs, they wrote that the land revisions would “facilitate the further transfer [to a settled lifestyle] of the mass of the Kirgiz people.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite any concern for the fate of mobile pastoralist Kazakh communities in light of the increased settlement and the land reductions they were subjected to, Krivoshein maintained his stance on land reform even after seeing its effects first hand. On a journey through the region in 1909 with Petr Stolypin, he noted that the concern of the Russian government should not be for the future of the individual Kazakhs displaced and economically ruined, but for the future of the whole steppe. “As for those vast areas where the Kirgiz economy does not show sufficient improvement and development,” he wrote, “it is necessary to continue the policy of seizing land surpluses from the nomads.” Krivoshein argued that this procedure was most necessary in situations involving arable land suitable for grain farming. Should Kazakhs in these areas wish to remain primarily livestock breeders, then perhaps, he concluded, they could be given less fertile land further to south in some sort of exchange. As a result of the new land policies, Krivoshein argued that settlement had initiated a twofold process in the steppe: the transition of mobile pastoralist Kazakhs to a settled way of life, and the introduction of “proper cattle breeding.” As both of these processes culminated in the best possible use of the productive forces of the region,

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<sup>6</sup> RGIA, f. 1276, op. 4, d. 468, ll. 1-3. On the mood of the Kazakh people regarding land seizures, the Department of Agriculture wrote that the repeated practice of such seizures “shocked” the economic life of a number of Kazakh communities and deprived them “of all confidence in the future.”

according to Krivoshein, he saw it as further proof that Russia must “actively and vigorously populate the Kirgiz steppe.”<sup>7</sup>

For Krivoshein and others, seizing “surplus” land from Kazakhs was not actually viewed as a process harmful to Kazakhs themselves. In fact, he asserted that the Russian colonial policy these seizures were part of was beneficial for the vast majority of Kazakhs and that they only affected the interests of a “small, but rich and cohesive group of nomads.” He argued that the “guise” of communal land ownership practiced by Kazakhs enabled this relatively small group of herdsmen (*skotovody*) to dominate the region through land seizures of their own, a situation he deemed most “unjust.” The Russian perception was that these rich *skotovody* would use their wealth and influence to push others to the side in order to use the best grazing lands. On the verge of economic ruin, herdsmen of smaller farms would be forced to integrate their animals into the larger herds and work for the rich *skotovody*. This process, it was argued, led to ordinary Kazakhs being dragged into slave-like (*rabskii*) conditions, deprived of any rights to the “common” land they supposedly had rights to while the rich were able to gain even more economic and political influence. It was from this select group of rich herders alone, according to Krivoshein, that all complaints regarding new land allotment decrees – and the actions of local governing officials enforcing those decrees – were received; not from those he would classify as “ordinary” Kazakhs.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> P.A. Stolypin and A.V. Krivoshein, *Zapiska o poezdke v sibir' i povolzh'e v 1910 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 92.

<sup>8</sup> RGIA f. 391, op. 3, d. 910, ll. 5ob-6. This notion was likewise reported a few years earlier in the correspondence from the Department of Agriculture to the Resettlement Department, previously cited. The report contained almost identical language to that of Krivoshein, noting that under the “guise” of communal land, “some rich clan representatives took the best lands and in infinitely (*neizmerino*) larger quantities than the ordinary Kirgiz mass.” See RGIA f. 1276, op. 4, d. 468, l. 3ob.

The suspicion amongst imperial officials regarding Kazakh exploitation by this small but rich and cohesive element within Kazakh mobile pastoralist communities had been increasing in the early twentieth century. Nikolai Konshin, whose travels to the steppe were discussed in chapter one, wrote in 1901 that the Kazakh villages he saw were “characterized by sharp individualism” and claimed that in lieu of working for the rich Kazakhs, “poor Kirgiz among the Russians are nevertheless better off.”<sup>9</sup> In an account from a resettlement official in 1910, there reportedly existed in Akmolinsk *uezd* “two totally different economic elements: the richest households in need of outside labor and the poor and disadvantaged households who have nothing but available working hands.”<sup>10</sup> Because of this relationship, perceived or otherwise, imperial officials came to believe that what was truly holding the Kazakh people back was not necessarily a reliance on mobile pastoralism, per se, but the reliance of the poor on the rich. Settlement, they believed, could solve this problem. In a 1908 letter from resettlement officials in the Turgai-Ural’sk region to district headquarters in Orenburg, an official presented his superiors with a petition from 35 Kazakh *kibitka* (yurt) owners who were asking for 150 desiatin of land each to lead a sedentary and assumedly agricultural lifestyle. “We are not a cultured people (*kul’turnyi narod*), but herdsmen,” the Kazakh representative wrote, “and for us Kirgiz, a cultured economy requires a lot of time.”<sup>11</sup> The petitioners complained that land seizures had led them to ruin and, jumping at an opportunity to prove that Kazakhs could be settled if they were free from the influence of the rich, the official told his superiors that a favorable resolution of the matter for the petitioners could serve as an example to other Kazakhs whom he believed wanted

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<sup>9</sup> Konshin, “Ocherki ekonomicheskogo byta kirgizov Semipalatinskoi oblasti,” 158, 154.

<sup>10</sup> V.K. Kuznetsov, *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo v Akmolinskoi oblasti*, t. V, *Akmolinskii uезд* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 48.

<sup>11</sup> RGIA f. 391, op. 3, d. 883, l. 175.



to settle but were restrained in their efforts due to “fear of the rich, who occupy all the *volost*, administrative and judicial positions.”<sup>12</sup>

## **The Move to Colonize**

The growing emphasis on the economy of the Kazakh Steppe and the specific relationship between rich and poor was indicative of a mentality shift regarding the process of settlement and colonization within the region. According to one historian, the “ideological intensity” of this period “reflected political instability and a desire for modernity” which was rooted in imperial authorities dismissing the notion that the resettlement drive must be continued merely as a remedy to European Russia’s “land problem.” Instead, the focus shifted towards the active colonization of the empire’s periphery. Resettlement, as he noted, “involved a precarious spreading over the territory” which could be, and often was, haphazard, inefficient, and ineffective in pacifying the region and its people. Colonization, on the other hand, “denoted purposeful, economically solid, and culturally influential transformation of the environment,” a process which certainly pointed toward “progress.”<sup>13</sup> This shift was noted in a 1915 publication of *Voprosy Kolonizatsii* (Questions of Colonization). Leading the particular volume’s slate of articles on Central Asia and Siberia was an outline of the colonizing work under Krivoshein by professor and consultant on resettlement affairs, V.P. Voshchinin. In the article, Voshchinin praised Krivoshein for providing a greater and more sound direction to Russia’s resettlement efforts. Lauding his efforts since first assuming the post as Minister of Agriculture in 1908, Voshchinin wrote the following:

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<sup>12</sup> RGIA f. 391, op. 3, d. 883, l. 172.

<sup>13</sup> Alberto Masoero, “Territorial Colonization in Late Imperial Russia: Stages in the Development of a Concept,” *Kritika* 14, no. 1 (Winter, 2013), 88-91.

Resettlement as a self-sufficient, state-important task, and not as a means for resolving the land issue in the central provinces, – and the Trans-Urals not primarily as a penal colony – but a region of rich economic, cultural and political values; such were the slogans of the new course of A.V. Krivoshein, whose main principles were immediately met by the approval of the widest social circles and, above all, of the State Duma, which declared the resettlement case to be under his protection.<sup>14</sup>

The direction in which Krivoshein was steering the empire's efforts in the Kazakh Steppe was cut short, however. World War I drastically reduced the resettlement numbers which had been steadily climbing since the turn of the century and the Kazakh uprising in 1916, followed shortly thereafter by the revolution which deposed Tsar Nicholas II, catapulted the region into a years-long crisis.<sup>15</sup> When the post-revolution tumult began to taper, Soviet authorities got to work attempting to reverse many of the imperial-era policies which they denounced as colonial and exploitative in nature. Much of the Soviet government's attention in this regard was focused on the millions of settlers who had flooded the region throughout the previous half-century. As early as 1920, Lenin and other members of the Central Committee resolved to destroy the "relations created between the newly arrived European population and the indigenous people as a result of 50 years of imperialistic policy of the Russian autocracy," in bordering Turkestan. Though resettlement had been halted with the intention of soothing relations throughout Central Asia and instilling sympathy in the indigenous population toward communism, committee members feared that nothing of the sort was happening. In fact, they asserted that a small stratum of Russians,

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<sup>14</sup> V. Voshchinin, "Kolonizatsionnoe delo pri A.V. Krivosheine," *Voprosy Kolonizatsii* no. 18 (1915).

<sup>15</sup> Niccolò Pianciola refers to the years from 1916 to 1922 as a period of "crisis." See Pianciola "Famine in the Steppe," 146.

still intrenched in colonial ideals, had caused the situation (at least in Turkestan) to worsen rather than the opposite.<sup>16</sup>

### **Toward a Soviet Steppe**

The largest segment of the steppe population drawing the ire of officials during this period was the settlers who had continued to make their way to the borderlands throughout the civil war years and into the 1920s. Despite a decree outlawing colonization, these *samovoltsy*, according to officials, continued to carry on the colonial process of the imperial period, displacing Kazakhs from their own lands and heightening ethnic tensions in the region. In this regard, according to one historian, “very little had changed by 1924” and many of the newly instituted Soviet policies were failing to be implemented on the ground level either through refusal, incompetence, or otherwise.<sup>17</sup> In a 1924 case presented by the Orenburg Provincial Executive Committee to top republic authorities, local officials inquired about the problem of *samovoltsy* in the district and the possibility of evicting the “self-righteous people” from the area and back to their places of origin. The case went through numerous channels before apparently hitting somewhat of a dead-end. Many of the families remained on the plots of land which they illegally settled and accusations of certain departments “pandering” to the *samovoltsy* and supporting their “colonialist inclinations” were thrown about.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 3, d. 92, ll. 4-5. Document retrieved from [http://istmat.info/files/uploads/53180/rgaspi.\\_f.17.\\_op.3.\\_d.92\\_1.1-10.pdf](http://istmat.info/files/uploads/53180/rgaspi._f.17._op.3._d.92_1.1-10.pdf) on February 13, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe,” 47. Regarding settlers in general, Cameron also highlights a decree aimed at returning land and water access to the indigenous Kazakhs. However, she notes that “these early efforts at reorganizing the steppe were frequently hampered by an inadequate knowledge of local conditions, as well as poor oversight on the part of republic and central-level officials.” See *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>18</sup> TsGARK f. 5, op. 6, d. 102, ll. 1-5ob.

In addition to combating the samovoltsy and the problems they were reportedly creating in the region, Soviet officials were likewise – and perhaps even more so – concerned about those elements who continued to exploit the indigenous Kazakh communities via previously established economic relations. In 1921, the Bolshevik official G.I. Safarov, then a member of the Central Committee in Turkestan, declared war on “kulak chauvinism” throughout Semirech’e oblast, determined to return all seized land back to the Kazakhs. The class struggle throughout the region, he argued, could not be solved in any other manner.<sup>19</sup> Safarov’s program was directly in keeping with the 1920 protocol for the reorganization of Turkestan which called for the arrest of “speculators” and “managers of large Russian enterprises” as well as various former tsarist officials.<sup>20</sup> Subsequent decrees targeting other areas of Central Asia were passed in April 1921 intent on seizing lands previously belonging to Ural and Siberian Cossacks in the northern reaches of the Kazakh Steppe. Reflective of many of the measures the Bolshevik party had been taking in those early years of power, however, it seems that the land reform proposals caused more harm than good to the existing populace.<sup>21</sup>

Soviet authorities were certainly concerned about the continued existence of those individuals they would classify as “colonial oppressors” in the steppe. Their concerns, however, were not limited simply to Russian kulaks or former imperial officials. Like some of their predecessors, the Soviets were convinced that tsarist imperial policies had benefited a select group of the indigenous population and enabled them to amass great wealth and political influence which they then used to exploit and oppress their neighbors. A successful transition to communism in the steppe would thus require the elimination of this group - the elimination of

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<sup>19</sup> V.L. Genis, “Deportatsia russkikh iz Turkestana v 1921 g. (delo Safarova),” *Voprosy Istorii* no.1 (1998), 45, 49.

<sup>20</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 3, d. 92, l. 5

<sup>21</sup> Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe,” 46.

the *bais*.<sup>22</sup> The 1920 protocol on Turkestan specifically outlined this fight when officials called for “the elimination of the patriarchal-feudal population preserved in the social relations of the native population in order to introduce the workers’ councils which should protect the population from all forms of exploitation and make alliance with the republics in which the proletariat is able to carry out the transition to communism.”<sup>23</sup> But just as similar Soviet policies had created more strife than peace, the initial fight against the kulaks and *bais* did little throughout the early 1920s toward effectively changing the economic and social structures of the steppe.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Fight Against the Bais**

One of the most immediate changes central authorities in Moscow intended to effect throughout Central Asia was one that the Imperial-era authorities had increasingly sought in the years leading up to World War I – sedentarizing the mobile pastoralist Kazakhs. As has been demonstrated, this process began during the late imperial period merely as a result of the resettlement drive but while this method was, according to men like Krivoshein, haphazard in nature, sedentarization via peasant resettlement became a concerted effort in the final years of imperial rule. That Soviet officials closed the region to resettlement meant they would have to attack the “problem” from a different angle and by the mid 1920s it became clear that this meant,

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<sup>22</sup> Though the term *bai* was not used by Soviet officials with great frequency until the mid-1920s, I have taken the liberty to use it when describing the early Soviet fight against “patriarchal-feudal” relationships throughout the Kazakh Steppe.

<sup>23</sup> RGASPI f. 17, op. 3, d. 92, l. 5

<sup>24</sup> Not only were many of these reforms ineffective, Sarah Cameron argues that “many aspects of early Soviet governance in Kazakhstan might have seemed indistinguishable from those of tsarist rule.” See Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe,” 50. In the same vein, Niccolò Pianciola argues that Soviet “decolonization” policies were not successful and that by the mid 1920s, “the majority of Kazaks were poor and the difference in standard of living of between Kazaks and colonists had remained unchanged.” See Pianciola, “Famine in the Steppe,” 146.

by one way or another, keeping Kazakhs away from their animals which were both their reason for continuing a mobile lifestyle as well as their means for doing so.

A report from 1925 regarding the future of an agricultural cooperative in Syr-Dar'ia in the south of what had just recently become the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic highlights the shift in the Soviet mentality toward sedentarization. Due to its location, the members of the cooperative *Zemlia i Trud* (Land and Labor) were primarily engaged in cotton production and the presence of such cooperatives in Syr-Dar'ia and elsewhere was proof to local officials that the Kazakhs' desire for "irrigable land [was] obvious and very great" as was their desire to transition from cattle breeding to agriculture. After an inspection of *Zemlia i Trud*, however, officials determined it to be a "false" cooperative dominated by kulak and bai elements. The focus of the report was not necessarily on the economic relationship between the supposed kulaks and bails relative to the cooperative's workforce, rather it was in regards to their livestock and tendency toward pastoralism. "In order to combat the 'absorption' of a part of the cotton area by pastoralists," the document reads, "it is absolutely timely and absolutely necessary to constantly and vigilantly regulate this transition from cattle breeding to settled life." The complaint by those who drafted the report was that the kulaks and bails – the "true pest of cotton production" – looked at agriculture not as an end goal but only a way to make money in order to purchase more livestock and add to their herds which, it was argued, already numbered in the hundreds and often thousands of head. Not only did this maintain their existence as cattle breeders, but it kept the money from being invested in agriculture equipment, the improvement of cooperative living conditions, etc. They concluded that the cooperatives must be purged of all kulak and bai elements and a petition was submitted to terminate *Zemlia i Trud* after a "thorough cleansing."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> TsGARK f. 5, op. 9, d. 111, ll. 10-13.

To fully transform Kazakh society and bring it in line with the visions of the Soviet state, much more was needed than a simple “cleansing” of bai elements and Soviet officials and academics spent a great deal of time and resources attempting to understand exactly how the bais were able to accumulate and maintain the power they had. In what appears to be an unpublished article from mid-1931, B. Semevskii wrote extensively on the social and economic characteristics of the Kazakh aul in an attempt to address this very issue.<sup>26</sup> Part of the immediate problem, he wrote, was that until the “Sovietization of the Aul” campaigns in 1926 (to be discussed below), bais on the whole were not affected by the measures directed against them as class enemies. Instead, he argued, the bais were able to take advantage of the “debris” (*zasorennost*) of the Soviet apparatus and use “land management, credit, etc.” to preserve their positions of power. During the campaigns beginning in 1926, however, Semevskii quoted Goloshchekin who said that as the Kazakh poor became more enlightened of Soviet ideology and its goals in the countryside, they “understood Soviet power as their own” and “Kazakh cadres of internationalists grew.” But while these campaigns may have been successful in turning some of Kazakh society against the bais, it did little to inform officials’ understanding of the formative processes regarding the socio-economics in the region which is exactly what was needed if they were to successfully reconstruct both the region and people.<sup>27</sup>

Semevskii’s work highlights a great deal of the discourse regarding the bais, mobile pastoralism, and the legacies of Russian colonial policy in the steppe, all of which factored

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<sup>26</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 15, d. 23. This file contains only the one, roughly eighty-page, article titled “Sotsial’no-ekonomicheskaiia kharakteristika Kazakskogo aula do vstupleniia v rekonstruktivnyi period.” Boris Semevskii’s name appears with the title but there is no other identifying information regarding him throughout. There did exist a Boris Nikolaevich Semevskii (1907-1976), was a specialist in socio-economic geography, and gained fame within academic circles. This article predates his published works and may actually be from his time at the Timiriazev Agricultural Academy in Moscow from where he graduated in 1931.

<sup>27</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 15, d. 23, l. 49.

heavily into Soviet plans for rationalizing and “Sovietizing” the Kazakh economy in the second half of the decade. To that point, there seemed to be a general consensus amongst those who studied the region that the *bais* were engaged primarily in horse and sheep breeding while poorer Kazakhs raised cattle and goats. The former of these enterprises was the pursuit of the purely mobile groups of Kazakhs while the latter was practiced amongst those who lived semi-sedentary or even completely sedentary lifestyles. But while some academics argued that the *bais*’ livestock breeding practices were “primitive, extensive, [and] regressive” in contrast to those of their Kazakh counterparts, Semevskii questioned why the *bais* would then not see the virtues of settled life and convert to what these academics claimed was a much “improved” and rational form of living. He argued that the problem Soviet policymakers faced in the republic was a consequence of the “insoluble contradiction” that Russian imperialism had introduced to the Kazakh *aul*: on the one hand, destroying the livestock breeding industry of the region while forcing many Kazakhs to settle and take up agricultural pursuits but on the other hand, seeking to preserve the region as the empire’s primary supplier of livestock.<sup>28</sup>

For Semeveskii and others, the most prominent legacy of Russian imperialism was the existence of the *bais* as a class. From their Marxist-Leninist interpretations of Kazakh socio-economics, they contended that prior to the penetration of Russian capitalism to the region, Kazakh economic relations could best be described as “patriarchal” – the first and most primitive economic order, according to Lenin. With the introduction of Russian capitalism, Semevskii argued, a small group of “*bai-capitalists*” developed “due to the ruin of tens, hundreds, and thousands of other farms.” The ability of the *bais* to migrate longer distances compared to those who had fallen into ruin, he wrote, was both a result of this economic transformation and perhaps

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<sup>28</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 15, d. 23, ll. 8-9. Semevskii argued that the 1916 uprising was evidence that Russian imperialism had led the Kazakh economy to a “dead end.”



more importantly, a factor intensifying the wealth disparity amongst Kazakhs. While many poor Kazakhs were limited in their seasonal migratory routes, the bais were able to move their herds much greater distances. For most of the year this was rather inconsequential, but during the summer, this disparity kept many of the poorer Kazakhs away from the summer markets. Semevskii argued that the bais used this to their advantage by acting as “intermediaries between the market and the poor,” a trend that lasted into the 1920s and became particularly acute during the period of the New Economic Policy in Kazakhstan.<sup>29</sup>

A stark difference between the Russian imperial period and the early Soviet period was that as the 1920s wore on, the bais were targeted more for their exploitative practices rather than simply their mobility. In fact, Goloshchekin even believed that to maintain a prosperous livestock breeding industry in Kazakhstan, mobility was a necessity. Regarding this, Goloshchekin wrote the following in 1930:

Should we think of the complete settlement of Kazakh livestock breeding [zhivotnovostvo] and exclude any migrating? No. Even a number of state farms (in the southern regions), if they do not resort to migrating (to drive the cattle in the hot months to the dzhailiau [summer pasture] in the mountains and foothills) - will make a big mistake. Settlement in nomadic and semi-nomadic livestock breeding should be thought of in the form of a series of activities that reduce the radius of the migration and, instead of moving the farms, only allow for the movement of livestock.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 15, d. 23, ll. 78-82.

<sup>30</sup> TsGARK f. 74, op. 15, d. 23, l. 71. Semevskii cites this quote from *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Kazakstana* no. 7-8 (1930), 13.

Goloshchekin's words were reflective of the overall policies implemented in the second half of the 1920s which were aimed toward "sovietizing" the aul and, in general, bringing October 1917 to Kazakhstan. Known as "Little October" (*mal'yi oktiabr'*), Goloshchekin's program closely resembled Soviet nationalities policies employed in various other republics and were specifically meant to modernize Kazakhstan and its people, enabling a smoother transition to Soviet power.<sup>31</sup> The policy of sovietization was passed in December 1925, just prior to the Kazakh campaigns for the election of delegates to the 1926 Supreme Soviet.<sup>32</sup> Participation of native populations in Soviet political structures was a fundamental demand of the existing nationalities policies and Kazakhstan was a particular area of emphasis in light of the fact that Russians had predominantly controlled the facets of government in the region to that point.<sup>33</sup> The policies were not intended solely for the ousting of Russian elements within the governing structures, however. A great deal of the emphasis was also focused on destroying, or at the very least limiting, the existing relationships of power within the aul, i.e. to wrest political power from the *bais*.<sup>34</sup>

The election results from 1926 were not entirely encouraging but elections the following year showed promise. According to a report from that year, propaganda efforts had resulted in "manifestations of activity [among the Kazakh population], which, compared to the previous election campaign, have reached a significantly higher level." But while election interest among

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<sup>31</sup> Martha Brill Olcott writes that the "Sovietization of the Aul" was a policy "directed solely toward the Kazakhs and was not applied to the other Central Asian nationalities." She argues that Kazakhs, due to their greater integration into the Russian economy, were seen as "more malleable and cooperative than the other Central Asian nationalities; thus, the Kazakh aul was expected to adapt to the conditions of social revolution more readily than the *kishlak* (village) of the sedentary Central Asian Muslims." See Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, 1995), 166.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Romeo A. Cherot, "Nativization of Government and Party Structure in Kazakhstan, 1920-1930," *The American Slavic and East European Review* 14, no. 1 (February, 1955), 42.

<sup>34</sup> Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 166. Beyond the *bais*, however, Soviets were wary of aul elders (*aksakals*), and, of course, kulak elements who wielded political control over Kazakhs as well.

the lower strata of the Kazakh population had risen, the report noted the continued struggle against the bais, aul elders (*aksakals*), and kulaks who remained a “dominant factor” in the campaigns fostering anti-Soviet sentiments.<sup>35</sup> Indicative of what was often a disjointed Soviet attack on the bais and kulaks throughout this period, a subsequent report stated that while the two groups were still strong, they no longer played a “dominant role in the auls and villages, especially the latter.” However, the report noted that both groups were still quite active in their efforts to undermine the election campaigns, namely through what local officials described as “intimidation,” “hooliganism,” attempting to exert their “tribal” (*rodovoi*) influence, and even through unification with other anti-Soviet elements.<sup>36</sup> This “underground work,” as one official called it, was often the only recourse for many who were labeled as either bais or kulaks and had their own voting rights stripped.<sup>37</sup>

Though officials had experienced more success in the election campaigns of 1927 compared to the previous year, the progress against the bais was not moving quickly enough for the Communist Party and in early 1928, members of the Kazakh Republic’s party committee (*Kazkraikom*) began organizing a commission for the purpose of expropriating land and possessions from the bais, specifically.<sup>38</sup> While discussions regarding the particularities of such a decree were being parsed out in the Kazakh capital of Kzyl-Orda, the Central Executive Committee in Moscow passed a resolution in March severely restricting land use rights of bais and in certain instances calling for the direct confiscation of their property. In language that was becoming rather commonplace in various descriptions of Kazakhstan, the committee wrote that

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<sup>35</sup> TsGARK f. 5, op. 20, d. 83, ll. 1-3ob; 11.

<sup>36</sup> TsGARK f. 5, op. 20, d. 83, l. 47.

<sup>37</sup> TsGARK f. 5, op. 20, d. 83, l. 51.

<sup>38</sup> APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 1827a, l. 153. Reprinted in *Tragediia kazakhskogo aula 1928-1934 t. 1 (1928-aprel’ 1929) sbornik dokumentov* (Almaty, 2013), 344.

the revolution had, to that point, failed to fully transform some areas of the region and that pre-revolutionary ways, highlighted by the existence of bais who were “irreconcilable enemies of Soviet power...delaying the pace of economic and cultural development” had been permitted to endure.<sup>39</sup>

For Soviet officials, the number of livestock a Kazakh owned had become the defining marker of bai status. In the March decree from Moscow, the central committee stipulated that only those Kazakhs owning 100 or more head of cattle would be subjected to the loss of land use rights and confiscations set forth. Once confiscated, the livestock would be distributed among the poor population for use in organized collectives or handed over to provincial or district committees for use in the organization of state farms. In this way, they believed they were reversing the socio-economic structures that had become pervasive during the imperial period whereby a group of elites prospered at the ruin of the many. Through confiscation, it would be possible to benefit the majority only to the detriment of those individuals who had gained their wealth through such exploitative practices.

Fearing, or perhaps anticipating, an all-out confiscation drive, many bais had by the mid-1920s begun taking steps to avoid their economic ruin at the hands of the government. The methods they used included false reports of lost animals, the distribution of property to family members, fleeing either to remote steppe areas or, given the proximity, to China, and the quick sale of animals to whomever would purchase them. A secret police report from August 1928 brought some of these issues to light and noted the flight of 153 families at the end of July from Zaisan to Western China. They took with them 6,600 head of small and 1,000 head of large livestock and “several” villages, according to the report, followed suit in August. In

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<sup>39</sup> APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 1687, ll. 38-41. Reprinted in *Tragediia kazakhskogo aula 1928-1934*, 344-347.

Semipalatinsk, one bai fled with upwards of 1000 sheep, 500 horses, 87 cows, and 50 camels. Those who could not flee, like a bai from Kzyl-Orda, chose to sell their animals for whatever price they could. “We, the rich, need to sell cattle in the shortest possible time and keep the money in a safe place,” he wrote, “otherwise they will be taken away this year and given to our farm laborers.”<sup>40</sup>

The call for complete confiscation of bai property and, depending on the situation, eviction of those individuals to other regions of Kazakhstan came on August 27, 1928. The efforts to that point, the Kazakh Central Executive Committee and Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom) wrote, had not “to the proper extent, changed the old pre-revolutionary relations” in the republic. Citing such conduct as “malicious agitation” against Soviet power, “inciting ethnic and tribal strife,” as well as using “tribal relations” for the continued exploitation of the poor, the committee members passed these measures in order to free the population from economic dependence on the bais and “create the necessary conditions for the early economic recovery and cultural development of the working people.”<sup>41</sup> The committees approved instructions for the confiscation and eviction campaign a few days later which identified those persons subject to the decree as individuals living in “nomadic areas” with more than 400 head of livestock, those in “semi-nomadic” regions with more than 300, and those in settled areas with more than 150 head of livestock. Such numbers, they wrote, were indicative of “socially dangerous” elements who keep the surrounding population in “bondage” and “interfere with the Sovietization of the aul.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> TsGARK f. 5, op. 10, d. 88, ll. 53-59. Reprinted in *Tragediia kazakhskogo aula 1928-1934*, 369-375.

<sup>41</sup> TsGARK f. 5, op. 21, d. 15, ll.-4-7. Reprinted in *Tragediia kazakhskogo aula 1928-1934*, 389-394.

<sup>42</sup> APRK f. 30, op. 1, d. 813, ll. 117-124. Reprinted in *Tragediia kazakhskogo aula 1928-1934*, 394-400.

The confiscation and eviction decree signaled a new chapter in the fight against the *bais*, toward sedentarization and what Soviet authorities envisioned to be the complete recovery of the Kazakh economy which they believed to be of paramount importance not just locally for Kazakhstan but for the entire Soviet Union as well. The livestock industry problem throughout the 1920s in the republic was significant and well-documented. And while livestock numbers had shown improvement in the second half of the decade, they remained – certainly by Soviet standards – at concerning levels by the end. At a plenum in December 1931, central committee members imposed on all party organizations “the most serious responsibilities with regard to the development and socialist reconstruction of livestock breeding” in Kazakhstan which they identified as the main branch of its rural economy and of great importance beyond its borders. Solving the problems that plagued the industry there, they argued, was “of major importance for resolving livestock breeding problems throughout the USSR.” Most tellingly in regard to the fight against the *bais*, the committee declared that:

In fact, the task of reconstructing livestock in Kazakhstan and the problem of increasing its marketability is resolved, firstly, only with a decisive attack on the kulak and *bai* and, secondly, not only by increasing the total number of livestock, but also by increasing the feeding rates, improving cattle breeds, increasing fatness and wool products.<sup>43</sup>

That livestock breeding was the main branch of the Kazakh economy and so important to the USSR as a whole was exactly the reason that Soviet authorities were intent on the sedentarization of the population. The economy was reliant on livestock breeding and, to the Kazakhs, livestock breeding was reliant on mobility. And while an overall campaign to

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<sup>43</sup> APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 2943, l. 6.

sedentarize was not made overtly explicit throughout the decade, it was certainly implied through official attempts at social and economic reconstruction – namely, the campaign for the “sovietization” of the aul. In fact, from a debate in 1927 regarding the possibility of opening the region once again for resettlement purposes, Kazakh officials wrote to central authorities in Moscow voicing their condemnation of such a proposal. They wrote that to pass any such legislation allowing migrants to “infiltrate the lands of Kazakhstan” would result in a significant setback at a time “when the local population [was] settling in for themselves.”<sup>44</sup> As confiscation efforts ramped up in 1928 and Kazakh livestock was increasingly allocated to state and cooperative farms (*sovkhozy* and *kolkhozy*), the intent became much more overt. In a report on Kazakhstan’s breeding industry from the late 1920s, one official wrote:

The significance of building *sovkhozy* for the socialist reconstruction of unusually backward forms of rural production in Kazakhstan is exceptionally immense. Forcing and promoting the transfer of the nomadic population to a sedentary lifestyle and management - state farms will be the most important fact in resolving one of the main problems of Kazakhstan - the problem of settling the nomadic population.<sup>45</sup>

Goloshchekin and the Kazakh Regional Party Committee intensified their attack against mobile pastoralism in November 1929 with the adoption of a “special decision” on the systematic settlement of the mobile-pastoralist population in Kazakhstan. The issue of settlement was discussed specifically at the Fifth Plenum of the Kazakh Regional Committee in December of that year and reaffirmed that the settlement solution was “one of the main methods of developing new lands and their rational use – in terms of the greatest economic efficiency.” The plenum

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<sup>44</sup> TsGARK f. 30, op. 1, d. 725, l. 88.

<sup>45</sup> APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 2892, l. 22.

developed specific measures for the realization of complete settlement which were not dissimilar from the official's words above regarding the construction of state and collective farms.<sup>46</sup> Only a few years later, Goloshchekin recalled the workings of the 1929 plenum in his "theses on the settling of the Kazakh nomadic and semi-nomadic population." As he had previously argued, Goloshchekin wrote about the class exploitation that Kazakhs continued to suffer at the hands of the *bais*. "What makes this issue so important?" he asked. "The nomadic economy and nomadic life are the biggest obstacles to the rise of the economic and cultural level [of the Kazakhs] and the integration of the Kazakh laboring masses to the general process of socialist construction."<sup>47</sup>

### **A Horse for the Horseless**

Horses did not necessarily factor prominently in either the discussions regarding confiscation or the decision to carry out such a program, this in light of the perception that the *bais'* economy was primarily centered around horses and sheep. They do, however, appear in the archival sources in particular ways that demonstrate their importance to the Soviet government and to Kazakhs alike during the confiscation campaign. For instance, in an open letter from the Kazakh Communist Party addressed to all Kazakh aul *tovarishchi*, officials explained the aims of the confiscation campaign and what was to be done with the confiscated animals, in particular. They insisted that the complete confiscation of the *bais* could not take place without the help of a vigilant and proactive society but warned that "the peasant farmer [was] unlikely to receive any

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<sup>46</sup> *Rezoliutsii i postanovleniia V plenuma Kazakskogo kraevogo komiteta VKP(b)*, (Almat-Ata, 1929), 15. The November 1929 decision and subsequent party plenum were also discussed in M. Shaumian, *Ot kochev'ia k sotzializmu*, (Alma-Ata, 1965), 93. Shaumian quoted the plenum in writing that they "emphasized that 'by the very course of the collective-farm movement, the task of transferring nomadic and semi-nomadic peasant farms to residency on the basis of collectivization was already set.'" – While this is in keeping with the words of various other party officials, this exact quote was not found in the *rezoliutsii i postanovleniia V plenuma* - at least in the location where Shaumian cited it.

<sup>47</sup> APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 4839, l. 345.



part of the confiscated cattle.” Instead, they proclaimed, the livestock and other means of production should be handed out to the poor – “a horse for the horseless, a cow for the cowless – the same for camels – and small livestock to the poor” who have none. To ease the fear of the peasant farmer who perhaps thought they would receive nothing, the letter reassured them that once the feudal ties of the Kazakh economy had been completely severed, then “the economic and cultural rise of the middle peasants will go faster.”<sup>48</sup> While this is a small example, it is both telling and in keeping with a trend of mentioning horses first within discussions of livestock in general. This practice was also extremely prevalent when discussing issues of poverty – horses were, time and again, the ultimate indicator of wealth.

The equivalence of horse ownership and wealth took on a new dimension during the confiscation campaign when Kazakhs looked to protect themselves from prosecution. Horses instantly became a tool that one could use to perhaps gain retribution for a perceived wrong or as a bargaining chip to stay on the good side of confiscation authorities. This was seen in the case of Khusain Shylenbaev of Akmolinsk. Upon having his property seized for allegedly being a bai himself, he lodged a complaint with local officials arguing that he was unfairly targeted (by whom was not made clear) according to the stipulations of the confiscation decree. He, like many others who were identified as bais, claimed that his property should not have been subject to confiscation at all and, in his particular case, certainly not while Al’niiaz and Komza Muldabaev, obviously individuals living in the same area, went “unharmless.” According to Shylenbaev, Al’niiaz and Komza had a house, approximately 400 horses, and other animals and property – all worth approximately 10,000 rubles. Inferred from his complaint is the notion that he believed their property, highlighted by the horse herd, made them much more of a bai than he

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<sup>48</sup> TsGARK f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 95-98.

and therefore should have had their property confiscated rather than his own.<sup>49</sup> Most Kazakhs, however, were not so quick to turn on their neighbors, a problem that higher-level communists found troubling.

The confiscation campaign was fraught with instances of abuse by local officials who regularly took extreme measures when carrying out their duties; this for reasons ranging from the hope of advancement or simply lining their own pockets. In a 1929 report on the progress of the confiscation campaign, a Kazakh senior official complained that there existed a number of documented instances in which local, district, and even county officials demonstrated “extraordinary weakness” in carrying out their work. He reported cases of incompetence, excessive violence against poor laborers – accusing them of harboring *bais* and/or hiding their property, aiding suspected *bais* themselves, drunkenness, and even taking bribes. In the handful of case excerpts presented to back up his claims, the official noted one Dzhumar Tugurenov who received a bribe in the form of a horse from a *bai* who wished to escape persecution. Not only did these actions, in his words, reveal “the excessive weakness and contamination (*zasorennost*)” of the aul party organization and the colossal political backwardness of the aul communist,” but it also turned many poor and middling Kazakhs against Soviet authority causing them to instead help those being targeted as *bais*. The official noted, for example, that in the district of Karkaralinsk in Semipalatinsk oblast, out of 90 aul soviets, more than 20 defended the local individuals accused of being *bais*.<sup>50</sup> The forms of defense typically ranged from verbal testimony

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<sup>49</sup> TsGARK f. 135, op. 1, d. 11, l. 122.

<sup>50</sup> TsGARK, f. 135, op. 1, d. 24, l. 50. The report here is telling in the ways that poor Kazakhs dealt with situations regarding confiscation. The official who drafted the report claimed that it was not uncommon for poor Kazakhs to vote for confiscation at aul soviet meetings to then reverse their decision “under the influence of *bai* manipulation (*obrabotka*)” only to vote again for confiscation after “explanatory work” by Soviet workers and so on. This could simply be indicative of poor Kazakhs placating whomever was trying to sway them at a given moment or, more likely, it signaled a greater defiance of Soviet authority.

to authorities about the property holdings of suspected bais to physically hiding animals.

Mukhamet Shayakhmetov noted this discontent amongst all Kazakh social groups which he wrote “led people to harbor fugitives as a form of protest.”<sup>51</sup>

The August 27 confiscation and eviction decree was such that, even if a person did not own herds in excess of the numbers stipulated for their particular mode of living, they could still be prosecuted if they belonged to previously privileged groups such the descendants of sultans, khans, or other groups associated with “anti-Soviet activities,” an accusation which could not necessarily be quantified and thus used a bit more liberally by confiscation authorities.<sup>52</sup> This was the case of Sabikan Esengel’dinov and his son, Kasymzhan, of Semipalatinsk who were informed that their herds and property were to be seized in September 1928. A rather savvy litigator, however, Esengel’dinov wrote a lengthy appeal arguing that, as a “semi-nomad,” his herds did not total more than 300 head which, he argued, according to article one, note one of the confiscation decree, placed him in full compliance with the law. He reported that officials only counted 108 head in his herd and 79 in that of his son. However, he was also accused “conducting malicious agitation” against the Soviet government, an act that subjected him to confiscation but one which he vehemently denied. To this point, Esengel’dinov pleaded for officials to see his dedication to Soviet power in Kazakhstan by relaying information to the fact that, during the civil war, he did not run off to China as many others did or in any way aid the “white gangs” in the region. On the contrary, he helped organize cooperatives among his own

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<sup>51</sup> Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> In his memoirs, Shayakhmetov discussed the “arbitrary selection” process that often took place during confiscation. Writing about his father’s livestock, he claimed it was of “average size, consisting of 100 sheep, twelve horses, eight large-horned cattle and two camels” which, according to the August 27 decree, was not enough to merit confiscation. However, he wrote, his father was “just another, and by no means the last, victim of an arbitrary selection. The local authorities were plucking figures from the air and deliberately falsifying the numbers of livestock and size of crops so that they could classify people more or less at random as kulaks.” See Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 52-53.

“dark population” (*temnoe naselenie*). Luckily for Esengl’dinov and his son, the Kazakh Sovnarkom was granted the right to provide exemptions to people indicted under this particular charge and the two men were spared confiscation.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to his notes on poor Kazakhs aiding and protecting bais from confiscation, the Kazakh senior official cited above reported on the overall mood of various other aul elements. In the case of middle peasants (*seredniaki*), the report states that, much like the poor peasants, many were hesitant to take an active role in the confiscation campaign for fear of bai retaliation. Members of the Kazakh intelligentsia argued succinctly that “confiscation is robbery” and urged Kazakhs to unite against the campaign and deliver their complaints to Moscow. Not only did they suggest to bais that they should “turn their cattle into value,” i.e. sell them before they could be confiscated, but, if they were able, that they should run to China to escape their impending persecution. There even existed fear that Kazakh Komsomol members, who actively participated in the campaign against the bais, were not as receptive to the process as once had been thought. Using words similar to those of the intelligentsia, they characterized confiscation as a “colonizing act.” A group the official categorized as “nationalists” echoed the sentiments of the Komsomol members arguing that confiscation was carried out only in the auls, leaving the Russian kulaks unharmed. Additionally, they claimed, the authorities were not even confiscating the property of bais but that of the poor (*bedniaki*) and middle-class (*seredniaki*) Kazakhs against whom they unleashed their “monstrous (*chudovishchnye*) corruptions and harassment.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> TsGARK f. 135, op. 1, d. 329. ll. 7-8, 27, 29. Surprisingly, some Soviet authorities took into account age, the presence of children, the coming winter, etc. when reviewing cases of confiscation and eviction. In many instances, families were spared, at least temporarily, the full punishments of the August 27 decree. For a few of these cases see TsGARK f. 135, op. 1, d. 329, ll. 32-34.

<sup>54</sup> TsGARK f. 135, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 61-65.

## A Focus on Horses

Despite the various setbacks brought to light as a result of the August decree, confiscation efforts were certainly paying off for the Soviets, and the numbers certainly appear to bear out the fact that, either by design, some sort of unwritten understanding, or both, horses were confiscated in higher numbers than other livestock. In a report from districts in the region of current-day Almaty, the capital of the Kazakh Republic for much of its existence, officials identified the number of horses, camels, horned cattle (*rogatyi skot*), and small cattle – rams, sheep, goat, and donkeys – that had been confiscated. In total, some 5829 horses were confiscated from 80 bai families across twelve districts. Authorities confiscated only 465 camels, 2051 horned cattle, and 10,537 small cattle. Because the “small cattle” category included four different types of animals, it should be safe to assume that horse numbers were greater to or at least on par with those animals, this also factoring in relative size and monetary worth. In fact, in only one district did either camels or horned cattle outnumber horses confiscated. In Balkhash district, bordering the lake of the same name, 172 horses were confiscated from bai farms in comparison to five camels and 427 horned cattle.<sup>55</sup> These numbers could simply be a product of local conditions, but other sporadic reports show that confiscation numbers leaned heavily toward horses. A bai in Akmolinsk, for example, was in possession of 166 horses, only 19 horned cattle, and 85 sheep and goats when his property was taken.<sup>56</sup>

If there did exist a focus on the confiscation of horses, it was likely a product of the slow recovery of the horse population in Kazakhstan coupled with the importance that Soviet authorities had time and again proclaimed the animals would play toward the success of the economy, military, and other areas of vital importance. A report from around 1929 on the state of

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<sup>55</sup> TsGARK f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 130-131ob.

<sup>56</sup> TsGARK f. 135, op. 1, d. 460, l. 5.

livestock breeding in Kazakhstan presented herd population statistics for the years 1917, 1924, and 1927 in order to demonstrate the progress that was being made toward full recovery of each. Of the six types of livestock presented, cattle (*krupnyi rogaty skot*), sheep, goats, and pigs had all exceeded their 1917 numbers – and with the exception of sheep, exceeded those numbers by a significant margin.<sup>57</sup> Horses and camels, on the other hand, were lagging behind their 1917 numbers by a significant margin. These “working animals” as they were classified by the report, had only reached levels accounting for 76.2% and 77.1%, respectively, those numbers from a decade earlier.<sup>58</sup> This was a heavy blow particularly in the case of horses because in addition to serving as work animals in the cooperative and state farms, they were also paramount for military purposes – an area where camels’ usefulness fell short.

But while horse numbers lagged in terms of overall herd population growth, their numbers in cooperative farms witnessed an exponential increase from numbers recorded in 1927/28, the year just prior to confiscation, and those from 1928/29, the year directly after. This was especially the case within Kazakh cooperatives where the numbers of horses increased from approximately 9,210 to a staggering 162,200 – a nearly 1800% increase. As seen previously, stocking cooperative farms with confiscated animals was a prescribed strategy from the campaign’s onset and, from the figures presented in the report, it appears that animals taken from bais were sent to Kazakh cooperatives while those taken from kulaks were allocated to Russian cooperatives. In these numbers it can be seen why many Kazakhs felt unduly targeted compared to their Russian counterparts in Kazakhstan. The number of horses reported in Russian cooperatives over the same period only rose from 12,300 to 48,800 – a roughly 400% increase.

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<sup>57</sup> The table presented in the report includes a section listing the 1927 numbers as percentages of those from 1917. Cattle reached 125.7% of their 1917 numbers, sheep – 100.9%, goats – 132.8%, and pigs 127.7%. See APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 2892, l. 1.

<sup>58</sup> APARK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 2892, l. 1.

Confiscating horses and placing them in state and collective farms was, beyond a fight against the *bais*, mobile pastoralism, and the perceived exploitative relationships of the Kazakh *aul*, a way for Soviet authorities to exercise ultimate control over the breeding industry in order to implement their plans for the “socialist reconstruction” of the breeding economy. Previously noted here was the open letter from the communist party to *aul tovarishchi* which warned them not to expect a complete redistribution of confiscated animals. Further on, the document stated that when dealing specifically with “herds of valuable improved breeds,” it was not advisable to transfer them to individuals for personal use but rather to entire collectives and *artels* where they could be put to use for the benefit of a greater number of Kazakh poor.<sup>59</sup> In this, we see a lot of the same discussions that had been taking place for years regarding Kazakh breeding methods dating back to the imperial period. Officials believed that sedentary and selective breeding methods were not only the best way to ensure strong bloodlines and the production of the most ideal physical traits, but also to protect the herds from the often dangerous natural conditions of the steppe and ensure proper nutrition. In a 1927 letter to the Kazakh Central Executive Committee, a provincial official complained (like many before him) that the “main evil” in improving the livestock in his region – especially in the nomadic areas – was the complete lack of forage harvests. He reported that the Kazakhs had no harvesting equipment and almost never stocked fodder for their animals. To solve the problem, he filed a petition for authorities to issue a decree on the compulsory expansion and harvesting of hayfields in the region.<sup>60</sup>

Even in the initial wake of confiscation and collectivization, horse breeding figures continued to lag through the end of the 1920s. By 1931, central committee officials, including Goloshchekin, were wholly unsatisfied with efforts to improve Kazakhstan’s breeding industry

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<sup>59</sup> TsGARK f. 135, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 98-99.

<sup>60</sup> TsGARK f. 30, op. 1, d. 725, l. 28.

in general, to say nothing of the horse breeding industry, specifically. At that time, only six state horse breeding farms existed in Kazakhstan housing a total number of 5770 head. Officials blamed the situation on a number of issues laid out in a protocol from early 1931. Amongst the contributing factors were cited such problems as “the lack of proper work organization, the distribution of employee functions, the weakness of labor discipline, [and] the lack of socialist competition.” The lack of proper veterinary care and high instances of epizootic diseases certainly did not help, either. These issues, the officials wrote, were “a direct disruption of socialist construction” and they challenged industrial leaders to focus for the rest of the year on proper standards of organization, “increasing productivity, reducing costs, combatting losses and maximizing marketable output.”<sup>61</sup> The following year, however, construction plans for an additional 16 horse farms and two breeding nurseries were inexplicably placed on hold and the still unsatisfactory results led the head of the Kazakh horse breeding farms collective (*konevodkolkhoztse*) to declare that,

Responsible work on the creation of a military-repair, as well as a transport horse, is at a rather low level. Until now, despite a number of requests from the *konevodkolkhoztse*, the Kazakh peoples commissariat of agriculture (*Kaznarkomzem*) has changed the number of horse breeding areas for the third time. Moreover, there has not yet been a breakdown of areas for growing horse stock of certain breeds and varieties.<sup>62</sup>

The state and collective farms that were in operation, and which held at least nominal numbers of horses, were certainly not helping to improve the industry and reports on the conditions to which workers subjected the animals continued to point toward a rather bleak future. In the collective

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<sup>61</sup> TsGARK f. 141, op. 1, d. 293, ll.13-15.

<sup>62</sup> APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 5416, ll. 99-102.



farm “Oian” (Kazakh – “Awake!”), in western Kazakhstan, workers established a horse breeding division in 1931. When little progress was made in the first year, workers blamed the situation on the “inexperienced management of the communal farm” on the one hand, and the “hostile actions” of the kulak-bai elements on the other. All of the best horses, they reported, were worked too hard, taken only to be returned “overridden” and “emaciated.”<sup>63</sup> The types of conditions that “Oian” workers witnessed at their own communal farm were soon addressed by central party officials in mid-1932 when they passed a resolution “on the conservation and development of horse livestock.” Despite prior instructions, the document opened, “the Central Committee is compelled to note that, up to now, in most collective farms, state farms and urban enterprises, the proper care for horses and their normal reproduction has not been established.” The Central Committee blamed these issues on local authorities and noted that, as a result, horse stock both declined and deteriorated “in most republics, territories, and regions of the Union,” a significant problem given the effects such issues had on agriculture and the military. In closing, the Central Committee warned that “the predatory and negligent attitude towards horses, causing their mass death, will be considered a crime against the interests of the national economy and will be punished by all the rigor of the law.”<sup>64</sup>

### ***Kyzyl-At*** **(Red Horse)**

While the general disrepair of the horse breeding industry was problematic for authorities, it was catastrophic for the Kazakh people who regarded the animals as much more than simply a beast of burden. Mukhamaet Shayakhmetov addressed this a bit in his memoirs

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<sup>63</sup> A.V. Misharev, *Konevodcheskaia tovarnaia ferma kolkhoz “Oian”* (Alma-Ata, 1940), 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial’no-Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI) f. 17, op. 3, d. 886, l. 34. Document accessed at <http://istmat.info/node/55594>, 3/4/2019.

regarding confiscation and collectivization and, in general, the horse's role in a Kazakh's everyday life has been well-documented in both Kazakh and Russian sources. A particular source that speaks volumes to this unique relationship and the detriment caused by confiscation and collectivization is oddly one that has been left absent in western accounts of this period. In his 1934 poem "Kyzyl At" (Red Horse), one of Kazakhstan's premier literary figures, Saken Seifullin wrote rather critically of the situations in state and collective farms and the conditions which Kazakhstan's horses were subjected to. Due to the nature of the work and its perceived critique of Soviet power, the poem only saw only a limited number of printings in its initial 1934 release, was not fully translated to Russian until much later,<sup>65</sup> and was used, amongst Seifullin's other writings, as evidence against him when he was arrested and put to death only five years later.<sup>66</sup>

Seifullin wrote his poem as a lengthy dialogue between himself and the title animal, which had by that point belonged to a collective farm for some time. The poem begins with affectionate words from the poet to the Red Horse, describing his love for the animal and his feelings are, in general, reciprocated by his friend. But in the Red Horse's words are some foretelling reservations. "Take care of the horse," he implores, "do not torture him with a

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<sup>65</sup> In regards to the Russian translation, the 1934 printed edition makes note that the translation was an incomplete version of the original but that a full translation would be provided in the second edition which was seemingly never printed. A Russian version from 1958 was still incomplete and even had notable omissions, particularly the final stanza of the 1934 Russian edition regarding Stalin. See Saken Seifullin, *Stikhotvorenia i poemy*, (Moscow, 1958).

<sup>66</sup> Though Seifullin's rather lengthy body of literary work, the accusations against him for being a nationalist, his trial and execution are not the subject of this discussion, I would be remiss not to note the reception this particular piece received. In this particular printing (the earliest Russian translation I was able to find), the literary critic Il'ias Kabulov wrote an introduction to the poem in which he discussed the "political" nature of the work and outlined its shortcomings and mistakes from that perspective. He wrote, however, that the "mistakes and blunders that have taken place in [Seifullin's] political and literary work are completely fixable, provided that an appropriate party environment is created around his political and writing activities." Kabulov's introduction was the subject of a 1935 report L.I. Mirzoian, future Communist Party First Secretary of Kazakhstan, alerting him to the potential problems of the poem. See Saken Seifullin, trans. S. Talzhanov *Kyzyl-At*. (Alma-Ata, 1934), 5-14; APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 10053, l. 6.

whip...Take care of him, do not forget about him.” It is time to get to work on the kolkhoz, and the Red Horse is asked if he is ready for sowing – “it’s time, Red Horse, to meet the spring. Direct your energy to the fields.” The poem elicits imagery of the earth coming to life – the steppe soil being broken in its preparation for seeding, birds chirping, and the auls beginning work on a new season’s sowing campaign. But the poet sees trepidation in his Red Horse. “My handsome, you are cold with me” he says, “...you do not answer my call. Have I not been affectionate with you?” To this, the Red Horse replies with assertions that the poet had abandoned him. He reminisced of the times the two had spent together in the open steppe and recalled the poet’s oft-spoken words of loyalty. Seemingly pleading with the Red Horse, the poet reminds him of all the times they went to battle “in defense of October” and the countless instances the brave horse saved him.<sup>67</sup> Until this point, the poem could very well read like one of simple longing for times passed between a man and his horse but, in the subsequent stanzas, the tone turns much more sinister toward the collective farms, the authorities, and the Soviet socialist order.

In the poem, each group of stanzas is separated and individually titled. For instance, the poem’s first set of stanzas which were spoken by the poet to his horse are titled “Dedicated to a Friend” and the Red Horse’s reply is simply titled “To the Poet.” Signaling the drastic change in tone, the set of stanzas that follow the poet’s pleas to the Red Horse are titled “You did not remember me and the vermin ruined me” (*ty ne vsponmnil obo mne a vrediteli menia portili*).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Seifullin, 15-22.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 22. The Russian word “*vrediteli*” can be translated as “vermin” but also “economic saboteur.” Given the fact that these stanzas are being spoken by the Red Horse, and the general tone he takes toward the collective farm workers, it seems more likely that the former would be intimidated rather than the latter. However, when the poet uses the word, it seems as though there could be the connotation of a saboteur as he uses the term more than once in conjunction with the “liars” (*Igun*) of the kolkhozi. In the Kazakh edition, the word “*ziianqestr*” is used which is translated to English as something like “vermin” or a

“My back is all rotten in pus,” the horse tells the poet, and “I am beaten and thin as a rusty string.” The Red Horse continues with his onslaught against the collective farm workers who mistreat and overwork the horses. He asks the poet to recall the other horses he had known and informs him about the sad state that each is now in as a result of similar treatment. “The order is not given by the government to beat the cattle, destroy the horses and impoverish the people”, the poet replies. He scolds the Red Horse for believing that the government does not care about the horses. Rather, the poet tells him, the government lauds the animals as heroes of the Civil War and defenders of October. “They said to the collective farmer:” averred the poet, ““the horse is your brother, when he is able to work, you are rich.”” He maintained that the liars the villains of the collective farms are those to blame for his condition. As the remaining stanzas unfold, the horse is never convinced by the poet’s words as he attempts to alter the horse’s attitude toward the collective farm and socialist order. “Will I be proud of you again?” the poet asks, in what are his final words.<sup>69</sup>

In the final stanzas of the poem, which are the words of the Red Horse, he appears to concede to the poet. He claims to have calmed down completely and, suggesting the sincerity of what he says, asks the poet to take his hand. “You have sung the slogans of the government in your melodies”, he tells the poet. The reader is left to wonder if his words are being spoken ironically – an issue the poet had raised with the horse earlier – but the horse’s final lines appear, at least in content, to indicate a turn of heart. He laments that if only the enemy – liars, saboteurs, etc. – had been completely defeated earlier, he and his fellow horses would not be in such a state of abuse and neglect. He implores the poet to “follow the vileness of the enemy with vigilance

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“pest” which harms animals, specifically. The Kazakh word, too, can be translated as something similar to a saboteur.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 22-37.

and a watchful eye...Our power is fair and strict!” he shouts. The final lines of the Russian translation of the poem end with the following plea from the Red Horse:

Cherish the horse, so that the horse may plow and carry,  
So that the sowing front sparkles and grows,  
Let the collective farms fulfill all the directives of Stalin!<sup>70</sup>

For the purposes of this work, perhaps the most important aspect of the poem is in its description of the condition of the Red Horse, the clear disconnect felt between the horse and the poet, and the descriptions and reminiscences of times together. In the introduction to the cited Russian version, in fact, the literary critic Il’ias Kabulov noted that “Seifullin, in general, truthfully describes the state of the draft stock and of Kazakhstan’s livestock breeding” – a fact that was brought to the attention of authorities.<sup>71</sup> The mere subject of the poem, as well as these features within, highlight the relationship that Kazakhs had with their horses and the significant effect that confiscation and collectivization had on that component of Kazakh everyday life throughout the steppe and in Kazakhstan in general. Referring back to the words of Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, who said that whole Kazakh families would mourn the loss of one their horses, he continued by writing that “the Kazakh nomads could not imagine an existence without their livestock: they knew of no other kind, and believed that to be left without their animals would mean certain death.”<sup>72</sup> In this way, the confiscation and collectivization drives of the late 1920s and extending into the early 1930s, represented both a figurative death to many Kazakhs and, as famine struck in the first years of the decade, literal death as well.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 8. APRK f. 141, op. 1, d. 10053, l. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Shayakhmetov, *The Silent Steppe*, 1.

## EPILOGUE

*So you may ask, “what does this have to do current times?” and the answer is that the history of the horse in Kazakhstan is seminal to the culture of the country.<sup>1</sup>*

The roughly fifty-year period spanning late Russian Imperial and early Soviet power in the Kazakh Steppe was one that featured perpetual and lasting damage to the indigenous society, economy, and culture. And where this study ends, another period of suffering – brief but devastating – struck the steppe and its people. In the early 1930s, Stalin’s collectivization campaigns led to a catastrophic famine in the region resulting in the deaths of well over one million people, nearly a quarter of the republic’s population. In addition to the death toll, which disproportionately affected the native Kazakhs, more than a million more starving Kazakh people fled for neighboring Soviet republics or to the east into China. As a result, Kazakhs became the minority within their own republic and would remain so through nearly the entirety of the Soviet period. In describing the effects of the Kazakh famine, one historian has written simply that the “the vast plains of central Kazakhstan, previously traversed by nomads and their herds, fell silent and empty.”<sup>2</sup> The disruption that these periods caused to the Kazakh people, from a cultural and historical standpoint, is perhaps incalculable but when tasked with finding and establishing a new, post-Soviet identity after gaining independence in 1991, the Kazakh people and their government have returned to familiar symbols rooted in the region’s past. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the horse has (re)assumed a prominent role in this modern Kazakh identity. In some ways that may be surprising, though, we can see that for many Kazakhs, the role of the horse as a marker of a uniquely Kazakh history and culture never quite disappeared.

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<sup>1</sup> “History of Horse Riding in Kazakhstan,” <http://kazakhworld.com/history-horse-riding-kazakhstan/> accessed March 24, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Cameron, “The Hungry Steppe,” 1.

In 1997, Kazakhstan moved its capital city from the southeast corner of the country some six-hundred miles north, deep into the steppe to the banks of the Ishim River. But while Nur-Sultan is the governmental center of Kazakhstan, the former capital city of Almaty remains its largest urban center, economic hub, and arguably, its cultural capital.<sup>3</sup> Visitors to this metropolis' city center will undoubtedly find themselves walking down the main thoroughfare named after the country's most popular poet, Abai Qunanbaiuly. A statue of Abai resides in front the Palace of the Republic at the intersection where the avenue bearing his name ends and intersects with Dostyk (previously Lenin). Just to the west of this monument, a tree-lined pedestrian walkway connects Abai to a parallel avenue just to the south where Almaty's Republic Square is situated. In the square is a monument to the independence of Kazakhstan which has as its centerpiece a 91-foot tall column topped by a statue of a "Golden Warrior" (Kazakh - *Altan Adam*) standing on a winged snow leopard. The statue was inspired by a Scythian warrior prince who was buried not far from Almaty around 500 B.C. and unearthed in 1969. In her chapter from an edited volume on "materializing identities in Socialist and post-Socialist cities," Nari Shelekpavev ponders why such a choice was made to represent an independent Kazakhstan and provide a common point of identity for all of the country's citizens. She argues that with independence across Soviet space "many post-socialist states tried to excavate figures from the more distant past, since more recent figures were or could be contested by various groups of people." In the case of Kazakhstan, she writes that some historical figures from the Russian Imperial or Soviet periods were too

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<sup>3</sup> As of the writing of this epilogue, the capital city's name change from Astana to Nur-Sultan, in light of Nursultan Nazarbayev's retirement, was only days old.

contentious but that the Scythian prince “provided a fascinating symbol that represented strength, greatness, and compromise at a moment when other historical figures were questionable.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the column of the Golden Warrior, the monument to independence in Republic Square is comprised of four statues at the column’s base, amongst which are two children on horseback flanking the column to either side (fig. 3). According to the monument’s architect, Shot-Aman Valikhanov, the children signify youth and hope for the country’s future. Though the horses are at first sight perhaps of secondary importance to the children riding them, Shelekpáyev argues that they are the “main elements” of a continuation of a “late-Soviet instrumentalization of the Nomadic Myth, appropriated in order to give authenticity to a constructed ‘kazakhness.’” Shelekpáyev elaborates on her usage of the term “myth” in this context by arguing that nomadism/mobile pastoralism was destroyed by the Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s and thus something of the distant past. She claims, however, that Soviet ideology maintained the image of a mobile Kazakh to foster “an idea of the antecedent of the nation.” With independence, then, this imagery was readily recognizable and available to be employed as “a more active instrument of ethnocentric nation-building.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nari Shelekpáyev, “Public Spaces and Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan (1991-2001)” in Jaroslav Ira and Jiří Janáč eds., *Materializing Identities in Socialist and Post-Socialist Cities* (Prague, 2018), 86-88.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 88.





Figure 3: “Young Boy on Horse”  
Monument to Independence –  
Almaty, Kazakhstan.  
Source: Photograph by Author, July 2013

Adding to the imagery on display in Republic Square, one only has to peer across Satpayev to the government building that once served as the Bolshevik party headquarters. Where once the hammer and sickle hung high above the main entrance, the national emblem of independent Kazakhstan (fig. 4) is now featured exclusively. According to the official website of the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the state emblem is in the shape of a circle which is a symbol of eternity and was “especially valued among the nomads of the Great Steppes.” At the center of the emblem is the image of a *shanyrak* – the arched cross piece at the top of a yurt – with the structure’s supports spreading in out in all directions. To either side of the shanyrak, and intended to be the “key heraldic element of the State Emblem,” are two mythical winged horses known as *tulpars*, all juxtaposed against the blue hue of the endless steppe skies. Not

coincidentally, this same shade of blue is the primary color of the Kazakh national flag. Within this one area, then, and in close proximity to one another, we see multiple images of the horse and other elements of a Kazakh mobile pastoral past which greatly emphasizes the persistent and dominant position of each within Kazakh culture.



Figure 4: The Kazakh National Emblem.  
Source: [http://www.akorda.kz/en/state\\_symbols/kazakhstan\\_emblem](http://www.akorda.kz/en/state_symbols/kazakhstan_emblem)  
(accessed March 23, 2019)

These symbols are intended to draw on imagery of times gone by and unite the Kazakh people in the present, but while the use of yurts and the practice of mobile pastoralism had been largely ground to a halt during the Soviet period, the horse has strayed little from the center of most

Kazakhs' lives. Throughout the Soviet period, herd horse breeding, as discussed in chapter three, remained a principle method practiced throughout Kazakhstan and was done so in large part for the meat and dairy products that the horses could provide. In 1983 for instance, over 50 kumys production centers were in operation within the Soviet Union and horse meat comprised somewhere around 8-10% of consumed meat in some parts of Kazakhstan.<sup>6</sup> To this day, visitors to the country can readily find meals of *beshbarmak* (horse meat, noodles, and onions, served family-style in a large dish) at local eateries, purchase horse meat from bazaars or butchers to prepare it themselves, or find multiple variations of dried horse meat and sausages to snack on. And just as is the claim in lore, Kazakhs continue to laud the purported health benefits – often bordering on mysticism – of a steady diet of horse meat and mare's milk. In fact, Kazakh Olympians grabbed newspaper headlines during their trip to London in 2012 when their *kazy* (horse meat sausage) and *karta* (a snack made from the horse's large intestine) brought from home were held up by customs officials due to stringent British import restrictions on certain meat products – horse included. Because the Kazakh national team would not have a chef with them to cook the traditional cuisine of their homeland, coaches claimed they wanted to bring the food items as something “extra” for their diet, especially for their weightlifters and wrestlers, to help them reach peak fitness for their events.<sup>7</sup>

Other signs of a Kazakh connection to the pre-tsarist and certainly pre-Soviet past are somewhat less subtle than the slabs of horse meat hanging in the bazaars or the yurt-shaped restaurants that attract locals and visitors alike. The game of *kokpar* is one that is typically

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<sup>6</sup> Iu.N. Barmintsev and E.V. Kozhevnikov, *Konevodstvo v SSSR* (Moscow, 1983), 113-115. Though the work does not specify where the kumys production centers were located, it is most likely that they were located within the Central Asian republics as kumys is much more popular there than elsewhere.

<sup>7</sup> “Kazakhstan Olympic team will bring horse meat to London,” <https://en.tengrinews.kz/people/Kazakhstan-Olympic-team-will-bring-horse-meat-to-London-11315/> accessed March 23, 2019.

featured at cultural events and holiday festivals but has been experiencing quite a resurgence of late throughout the country. An ancient game played on horseback, kokpar riders fight over control of goat carcass in an attempt to carry it off and throw it in their opponent's goal. The game is played similarly throughout much of Central Asia, albeit under different names, and harkens back to a time when warrior-men had to be masterful riders. The game allowed them to train their horses and sharpen their skills in preparation for combat but obviously lost some of its original purpose with time. During the Soviet period, the game was played in non-sanctioned fashion throughout villages of the steppe as fathers would pass the game down to their sons but has become a much greater presence in the post-Soviet era. And like in other regions of Central Asia, kokpar in Kazakhstan has become a contemporary sport transformed for modern times with the help of the government.<sup>8</sup>

In his 2017 piece “A Kingdom for a Horse: Kokpar and the Future of Kazakhstan,” Will Boast traveled to Taldykorgan, about 150 miles northeast of Almaty, to take in the sport which has been catching on in Kazakhstan. With heavy government support and financial backing, Kazakhstan's National Kokpar Association was formed in 2000 and quickly included professional teams from every corner of the country. Not only do teams compete within Kazakhstan for national recognition, but as of 2017, a world kokpar competition was organized in which eleven international teams participated – including the United States. Kazakhstan hosted the inaugural event and won, beating Kyrgystan in the championship match.<sup>9</sup> For Kazakhstan, Boast claims that such a resurgence – particularly at the behest of Kazakh officials – signals a Kazakh desire to “not only define itself to the world, but to reclaim and remake the

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<sup>8</sup> For example, see G. Whitney Azoy, *Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan* (Long Grove, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> The kokpar championship coincided with the 2017 World Expo in Astana, Kazakhstan. See “The First World “Kokpar” Chmpionship,” <http://www.expo2017culture.kz/en/event/view?id=356> accessed March 24, 2019.

past.” Speaking to spectators at the kokpar games, Boast writes of “nearly every middle-aged man” he spoke with recalling the kokpar matches they played as boys and the appreciation they still hold for the game. “We play kokpar because it’s in our blood,” he was reportedly told many times, “because we are nomads.” These words ringing true to his ears, Boast writes that “after all, a nation defines itself by what it reveres.”<sup>10</sup>

Long-established horse breeding methods as well as the rites and festivals associated with them likewise continue to prove an important aspect of cultural heritage for Kazakhs. In one particular region of Kazakhstan, these practices have even been acknowledged by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). As of 2016, the “traditional spring festive rites of the Kazakh horse breeders” has been added to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanities. The particular event takes place yearly in the village of Terisakkan, situated deep within the steppe in Ulytau District, Karaganda Oblast – just under 200 miles west of the capital, Nur-Sultan. In an interview regarding the festival, Baktiyar Kozhakhmetov, director of the National Museum in Ulytau, described the main components of the holiday – the rites of *biye baylau* (“tethering mares”) and *ayghyr kosu* (joining the stallions with the herds). He claims that “from time immemorial” and through the Soviet era, villagers of Terisakkan come together yearly on the first or second day of May to conduct the rites which have been carried on there in their original forms to this day. This, he says, is not the case in other parts of Kazakhstan but diaspora communities in both Mongolia and China continue to do the same. The general purpose of these events are to celebrate the coming spring and bless the horse herds on which they are so dependent.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Will Boast, “A Kingdom for a Horse: Kokpar and the Future of Kazakhstan,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 93, no. 3 (Summer, 2017): 26-35.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO contends that, at least in Terisakkan, the “viability” of the events “are not threatened, as it is firmly rooted in the family environment and continuously transmitted.” See “Decision of the

The culmination of biye baylau is milking the tethered mares and preparing a feast at which the year's first kumys is prepared and served at large feasts in a gathering known as *kymyz muryndyk*. According to famed Kazakh historian Akhmet Toktabai, the success of these events would foretell the health and prosperity of the village for the year to come.<sup>12</sup> Baktiyar Kozhakhmetov notes the present day importance of spreading awareness of these festivals among Kazakhs to connect them with a strong common past. Since the festival's inclusion on the UNESCO Heritage List, kymyz muryndyk celebrations have been held throughout Kazakhstan and the Kazakh government has been actively promoting such festivals through its recently initiated "Rukhani Zhangyru" (Modern National Identity program) which is focused on the revival of "spiritual values" and the preservation of a "national identity" in the modern Kazakh citizen.<sup>13</sup> A visitor to one of the festivals, Zhanen Dodanova, expressed her pride in the "ancient traditions" and the importance of their revival for the younger generations. "This festival," she said "is a testimony to the success of [the Modern National Identity program]. We are going back to our roots and honoring our history."<sup>14</sup>

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Intergovernmental Committee: 13 COM 10.B.21," <https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/13.COM/10.B.21> accessed March 24, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Kymyz Muryndyk, see Akhmet Toktabai, *Kul't konia u kazakhov* (Almaty, 2004), 24-26.

<sup>13</sup> "O proekte," <http://ruh.kz> accessed March 24, 2019. Amongst other goals, this project involves the transition of the Kazakh language to Latin script.

<sup>14</sup> "'Kymyz Muryndyk' is one of the ancient Kazakh traditions," [https://kazakh-tv.kz/ru/view/culture/page\\_195979\\_'kymyz-muryndyk'-is-one-of-the-ancient-kazakh-traditions](https://kazakh-tv.kz/ru/view/culture/page_195979_'kymyz-muryndyk'-is-one-of-the-ancient-kazakh-traditions) accessed March 24, 2019.

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