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The Tenor of Religious and Everyday Culture Among Russian Peasant Sectarians in Eastern Armenia (Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century)

Although religion is known to permeate many spheres of life, both social and individual (traditional economic forms, everyday customs and cultural practices, self-awareness, etc.), religion had an even greater impact on social and family life and culture among the Russian peasant sectarian settlers of the Transcaucasus because of their natural and artificial isolation.¹ The Molokans, Dukhobors, and Subbotniks—who had been “expelled” by the Orthodox Church, with the support of the tsarist administration, into distant lands where they were surrounded by peoples alien to them in language, religion, and material and spiritual culture—carried with them not only all the cultural and everyday mores that they had inherited from their forebears but also a religious organization, a system of relationships among community members that was based on religious traditions and psychological orientations.

It is entirely natural that, once in the Transcaucasus, the sectarians did their best to settle in enclaves, isolated not only from the indigenous

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population but also from members of other sects. This multid denominational colonization permitted them to cling to the rituals and norms of their religious life and helped strengthen the rural community. Settlement according to denominational affiliation suited the tsarist government, too, making it easier to manage and monitor the sectarians. While entertaining high hopes that the settlers would improve the local economy and assist the army during military operations, the government did, however, seek to restrict the sectarians' religious activism in their new home. It recommended: "in forming societies of schismatics, endeavor that they be constituted of followers of diverse sects, whose rules are in essence mutually disparate."²

In eastern Armenia (within the frontiers of present-day Armenia) sectarianism was represented by the two trends of Molokanism and Subbotnikism. In 1886 Molokans were in a majority, with 7,500 members versus 1,000 or so Subbotniks. The late nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new sect—the Baptists, then represented by only about a hundred people.³ The preponderance of Molokans influenced the name given to the sectarians by the indigenous population, who called them all Molokans.⁴

The Armenian settlements were monodenominational (predominantly Molokan) and polydenominational (populated by Molokans and Subbotniks), and we have uncovered a certain dependence between denominational composition and the formation of a given settlement.

Population centers such as Nikitino and Voskresenka, which were established by individuals who left a given region [in the central provinces—Ed.] for the Transcaucasus in organized contingents, were monodenominational. Settlements formed by peasants who had come "at various times, from various places and various jurisdictions," and had changed their place of residence more than once before finally settling down were normally inhabited by both Molokans and Subbotniks. Examples of the latter are the villages of Elenovka and Vorontsovka, which were founded by settlers originally from the village of Topchi (Shemakha province), who had moved to the Transcaucasus "at various times" during the 1830s from Bessarabia and from Taurida, Voronezh, and Penza provinces.

Molokans outnumbered the rest in all polydenominational settlements except Elenovka, where Subbotniks accounted for 780, or 63.6 percent, of the 1,226 inhabitants and Molokans (both Constant [*postoiannye*] Molokans and Jumpers [*pryguny*]) for the remaining 446, or 36.4 percent.⁵

Molokans and Subbotniks sharing a single village had an easygoing relationship. Their religious distinctions went almost unnoticed in daily life, and some were even linked by ties of kinship. Although Molokans and Subbotniks both had systems of prohibitions and restrictions on their members' day-to-day conduct in society, there were points of contact between the creeds. They were characterized by an identical attitude toward Holy Writ, recognizing the Bible as the source of their faith, and the members of both assembled into religious communities.

This religious community took specific forms. The Molokan religious community gave every semblance of being a fraternity of equals. Its older members were its chief authorities and supplied the pool from which the presbyter—the head of the religious community but equal to its other members and indistinguishable from them in dress and conduct, as much a peasant as everyone else—was elected. In principle, any man in the community could become presbyter someday. The main requirements for the post were a good knowledge of the Bible and the high regard of one's fellow peasants. Jumper communities had prophets, who entered a trance state to predict upcoming events in the lives of the faithful. Great authority was exercised by the “speakers” [*besedniki*] or “readers” [*chital'niki*], who were biblical experts capable of explaining readings to the group. Because singing occupied a significant place in the Molokan worship cycle, cantors, too, commanded honor and respect. The singing of religious songs and psalms to ancient Russian melodies was, especially in the case of the Jumpers, a means of manipulating the emotions of the faithful.

The Molokan religious community could comprise not only Russians but also members of other nationalities, provided that they accepted the Molokan creed. Religious communities in Novyi Baiazetskii district [*uezd*] (in Erivan province) included some Mordvins who had been exiled from the Volga in the 1850s for rejecting Orthodoxy. Field materials, corroborated by literary sources, also tell of instances (admittedly rare) of Armenians accepting Molokanism.⁶

The creed and praxis of the Molokans and of the Subbotniks emphasized women's subordination to men. Women could not preach or lead prayer meetings.

The age-related hierarchy became conspicuously clear when worshippers entered a prayer meeting and took their seats. The older people entered first and took the seats of greatest honor in the corner facing the door, behind the table, followed by the middle-aged, young married

couples, and the young. The women sat behind the men (“Being of lower rank, they sit to the rear”).⁷

In the nineteenth century, prayer meetings were held in private homes, which were too small to accommodate all the faithful at once, so the congregation separated into several groups corresponding to the division of the village into neighborhoods or sectors. After the decree of 1905 that “granted complete freedom in the matter of meeting one’s spiritual needs,” prayer houses were constructed in some villages, usually centrally located. In Vorontsovka, for example, three Constant Molokan meetings were replaced by a single large gathering.

Molokans began regularly attending prayer meetings—which were held on Sundays, on holidays, and on the eve of holidays—after marriage. A family going to a morning or evening Sunday service would be led by the head of the family and his wife, followed by the adult sons and their wives, all dressed in their best. Meetings lasted for three to four hours, consisted of reading passages from the Bible or the book *Spirit and Life* [Dukh i zhizn’] and the singing of psalms and religious songs, and ended with general prayer. It must be emphasized that the religious ideas and dogma were adopted in the peasant environment as a matter of form. Only the outward hieratic forms—public worship, prayers, and fasts that were to be strictly performed and observed by all community members—were grasped. Any deviation from the accepted norms immediately stood out and thus became amenable to superintendence, which presented the spiritual preceptors [*nastavniki*] with the opportunity to exert their influence over the congregation.

The number of sectarians in the Transcaucasus was somewhat increased by instances of “divergence” from Orthodoxy into schism. Such conversions were facilitated by the Orthodox Church’s weakness in the Transcaucasus and its inability to muster the vigor needed to withstand sectarianism. Many formerly Orthodox fugitive peasants became sectarians in the 1830s–50s, since the support provided by religious communities offered the only possibility of avoiding punishment for having run away.

There was a mass conversion from Orthodoxy to Molokanism in Armenia during the 1880s, when more than two hundred peasants from settlements in Borchalinskii district (Novopokrovka, Gergery Russkie, Privol’nyi) became “Molokanized” and founded the village of Novomikhailovka near Vorontsovka.⁸ But the increase in the numbers of sectarians is basically attributable to the natural population growth among

the faithful, since children were regarded as belonging to their parents' community and wives to their husbands'.

There were also documented instances of sectarian conversion to another denomination: "schismatics are arbitrarily abandoning their beliefs, converting from one sect to another; thus, for instance, those of the Molokan sect convert to the Subbotnik or Judaist sect."⁹ Both Molokans and Subbotniks were known to switch their religious affiliation, often in accordance with the balance of religions in a given settlement.

The largest local group of sectarians would influence their neighbors of other religions. "In the settlement of Elenovka," we read in a report to a provincial board, "the overwhelming majority consists of Subbotniks, who take advantage of this to exert pressure of every kind on the Russian settlers there and endeavor to spread among them ideas and interpretations that are dangerous and intolerable to the government."¹⁰ Subbotnik religious doctrine attracted Molokans because it accepted divorce and did not prohibit alcohol. "If a Molokan sees that it is difficult for him to refrain from drinking, he converts to Subbotnikism; and if he wants to leave his wife because another has taken his fancy, he converts to Subbotnikism, since Molokans disapprove of divorce, but Subbotniks place no constraints on it."¹¹

Whereas a religious community encompassed only followers of a single religious doctrine, the village commune comprised all peasants, regardless of religious affiliation. Church law and procedures were embodied in the religious community, and common law and procedures in the village commune. Since the religious community and the village commune were not opposites but complementary, the activities of one did not contradict the other. It was also quite significant that the law indiscriminately classified the followers of "particularly harmful" sects as nonconformists: hence, Constant Molokans, Jumper Molokans, and Subbotniks were rallied and united by a sense of religious solidarity. The village commune expressed the interests of all its peasants, regardless of their denominational affiliation.

There also existed an internal mechanism of interaction between the village commune and the spiritual community, between village officials and religious leaders, which played an important role when sects coexisted in a single settlement. Although data on this are extremely sparse, they do permit us to draw some conclusions—for example, the village commune was usually led by members of the numerically dominant sect. The village elder [*starosta*] in Elenovka was a Subbotnik. In Vorontsovka,

where a small group of Subbotniks lived alongside a large Molokan community, the former never took public office. But if a settlement was populated by both Constant Molokans and Jumpers, an individual's religious persuasion played no role in his election to a public position.

It was not unusual for spiritual preceptors not only to dominate a community's religious life but also to act as a surrogate for civil authority there. In the first decade of the twentieth century, for instance, Stepan Zhabin, a peasant who was simultaneously "senior" presbyter, teacher of religion, and superintendent of the local school, was also a noted authority in the Vorontsovka rural assembly.¹²

Throughout the nineteenth century and in the first quarter of the twentieth, the rural, localized mode of settlement, the isolation (especially in matters spiritual) both from the indigenous population and from Russians who practiced the state religion, and the paucity of Orthodox churches and officiants whose duties would normally include returning sectarians to the bosom of the church created conditions conducive to the development and consolidation of religious communities.

All members of the religious community had close familial and matrimonial, ceremonial, and ritual ties that were legitimized by the sectarian creed. The peasant's religious and everyday lives were interwoven, with no boundaries between them.

One of the religious community's important functions was the regulation of familial and matrimonial relationships, and primarily the construction of a firm foundation for the family. The village "world" [*mir*, which also means commune] had a vested interest in fostering and harnessing natural population growth, while the religious community's interest lay in increasing the numbers of its adherents.

Sectarians in the Transcaucasus typically married within their religion, especially in the decades immediately following the move to Armenia. Restricting marriage to coreligionists was possible, however, only where there was an equal number of men and women of the socially appropriate age. The gender disproportion caused by small population size led to marriage between second or third cousins and to marriages between an older woman and a younger man. This explains a comment found in *Acts of the Caucasian Archeographical Commission* [Akty Kavkazskoi arkhograficheskoi kommissii]: "in the Russian schismatic settlements of the Transcaucasus all schismatics, in general, enter into marriage wantonly, allowing males still in their minority to marry adult women and vice versa."¹³ Such marriages did indeed take place, but they were not the norm.

As evidenced by an analysis of family lists [*semeinye spiski*, administrative records—Trans.] for the sectarians of Armenia, in the 1850s the proportion of married couples in the village of Nikitino (Aleksandropol'skii district, Erivan province) in which the wife was older than the husband (often by up to five years) was a significant 21.5 percent, and in the 1880s that number stood at 20.3 percent in the village of Elenovka (Novyi Baiazetskii district, again in Erivan province). Such marriages were prompted by rigid adherence to the religious prohibition on marriage to people of other faiths, which was strictly observed by the inhabitants of Nikitino, who had been exiled there from the village of Algasovo (Morshanskii district, Tambov province) for their devotion to Molokanism, and in Elenovka, among the adherents of various religious persuasions (Constant Molokans, Jumpers, and Subbotniks).¹⁴

But that strict religious endogamy was abandoned around the turn of the nineteenth century. Marriages took place between sectarians of various religions, including Baptists, although marriage between coreligionists was still preferred. If people from two different sects married, the ceremony was conducted by the groom's religious community and the wife adopted her husband's faith—for instance, a Molokan woman marrying a Subbotnik man would join the Subbotnik congregation. The very fact of changing religion was an important psychological landmark in the life of a believer, although a true conversion to a new faith required time.¹⁵

The sectarians, however, held scrupulously to the religious prohibition on marriage to those of the Russian Orthodox faith, except among the Orthodox peasants of the village of Novoaleksandrovka (Borchalinskii district, Tiflis province), who contracted marriages with the Molokans of Vorontsovka and Novomikhailovka. The explanation for this lies in Novoaleksandrovka's history. When the status of its first settlers—fugitive estate peasants, some of whom were Molokans—was uncovered by the authorities in 1858, the escapees were given the choice of remaining Molokans, in which case they would have to be returned to Russia's interior provinces, or accepting Orthodoxy and staying in the Transcaucasus. Pressured thus by circumstance, they made a formal renunciation of their faith and accepted, pro forma, all the precepts of Orthodoxy, while in fact remaining true to their old belief. It is no coincidence that many in late nineteenth-century Novoaleksandrovka were Baptists.

Despite the fairly close economic ties between the sectarians and the indigenous population of Armenia, they seldom intermarried. Our field notes contain only one reference to such a marriage, which took place

in 1918 between a Molokan woman from the village of Nikitino and an Armenian man from Novyi Baiazet, who had accepted Molokanism while temporarily residing in Nikitino. But the descendants of that marriage are snubbed to this day.¹⁶

The religiously and ethnopsychologically determined shunning of mixed marriages between Russians and Armenians separated neighbor from neighbor and closed off one of the most important routes for acquiring the neighboring culture or language. Marital endogamy, however, did prevent the assimilation of the Russian ethnic group by any other people.

Molokan values in family relations called for honesty and loyalty to the family and to home and hearth. The sectarians had no truck with the ecclesiastical formalities of marriage, which involved sizable fees paid to the clergy. They recognized only marriages founded on the agreement of bride and groom and blessed by the presbyter and the religious community. In the past, Molokans did not use the common word for “wedding” [*svad’ba*], preferring instead a term derived from the Bible [*brak*]. Like all other family rituals, marriage was supervised by the religious community. The presbyter gave his consent to the marriage of the two young people and met with the parents to set the amount of the dowry. The ceremony was attended not only by the couple’s coreligionists but also by fellow villagers of other religious persuasions who were linked by neighborhood, kinship, and the rural environment. Their inclusion strengthened the rural collective by overlapping social and denominational ties.

The wedding ceremony, which was performed by the presbyter, included the blessing of the bride and groom by their parents, a homily on the meaning of marriage (based on biblical texts), and the assent of bride and groom, given to each other in the presence of all the guests, followed by a reading of the list of mutual spousal duties and the ritual bestowal of the bride on the groom. The reading of appropriate passages from the Bible was interspersed by the singing of psalms and spiritual songs.

By formalizing the marriage and effectively legitimizing the new family, the religious community assumed a certain commitment toward the village commune for the preservation of that family and the fulfillment of all its functions. Conflict (depending on its severity and significance) was resolved on the spot or brought before the meeting; only in extreme cases was it taken to the communal authorities. There was in this a certain concession to the principle of “not washing one’s dirty linen in public,” especially if adherents of other sects lived in the same settlement. The

religious community's close attention to its members' family affairs is explained by the fact that a pleasant atmosphere in the home provided the preconditions for the family's economic well-being, for the religious upbringing of children who would be active members of that community in the future, and so on.

But, while Molokan doctrine held that "the wife . . . is a helpmeet and support, a friend and companion in this vale of bitterness,"¹⁷ in reality relations between spouses were viewed as necessarily entailing the wife's subordination to the husband. Spousal relations were complicated by the fact that quite a few marriages were contracted exclusively at the will of the parents, who married off their sons and daughters without their consent and quite often contrary to their desires. One cause of domestic conflict was drunkenness, which was not infrequent in sectarian families, even among the Molokans, whose doctrine forbade the use of alcohol.

Although the wife was to subordinate herself to her husband, the religious community condemned any husband who treated his wife cruelly. Also condemned was a head of the family who failed to fulfill his obligations to support his wife, children, or aged parents. The woman could complain to the meeting if her husband beat or berated her. The perpetrator was then formally admonished in the presence of his coreligionists. A repeat offender could be banned from the prayer meetings for a month or longer (depending on the degree of guilt). If the man persisted in his idleness and refused to work, the community would exhort the other villagers not to feed him or give him a place to sleep. That injunction would be spread to neighboring religious communities, both within and outside the settlement in question. The boycott was not lifted until the excommunicate repented before a prayer meeting. The penitent was received back into the community and the family, sometimes after having been physically chastised.¹⁸

We also have the following observation of sectarians, made by civil servants in the mid-nineteenth century: "when couples disagree or quarrel, they dissolve the marriage, sometimes drawing up secular adjudications, which, however, they show to no one."¹⁹ That conclusion may have rested on observations of Subbotniks, whose religious gatherings, while censuring divorce, still allowed one of the divorced parties to remarry—which was, as mentioned above, one of the reasons for Molokan conversion to Subbotnikism. The Molokans held strict views on the indissolubility of the bonds of matrimony, and peasants in general viewed divorce as the most grievous sin. The Molokan consensus was that divorced spouses

were adulterers. They were not permitted to remarry, and an acknowledged adulterer was effectively banished from the community and incurred the scorn of the faithful. That was their way of doing everything humanly possible to keep divorce at bay.

The community's strict policy toward broken families prevented many women from taking the ultimate step. In most cases, significantly, the parents of a woman who left her husband would refuse to take her back, for fear of attracting censure from the other villagers. Sometimes despairing women petitioned the provincial board [*gubernskoe pravlenie*] for a divorce, as the peasant M. Karaeva did in 1867:

Six years ago I married, by the rites of the Molokan sect, Timofei Vavilov, a villager from Konstantinovka. . . . I endured all, in the hope that he would at last recollect himself and my sufferings would end, but I was mistaken. My sufferings continue. My husband intensifies his persecution with every passing year; with every passing day he intensifies the beatings, the vile language, and whatever might do me harm and give him pleasure. . . . Lacking the means to be rid of my husband . . . I have decided to abase myself before Your Excellency, asking that you bid whomever it may concern to divorce me from my husband, Timofei Vavilov.²⁰

That suit, like other similar requests, passed unremarked, since the government had already resolved “not to intervene in errors repugnant to the canons of the true Church.”

The official policy on sectarian family life was unique. Inasmuch as the family rituals of baptism, marriage, and burial were not sanctified in a church, the authorities viewed sectarian marriages as cohabitation and permitted any who abandoned the sectarian creed and accepted Orthodoxy to marry again.²¹ That provision, in effect, gave official sanction to divorce: the acceptance of Orthodoxy offered a way out of domestic conflict to which some women did indeed resort. In 1852 A. Kanygina, a fugitive peasant, explained at trial that in her previous place of residence in Saratov province, “having disagreement with her husband, Gr. Kozlov, and wishing to obtain a divorce from him, [she] accepted Orthodoxy, but then repented thereof and fled in 1843 to the territory of the Transcaucasus, where she married a Russian peasant and again began to follow the Molokan sect.”²² In the mid-nineteenth century two married women in Vorontsovka were “converted to Christianity” [*vykrestilis*'] (one with her youngest son, aged two) and, having accepted Orthodoxy, left for Tiflis.²³

Those who accepted Orthodoxy were allowed to return to their home-

land. In 1858 Dar'ia Merkulova Katasonova rejected Molokanism and went back home, to the village of Chuev (Borisoglebskii district, Tambov province). Her husband, who remained in the village of Semenovka, "was cautioned that in the event of any action taken to tempt his wife, he would be treated as a seducer."²⁴

One of the important functions of the sectarian family was to raise children in the spirit of religion, in reverence for the moral dogmas by which their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers had lived. Children were introduced to religion at an early age. The prayers that accompanied nightfall, a meal, or the launching of a new work project and the solemn atmosphere surrounding meeting attendance by the family's adults created in the child a particular perception of religious life.

No small role in the religious upbringing of children belonged to the oldest members of the family, who, by virtue of having less to do, spent more time with the children than their parents did. The old people were the custodians not only of the productive skills of their fathers and grandfathers but also of traditional moral and ethical ideas and behavioral norms. In the eyes of those around them, they were the founders of the settlements and had borne all the rigors of migration and setting up in a new location. Some of them had been exiled to the Transcaucasus for their devotion to sectarianism, which threw a halo of martyrdom for the faith around the entire older generation. The elderly kept a watchful eye on the family's observation of all the religious prohibitions and regulations.

The religious upbringing of the young was performed not only by the family but also by the religious community. There were Sunday schools of a kind, which the children began to attend from the age of ten to thirteen: on Sundays all the young people in the village came to the prayer meeting, where experienced preceptors acquainted them with what was in the Bible and instructed them in the complex motifs of religious song.

Attendance at prayer meetings and the precise fulfillment of all religious precepts played a substantial role in the shaping of a young person's reputation. Not only the family but also the entire community watched to make sure that young people did not miss Sunday services. While the spiritual preceptors rebuked parents whose sons failed to attend the meetings, youngsters who proved themselves outstandingly pious were, by contrast, held in some regard.

The sectarians' religion also made its mark on the enjoyment of secular games and amusements. In Molokan families, any expression of a spiritual life unrelated to religion—folk songs (which the sectarians called "sol-

diers' songs"), ceremonies, and dances—was forbidden. No poetry not authorized by the sect (spiritual verses and songs of religious content) could be performed. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Dingel'shtedt wrote:

The doctrine of the Jumpers prohibits any manifestation of gaiety. Any songs other than "spiritual" songs are strictly forbidden, which does not, however, prevent the young girls from singing ditties under their breath. . . . But such songs they sing only where there are no older people about and no one can hear them. . . . "Whirlwinds shall rend us for those songs," one boy told me, "or we shall be thrashed . . . with reins or aught else." Any dance of a secular nature is also most strictly forbidden.²⁵

Those who sang religious songs well were highly regarded and invariably asked to participate in family ceremonies, which provided no inconsiderable motivation to master the complex polyphonic singing style. Girls who wanted to perfect their singing often gathered to learn by ear from singers of renown.

The singing of psalms was widespread among the Molokans. In fact, spiritual verse was found among sectarians of various persuasions—the Baptists and the Molokans, for instance—and many such verses were studied and learned from printed collections. The main motifs of those spiritual songs included praise for the power of God the omnipotent, uncomplaining resignation to a harsh fate, and the coexistence of and battle between good and evil.

Although spiritual verses had no poetic value, they played a large role in the nurturing of religious sentiments, being sung not only during services but also during family rituals and holiday celebrations and social gatherings of young people. As Dingel'shtedt tells us of the Jumpers: "where several girls and boys or even just girls come together, the spiritual songs would begin right away, and in winter, to the placid whirring of a spindle or the even more placid click of knitting needles, they sing up to fifty songs, one after the other. Usually everyone present joins in."²⁶

No amount of prohibition, though, could force people to abandon what they held dear, so lyrical and ritual poetry lived on "surreptitiously" among the sectarians. Folk songs were secretly sung when young people got together outside the village or in their social gatherings. Lyrical songs—songs about parents who arranged the fate of a son or daughter contrary to the child's own desires and about unhappy marriages, and songs of literary provenance (such as "The Moscow Blaze Did Roar and Burn" ["Shumel, gorel pozhar moskovskii"])—were popular. When

quadrille songs (more accurately described as quatrain songs) were sung, the young people would dance.

The Bible occupied a special place in Molokan life. It was the source of their creed and of their knowledge of the truth. Everything that both spiritual preceptors and rank-and-file Molokans said or did was backed by an appropriate quote from the Old or New Testament. The Bible was the book of first resort in every Molokan household and was consulted for advice on life. The recitation from memory of fragments of religious texts was an everyday phenomenon in the Molokan milieu.

The huge role played by the Bible in Molokan doctrine and the elevated social status accorded to a literate peasant by the religious community provided the peasants with motivation for learning to read and write. The high level of Molokan literacy distinguished them not only from the Subbotniks and Dukhobors but also from Orthodox peasants.²⁷

Molokan families enjoyed spending their evenings reading and being read to aloud—usually from a book of spiritual content, although in some villages (Vorontsovka, for instance) there were also secular books, newspapers, and journals.²⁸ In addition to meeting religious needs, literacy also speeded the development of monetary/commodity exchange.

The Molokans paid a great deal of attention to educating their children, especially the boys, and many Molokan villages had a school. In 1905 there were forty-nine sectarian schools (with 2,562 students) in the Transcaucasus, three of them (with 172 students) attended by Dukhobor children, three others (with 140 students) by Subbotnik children, and the remaining forty-three (with 2,250 students) by Molokan children.²⁹ The teachers were outsiders, but religious studies were taught, according to the rules of the faith, by the local spiritual preceptor. The school was run by a parents' council, which also included the village elder and a member of the religious community. In some villages, classes were held in the prayer house, which strengthened the children's denominational focus.

The peasant commune financed the construction of schools and libraries and issued invitations to new teachers, who were paid from the public purse. The peasants believed that the school should teach their children not only reading, writing, and arithmetic but also the trades they would need in adult life. In 1919 the village of Nikitino decided to allocate public funds for a third teacher and to hold handicraft classes for the girls and trade classes for the boys, so that the latter could learn metalworking, woodworking, and cooperage.³⁰ In 1916 the Molokans in the village of

Sukhoi Fontan decided to apply public funds to opening a library and reading room, the intention being to distract “the younger generation from all games of chance, from debauchery, and from misbehavior.”³¹

Another function of the religious community was to monitor compliance with various restrictions that impinged on all spheres of peasant life. The peasant settlers had brought this tradition of prohibitive rulings from their previous homes, and the Russian sectarians’ introversion in Armenia helped entrench the taboos.

The community intervened heavily in issues relating to full or partial taboos. No work could be done in the fields on Saturday afternoon, and after the midday meal, preparations for attending the meeting had to begin. The ban on working on a day of rest was strictly observed, especially in large, undivided families. Not until the twentieth century, when the process of family division began to intensify, was permission granted to perform light work on Sundays, after sundown. Violators were subjected to moral discipline, up to and including a demand that they repent before members of the community. Even peasant carters tried to observe the ban on Sunday work. The Subbotnik day of rest was Saturday [*subbota*], on which day their religion forbade them to kindle a fire, either to light the stove or to heat the samovar. So they asked their Molokan neighbors to come in and perform those tasks on their behalf.

These prohibitions (and others associated with sexual relations between spouses and the purity of women) were, to some degree or another, also typical of Orthodox Russians living in Armenia, although the sectarians were much more exacting in monitoring compliance with the prohibitions, and the degree of compliance was also much higher.

The Molokans of Armenia observed particularly strict dietary taboos on a number of foods. They did not eat pork, hare, certain varieties of fish (“scaleless fish”), onions, or garlic. They were forbidden to smoke tobacco (which they called the “devil’s incense”) and to drink alcohol. The Subbotniks also did not eat pork.

Additionally, the sectarians were not allowed to eat meat “butchered by strangers,” meaning that they had not bought it from coreligionists. Violators were declared sinners.

The Molokan religious doctrine preached the observation of fasts: “The fast . . . should be secret, not manifest—that is, not in food but in spirit.”³² Fasts were held on the eve of a holiday (of which they had fewer than the Orthodox) and additionally in spring and in fall, before the work in the fields began and after it was completed. The spring and fall fasts

were followed by a public meal (“they offered a sacrifice”). The fasts lasted from one to three days, never longer. During a fast, nothing could be eaten between sunup and sundown, but one explanation of the name “Molokan” is that they were permitted to drink milk [*moloko*] on fast days, which the Orthodox faithful in similar circumstances could not do.

The system of prohibitions also had a role to play in the preservation of traditional dress. The gradual infiltration of individual elements of urban costume into the everyday lives of the Russian sectarians of eastern Armenia, which began in the late nineteenth century, did not lead to the disappearance of traditional types of dress, due to the older generation’s staunch opposition to innovation. The old costume persisted, even though it was made from purchased fabric. That dress, now an ethnographic idiosyncrasy of Molokanism, began to play the role of a social marker which pointed up the wearer’s membership of this particular ethno-denominational group.

In the past, the religious community was, in effect, the supreme power in the sectarian village. It determined the nature of group ceremony and ritual, the direction taken by public opinion and personal judgment, tastes, conduct, and much more. The regulation of everyday culture and the monitored observance of religious and moral norms placed the congregant in a rigid framework that allowed him no leeway beyond the bounds of that system. The individual had to conform to strict and clear-cut behavioral norms to which there was no alternative. The unquestioning adherence to the old ways defined the profound traditionalism that pervaded the tenor of village life, while the introversion of the Russian sectarians’ daily life, the disconnection between it and its mother-ethnos, and the exoethnic and exodenominational environment in which it was lived facilitated the preservation, until recently, of the sectarians’ religious foundations and their everyday cultural customs as a whole.

Notes

1. This article makes use of historical and ethnographical literature and documents from the USSR Central State Historical Archive [TsGIA SSSR], the Armenian SSR Central State Historical Archive [TsGIA ArmSSR], and the Georgian SSR Central State Historical Archive [TsGIA GruzSSR], supplemented by field materials collected by the author in Russian villages in Armenia during the 1980s. We concentrate on the influence exerted by Molokanism on everyday peasant culture, since that sectarian group was found to predominate in Armenia.

2. TsGIA GruzSSR, f. 4, op. 2, d. 140, l. 252.

3. Calculated from *Svod statisticheskikh dannykh o naselenii Zakavkazskogo kraia, izvlechennykh iz posemeinykh spiskov 1886* (Tiflis, 1895).

4. P. Egorov, "Zakavkazskie dorozhnye zapiski 1851 (doroga ot Tiflisa do She-makhi i g. Elisavetpolia), *Russkii invalid*, 1857, no. 217, p. 897.
5. Calculated from *Svod statisticheskikh dannyykh*.
6. "Pryguny (materialy k istorii obruseniia Zakavkazskogo kraia)," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 1878, no. 9, p. 386. Field materials from the Archive of the Ethnography Department, Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of the Armenian Academy of Sciences (henceforth AOE), no. 117, l. 14.
7. V.V. Vereshchagin, *Dukhobortsy i molokane v Zakavkaz'e. Shiity v Karabakhe. Batchi i opiumoedy v Srednei Azii. Ober-Ameryayu v gorakh Bavarii* (Moscow, 1900), p. 28.
8. G.S. Buniatov, "Byt russkikh krest'ian Loriiskogo uchastka Borchalinskogo uyezda Tiflisskoi gubernii," *Sbornik materialov dlia opisaniia mestnoei i plemen Kavkaza*, no. 31 (Tiflis, 1902), p. 103.
9. *Akty Kavkazskoi arkhologicheskoi komissii* [henceforth AKAK], vol. 11 (Tiflis, 1888), p. 2.
10. TsGIA ArmSSR, f. 94, op. 1, d. 3519, l. 6.
11. A.I. Masalkin, "K istorii zakavkazskikh sektantov," *Kavkaz*, 1893, no. 307.
12. TsGIA ArmSSR, f. 133, op. 1, d. 257, l. 14; field materials, 1973, notebook 3, pp. 1, 12.
13. AKAK, vol. 11, p. 2.
14. TsGIA ArmSSR, f. 133, op. 1, d. 366; f. 93, op. 1, d. 123, ll. 1–25, 641–47; d. 210.
15. P.I. Puchkov, "O sootnoshenii konfessional'noi i etnicheskoi obshchnosti," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, 1973, no. 6, p. 54.
16. Field materials; AOE, no. 117, l. 14.
17. V. Maionov, "Brak i polozhenie zhenshchin u molokan (bytovoii ocherk)," *Znanie*, 1874, no. 3, p. 25.
18. AOE, no. 152, ll. 17, 28; no. 164, l. 33.
19. TsGIA GruzSSR, f. 239, d. 547, l. 32.
20. TsGIA ArmSSR, f. 133, op. 1, d. 809, ll. 2–2 ob.
21. *Sobranie postanovlenii po chasti raskola* (St. Petersburg, 1875), p. 187.
22. TsGIA SSR, f. 1268, op. 6, d. 233, ll. 1–4.
23. TsGIA ArmSSR, f. 133, op. 1, d. 363, l. 9.
24. TsGIA GruzSSR, f. 239, d. 818, l. 10.
25. N.A. Dingel'shtedt, *Zakavkazskie sektanty v ikh semeinom i religioznom bytu* (St. Petersburg, 1885), pp. 18–19.
26. Dingel'shtedt, *Zakavkazskie sektanty*, p. 102.
27. A.M. Argutinskii-Dolgorukov, *Borchalinskii uezd v ekonomicheskoi i kommercheskoi otnosheniakh* (Tiflis, 1897), p. 28; Vereshchagin, *Dukhobortsy i molokane v Zakavkaz'e*, p. 40.
28. Argutinskii-Dolgorukov, *Borchalinskii uezd*, p. 40.
29. TsGIA ArmSSR, f. 113, op. 3, d. 84, l. 9; op. 5, d. 31, l. 13 ob.
30. TsGIA ArmSSR, f. 140, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 71–72.
31. TsGIA ArmSSR, f. 101, op. 1, d. 99, ll. 25–28.
32. Masalkin, "K istorii zakavkazskikh sektantov," *Kavkaz*, 1893, no. 306.

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