Warriors and Peasants

The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia

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Warriors and Peasants

The Don Cossacks in Late Imperial Russia

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Lecturer in History
University of York

in association with
ST ANTONY’S COLLEGE, OXFORD
For my Mum and Dad
The historical life of the Voisko of the Don flows in two parallel directions which in many ways are irreconcilable with each other. On the one hand there is the continuous bearing of arms and the frequent campaigns while on the other there is peaceful domestic life. Similarly you have the brilliant military victories, the eternal glory and the famous names of the heroes which are immortalized in popular mythology and in various military tales. These are passed on from mouth to mouth, feeding the Cossack spirit and fanning national pride. In contrast you have the grey, humdrum routine of ordinary domestic, civil and intellectual activity.

Donskiia Oblastnya Vedomosti, 6 August 1881
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A Note on Transliteration

I have followed the Library of Congress system of transliteration except in cases where names are already widely known in another version. Titles of old newspapers such as Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti have been transliterated exactly rather than rendering them in modern Russian.
**Glossary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ataman</strong></td>
<td>originally Cossack Chieftain, later an official.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chetvert’</strong></td>
<td>as a dry measure equivalent to 210 litres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desiatina</strong></td>
<td>unit of land equivalent to 2.7 acres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Esaul</strong></td>
<td>Cossack officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inogorodnie</strong></td>
<td>‘from a different town’. Name given to peasant migrants to the Don after 1861.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kazachka</strong></td>
<td>Cossack woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Khutor</strong></td>
<td>satellite settlement of a <em>stanitsa</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Krug</strong></td>
<td>‘circle’. Sovereign Assembly of the Don Cossacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oblast’ Voiska Donskogo</strong></td>
<td>Official name for the Don Cossack territory after 1870.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Odnosumstvo</strong></td>
<td>‘one bag’. Friendship based around military service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Okrug</strong></td>
<td>Cossack administrative district equivalent to the more usual <em>uezd</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pai</strong></td>
<td>basic unit of communal land among the Cossacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Polchanik</strong></td>
<td>someone who serves in the same regiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pud</strong></td>
<td>measurement of weight equivalent to 16.38 kg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sbor</strong></td>
<td>communal assembly of the Cossacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skhod</strong></td>
<td>communal assembly of the peasantry (although the Cossacks also used this term).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stanitsa</strong></td>
<td>large Cossack settlement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Starshina</strong></td>
<td>originally an assistant to the <em>ataman</em>, later an honorific title.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zemlia Voiska Donskogo</strong></td>
<td>Official name for the Don Cossack territory before 1870.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Introduction

In the summer of 1874 a journalist working for Donskiiia Oblastnyaia Vedomosti, the official gazette of the Voisko, decided to investigate the claims of a renowned faith healer, Varvara Tikhovna. She lived in Karaitskii Khutor which was part of Sirotinskaia Stanitsa. Tikhovna’s fame as a faith healer had spread for miles around, even coming to the notice of the educated classes in Novocherkassk, the Cossack capital. People came from all over the Don and from beyond its borders to seek her advice about their misfortunes and, hopefully, to receive a cure for them. Two were already there when the journalist arrived. One had come from nearly 50 and the other from 100 miles away. The first Cossack told Tikhovna that his wife had been bedridden for five months. Tikhovna immediately divined that someone had put the ‘evil eye’ on her. The second case concerned an old Cossack, Ivanovich, who had come about his son. To the despair of the old man, his son was completely idle. When Tikhovna had listened to his tale, she asked for the son’s name and set to work.

Tikhovna took the glass phial with water, placed it under her hands, removed the cork and raised it to her lips. Whispering, she shook the phial and, turning from him to the light, began to gaze intently at it. ‘There is a lazy illness in him,’ she said, ‘placed there from childhood by a red-headed neighbour who lives at the back of you.’

Ivanovich expressed no surprise at this diagnosis. He thought for a moment and then identified the ‘red-headed neighbour’ as a first cousin, acting out of spite. Unlike modern psychiatrists, Tikhovna cured as well as diagnosing. She asked for two bottles of vodka over which she spoke
an incantation. The son was to drink both bottles until empty after which he would be cured.

The sceptical journalist who recorded this incident noted that Cossacks routinely consulted all sorts of fortune tellers, faith healers, witches and wizards. Belief in the ‘evil eye’ was strong and was regarded by most ordinary Cossacks as one of life’s many hazards. Ivanovich accepted the faith healer’s explanation without demur and was well satisfied with the outcome. When questioned by the journalist afterwards, Tikhovna explained that she took no money for her services, living on whatever people chose to leave her. Concerning the extent of her powers, she said that if an illness came from God she could do nothing, but if it came from people she could help.

The world of late Imperial Russia was a world of contrasts. Tikhovna, Ivanovich and the journalist embodied some of those contrasts. The story identified a system of attitudes and beliefs that had been produced by a complex mental universe in which the borders between the supernatural and natural were porous, not sealed. But it was recorded by an institution that was very much a product of the modern world: the newspaper. Knowledge based on science, rationality and objectivity were the hallmarks of the newspaper, a relative newcomer to Imperial Russia.

By the mid-1870s, when the this story appeared, the paraphernalia of modernity was penetrating into the heart of the Empire, bringing into collision with each other profoundly different cultures: traditional and modern. For the people who lived in this world there was no neat division. Cossacks in late Imperial Russia moved seamlessly between both worlds. High rates of literacy, a lively local press and better communications brought the outside world into Cossack stanitsas, although traditional beliefs remained strong. Cossacks held faith healers in high regard, yet they used modern artillery, bolt-action rifles and machine guns. They insisted on the annual procession around the fields by their priest, but they knew the importance of getting produce to the Moscow market as fast as possible to get the best price. New ideas, new problems, new tensions coexisted with traditional values, traditional institutions and traditional attitudes. From this emerged the dilemmas that would dominate Cossack life in the last fifty years of Imperial Russia.

Peasants and the state

Since the discovery of agriculture in Neolithic times, peasants have formed the base of every settled human society. Their labour and the
surplus extracted from them provided the wealth for all the great civilizations from antiquity onwards. Ruling elites might have had little respect for peasants, but they accepted them as part of the necessary order of things and recognized that there were limits to the amounts that could be extracted from them. The ruin of the peasantry through war or excessive taxation was usually followed by the ruin of the state. The link between peasant prosperity and state power remained unbroken for millennia. In the eighteenth century, however, England became the first society to break this cycle. Agricultural and then industrial revolution brought undreamt-of wealth and power, allowing a relatively under-resourced state to become the first genuine world power. But this transformation had begun with the destruction of the English peasantry; and for peasants everywhere, sooner or later, it meant a sustained attack on them and their way of life. For other countries, spurred on by English success, strove to imitate her. They were inspired by the English example and hastened to adopt her methods and practices.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the creation of a highly competitive world system in which only the strong flourished. Unlike earlier times, no country or society was so remote that it could opt out or isolate itself from the process of globalization. Peasant-based societies were the weakest and most vulnerable, and quickly became part of the formal or informal empires of their more developed neighbours.

While many ruling elites were so moribund that they could see no escape from this unequal relationship, other sections of the elite offered much more vigorous solutions to the dilemma. The reformers’ chance normally came as a result of some national catastrophe which completely discredited the traditional elites. Defeat at Jena and Auerstadt in 1806 gave the Prussian reformers their chance, while in Russia it was defeat in the Crimean War which broke the inertia that had paralysed earlier attempts to reform the serf system.

The reformers pursued policies in the name of modernization, progress or national development. Whatever euphemism they used, it remained an exercise in the extension of state power. And for peasants it has meant disaster since nearly every state pursuing these policies has looked to England for inspiration. What they understood about England, however, was based on simplistic views of the agricultural revolution.

The traditional view of the agricultural revolution is that it took place approximately over a fifty-year period spanning 1770 to 1820. The old system of agriculture dating from medieval times was replaced by the type of agriculture we are familiar with today. Communal ownership, strip farming, commons and three-field rotations were replaced by private
property, enclosed land and the continuous cropping of fields through the use of new grasses and improved fertilizers. Consequently, millions of peasants were driven from the land to make their living in the factories and construction sites waiting to receive them in the towns. While it was true that there was suffering, the result of all this was the liberation of stagnant human and material resources and a massive increase in national wealth. Every elite seeking to modernize its society has regarded the English experience as axiomatic for their own societies. Depending on whether they were inspired by liberal or Marxist theories, the result would be either a capitalist or socialist system. The essential elements of the process, however, would be largely the same.

This interpretation, however, is based on an understanding of the agricultural revolution in England that is fundamentally flawed, and a belief in the universal relevance of the English experience that is misplaced. No scholar today working on the agricultural revolution in England gives any credence to the traditional interpretation. A recent synthesis of scholarship suggests that the changes in the structure of English agriculture took place over a much longer interval, stretching from Elizabethan times to the end of the nineteenth century. What took place was a gradual evolution from one system to another which, even so, was traumatic enough for those involved. English society had three centuries to absorb the shocks of transformation: most modernizing elites are not prepared to wait three decades. Stalin's determination to compress 50 years of development into ten, regardless of the costs, is typical of such attitudes. In forced transitions from one type of society to another, whole political, economic and social systems have been subjected to levels of stress far in excess of anything English society suffered and with very different consequences.

Alongside this misconception of agrarian change, there have been even more fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of peasant society. Most modernizing elites were from urban, educated backgrounds. The cultural alienation between these elites and the peasants from the rural hinterlands was substantial to put it mildly. To them, peasants with their archaic ways and traditions were an obstacle to national development that had to be overcome, with force if necessary. The Bolsheviks were a classic case, but Marxists did not have a monopoly on these attitudes. In Mexico, an aggressive liberal regime came to power in the mid-nineteenth century determined to break the peasant system of corporate landholding in its bid to establish a free market economy. To these elites peasant culture seemed irrational, moribund and irrelevant to the needs of modern society.
Nowhere is this more true than in the ways peasants organize their economy. The system of peasant landholding – with its strip farming, communal ownership, periodic reallocation and underemployment of labour – appears self-evidently a chronic waste of resources. The validity of this conclusion, however, depends on the criteria used to assess efficiency. If the criteria used are those of a commercial enterprise, the conclusion is perfectly valid. If other criteria are applied, the conclusion becomes much more suspect.

The Russian economist A. V. Chayanov first pointed out that peasant agriculture operates on principles which are very different from those of a commercial enterprise. For peasants, the overriding purpose of their activity is the survival of the family and the farm, not profit maximization. Behaviour that is irrational in classical economic terms, such as the continued input of labour resources despite steeply diminishing marginal returns, is rational in peasant terms because the use of that labour has no opportunity cost and, as long as it contributes something extra to the family table, is worthwhile. The use of resources in this way enables the family and farm to survive in circumstances which would have driven a commercial enterprise into bankruptcy long before.

One of Chayanov's most perceptive arguments was that a peasant and a capitalist economy could coexist for many decades. Peasants have shown themselves remarkably adept at moving between these different economies. In effect, they have used commercial opportunities to subsidize the family farm. These could be the obvious ones such as cottage crafts and seasonal work in industry, and less obvious ones as well, such as banditry and smuggling. In the hinterland of St. Petersburg, a complex peasant industry grew up around the fostering of children from the foundling homes in the city. In my own research, I came across a Cossack khutor that specialized in amputations for Cossacks wishing to avoid military service. Another tactic adopted by peasants has been to give over part or all of their land to commercial crops which generated cash incomes, although this made peasants directly dependent on the world markets. The extraordinary sacrifices peasants make for their farms are a poignant testimony to the depth of their belief that the land represents something much more than a means of earning a living. Peasant attachment to the land cannot be explained in economic terms alone. This is not just a Russian phenomenon, it is present in many different cultures. Peasants are not easily forced from their land, and are capable of prolonged resistance to attempts to do this.

A modern state needs to change cultural attitudes as well as economic structures. The school system or the army provided a direct means to do
this. More indirect but no less effective, a flourishing civil society could transmit the values deemed desirable by the state into areas or groups which it has problems reaching. The market itself could foster new attitudes useful to a modern state. Where these cultural reconstructions have been successful, the state has been able to call for almost limitless sacrifices from its citizens – nowhere more so than Western Europe during the First World War. This is a long process, however, and peasants remained the most sceptical of all groups to the blandishments of cultural modernizers.

Peasant society has displayed the same resilience in defence of its norms as in defence of its economy. Scholars building on the work of Chayanov have argued that the basic dynamic of peasant life is survival and that all the norms and values of that society are directed to that end. James C. Scott has been the most influential of these theorists, arguing that the core value of peasant society is a ‘subsistence ethic’ which stipulates that the right to subsistence is one to which all members of the community are entitled. It is these values that give coherence to peasant society, but they are the ones that need to be eradicated if the modernizers’ goals are to be achieved. Violation of the norms of peasant society, whether by the state or the market, can provoke such moral outrage that revolt becomes a possibility, threatening everything the modernizers have sought to achieve.

Revolt, however, was not an inevitable peasant response to modernization. In many cases peasants have demonstrated the ability to come to terms with new situations and demands if they were given time and opportunity to do so. Change did sometimes bring improvement to what remained a desperately difficult and hard life which was and is easy to romanticize from the outside. But the bitter experience of most peasants has been that change brought from outside has been calamitous.

**Tsarist Russia 1861–1914**

Between 1861 and 1914 Tsarist Russia underwent a fundamental transformation of a type that has since become common. Rapid changes in the social and economic structure accompanied by a sharp rise in the population created a radically different order within the Empire. The political system spent the next 50 years struggling to come to terms with the changes that it had initiated in 1861.

Defeat in the Crimean War had exposed to Russia’s rulers the hollowness of her great power pretensions. Russia could not protect her own borders, let alone project her power beyond them. Unless root and
branch reform was introduced, Russia risked falling out of the first rank of great powers to join the Ottoman Empire as another sick man of Europe. This was the spur that drove Alexander II and his small group of advisors to carry out the most ambitious piece of social engineering yet attempted. What resulted was a period of unprecedented turmoil for the inhabitants and institutions of the Empire. The social and economic order that had existed largely intact since the reign of Peter the Great disintegrated within a few decades, but no new stable order arose to replace it. A society based on serfdom and an estate system began the process of separating into a class-based society, and an economy that was overwhelmingly rural and agricultural experienced precipitous rates of urbanization and industrialization. Such a fundamental transformation flowed inexorably into the cultural sphere. New values and symbols arose to challenge and replace old ones. Completely unforeseen, the population grew at a prodigious rate. Only the political system remained unchanged, but this, far from being a source of stability, became the prime source of instability within the Empire.

The starting-point for the transformation of Imperial Russia was the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861. Millions of peasants were freed from the personal authority of their gentry masters. Although the peasants did not receive complete freedom, the system had been sufficiently loosened to release the energies of millions of people. Even so, the halfway house between serfdom and citizenship that was created represented a leap into the dark for the small group of men responsible for the reform. They had no way of telling how the peasants would react to the removal of the only external authority they had ever known, but even the most sanguine of them would have had misgivings. They hoped to keep control of the situation by preserving the tsar’s autocratic powers and using them to stabilize the state through the transition period. Compared to the catastrophes that have accompanied many modernization programmes this century, the Tsarist reformers managed the transition surprisingly well. What they could not do, however, was ensure the reform process developed along the lines they intended. It did not take long for them to be disillusioned. The forces they had unleashed swiftly slipped beyond their control and developed a momentum of their own which no political authority could impede. Twenty years after the Emancipation, Alexander III, tough and determined as he was, could not reverse the reforms but only seek to push them in a more conservative direction.

The first upset in the reformers’ plans was the sharp increase in the size of the population. No-one had forecast this and it created a tremendous
additional pressure on the whole system. Between 1860 and 1914 the population rose from 74 million to 164 million. The post-emancipation population was much more mobile than the one of the pre-emancipation era. Millions of people were continuously on the move between the rural and urban areas and from the centre to the periphery. Peter Gatrell noted that ‘nearly 10 per cent of the population of imperial Russia were living in provinces other than those of their birth’ by the end of the century. Movement on such a scale exacerbated problems of political and social control, but there was nothing that the authorities could do to stem it, let alone reverse it.

The Crimean War had shown the government that a serf economy was no basis for a modern great power. Heavy industry, good communications and an integrated society were the prerequisites for great power status. This took some time to become clear to the government, but by the mid-1880s the government was sponsoring an intensive industrialization drive. Protective tariffs, heavy taxation and foreign loans financed the creation of an industrial infrastructure based on mining, metallurgy and railways. By 1914 a conspicuous level of success had been achieved and Russia had become one of the world’s top five industrial powers.

Linked to these developments was the creation of a truly national market for the first time in Russian history. Millions of peasants were brought into the market for the first time or in a much more complete manner than previously. As the Russian economy became dependent on the world economy, fluctuations in the latter had a direct impact on the lives and fates of the inhabitants of the Empire. Chayanov remarked that peasants in a Russian province found that their incomes depended on the manner in which American banks financed Belfast cotton mills. Equally, the market intruded into the social relations of the peasantry, creating new tensions and pressures within peasant society. The growing complexity of the economy, the influence of foreign markets and its own dynamism made it very difficult for the government to predict future trends and impossible to control them.

The spectacular changes in the social and economic structure were accompanied by a more subtle but equally devastating cultural transformation. Unlike its success in transforming the economy, the Tsarist regime abjectly failed to create new integrating mechanisms. The diversity of peoples and cultures which made up the Empire relied primarily on the tsar and, to a lesser extent, on the Orthodox Church for social cohesion and stability. Deference to these symbols was vital to the cohesion of the Empire since there were no other integrating mechanisms.
The spread of literacy, the growth of an independent press, the blossoming of a professional and commercial class in the urban areas of the Empire slowly subverted these traditional symbols of cohesion. In popular literature and the press, the tsar was no longer automatically identified with Russia and, imperceptibly, the separation of the dynasty from the nation took root. At first these abstractions were confined to the educated classes but they did begin to seep down into the lower layers, culminating in the permanent destruction of the image of the tsar as the father of the community after the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1905.

The creation of a school system, the introduction of universal military service and the development of civil society should have helped reintegrate society. In Russia, however, the state and civil society had few shared values. The peasant experience of the army was reminiscent of serfdom, particularly in the humiliating relations between conscript and officer. Even the school system failed to fulfil its role as peasants successfully imposed their values and priorities on it. The result was a steady attenuation of the ties linking the throne and the population. The erosion of the traditional sense of deference among the subordinate sections of the population weakened one of the most intangible but important pillars of the whole power structure.

In the midst of the great changes transforming Russia, only the autocracy stubbornly refused to change. This was the means by which the original reformers had hoped to preserve stability during the period of transition. Theunchanging nature of the autocracy was not a sign of its strength, but of its advancing atrophy and its inability to cope with the altered world of post-emancipation Russia. The growing sophistication of society did not rest easily with a conception of state power that was unchanged in its essentials since Muscovite times. Initially the new professional classes sought only to help in the regeneration of their country, yet they were rebuffed at every turn. Enthusiasm gave way to frustration and then to opposition. The last two tsars and the bureaucracy remained sullenly suspicious of any independent initiatives coming from society and particularly so of ones that hinted at any broadening of the political process. The manner in which Russian society and the economy were evolving ensured that such demands would not diminish, but would grow stronger and begin to destabilize the political system.

The last two tsars in particular, Alexander III and Nicholas II, demonstrated such a level of inflexibility that most sections of Russian society began to see the autocracy as the source of the Empire’s problems rather than the solution to them. Alexander III was tough enough to inspire obedience, but his son Nicholas was a much weaker character. Nicholas
aspired like his father to prevent any reduction in the powers of the autocracy, but, lacking his father’s basic strength of character, all Nicholas managed to achieve was the alienation of the few remaining active supporters of the regime. He was fortunate to save his throne in 1905, but he learnt nothing, and received no second reprieve in 1917.

The changes that took place in post-emancipation Russia provided the larger context for the Don Cossack Voisko in this period. The Voisko was part of the Empire and could not isolate itself from the changes that were taking place throughout it. Population increase, the creation of a national market, the development of railways and the dissemination of new ideas influenced the Voisko as much as any other part of the Empire. While what was taking place was an Empire-wide process, the response of individual peoples depended on their own history and culture and how they perceived the changes affected them. Because Tsarist Russia was a society made up of very different peoples and cultures, the process and consequences of change were far from uniform.

The historiography of the peasantry in Imperial Russia

Imperial Russia was overwhelmingly a peasant society, and peasants continued to form a majority of the Soviet population until after the Second World War. Despite this, relatively little work has been done on them either in the Soviet Union or the West. For years the historiography of Russia was dominated by the history of the state, the revolutionary movement and the intelligentsia. These were considered the driving forces of Russian history with other groups relegated to minor roles. The peasantry in particular was seen as a rather unrewarding subject of study. Stretching across Russian history like some vast immobile hulk, peasants were important only in so far as they appeared the object of other people’s plans and intentions or thwarted them through their passivity. In addition, in the Soviet Union the history of the peasantry was sensitive politically and remained subject to strict control until the last three or four years of the Soviet Union’s existence. In the West there was simply a lack of interest in the Russian peasant until the late 1970s and 1980s. This changed partly as a result of the American experience in Vietnam as scholars sought to explain how a nation of peasants could defeat a superpower. There was also a more general realization that peasants were not simply passive objects but historical agents in their own right. This interest in Southeast Asian society spilled over into the history of other peasant societies including that of Imperial Russia.
During the first years of the Soviet regime, the peasantry was a matter of vital interest. The lively debate that was carried on over the nature of peasant society and its future was a continuation of the debates that had gone on since the emancipation. The rise to power of Stalin abruptly halted all discussion of the nature of peasant society and imposed the model first articulated by Lenin in his book *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. That model is too well-known to bear repeating here, but since Stalin’s time virtually every academic work on the peasantry has had to subscribe to Lenin’s model of peasant society. Invariably, any work published on the peasantry outlined Lenin’s conception of peasant society, noted its fundamental correctness and proceeded to demonstrate it. Thus a history of the peasantry in the North Caucasus published two years before the end of the Soviet regime says:

V.I. Lenin formulated a profound Marxist analysis of both the regularity and the uniformity of the development of the agrarian economy of Russia in the pre-revolutionary period. His basic conclusions about the social and economic structure of Russia, the evolution of agrarian production and the character of capitalist relations in the Russian Village have not only materially enriched Marxist study of agrarian capitalism but have posed for historians a series of actual problems, the study of which has been successfully continued in soviet times.

It is easy to criticize historians when writing in a society that does not subject the writing of history to political control. During the purges many historian lost their lives and, even in the more secure atmosphere of the 1960s and 70s, many found it impossible to publish their work or had their careers cut short for deviating from the official line. Mikhail Frenkin, for example, argued that Lenin’s definition of peasant society was politically motivated and had nothing in common with scholarly definition. Not surprisingly, his work was never published in the Soviet Union and he himself was forced into exile. Only since the demise of the Soviet Union has it been possible for independent research on the peasantry to take place.

The lack of serious interest for so long among Western historians can be seen in the paucity of works published on them. Between Geroid Robinson’s pathbreaking work in 1932 and the recent spate of scholarship beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s only one book was published that focused directly on the peasant experience as opposed to its
relationship to the state. \(^{24}\) Since the 1980s, however, much work has been done on the peasantry, giving us a much greater understanding of peasant life in late Imperial Russia.

Historical writing is said, with justice, to reflect the preoccupations of the historian’s own times and society. Much of the work on the peasant family is testimony to the accuracy of this observation. We now know far more about peasant women than we do about peasant men. Family life has been examined extensively from the point of view of women. Thus we know about the relationship of the mother-in-law to her daughter-in-law, sexual attitudes towards women, women’s role in the economy and women’s property rights. \(^{25}\) There have been no comparable works on male peasants. While the quality of work on peasant women has been excellent, until we know more about the lives and attitudes of male peasants our understanding of peasant society will remain incomplete.

Compared to earlier times, we already possess a much richer picture of peasant life, but there is still a long way to go before we approach the breadth and variety of peasant history that is available for England, France or Germany. To take one example, there is very little written on peasant religious experience, let alone differences between Orthodox and Old Believer communities. \(^{26}\) At present we have a dozen or so monographs and some more articles. Measured against the historical importance of the peasantry, this is a drop in the ocean. The peasantry numbered millions of people spread across the whole Eurasian landmass, and it cannot be assumed that studies of peasants in one place and time can be extrapolated from indiscriminately. While there were certainly similarities in peasant culture, there were profound differences of history, tradition, religion and physical environment. What basis have we for believing that peasant life in a village on the shore of the White Sea had much in common with life in Voronezh, or that the experiences of peasants in Siberia were shared by those in the central provinces? The one major monograph that we have on serfdom as experienced by the peasants is confined to the serfs belonging to one family, on one estate, in one province. \(^{27}\) In the post-emancipation era the single monograph on peasant communities is based on Central Russia and naturally cannot take account of peasants in Ukraine, Siberia, the Baltic States or Central Asia. \(^{28}\) Until we begin a process of taking account of the variety and diversity of peasant experiences alongside their convergences, we will remain with a one-dimensional understanding of rural Russia in the Imperial regime. I hope that this book is a contribution to that process.
The historiography of the Cossacks

Of the many distinct groups that made up the Russian Empire, the Cossacks are among the best-known in the outside world. They have been familiar to Western Europe since at least Napoleonic times in the guise either of the romantic warrior of the steppe or as the personification of the savagery of Asiatic Russia. Beyond this, however, the level of knowledge about them is quite limited. Philip Longworth’s survey of the Cossacks from beginning to end is an excellent introduction to Cossack history. However, it is not a substitute for detailed histories of the individual Cossack hosts which still remain to be written. Paul Avrich’s work on the Cossack rebellions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is an exemplary work covering the great Cossack rebellions of Bolotnikov, Razin, Bulavin and Pugachev. More recently Robert McNeal explored the connections between the Cossacks and the tsars in late Imperial Russia. He provided a meticulous account of the changing relationship between the two, concluding that the Cossacks as a caste had become an anachronism and were close to collapse by 1914. This is not a conclusion I accept, and I hope to show why in the course of this book. More recently there has been an important article published on the Terek Cossacks and my own work on the Don Cossacks. Beyond this there are several general accounts of varying quality which are listed in the bibliography.

There is a much wider literature available in Russian from both Imperial and Soviet times. In neither era was the writing of Cossack history a straightforward business. The Imperial Government was happy to see work published that extolled the Cossacks’ service to the throne. It was much less enthusiastic about studies that recalled the Cossacks as opponents of autocratic power rather than its loyal supporters. Only towards the end of the regime could such works be published. In Soviet times it was more difficult still. Alongside the general hostility and suspicion that existed towards all rural people, there was a specific hostility towards the Cossacks for their role in the Civil War, which made any history of the Cossacks a matter of keen political interest.

The first modern historical account of the Cossacks was written in 1788 by A. I. Rigel’man, a regular army officer serving in the Don. Rigel’man’s account is valuable not only for being the first history of the Cossacks but for its intrinsic merits. He travelled extensively in the Don and spoke to many ordinary Cossacks, recording their ideas, customs and attitudes. While Rigel’man was clearly the product of his class, particularly noticeable in his accounts of the revolts of Razin and
Pugachev, his work remains of outstanding importance. V. Bronevski and A. V. Savel’ev produced valuable works in the same conservative tradition. All these works emphasized the service of the Cossacks to the state and their loyalty to the throne, and minimized the significance of the Cossack revolts.

Historians who wanted to dwell on the anti-statist tradition of the Cossacks had a much more difficult time, none more so than E. Kotel’nikov. Kotel’nikov produced a work of unique importance which remains to this day the only history of an individual stanitsa. He was born in Verkhne-Kurmoiaraskaia Stanitsa around 1770 and wrote what was in effect a social history of the stanitsa from its foundation. His study was completed in 1824 but, because of the suspicion in which the authorities held him, it was not until 40 years later that it appeared in print form in the official gazette of the Voiisko, and a further 20 before it came out in book form. Another work in the same tradition was the magisterial study of the Don Cossacks by S. V. Svatikov. Over 500 pages in length, it is a comprehensive history of the Cossacks from their beginnings until 1914. The central theme running through the book was the tension between the freedom-loving Cossacks and the autocratic state. In total an impressive body of work in quantity and quality was produced in the Imperial period.

In Soviet times Cossack historiography suffered even more than that of the peasants. The long campaigns against the Cossacks during the Civil War entrenched a particular hostility to the Cossacks by the new Soviet state. The Leninist model of peasant society was imposed upon Cossack history and everything else was reduced, in essence, to a morality play in which the protagonists were the rich upper layer in Cossack society who were ruthless opponents of Soviet power, and the mass of ‘toiling’ Cossacks who fluctuated between loyalty to their caste and loyalty to the Soviet regime. Under the guidance of the Bolshevik party, the mass of toiling Cossacks came down finally on the side of forces of light. Even towards the end of the 1980s, when more sophisticated accounts began to appear, these could only refine the crude model, not discard it. One exception to this rule was the work of A. P. Pronshtein, who wrote on the eighteenth century and therefore probably had more latitude to draw his own conclusions. Overall, however, the sophistication of historical writing in the Soviet period was much less than that of Imperial times.

For the first time since the end of the Civil War, research on the Cossacks is now free of overt political control. Most new works are narrative histories of the Cossacks and represent the beginning of a new era in
Russian historiography. Many works that were suppressed under the Soviets are now being published again.

Emigrés provided another source of historical writing. Some of this work was of the highest quality, such as Svatikov’s, which was completed in Belgrade. However, much of the work was simply an attempt to come to terms with the Bolshevik victory and was as vigorous in promoting its own myths as the Soviet histories. One useful work was the Cossack dictionary/almanac which contains information on individuals, particular episodes, dialects, customs and so on.

What has been produced so far in Russia and the West represents an impressive body of knowledge on the Cossacks. We know much about the political history of the Cossacks and their relationship with the state. There is no shortage of books on the military exploits of the Cossacks and their role in the various wars of the Imperial regime. However, substantial gaps remain. Very little is known about Cossack communities: how they functioned, how cohesive they were, the relations between men and women, divisions in wealth, how land was allocated and so on. The social history of the Cossacks is still in its infancy. Yet without such a history, significant in its own right, the political history remains incomplete. Cossack behaviour in the Civil War cannot be understood without understanding what they believed about themselves and their communities. Only by looking at issues such as family and kinship relations, community institutions and communal values can we begin to cut through the crude models of behaviour motivated purely by economic circumstances or undying love of the throne or dynasty. It is my hope that this book will go some way to meeting these needs.

Sources

The major problem in studying the history of any peasant community is the lack of sources written by members of that community. Peasant societies, as a rule, placed little emphasis on literacy except in utilitarian matters. Gestures, speech and actions were far more important. Inevitably, much of peasant culture will have vanished beyond recall. This problem is exacerbated by the pains peasants took to keep their affairs private. This was not simply rural cussedness, but was an essential survival strategy for many communities. Accounts such as those by P. J. Helias or E. Guillaumin are exceptionally rare. Most of the records that do exist are written by outside observers who frequently brought their own values and judgements to bear. As Martine Segalen noted in her study of French peasants, this can reveal rather a lot about the
observer and his or her background, although not as much as might be wished about the society under observation.\textsuperscript{45} Therefore, as with all sources, caution and an awareness of who wrote them, for what purposes and for which audience are vital. With all these limitations, I believe there are sufficient sources to reconstruct many areas of Cossack life, even if not to the extent I would like.

The primary sources for this book come from both central and local archives. The central archive was the Ministry of War, which was the government department responsible for the Cossacks. Its voluminous holdings include statistical data on the population and the economy, annual reports on all the Cossack voiska, matters relating to Cossack military service, unrest in the Cossack communities and most matters that touched on the Cossacks’ relationship to the state. Of particular importance was the detailed investigation of the crisis in the Cossack economy carried out by Lieutenant-General Maslakovets in 1898. This was the fullest analysis of the impact of military service on the Cossack domestic economy ever carried out and I have made extensive use of it.\textsuperscript{46} Quite naturally in a central archive, the holdings present the views, attitudes and preoccupations of the central government. The primary interest of the government was the military service of the Cossacks and anything that impinged upon it. Unlike a social historian, the Imperial government had little interest in family or community matters where they did not affect military service. Nor, with few exceptions, did they have much interest in particular stanitsas. The Ministry of War was concerned mainly with the larger picture.

It is the local archive that supplies the missing details. The archive I used was the oblast’ archive of the Rostov region.\textsuperscript{47} This contains the holdings of the Don Statistical Committee which was the source for all official statistical information on the Cossacks. The records of the Ataman’s Chancellory also provided much useful information on the Don Voisko as seen through the eyes of the Cossack administration in Novocherkassk. Although it shared many of the central government’s concerns, it was much more aware of local nuance and colour. To my knowledge I am the first Westerner to have used these sources. The Don Statistical Committee also published several studies on contemporary Cossack life from the 1880s which constitute an important source. The weighty volume published in 1884 under the auspices of the Committee and edited by its chairman, S. Nomikosov, is important for the scope and depth of its coverage.\textsuperscript{48}

The source which really begins to provide information about Cossack life as it was lived in the stanitsas and khutora is Donskii Oblastnyia
*Vedomosti*. This was the official gazette of the *Voisko*, published three times a week by the Cossack administration. Each issue was divided into two parts, *Chast’ Ofitsial’niiia* and *Chast’ Neofitsial’niiia*. The official section contained only details of routine government business, and I have not used it; all the quotations and references I have used come from the unofficial section. No other source contains such variety or depth of information on Cossack life in the late Imperial period. Detailed surveys of individual stanitsas, discussions on Cossack family life, relations between men and women, the use of land, the stanitsa and *khutor* administration were just some of the matters covered by the paper. The gazette was the forum in which debates on the most pressing issues of Cossack life were conducted. Unfortunately, the unofficial section of the gazette was abruptly terminated without explanation in 1882. Nevertheless, its existence covered a pivotal time in Cossack history when all the issues that were to dominate Cossack life down to the collapse of the *Voisko* in 1920 were already visible and extensively discussed.

The gap left by *Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti* was partially filled by the local press, such as *Donskoi Vestnik*, *Donskoi Golos* and *Donskaia Rech’*. These dealt with many of the same issues as the official gazette and perhaps this was related to the ending of its ‘unofficial section’. Unfortunately, the commercial press did not cover them in anything like the same depth and had a tendency to concentrate on the more colourful aspects of Cossack life, such as its bawdiness, drunkenness and corruption, which certainly did exist. Allowing for this, it is still a very revealing source.

Of particular importance for the customs of daily life among the Cossacks were three surveys carried out in Razdorskaia, Berezovskaia, and Luganskaia stanitsas. I have used these as a check on the more general comments on Cossack life by different authors, as a source of concrete examples and an illustration of the diversity of Cossack life.49

I should also mention the works of Mikhail Kharuzin and A. M. Grekov.50 Kharuzin was an anthropologist who worked in the Don in the mid 1870s in order to carry out a survey of Cossack life and customs. As a good anthropologist, he carried out extensive field work among his subjects. He was given access to archives, but more importantly he spoke to ordinary Cossacks about all aspects of their lives, recording their answers sympathetically. This makes his book, much of it reproducing raw data without editorial comment, a priceless account of Cossack life in the 1870s, and it is probably as close as we will get to the attitudes and beliefs of ordinary Cossacks at that time.51 Grekov produced a
survey of the Cossack economy just before the Revolution and is a useful supplement to Maslakovets’ account.

The original inspiration for this book, which was my D.Phil. thesis, was Sholokhov’s great novel of Cossack life, Tikhii Don. Much of what I have found about Cossack life corresponds closely to descriptions found in the novel. Whoever wrote Tikhii Don, it is beyond doubt that the author was closely acquainted with Cossack life and customs and produced a wonderfully accurate account of them.

There are many gaps in the sources, of course. The biggest, as already mentioned, is the absence of any from the Cossacks themselves. A particular problem of the Don area is the virtual absence of zemstvo sources which figure so prominently in other works on the Russian peasantry. For reasons that will be explained, the zemstvo aroused fury among the Cossacks and only lasted six years in the Don. Thus there are no continuous surveys of Cossack life comparable to those that exist in provinces where the zemstvo had a much longer life. Another problem is the immense destruction that took place in southern Russia during the first fifty years of this century. Rostov, which holds the regional archive, changed hands several times during the Civil War and had the misfortune to be captured twice by the Germans in the Second World War. It is impossible to know how much has been lost, and any reconstruction of Cossack life can hope only to be less incomplete than it might otherwise have been.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is devoted to a brief survey of the Don Cossacks from their origins until the end of the Civil War. This is not original research, but it is necessary for two reasons. First, it provides the context for the rest of the book. Without it, the text would be burdened with too many asides and deviations. Second, there is no suitable book easily available in either Russian or English. Chapter 2 examines the structure of the Don Cossack Voisko 1861–1914. It outlines the physical environment in which the Cossacks lived, administrative structure, communications, population numbers and settlement. Chapter 3 is an examination of the Cossack economy and the principles on which it operated. It examines in detail the struggle over the use of resources that took place from the late 1860s. Chapter 4 is in many ways a continuation of the third. It focuses on the economic crisis that broke upon the Cossacks in the mid 1870s and the ways in which the Cossacks attempted to meet the burdens placed on them by the state. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the extent to which Cossack society had become stratified by 1914. Chapter 5 studies the local administration of the Cossacks. Its origins, development, the principles
underlying it and the relevance it had to Cossack life are the principal themes of this chapter. The final chapter is an examination of family and community among the Cossacks. It contains a detailed discussion of the structure of the Cossack family, the rules which determined the relationships between its members and the relationship between the family and community. Finally I should point out that this book is almost exclusively about the Don Cossacks. A broader, comparative history of the Cossack hosts in late Imperial Russia still awaits its historian.
The Don river basin is one of the oldest sites of human habitation, having been settled continuously since paleolithic times. For millennia its numerous waterways, open steppe and abundance of game have proved attractive to countless peoples. Nomads in particular have been drawn to its expansive plains which are part of the great Eurasian steppe, stretching from Mongolia to Hungary. Among the people who passed through the steppe or settled on it were the Scythians, the Samartians, the Huns, the Avars, the Khazars, the Pechenegs, the Polovtsi, the Mongols and the Tatars. In the course of their long migrations, these people linked the great civilizations of the East with those of the West. Interaction between steppe peoples and the surrounding civilizations through war, trade and marriage created a complex exchange in which the customs of many cultures and societies were absorbed into a new context. Such a fluid movement of peoples and customs makes it impossible to arrive at absolute statements about the ethnic origins and cultural roots of any of the steppe peoples, including the Cossacks. As one people wrested mastery of the steppe from another, the conquered people did not vanish without trace but were absorbed along with some of their customs into the society of the new masters of the steppe. Through this process, a new synthesis arose alongside the continuing interaction with the civilizations on the periphery of the steppe zone.

The Cossacks in their earliest manifestations were the last of the nomadic peoples to control the Don steppe before the final triumph of the sedentary societies over the nomads. Many of the defining characteristics of the Cossacks were formed in the first phase of their existence. Consequently, they ought to be seen in the context of the long tradition of steppe societies rather than simply that of a bilateral relationship
with Muscovy and the Empire. Only by recognizing the two sources of Cossack identity, the nomadic and the sedentary, can the true nature of Cossack distinctiveness be appreciated.

Many of the most elemental questions about the Don Cossacks, such as who they were, where they came from, when they first appeared on the Don and even the name itself are shrouded in mystery and are likely to remain so. Most of the documentation on the early period of Cossack history was lost in the great fire that destroyed Cherkassk, the Cossack capital, in 1744. In the absence of evidence, numerous theories, some verging on fantasies, were created to supply answers to these questions. None of them can be considered definitive, but even the most outlandish have some value, since they reveal competing conceptions about what the Cossacks were and, indeed, are.

The name ‘Cossack’

Nothing illustrates better the complexity and density of cultural exchange that went on in the steppe than the name Cossack itself. Cossack is simply a westernized version of a much older word, kazak, whose meaning and significance is a matter of much debate. One of the few things all the sources agree on is that kazak is not of Russian or Slavic origin. The traditional explanation is that it is a Tatar word meaning a ‘wanderer’ or a ‘wandering people’, with implications of vagrancy and criminality. In Muscovy it was applied to people with no fixed living place or occupation who wandered from place to place. Later on it was used to describe people who lived on the frontier zones of the Muscovite state, but its essential meaning of wanderer and brigand were retained. Other historians, particularly those who were of Cossack descent or came from the Don, argued that the term was much more complex than the simple translation ‘wanderer’ implied.

E. P. Savel’ev, a pre-revolutionary historian, argued that the traditional interpretation was flawed on several accounts, most notably because the word kazak did not exist in any tatar dialect and consequently could not be of tatar origin. He proposed that the name kazak belonged to a people who had existed in the Don area before the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century who were known variously as the Cherkasy, Kazakhi or Kazaki. A. A. Gordeev, an émigré historian, asserted that the name originated in Central Asia and had positive connotations of freedom and refusal to submit to authority. The name was given to several tribes noted for these characteristics, some of whom settled in the Don area, bringing the name with them. The compilers of the Cossack
dictionary/almanac argued the name is derived from a Scythian tribe living in the Don before the birth of Christ who were known as the *Saka* or *Sakhi*. Because this tribe were white, they had the Scythian word for white, *kos*, attached as a prefix to their name. The most recent historian of the Don Cossacks gave three alternatives. The first was that the word was of Mongol origin, appearing first in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, and referred to a single man not tied to a family hearth. Alternatively it could have been derived from two separate Mongol words: *ko*, meaning armour or defence, and *zak*, meaning border. Finally he suggested that *kazak* could be of Polovtsian origins, meaning roughly the same thing. All these interpretations contain in common a sense of someone or some group defined by the refusal to be tied down or submit to the authority of an overlord.

Without a knowledge of Scythian, Mongol, tatar and various Turkic languages, it is difficult to pass judgement on which of these theories is more correct. In some of these theories it is easy to see the nineteenth-century tradition of state- and nation-building at work, sometimes distorting the historical truth to an unrecognizable degree. However, the debate over the meaning of the word ‘Cossack’ does represent more than an exercise in dubious historical reconstructions or abstruse linguistics. The widely divergent interpretations demonstrate the difficulty in attempting to pin down a concept to one source in a context where there was such a multitude of cultural influences at work. More importantly, they revealed a fundamental division in what different people and groups conceived the Cossacks to be. This was not a coincidence, since ambiguity was at the heart of Cossack identity.

The Muscovite and Imperial States and many Russian historians understood the word *kazak* in its most basic sense, that of ‘wanderer’. For them the word implied that the Cossacks had always been part of the tsar’s patrimony but had for a time stepped outside his jurisdiction. The tsar himself, however, had never given up his claim of authority over the Cossacks and at the appropriate time reasserted his authority over his errant subjects. In this interpretation the Cossacks did not have an identity and legitimacy independently of the Muscovite and Imperial states. If, on the other hand, a more complex interpretation of the word is taken, then the Cossacks are heirs to an ancient steppe tradition of resistance to authority and subjugation which is much older than the Muscovite state and its pretensions. Even in the name itself it is possible to see the contradictions and disputes over Cossack identity which were to remain an enduring feature of their existence.
The Don Cossacks 1549–1920

The first Cossacks

The first reference to the Cossacks in the sense that they are tradition-ally understood, as products of the Muscovite and other appanage states, dates from 1444 and records a skirmish between Cossacks in Riazin and some tatars. The earliest unequivocal evidence of a Cossack community living on the Don was a complaint by Khan Iosef of the Crimean Tatars in 1549 to Ivan the Terrible about the raids of Cossacks on his territory. In the absence of other evidence, this diplomatic note is regarded as the starting-point of a distinct Don Cossack community. However, it is far from unproblematic. At the very least it can be argued that neither a Cossack community nor its ability to conduct raids on a scale sufficient to cause a diplomatic incident could have sprung up overnight. Some type of organized community must have existed before 1549, but exactly when remains a mystery.

On the basis of the existing evidence, which is minimal, the most plausible theory is that advanced by Astapenko. He argued that a Don Cossack community as a discrete entity evolved early in the sixteenth century, possibly in the 1520s. This would help explain how a group that apparently had no existence before 1549 could be known to both the Crimean Khan and the Muscovite Tsar, and one which, moreover, had the capacity to be a serious nuisance to the surrounding states. S. G. Svatikov opted for a date closer to the mid-sixteenth century, although he believed that isolated groups similar to the Cossacks had existed in the steppe since Kievan times.

Other theories dating the appearance of the Cossacks have a semi-mythical quality which become more pronounced the further back their origins are located. Savel’ev argued that the Cossacks were descended from the original Aryan tribe that came out of the North Caucasus. Another theory located the origin of the Cossacks before the birth of Christ, while a third sees the Cossacks as the direct creation of the Mongols and integral part of the army of the Golden Horde.

Many of these theories were seeking to create an identity for the Cossacks which would confer legitimacy on an independent Cossack state. In a sense they were trying too hard. The legitimacy of an independent Cossack state did not depend on artificial intellectual constructs, but on the beliefs that the Cossacks held about themselves. As we shall see, the Cossacks always defined themselves in opposition to the Muscovite and Imperial States.

The earliest record we have of how the Cossacks themselves responded to specific questions about their identity and origins comes from
Rigel’man’s history, written in the late eighteenth century. When he asked the Cossacks where they believed that had come from, he was told that they were descended from a nomadic people who had lived in the upper Don and who gradually became Russianized. None of the Cossacks Rigel’man spoke to considered themselves Muscovites and resented being described in this way. He cited one of the answers he received as expressing the general Cossack view about themselves: ‘I am not Muscovite but Russian, and even this only through custom and the Orthodox faith, not through birth.’12 In addition, the Cossacks still retained their belief that they were free people, subject to no-one.

Just as with the name itself, the debate about the origins of the Cossacks revealed competing conceptions of what exactly the Cossacks were. Were they products of various Russian states or did they have roots outside those states in a very different historical and cultural context? Again we return to the difficult task of unravelling the complex cultural roots of steppe society.

**Cossack life in Dikoe Pole**

The Don steppe in Muscovite times was called, with good reason, *Dikoe Pole*, the ‘Wild Country’.13 It covered a vast area south of the Muscovite borders and north of those of the Crimean Khanate. In the west it was bounded by the River Dnepr and in the east by the Volga. The Don steppe was the crossroads at which the Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic worlds met. All competed for influence in the steppe, although none of them controlled it. The steppe belonged to the fierce nomadic tribes in nominal allegiance to the Crimean Khan, but in reality very much their own masters. The trans-Don steppe on the left bank of the Don was the territory of the Nogai who had been independent since the disintegration of the Golden Horde.14 At the mouth of the Don were the Azovtsi, who took their name from the fortress of Azov.15

These people were classic steppe nomads, engaging in constant warfare with each other and the surrounding powers. They accepted the suzerainty of their masters only as long as it suited them. In conjunction with the Crimean Khanate or on their own, they mounted devastating raids on the territory of Muscovy, including Moscow itself on several occasions. Moving swiftly on horseback, they struck unexpectedly, burning, looting and carrying off thousands of captives for the slave markets of Istanbul. By the time the slow-moving Muscovite armies had responded, the raiders had long since melted back into the steppe.
While these nomads were prepared to co-operate with the Crimean Khan when it was in their interests to do so, they guarded their independence jealously. Neither the Crimean Khan nor even the mighty Ottoman Sultan were strong enough to subdue them indefinitely. The Nogai and the Azovstí were the unchallenged masters of the Wild Country until the early sixteenth century, when the Don Cossacks began to make their presence felt for the first time.

The appearance of Cossacks in the Don was closely related to the rise of the Muscovite autocracy and the spread of serfdom. For peasants, the options open to them narrowed either to submission or flight. The most daring, rebellious and foolhardy chose flight to the Wild Country to take their chances there rather than accept a life of relative security but complete personal abasement in Muscovy. Those who made it to the steppe gathered in small communities in the lower Don with other fugitives from Muscovy and the remnants of much more ancient steppe peoples, the Khazars, the Pechenegs and the Polovtsi. The lower Don remained the centre of Cossack power and the site of all the Cossack capitals. The upper Don was not settled until much later. Though the two sections of the Don shared a common Cossack identity, strong tensions existed from the beginnings until the Civil War in the twentieth century.

Anyone who made it to the Don was accepted into the ranks of the Cossacks without any questions asked about their former existence. All that was required was a profession of Christianity which was so broad that it did not seem to have put off fugitives from the Islamic world. Living in such a dangerous environment imposed its own constraints on those who lived there. Agriculture was out of the question, since it offered far too easy a target for the Nogai and the Azovstí, but also because it was associated with the hated social order of Muscovy. The only option for the Cossacks was to become steppe nomads like their enemies. The Cossacks rapidly adapted to the steppe way of warfare and became excellent riders, skilled archers and swordsmen. Unlike the nomads, they became accomplished sailors and successful pirates. The Cossacks gained a reputation for audacity, cunning, and extreme physical toughness, and along with this they gained the respect of their enemies.

The Cossack way of life in this early period was one of continuous warfare. There was no peace between the Cossacks and their steppe enemies. Ceaseless marauding, burning of enemy settlements and the capture of people for slaves or ransom were the daily fare of the Cossacks, as of other steppe peoples. Life was so insecure that the Cossacks at first
did not make permanent camps, preferring to keep on the move. Only in winter did they remain in one place for any length of time, constructing temporary camps which were abandoned in the spring. Whatever interruption there was in the fighting was purely temporary, with both sides looking for the first excuse to resume hostilities. Often war would break out on the same day that peace was concluded. Even when the surrounding powers attempted jointly to impose peace in the steppe, this proved impossible. Neither the Muscovite Tsar, the Crimean Khan, the Ottoman Sultan nor the Polish King could force the Cossacks, the Nogai and the Azovtsi to live in peace.

The Cossacks and steppe nomads encountered each other most frequently as enemies, but their relationship was more complex than this. As with all nomadic peoples, constant contact, even in the form of warfare, allowed a much wider cultural transference to take place. The Cossacks adopted many of the customs of their neighbours, from their clothes to parts of their speech and even some of their ways of viewing the world. On occasion the Cossacks co-operated with one of their enemies against the other. Equally, their warfare was not without rules. While they would rob, kill and destroy, neither side would ever burn the hay meadows of the other, which were essential for feeding their horses. Probably most important in allowing this transfer was the ancient steppe tradition of living with women captured from enemies. This was much more pronounced in the lower Don than in the upper, which gave an ethnic dimension to the divisions between the two parts of the Don.

Cossack life in the 'Wild Country' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the formatives ones for the Cossacks as a whole. Their identity as a warrior people was forged in the steppe, along with a fierce sense of independence which seems to have been common to all the inhabitants of the 'Wild Country' and, indeed, all frontier societies. Fugitives from Russia brought with them to the Don the Russian language, the Orthodox faith and a hatred of the Muscovite social and political order. Over time these fugitives were profoundly influenced by their contacts with the Azovtsi and Nogai and, through them, the long traditions of steppe society and the Islamic civilizations of the Ottoman and Persian Empires. These were the constituent parts out of which the Cossacks emerged. The Cossacks, however, were not passive absorbers of the cultural traditions of the surrounding societies. They created their own specific cultural identity and historical tradition, above all in the system of popular sovereignty that became as much their hallmark as their warrior status.
The political institutions and ethos of the Don Voisko

Traditions of co-operation between the different fugitive groups living in the Don gradually assumed institutional forms in the early sixteenth century. A sense of belonging to a distinct community permeated the previously isolated bands. The creation of the first Cossack capital, Atamanskaia on the River Aksai, assisted the articulation of a common identity. By the mid-sixteenth century the idea of Zemlia Voiska Donskogo (the Land of the Host of the Don) was firmly rooted among all those calling themselves Cossacks. Hand in hand with this process came the creation of a political institution which expressed the fundamental ethos of the Cossacks: freedom and equality.

The institution of supreme authority among the Cossacks was the Krug, literally the Circle or Ring, which symbolized the unity and equality of all Cossacks. The Krug gathered once a year, usually in spring, in the capital and all Cossacks had the right and obligation to attend. The Krug met on the maidan, a Persian word meaning square, and decided all questions pertaining to the life of the Cossacks. It declared war and made peace, elected the ataman and his assistants, the starshiny, for the coming year, passed judgement on those of the previous year, and arbitrated disputes between Cossacks. The authority of the Krug was uncontested among the Cossacks, and once it had passed judgement all were expected to obey on pain of death.

The originality of the Krug lay not so much in the powers it possessed but in the ethos that lay behind it. The Krug embodied a form of direct democracy in which every citizen took a direct and active part in the decision-making process. It was a face-to-face encounter in which everyone had the right to speak, make suggestions and criticize those in authority. Naturally enough these meetings were stormy and on occasion violent. For the Cossacks the Krug was the very symbol of their freedom and they were fiercely loyal to it. It was always a radical institution, giving expression to the desires of the rank and file Cossacks and creating great difficulties for the Cossack elite and the Muscovite and Imperial governments later on.

The origins of the Krug, like so much of the early history of the Cossacks, are obscure and contested. Since all the surrounding societies, including the nomadic ones, were rigidly hierarchical, the Cossacks could not have taken their model of democracy from them. One suggestion is that it was brought to the Don by fugitives from Russia who brought with them the traditions and practices of the urban assemblies, the veche, which were widespread before the establishment of the
Muscovite autocracy.²⁹ This was also the opinion of Svatikov.³⁰ The communal practices of the Russian peasantry doubtless had some influence as well. Whatever the origins of their democracy, the Cossacks were determined to create a very different social and political order on the Don to the hated Muscovite one.

An unequivocal expression of this can be seen in the customs that surrounded the election of the leader of the Voisko. Each year the Krug elected an ataman and a few other assistants to manage their affairs while the Krug was not in session. The ataman was elected on the basis of his charisma and popularity among the Cossacks. On campaign the ataman received the unquestioning obedience of the Cossacks, but beyond this he could not expect deference. The Cossacks were not unaware of the attractions that the exercise of power had for those who wielded it and they sought through their annual elections to prevent the emergence of a permanent elite among themselves. Each year the outgoing ataman would have to face the judgement of the Krug. This was not a perfunctory ritual and on several occasions atamans whom the Krug felt had betrayed the interests of the Host were executed. Each community of Cossacks replicated the Krug and the ethos that lay behind it. Long after the Krug ceased to exist its spirit was preserved in the every Cossack stanitsa until the end of the Civil War in the twentieth century.

Alongside the commitment to political equality, the Cossacks had an equally strong commitment to social and economic equality. Anyone reaching the Don was automatically accepted into the ranks of the Cossacks with the same rights, privileges and obligations as other Cossacks. The most famous expression of this egalitarianism came during the visit of Boris Gudonov’s ambassador, Nashchokin, to the Don in 1593. One of his tasks was to distribute the tsarist salary to the Cossacks for services to the tsar which he wanted to do according to rank. However, when he suggested this to the Cossacks they informed him that ‘we have no great ones among us, all are equal. We divide everything among the whole Voisko according to need.’³¹

The adherence of the Cossacks to a radical form of political, social and economic democracy was what made them a unique society. The institutions they created and the ethos behind them were directed to preventing the emergence of an hereditary elite and for a while they were successful. The Cossack system of democracy, however, contained a number of weaknesses which were ultimately to destroy it. Its continued operation depended on small numbers, a relatively simply social structure and above all on the continued adherence of all members of the
society to its basic beliefs. Increasingly these conditions failed to be met in the second half of the seventeenth century.

**Relations with Muscovy 1549–1671**

The relationship of the Cossacks with the Muscovite state has been a subject of acrimonious debate both at the time and since. Were the Cossacks members of an independent state or were they servitors of the tsar? The issue was made more complicated by a wide discrepancy between the form and the substance of the relationship which each side interpreted according to its own beliefs.

For the Muscovite state the existence of a people in the steppe who lived and fought like tatar nomads but were their bitter enemies was a great boon. The Cossacks and the Muscovite state had a common interest in their battles against the tatars and co-operated to their mutual advantage. Most importantly the Cossacks assisted in the defence of Muscovy’s vulnerable southern borders. They launched pre-emptive strikes against the tatars, attacked them on their way to Moscow or struck them on their way back. The Cossacks provided other valuable services such as the escort of ambassadors from Moscow and Istanbul across the steppe. In return the tsar supplied the Cossacks with certain goods that they could not supply for themselves. This was the ‘tsarist salary’ which ultimately enabled the government to divide the Don Voisko to its own advantage. Beyond this, the Cossacks served in particular campaigns for specified times and wages. Was this simply a business relationship or one between a sovereign and his vassals?

The written records of the relationship between the Cossacks and the Muscovite state only deepen the ambiguity. Ivan the Terrible denied any responsibility for the actions of the Don Cossacks in replies to complaints about Cossack raids to the Crimean Khan and Ottoman Sultan. This could have been either diplomatic dissembling on the part of the tsar or a simple statement of fact that he had no authority over the Cossacks. In 1554 there is a record of the Krug meeting to discuss participation in the campaign against Astrakhan and deciding to send help to Ivan. That the decision was a matter of debate implied that the tsar could request their help but not order it. The conduct of relations between Muscovy and the Don Voisko through the Muscovite equivalent of a foreign office, the Polsol’skii Prikaz, rather than through any domestic department of state strengthens the impression that the Don was an independent state at this point.
However, the communications between the tsar and the Cossacks gave a very different view of the relationship. The language expressed a relationship based on domination and subordination. When the Cossacks wrote to the tsar they habitually referred to themselves as ‘we your slaves’, while he referred to them as his votchina.\textsuperscript{34} The obvious inference from this is that the Cossacks were as much as part of the tsar’s patrimonial inheritance as any other section of Muscovite society. Such a straightforward interpretation would, however, be mistaken. The words have to be set in the context of the political cultures of both societies.

Muscovite political culture insisted that only the tsar possessed political power and that the function of people and institutions was limited to carrying out his will. This was a fiction, but one to which all subscribed.\textsuperscript{35} The reality was different and there were many players in the Muscovite political game, particularly the boiar elite.\textsuperscript{36} Muscovite political culture demanded that the Cossacks subscribed to this fiction as well. The Cossacks were willing to do this because it had very little meaning for them. They continued to act as they wanted, regardless of their ‘slave’ status. This relationship had parallels in the ways in which both the Byzantine and Chinese Empires dealt with steppe peoples.

Over time the issue of cultural relations probably troubled court scholars more than nomad military attacks for the nomads’ refusal to accept Chinese values struck at China’s own definition of itself as the centre of the world order. This was true even during the times when the Chinese were successful in employing their own ideological framework of foreign relations. Frontier peoples became quite skilful at manipulating this system, often accepting the Chinese forms while rejecting their content, thereby developing reputations as insolent or insincere ‘barbarians’.\textsuperscript{37}

By calling themselves slaves, the Cossacks were following the form of Muscovite political culture; but their actions showed that they ignored the content. The meaning of words in Moscow and the meaning of the same words on the Don was not necessarily the same.\textsuperscript{38} The decisive issue for the Cossack was not the form of words used but the absence of an oath of allegiance to the tsar. This would have been the moment when the Cossacks entered into a subordinate relationship with the tsar. The Cossacks repeatedly rejected all attempts by the tsars to take an oath, and in the end only kissed the cross to Alexis in the aftermath of Razin’s revolt, and then only under the threat of invasion.\textsuperscript{39} If the
Cossacks really had been slaves an oath of allegiance would have been irrelevant either to request or give.

Cossack actions in this period confirmed that they were independent from Muscovy and they resented any attempt by the latter to control them. A reasonable understanding between the Cossacks and Muscovy existed during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. He requested aid for his campaign against the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan which they rendered to him. In return Ivan was supposed to have issued a charter which recognized the Cossacks’ possession of the Don in perpetuity. Although the Charter was lost, and indeed might never have existed, the belief that it had been issued was preserved by the Cossacks into the twentieth century.40

The only serious point of tension between the two came in the second half of the 1570s, when a Cossack gang of several thousand began to operate on the Volga, plundering caravans and the state treasury. An army sent against the gang by the tsar drove it from the Volga. Among those who escaped the tsar’s wrath was Ataman Timofeevich Ermak and his followers. Forced to go on the run, Ermak took up the offer of service with the Stroganov brothers and redeemed himself by the conquest of Siberia.41

After Ivan’s death, the regent and later Tsar, Boris Gudonov, made an ill-judged attempt to force the Cossacks into real submission to the state. Boris had little understanding of Cossack sensitivities and less sympathy. He resorted to crude threats to force the Cossacks to do his bidding. The embassy led by Ambassador Nashchokin ordered the Cossacks to live in peace with the Azovtsi or face execution. The Cossacks refused point-blank to accept this command. Subsequent events did nothing to repair the relationship and in 1603 both the Don and the Zaporozhian Cossacks rallied to the banner of the First False Dmitri. 42 Muscovy was plunged into a state of chaos which lasted for the next ten years. The Cossacks were in no small measure responsible for the collapse of the state, but ultimately it was the support of the Cossacks that was critical in the election of Mikhail Romanov to the throne in 1613 and the subsequent stabilization of the country.43

Mikhail was careful in the conduct of his relations with the Cossacks, particularly in the early years of his reign, for he had no wish to provoke another round of troubles. He did send repeated requests to the Cossacks not to attack Ottoman towns or commerce and to live in peace with their tatar neighbours, all of which the Cossacks ignored.44 Later on in his reign Mikhail attempted to move from exhortation to threat. In 1630 he sent an ambassador, Ivan Karamyshev, to the Don to
berate the Cossacks for their refusal to join his campaign against the Poles and for their continuing attacks on Ottoman towns. So outraged were the Cossacks at the peremptory tone of the ambassador that they seized him, put him a sack and threw him into the Don which was the traditional form of Cossack execution.\textsuperscript{45} Mikhail did not make a second attempt.

The clearest example of the Cossacks’ freedom to conduct themselves independently of Muscovy was the capture of Azov in 1637. This was a purely Cossack initiative undertaken without the approval of Tsar Mikhail.\textsuperscript{46} The capture of Azov and its subsequent siege and recapture by the Turks became one of the most celebrated events in Cossack history.

From 1549 until late in the reign of Alexis, the Cossacks created a state that was independent of Muscovy. The Cossacks had intimate relations with Muscovy, but they were not those of a vassal to a lord. The Cossacks believed that they served the tsar through their own free choice and not out of compulsion. Whatever the linguistic expression it took, this was the substance of the relationship. As long as the Cossacks refused to take an oath of allegiance, the point at which in their eyes they became vassals, they were part of a free state. It was for this reason that successive tsars were so keen to get the Cossacks to take the oath and the Cossacks were so resolute in their refusal to do so.

**The century of Cossack rebellions 1671–1774**

The key to the independence of the Don Voisko was the solidarity of its members. A set of values underpinned by political, social and economic equality to which all subscribed had given the Voisko a high degree of cohesion, enabling the Voisko to resist any attempt by Muscovy to assume control over it. Unity of purpose had given the Cossacks the ability to interfere in Muscovite affairs on a grand scale during the Time of Troubles. The long reign of Mikhail enabled the state to regain its strength and composure. The Muscovy that Alexis inherited in 1645 was very different from the shattered state and society that his father had assumed control over in 1613. Vigorous, confident and wealthy, Muscovy was once again a major power which did not bode well for its neighbours including the Cossacks. This might not have been so critical for Cossack independence if the Cossacks had maintained their solidarity, but it was precisely in this period that deep cleavages began to appear among the Cossacks which opened the way for the extension of tsarist control.
By the second half of the seventeenth century Cossack society had become much more complex. The simply social structure which had prompted the Cossacks’ famous statement to Nashchokin in 1593 vanished over the next 50 years. The differences at first were only economic. Families who had been Cossacks for generations had accumulated considerable amounts of property and became known as ‘homeowners’. In contrast those who were newly arrived were usually penniless and received the laconic but apposite title of ‘naked ones’. Most of the ‘homeowners’ were settled in the lower Don, particularly the capital Cherkassk, while the ‘naked ones’ were mainly in the upper Don, adding a regional dimension to differences in wealth.

Economic differentiation was soon accompanied by social and political distinctions. The original unhesitating acceptance of all who made it to the Don as free and equal members of the community was replaced by a complex system of apprenticeship in which new arrivals had to wait up to seven years before they were finally accepted into the ranks of the Cossacks. A desire to restrict the numbers of those entitled to a share of the tsarist salary appeared to be the motive behind this. The system of apprenticeship created a large number of people of indeterminate status who led a precarious existence in the upper stanitsas. The bitter disappointment and resentment of those who had fled Muscovy only to find similar divisions on the Don and the disdain with which the Cossack elite regarded the new arrivals broke the solidarity of the Cossack Voisko.

Even among those who were accepted as Cossacks the same processes were at work. Growing economic and social differentiation eventually translated itself into political power. A permanent Cossack elite had began to form around the office of the ataman and his assistants. As the seventeenth century progressed wealth and social standing replaced charisma as the key to political power. From being the servant of the Cossack community, the administration slowly transformed itself into its master.

The internal evolution of the Cossack Voisko had fractured its unity, but outside pressures escalated the divisions to the point of civil war. In 1649 the publication of a new law code, the Ulozhenie, completed the enserfment of the Russian peasantry which set off a new wave of migration to the Don. In 1666 and 1667 the confirmation of the reforms of Patriarch Nikon by two Church Councils sent thousands more fleeing to the Don. The Old Believers began to arrive in large numbers in the 1670s and settled in the upper Don, adding religious grievances to the already volatile mix there. The impoverished upper
Don and the wealthy lower Don were now set firmly on a collision course.

Unrest in the upper Don had been simmering for several years, but had lacked any focal point to concentrate its energies effectively. In 1667 the election of a new ataman in the upper stanitsas dramatically transformed the situation. The new ataman was Stenka Razin and he was to become the most famous of all the Don Cossacks. Razin was an unlikely leader for the impoverished Cossacks of the upper stanitsas. He was born into a wealthy and well connected family in Zimoveiskaia Stanitsa in the lower Don. The current ataman, Kornili Iakolev, was his godfather. Razin’s early career suggested that he would be a successful member of the emerging Cossack elite. He had been selected as a member of the prestigious zimovoi stanitsa which annually made the journey to collect the tsarist salary, had served as a diplomat for the Voisko on two occasions and had commanded a Cossack detachment in a victorious campaign against the tatars. There was no reason that Razin should not have become Ataman of the Don Voisko himself. Yet for reasons that will probably never be known he rejected all this and decided to throw his lot in with the ‘naked ones’ of the upper stanitsas.

Razin’s presence in the upper Don was electrifying. He had immense personal charisma, was a proven military leader and had considerable political acumen as well. His first act was to turn the energies of the Cossacks outwards towards the Persian Empire. For a year, he and his followers plundered the Persian shore of the Caspian Sea before returning to the Don laden with booty, his already formidable reputation greatly enhanced. His absence from the Don had relieved tensions there, but his return brought the Don to the point of civil war.

The Cossack elite in Cherkassk felt acutely threatened by Razin’s growing power. They dared not move against him in his stronghold in the upper Don, but they were coming under increasing pressure from Moscow to do something about him. Unease in Moscow about Razin was rising sharply. Unease not only about the diplomatic problems he was causing with the Persian Empire, but more importantly about the expectations he was arousing among the oppressed peasantry in Muscovy itself. In spring 1670 an ambassador was despatched to the Don to demand that the Cossacks keep Razin under control. Ataman Iakolev and the elite were able to convince the ambassador that they could deal with the problem. But as the ambassador was about to leave, reassured by what he had heard, Razin and his followers suddenly burst into the Krug, denounced the ambassador as an emissary from the boiars and persuaded the Cossacks to put him to death. The unfortunate ambassador, like his
predecessor under Mikhail, was sewn into a sack and tossed into the Don. For Razin itself this was the point of no return, the beginning of his rebellion and of the peasant war in Muscovy.

The eventual failure of the rebellion, Razin’s retreat to the Don, his capture by Iakolev and his subsequent extradition to the Muscovite authorities had fateful consequences for the independence of the Cossack Voisko. The Cossack elite gave explicit proof of what had been implicit for a long time: if forced to choose between the independence of the Don and the safeguarding of their own privileges they would opt for the latter. By handing over Razin the elite broke the right of sanctuary, one of the oldest traditions of the Don. Most damaging of all, they agreed to Moscow’s demand that the Cossacks should take the oath of allegiance. Iakolev convened the Krug to ratify the oath, but it took four days of stormy debate and the threat of invasion by Muscovite armies before the Cossacks finally agreed to kiss the cross to Alexis.

The taking of the oath marked the formal ending of the independence of the Don Cossack Voisko although it was only the beginning of a long process of incorporation that was never completed. Even after the oath, the government and Cossack elite’s hold over the rank and file Cossacks was not secure. Shortly after Razin’s revolt, Iakolev and his cronies attempted to draft thousands of Cossacks to work on a new defensive line for the government. A Krug was summoned in which the Cossack vented their displeasure at being drafted as labourers. Enraged at finding his wishes thwarted, Iakolev had three of the Cossacks who opposed him flogged. A riot ensued in which Iakolev was beaten up and was lucky to escape being thrown into the Don. It was a salutary warning to the elite that their control was far from complete. After the taking of the oath, the government left the Cossacks to their own devices, particularly after the death of Alexis in 1676 when the Muscovite state was absorbed with problems of the succession.

The accession of Peter the Great to the throne in 1682 marked one of the great crossroads in Russian history. Peter set the state on a new course, transforming Russia into a European great power, but at the cost of irrevocably breaking the old Muscovite culture. To fulfil his imperial fantasies, Peter mobilized all the human and material resources of his society. As far as Peter was concerned the Cossacks were as much a part of the state’s resources as the enserfed peasantry and he had scant respect for the traditions of the Don or the emotional sensibilities of the Cossacks. The Cossacks were to serve the state along with everyone else.

Discontent with Peter’s government had almost burst into rebellion in 1688. Persecution of Old Believers that had gone on since the
reforms of Patriarch Nikon continued to provoke anger among the Cossacks. This was particularly worrying for the government as this was the one issue that was capable of uniting rank and file Cossacks with a large section of the Cossack elite. Several Cossack starshiny, including a former ataman Samoil Lavrent’ev, publicly criticized the persecution of Old Believers. In the upper stanitsas, where memories of Razin’s revolt were still vivid and where many Old Believers had settled, the elders found enthusiastic support. Another revolt was imminent, but the government got wind of what was happening and immediately demanded the arrest of the elders and their extradition to Moscow. Fighting broke out in the Krug before it was finally agreed to extradite the elders. Lavrent’ev and nine other Cossack elders were executed in Moscow in May 1688.57

The resentment the Cossacks felt towards Peter did not diminish and eventually came to a head over the right of sanctuary. In the past the government had turned a blind eye to this right and despite ritual denunciations had done little to end it. Peter’s exactions had sent thousands more peasants fleeing to the Don. For Peter this was intolerable. The loss of people on this scale represented a serious drain on his economy. In 1707 Prince Dolgorukhi was sent into the Don at the head of a punitive detachment to round up fugitives. He behaved with great ferocity on his progress through the Don, flogging runaways and Cossacks alike. Trampling over Cossack traditions in such a contemptuous manner cost Dolgorukhi his life. Rebel Cossacks led by the Ataman Kondrati Bulavin of Bakhmutskai Stanitsa attacked Dolgorukhi, killing him and destroying his detachment.58 The upper Don rose in support of Bulavin and with their aid he captured the Cossack capital Cherkassk. Ataman Maximov and other members of the Cossack elite were put on trial by the Krug and executed for treason.

Unlike Razin’s revolt, Bulavin’s was largely restricted to the Don. There was to be no peasant war this time. In addition Bulavin faced a much more formidable army than had existed during Alexis’ reign. A major expedition was mounted into the Don to suppress the revolt. In order to ensure that it behaved with unrestrained savagery, Peter entrusted command to Dolgorukhi’s brother who fully lived up to expectations. As the revolt was crushed, as many as 10,000 Cossacks were executed in revenge. Scaffolds were floated down the Don with bodies of executed Cossacks dangling from them, and fourteen stanitsas in the upper Don were burnt by Imperial soldiers.59

The suppression of the revolt led to further erosion of Cossack autonomy. Peter imposed Emel’ian Razamanov as Ataman on the Krug and
on Razamanov’s death in 1715 vetoed the candidate elected by the Cossacks and appointed Vasilii Frolov, a pliant tool of the government.  

From this time on, every ataman was appointed by the government. The significance of the Krug in mobilizing the Cossacks was not lost on Peter and from 1721 they were forbidden to hold any more. In 1722 the administration of the Cossacks was transferred from the foreign office to the Military College.

By the end of Peter’s reign, Cossack autonomy was substantially less than it had been in his father’s time. Yet the Cossacks continued to resent the control of the central government over them and their elite’s compliance with the government. The greatest Cossack rebellion of all was led by a Don Cossack, Emel’ian Pugachev, but found its main support among the Cossacks of the Yaik Voisko. Pugachev only sought the support of the Don Cossacks when it was already obvious that his revolt had failed. Even so there was strong sympathy for him in the upper stanitsas where the Cossacks refused to participate in any measures against him.  

In 1792 an attempt to transfer 3000 Cossacks and their families to the Kuban provoked a widespread campaign of passive resistance which required a major operation by the regular army to suppress.

Over the course of the century from Razin to Pugachev, the Don Cossack Voisko lost its independent status. Its political institutions and leaders came firmly under the control of the Imperial government and both benefited from the alliance. However, the rank and file Cossacks, particularly those in the upper Don, remained unintegrated into the new order. Time and again they showed their attachment to the old Cossack traditions despite incurring ferocious punishment. Until the government was strong enough to reach out into each stanitsa and take control of the Cossack administration there, it could not be sure that the old rebellious spirit was completely extinguished.

The consolidation of the Cossack elite

The differentiation of Cossack society that had began in the seventeenth century accelerated dramatically in the eighteenth. The Cossack elite tentatively and then with increasing confidence used their power to plunder systematically the resources of the Voisko. The accumulation of political power and wealth went on hand in hand so that by the end of the eighteenth century, the division between the Cossack elite and the ordinary Cossacks was almost as wide as that between noble and peasant.
The first stage in this process was the consolidation of political power in the hands of the ataman and starshiny. Already by Razin’s time the offices of ataman and starshiny were the preserve of a few wealthy families in Cherkassk. Through their wealth and connections, these men were able to dominate the Krug on all but the most contentious issues. Yet as long as the Krug existed it posed a threat to their dominance, as the fate of Ataman Maximov uncomfortably reminded them. The Imperial Government too recognized that it was the Krug that had provided the forum for popular unrest and was at one with the Cossack elite in wishing to see it suppressed. The Krug was replaced by the Voisko Chancellory in 1722 which was completely under the control of the Cossack elite. With the absolute minimum of Imperial supervision and no popular check on its activity, the elite was ready to ransack the wealth of the Voisko.

The elite succeeded in gaining a monopoly of political power at a time when fundamental changes were taking place in the Cossack economy. Agriculture was beginning to develop in the upper stanitsas as an alternative means of earning a living. This mostly took the form of stock rearing, but there was some arable farming as well. The elite in Cherkassk initially opposed all forms of agriculture and threatened death to anyone engaged in it. However, once they realised the profits to be made from it, they became its most enthusiastic supporters.

Technically all the land in the Voisko was the inalienable property of all the Cossacks and no legal right of private property in land existed until 1835. Despite this, the Cossack elites seized great swathes of land as their own property. While there were few barriers to hinder them, unless they had people to work the land it would remain without value. Personal freedom was too deeply entrenched among the Cossacks to make the attempt to enserf them worthwhile, so it was necessary to look elsewhere for a labour force. Two sources were readily available. One was the constant stream of fugitives arriving in the Don and the other was the illegal serf market in Russia. The Cossack elite had no right to own serfs since they were not nobles, but in the open spaces of the Don it was easy to hide fugitives from all but the most determined efforts of the government to recapture them. By 1763 over 20,000 peasants had been settled in the Don. Thus serfdom came to the Don and the seeds of the Civil War in the twentieth century were sown.

For the elite, wealth on its own was not enough. They craved noble status both for its own sake and for the legal right to own serfs. The government was in no hurry to grant the elite’s wishes, feeling that it had already done enough for them. Only in the aftermath of the Pugachev
revolt when the Cossack elite had again demonstrated its loyalty, did the government begin to relent. Even so, it was not until 1798 that the Don elite were granted parity of status with the Russian nobility.\textsuperscript{68}

For most of the eighteenth century the understanding between the government and the Cossack elite worked well. Only on two occasions did tensions serious enough to disturb it arise. The first was due to the lack of any formal control over the elite, especially the ataman. This did not matter as long as both sides understood the informal rules of the contract, but if one side chose to ignore them or rewrite them, there was no institutional mechanism to prevent this short of sending in the army.

Between 1738 and 1772, one family monopolized the position of ataman. Daniil Efremov was ataman from 1738–53 and on his retirement managed to secure the position for his son Stepan. Stepan Efremov ruled the Voisko with increasing disregard for the wishes of St. Petersburg. He opened secret negotiations with the tatars and sought to create a power base for himself among the ordinary Cossacks. His intention appeared to be the restoration of the autonomy of the Don with his family as the hereditary rulers.\textsuperscript{69} The government issued repeated requests to Efremov to come to St.Petersburg to explain himself. Efremov ignored all of them and continued with his plans. In 1772 the government finally lost patience and despatched a general to arrest him. Only Efremov's personal intervention prevented the Cossacks lynching the general, but it was clear a new revolt was in the offing. At this critical point, other members of the Cossack elite recognized that Efremov's ambitions threatened the good life for all of them and formed a conspiracy to remove him. They seized Efremov in a night raid and fled with him to a government fortress from where he was sent to St. Petersburg for trial. Convicted of treason, he was sentenced to death, but had his sentence commuted to life imprisonment.\textsuperscript{70} With Efremov's removal, the threat of revolt dissolved.

For the government it had been a very close call. If the crisis had come to a head one year later during the Pugachev revolt, the danger to the state would have been much more serious. The government was determined that no ataman would exercise such power again and carried out a reform of the Voisko administration. The administration was split into civil and military wings with functions divided between six people who were to assist the ataman but also to keep an eye on him.\textsuperscript{71} This did little to prevent the elite plundering the Voisko, which had never caused the government concern; but it did prevent any single member accumulating sufficient power to threaten the link between the Voisko and St. Petersburg.
The other matter that continued to trouble the government was the persistence of Old Belief. Throughout the eighteenth century the government remained deeply suspicious of the Old Believers in the Don who numbered thousands. It suspected, probably correctly, that there were many adherents to the old faith among the elite. Knowing that this was the one issue crossing class lines in the Don and therefore having the potential to undermine government control, the government was merciless in its persecution of Old Believers. The execution of Lavrent’ev and the others was an explicit warning to the elite of what to expect if they flirted with Old Belief.

The eighteenth century was a good time for the Cossack elite. Their achievements by any standards were impressive. They had broken the power of the Krug and ensured for themselves a monopoly of political power which they then used to amass great fortunes for themselves. Their success was crowned at the end of the century when they were given noble status. However their triumph had cost the rest of the Cossacks dearly. The elite had deliberately chosen wealth and status within the Empire over the continued independence of the Don. They had cooperated ruthlessly with the government in the suppression of dissent and had irrevocably split the Cossack Voisko. Most damaging of all was the creation of an enserfed peasantry which ultimately proved fatal to the Cossacks in the twentieth century.

The erosion of Voisko autonomy

In the eighteenth century the control of the Imperial State over the Don Cossacks’ Voisko extended only to ensuring the loyalty of the Cossack elite and the elite’s dominance over the Voisko. In every aspect of their civil lives and in most aspects of their military service the Cossacks were free to organize themselves, untouched either by St. Petersburg or Novocherkassk. The only time the majority of Cossacks would come in contact with the state was during their period of military service, and even this was in a way which reinforced their identity as Cossacks rather than as part of a unified imperial army. In the nineteenth century the state involved itself much more actively in the life of the Empire, seeking to extend its control beyond the elites down into the narod. The Cossacks experienced the state directly and indirectly. Directly, they encountered the state much more actively in their military service and for the first time in their civil life. Indirectly they felt its presence in the Emancipation of the Serfs, the opening of the Don to peasant migration and the creation of a market economy.
The beginning of the nineteenth century, however, saw the state retreat from even the limited control it had exercised over the life of the Voisko. Paul I had undone many of the reforms introduced by Potemkin without putting anything in their place. The result had been administrative chaos. The elite, which had become slightly more circumspect in its plundering of the Voisko’s resources, found itself once more with a free hand to do as they pleased. By the time of Paul’s assassination in 1801 and his replacement by Alexander I even the Imperial Government was becoming embarrassed at the scale of seizures and it took the first tentative steps to curb the elite’s voraciousness. To facilitate the extension of bureaucratic control, the Don was divided into seven okrugi which were the approximate equivalent of the more usual uezdy. More systematic attempts to reform the administration were interrupted by the Napoleonic Wars when all Cossacks from 15 to 60 were mobilized. At the end of the war, the government took up where it had left off with renewed determination.

The Committee Concerning the Organization of the Don Voisko was established in 1819 under the leadership of Ataman Denisov. The Don nobility resented the Committee since it feared that part of the Committee’s remit would be to put effective restraints on the elite’s ability to enrich itself. The Committee’s deliberations were held in secret, generating a vast rumour mill about its activities which was not surprising since it took 16 years to complete its work.

The Committee’s labours finally bore fruit in the form of the Law Concerning the Administration of the Don Voisko 1835. For the elite and ordinary Cossacks, the Law of 1835 was a major intrusion of the state into their lives. The Committee recognized that further unchecked seizures by the Cossack elite could undermine the financial stability of the whole of the Don Voisko. It was too much to expect that a committee consisting of high ranking bureaucrats and Cossack officers would confiscate stolen land from the Cossack elite. Instead the Committee legitimized past seizures by granting legal title to them, but at the same time it extended the protection of the law to the land held by individual stanitsas. This effectively ended the elite’s ability to usurp common Cossack land. The Voisko administration was divided into seven sections and the Ataman’s position became akin to that of a governor in other provinces.

Unlike earlier reforms, the Law of 1835 affected the lives of ordinary Cossacks. As well as giving legal protection to stanitsa lands, it fixed, in theory at any rate, the minimum land entitlement of each adult male Cossack at 30 desiatiny of good land. For the first time the government
sought to regulate the stanitsa administration with guidelines about the role and character of the ataman and the functioning of the communal assembly, the *sbor.* The precise effects of these reforms will be dealt with in chapter four, but they were a demonstration of the government’s determination to take a much more active role in the life of its subjects. After 1835 no comparable legislation was introduced for the remainder of Nicholas’ reign.

The catastrophe of the Crimean War and the accession of a new tsar, Alexander II, led to the most intense examination of all the Empire’s institutions. The results of all this introspection were the Great Reforms which comprehensively transformed Imperial Russia. Even though the Cossacks were not directly affected by the most important of the reforms, the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861, they felt the consequences as much as anyone else. Moreover, they found themselves subjected to a level of scrutiny and evaluation by the bureaucracy that they had never before experienced.

A secret committee was set up under War Minister Miliutin with a remit to examine every aspect of Cossack life. The committee was staffed by professional bureaucrats who saw the Cossacks as an administrative anomaly in need of being straightened out. Rumours swept the Don that the government intended to abolish the Cossacks by administrative fiat and transform the Cossacks into peasants. Nor were such rumours that far wide of the mark, as the committee did indeed discuss the relevance, or lack of it, of a servitor class in a modern army. The era of the Great Reforms was an anxious time for the Cossacks as they awaited their fate at the hands of the secret committee.

In 1870 the work of the committee was completed in the form of a new law that was as radical in its scope as that of 1835. The committee did not opt for the most radical solution of abolishing the Cossack caste because changing internal and external developments convinced the government that the Cossacks did have a use for the state. Growing domestic unrest led to the widespread use of the Cossacks as reinforcements for the police in the Empire’s cities and towns. By the end of the century, Cossacks were considered indispensable by the authorities for the maintenance of order in both urban and rural areas. Internationally the emergence of a united Germany posed a new threat to the western borders of the Empire which the Cossacks were ideally place to counter, particularly after the building of the railway network.

Even so, the changes that the Law of 1870 introduced marked a thoroughgoing departure from previous practice. For the first time the government attempted to take control of the Cossack administration in the
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stanitsas. The success or otherwise of this measure will be looked at later, but again it was a further indication of the state’s ambition to control the lives of its subjects. Symbolic of the new drive for uniformity within the Empire was the changing of the official title of the Voisko from the poetic Zemlia Voiska Donskogo to the prosaic Oblast’ Voiska Donskogo.

The terms of Cossack military service did not escape the attention of the bureaucracy. A new law in 1875 changed the terms of Cossack military service which dramatically increased the cost of service to the Cossacks and set their household economies on a downward spiral that continued to the First World War. The government also ended the practice of allowing the Cossacks to keep their firearms at home which caused a great deal of resentment.82

The high point of reform was reached in 1876 with the introduction of the zemstvo into the Don. For the Cossacks this was the straw that broke the camel’s back. The zemstvo was to be supported by taxes levied on the local population as elsewhere in the Empire, but this struck at one of the most ancient of Cossack privileges: freedom from taxation. A surge of anger swept through the Don as Cossacks everywhere refused to pay taxes or elect delegates to the zemstvo. A prolonged campaign of civil disobedience finally paid off when Alexander III abolished the zemstvo in the Don in 1882.83

The Cossacks’ anxiety about their status and security was compounded by the growing number of peasant migrants into the Don. The relaxation of restrictions on peasant mobility enabled thousands of peasants from central Russia and Ukraine to migrate to the Don. Driven by poverty and attracted by the fertile Don land, the migrants known as inogorodnie or outsiders concentrated in the lower Don. Needless to say they remained impoverished, but their very poverty constituted a threat to the Cossacks and one that grew rather than diminished.

The reign of the last two tsars offered a respite to the Cossacks at least in terms of direct government interference in their lives. By the time Alexander III came to the throne in 1881, the enthusiasm for reform had long since dissipated. Alexander himself was hostile to further reforms and attempted to modify many of those which had been introduced. Alexander was deeply suspicious of the growing power of the bureaucracy which he felt was encroaching on his autocratic prerogatives and he was determined to keep it in check. The Cossacks were one of the beneficiaries of this attitude in so much as the tsar believed the Cossacks had a direct personal relationship to himself rather than one mediated through the bureaucracy. The distinctiveness of the Cossacks, in the mind of the tsar at any rate, was due to the special relationship
with the throne, and this was something with which the bureaucracy should not be allowed to meddle. The only major piece of legislation affecting the Cossacks was a new law passed in 1890. However, the Law of 1890 did not have the same sweeping nature as the Laws of 1835 and 1870. It represented more a tightening of the existing structure than any radical departure. This was the last piece of major legislation passed by the regime concerning the Cossacks. Nicholas II followed the same policy as his father towards the Cossacks and the threat that had loomed so large over the Cossacks at the beginning of the reform period receded.

Over the nineteenth century the government interfered more directly in the internal life of the Voisko than ever before. By the end of the century it had managed to transform the Voisko administration in Novocherkassk into one differing little from any other oblast' in the Empire. The very loose control of the elite that had existed in the eighteenth century was replaced by a bureaucratic apparatus and routine familiar all over the Empire. For the first time ordinary Cossacks directly experienced government intervention in their lives and had to live with the indirect consequences of government action.

**The last years of the Don Cossack Voisko, 1900–1920**

The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 placed a crushing burden on the domestic economies of the Cossacks. For the first time in a generation, Cossacks of the second and third turn were mobilized. Many families faced ruin as a result of the loss of labour, which often amounted to half the labour force. The local press recorded the plight of such families in detail. The end of the war brought no relief as the government, desperate for reliable soldiers, refused to demobilize any Cossack regiments. Yet the Cossacks accepted service in the war against Japan without complaint as part of their duties. What they rejected in the end was their role as the hired thugs of the regime.

The major role that the Cossacks played in suppressing the 1905 Revolution is well known and is a standard of any book on the revolutionary upheaval. The Cossacks themselves were defensive about their record in the revolution and were not inclined to celebrate it along with their other military exploits. However the strain of a complete mobilization and the shame which they felt in brutally crushing peasant and worker unrest led to a spate of mutinies in Cossack regiments and extensive unrest within the Voisko. By the summer of 1906 the level of unrest was reaching levels not seen since Bulavin’s revolt at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The ebbing of the revolutionary tide and the
demobilization of Cossack regiments defused the situation, at least for the time being.\textsuperscript{88} The survival of the regime owed a lot to the willingness of the Cossacks to carry out repression. Whether they would be willing to do so again was a moot question. Many officials commented on the changed mood among all the Cossack hosts. One reported that ‘undoubtedly the mood of the Cossacks is not what it had been previously’.\textsuperscript{89} One of the forms that this new mood took was the beginning of the separation of tsar and nation in the minds of the Cossacks. In 1905 the Cossacks found themselves between the tsar and the nation. In the majority of cases the Cossacks had chosen the tsar. There were clear indications, however, that the government could not rely on the Cossacks to do so again. The 1905 Revolution suggested that the willingness of the Cossacks to carry out repression was not inexhaustible and that the government ought to have looked for an alternative to the Cossacks with some urgency. By 1914 no alternative had been found.

The outbreak of war in 1914 was accompanied by the mobilization of over 100,000 Don Cossacks.\textsuperscript{90} Tellingly, this was less than for internal repression during the 1905 Revolution, although still a grievous blow to a fragile domestic economy. The suffering of men at the front and their families at home ensured that the Cossacks would no longer be a cat’s paw for the regime. The refusal of the First and Fourth Don Cossack Regiments in Petrograd to open fire on striking workers was part of a series of events that led to the overthrow of the tsar a few days later.

The collapse of the monarchy aroused little reaction in the Don. The Cossacks were as alienated from the throne as most other sections of society and raised no demands for his return. The Ataman, Count Von Grabbe, a tsarist bureaucrat, was arrested by a group of Cossack notables led by E. V. Voloshinov. Voloshinov became temporary Ataman and immediately began preparations to summon a Krug, the first for 176 years. The first step to independent statehood had been taken.

The Krug met in April 1917 and elected General Kaledin as Ataman. Initially supportive of the Provisional Government, Kaledin became increasingly critical of its failure to take action against the soviet and was an enthusiastic supporter of General Kornilov. Not surprisingly Kaledin refused to recognize the Bolshevik regime and began to prepare the Don as a base for the overthrow of the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{91} The Don formally seceded from Russia. Even though Kaledin made it clear that this was only temporary, the break had been made; and for the first time since the Cossacks had kissed the cross to Alexis, an independent Cossack state existed on the Don.
Kaledin’s position was much weaker than it appeared to be. The majority of the Cossacks were not actively opposed to the Soviet regime and certainly had no wish to become part of an anti-Soviet crusade. Most adopted an attitude of benevolent neutrality to the new regime. The workers of Rostov and Taganrog and the peasantry were firm supporters of soviet power and regarded Kaledin’s government as a tool of the landlord class. The frontline units who began to return at the beginning of 1918 tipped the scales firmly against Kaledin. Led by a non-commissioned officer, Feodor Podtelkov, they formed the Committee of Front-Line Cossacks in Kamenskaia Stanitsa and announced that they were taking power. At the same time a Bolshevik army was approaching the Don from the north. Caught between these two forces, Kaledin decided the situation was hopeless and shot himself.

The Don Soviet Republic was proclaimed with Podtelkov as President and the omens for Bolshevik rule looked favourable. However, the behaviour of the Bolshevik army that had entered the Don and the increasingly savage land war with the peasantry transformed the mood of the Cossacks. Bolshevik forces in the Don were undisciplined and were little more than a drunken mob. They plundered large areas of the Don, particularly the lower Don, and irreparably damaged the reputation of the Soviet regime. The peasantry took the opportunity to settle old scores with the Cossacks, seizing Cossack land and property. After only a few weeks of Soviet power, the Cossacks had had enough. In March 1918 a revolt broke out in Suvorovskai Stanitsa in the lower Don which rapidly spread across the whole of the Voisko. By May Soviet rule had collapsed and the Don was once more under Cossack control.

A new Krug was summoned which elected General Krasnov as Ataman. The change of mood among the Cossacks was apparent from their response to the mobilization decree issued by the Krug. Under Kaledin barely half a dozen men had responded to the call to arms he had issued in January 1918. Seven months later over 50,000 answered the new call. The Don under Krasnov was now openly committed to independence from Moscow, a policy which chimed with more Cossacks since the experience of Bolshevik rule. Yet subsequent events were to show that the Cossacks, while willing to fight fiercely in defence of their Voisko and their way of life, were much less willing to serve beyond the borders of the Don.

The Cossacks in the upper stanitsas in particular remained susceptible to Bolshevik propaganda and were usually the first go home once the fighting moved outside the territory of the Voisko. There were fewer peasants in the upper Don and the Cossacks felt much less threatened
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by the claims of the peasantry than those of the lower Don. The Bolsheviks had a chance to end the Civil War at the end of 1918 when the collapse of Imperial Germany allowed them to go on to the offensive against their internal enemies. The Bolsheviks re-entered the Don early in 1919 and advanced so rapidly through the upper stanitsas that the conquest of the entire Don seemed only weeks away. An ill-conceived policy of terror that came from the very highest levels of the Bolshevik state provoked a rebellion in the upper stanitsas. The Bolshevik advance ground to a halt and soon all Bolshevik forces had fled the Don. This provided General Denikin with the base he needed for his march on Moscow in the summer of 1919.

The defeat of Denikin at Tula and the subsequent rout of the White Army marked the beginning of the end of the anti-Bolshevik struggle. The Cossacks retreated with Denikin, fighting stubbornly as the Bolsheviks invaded the Voisko for a third time. There was to be no reprieve this time. The exhausted society was incapable of further resistance and in March 1920 the Voisko of the Don Cossacks ceased to exist.

The last twenty years of the Voisko’s existence were as turbulent as any in its history. The Don Cossacks fought in two major wars, experienced three revolutions, foreign occupation, a bitter land war with the peasantry and finally conquest by a deeply hostile regime. The violent upheavals of this period, particularly the Civil War, brought to the surface many of the familiar fault lines of Cossack society. The differences in outlook and interests between the elite of Cossack society and the mass of ordinary Cossacks out in the stanitsas remained. The division between the upper and lower stanitsas expressed itself in different attitudes towards the Bolsheviks. A new division was added by the First World War between those who had fought at the front and those who had not. Nevertheless, these years provided eloquent testimony to the essential cohesion of Cossack society based around the stanitsa. Cossacks responded to events not as isolated groups or individuals, but as members of a stanitsa. Their strong sense of caste identity enabled members of one stanitsa to act in co-ordination with other stanitsas while the historical memory of who they were and what they had been allowed them to develop local co-operation into an independent Cossack republic, as they had once done centuries earlier. In the end the re-established Don Cossack Republic succumbed to the forces opposing it, but only after three years of the most brutal of conflicts. That there was anything left of the Cossacks at the end of that period is testimony to the strength of their identity and the cohesion of their society.
2

The Land and the People of the Great Host of the Don

The Cossacks had many names for the river which gave them their identity. Don Batiushka, Don Ivanovich were two, but by far the most common was Tikhii Don, the Quiet Don. Meandering gently through their Voisko, it could have been a metaphor for the life of the Cossacks. Placid, unhurried and unchanging, the Cossacks felt themselves inextricably linked to their river. The River Don existentially and symbolically was at the heart of their tradition. Even the Don, however, came to mirror the instability of Cossack life in late Imperial Russia.

The River Don was the central feature of the complex but fragile ecosystem on which the Cossacks depended absolutely for their wellbeing. Man, climate, rivers, soil and forests interacted with each other to produce a delicate equilibrium. Changes in one of the elements inevitably had consequences on the others. A relatively stable equilibrium that had existed until the 1870s broke down under the combined pressure of rapid population growth and a sharp rise in the cost of military service. To meet these demands, to simply survive the coming year, the Cossacks intensified the exploitation of the Voisko’s resources without regard for the future. The consequence was severe and continuous environmental degradation: deforestation, declining soil fertility, desertification, falling water levels and climatic change. A spiral of short-term gains producing long term costs was set in motion and continued down to 1914.

This chapter looks at the environment in which the Cossacks lived and worked between 1861 and 1914. Its subject matter is the interaction between humans and the environment and the ways in which this changed in the half century from the Emancipation. I have provided as much information as I could gather on the topography of the Don and its population in this period. Both provide the essential backdrop to
Cossack, and indeed peasant, life in this period. Before this, however, a few words are necessary on the peculiar Cossack administration, because the information that follows relates to Cossack administrative units and terminology.

The administrative structure

For administrative purposes the Don was divided into okrugi which were the equivalent of the more common uezdy. The level of the okrug was as far as the professional bureaucracy reached. Beyond this, it had to rely on more indirect controls. Initially there were seven okrugi: Cherkasskii, First Donskoi, Second Donskoi, Ust-Medveditskii, Khoperskii, Donetskii, and Miuskii. In 1884 Sal’skii Okrug was created consisting of Kalmyk land in the trans-Don steppe. Three years later Miuskii Okrug was divided into two new okrugi, Rostovskii and Taganrogskii, which gave a total of nine. Each okrug had its own ataman, who was again a government appointee.

Cherkassk had been the Cossack capital for centuries. Its situation on an island made it easy to defend but it was prone to flooding. With final removal of the nomadic threat in the last years of the eighteenth century, defensive considerations were no longer relevant. In 1805 the capital was shifted to a new site and was named Novocherkassk, New Cherkassk. Novocherkassk was the only town of any size in the Voisko in the early part of the nineteenth century, but it never lost its air of a sleepy provincial town. In contrast, Rostov and Taganrog, which had been minor ports at the beginning of the century, were transformed by the export of grain through the Black Sea into cities of international significance. The brash energy of Rostov in particular drew the economic and, increasingly, the political life of the Voisko into its orbit.

The vast majority of the Cossack population shunned the towns and continued to live in the traditional rural settlements of the stanitsa and khutor. The stanitsa had no equivalent outside the Cossack areas. It had originated as the winter quarters of a particular band of Cossacks and took its name from the word stan, meaning camp. As the threat from steppe nomads decreased and the stanitsa population rose, groups of Cossacks broke away from their stanitsa to found new settlements. These became known as khutora, and were similar in size to peasant villages. However, every khutor retained a close bond with its mother stanitsa, and Cossacks living in a khutor were counted as members of the stanitsa. In this way a stanitsa could have a membership that ran into several thousands. Already by mid century several stanitsas had
over 10,000 members and a few close to 20,000. This made for a problematic but lively system of local self-government as we shall see. On the other hand, some stanitsas were tiny, with fewer than 1000 members. The smallest was Tatarskaia with only 617. Each stanitsa and khutor was headed by an ataman. However, in contrast to the administration at the level of the Voisko or the okrug, the Cossacks themselves controlled the administration at the stanitsa and khutor level through the election of the atamans and the communal assembly.

Whatever its size, the stanitsa was the recipient of the passionate loyalty of all its members. Unlike the okrug which was a creation of the Tsarist state, the stanitsa was an organic institution of Cossack society which predated and outlived the state. It was a critical element in the Cossack sense of identity. Allowing for the uncertainties of military service, a Cossack lived, worked, went to the army with his stanitsa fellows, married, raised a family and died within his native stanitsa. In 1914 there were 120 stanitsas.

The natural environment

No systematic survey of the Don Voisko was carried out until 1847, which defined the total area of the Don as 14,833,449 desiatiny. This figure fluctuated over the years as small adjustments were made in the boundaries of the Voisko. At the beginning of the twentieth century the total area was 15,020,442 desiatiny. There were four basic types of property owners in the Don. The largest owners were the individual stanitsas who owned nearly 62 per cent of the total. Reserve land belonging to the Voisko which was to be used for the benefit of the whole Cossack community formed another 15 per cent. Thus the stanitsas had at their disposal or held in trust for them 77 per cent of the total land area of the Voisko. The hereditary property of the Cossack nobles was 8.5 per cent of the total. The remaining land was owned either by peasant communes or owned by individuals. The Don Voisko was rich in mineral products, particularly coal and anthracite. In 1870 7,000,000 puds of coal were produced, rising to 40,000,000 by 1880. This, however, was only a fraction of the potential of the Don coal fields. An inadequate infrastructure seriously retarded any further exploitation. Commercial salt lakes had existed for a long time in the trans-Don steppe. Rostov and Taganrog became industrial centres as well as ports, offering new opportunities for many. Important as these developments were, it was agriculture that remained the key economic activity in the Voisko.
The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the Voisko, Cossack and peasant, earned their living from agriculture. In the 1890 annual survey of the condition of the Don, the Ataman’s Chancellory noted, ‘differences in the size of the harvest depend mainly upon the quality of soil, the suitability of location and, above all, on the influence of climatic conditions.’ The Don had a continental climate which was characterized by harsh winters and hot summers, although moderated by the influence of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The average temperature in winter varied from −5 degrees Centigrade to −10, while in summer 28 Centigrade was the average, although on occasion it could reach 40 degrees Centigrade. Within this framework, however, there existed at least four microclimates which produced extremely variable weather patterns over relatively short distances.

The first distinct climatic zone consisted of the two northern okrugi, Khoperskii and Ust-Medveditskii. Being furthest from the sea, this area had the most typically continental climate of the Don Voisko. The winter was cold and unbroken, beginning in November with the freezing of the rivers and ending with the melting of the ice in mid-March. Spring sowing took place in April and crops were harvested at the end of June. July and August were the hottest months but the summer heats were moderated by the profusion of woods and rivers.

The second zone contained the southern part of Ust-Medveditskii Okrug and the northern parts of the First and Second Donskoi Okrug and Donetskii Okrug. Here winter began slightly later, was generally milder, more broken and ended earlier. Summers were hotter than in the first zone.

In the third zone, the southern part of Donetskii Okrug, part of First Donskoi, the northern parts of Cherkasskii, Taganrogskii and Rostovskii Okrug, there was a more marked difference. Winters began a month later, were mild and ended earlier. The winters were very unpredictable: sharp frosts alternated with sudden thaws. Spring and autumn were very wet and thick fogs were common. The summers heats were intensified by a humid wind from the West and a dry one from the East.

The whole of Sal’skii Okrug and the southern parts of Rostovskii and Taganrogskii Okrugi made up the final zone. Much of this area was open steppe without tree or settlement. Short, waterless winters and fierce summer heats were the predominant characteristics of this area.

These microclimates could produce sharp contrasts on the level of the harvests within the Voisko in any one year. In 1895 for example untimely rain ruined the harvest in most of the Don apart from the Second Donskoi Okrug where it was ruined by drought. 1898 produced
a reasonable harvest in six of the okrugi but an excess of rain followed by a summer drought resulted in a poor one in the remaining three. An additional complication to the variety of climates in the Don was the increasing evidence of climatic change. When Grekov wrote his study in 1905, it was clear to him that climatic change was accelerating with disastrous consequences for the harvest throughout the Voisko. Dry years were followed by deluges without any discernible pattern.

After the climate, the quality of the soil was the next greatest influence on the size of the harvest. Soil in the Don Voisko was predominantly of the Black Earth type, which made it among the most fertile in the world. In 1890 the Ataman’s Chancellory classified 82 per cent of the soil in the Voisko as good for agricultural purposes and 11 per cent as indifferent or poor, with 7 per cent remaining unsurveyed. The best soils were on the left bank of the Don in Khoperskii and in the northern half of Ust-Medveditskii Okrug which also possessed the climates most favourable to agriculture. The poorest were in the Second Donskoi Okrug. Generally speaking most parts of the Don had a good supply of high quality land.

Despite the natural fertility of the Don land, the productivity of the soil was declining. Overwork without adequate fallow periods or fertilizer led to falling yields. Until the 1870s, every grain sown had multiplied itself five or six times. By the 1890s the yield had slipped to 1:4/4.5. Deforestation and a rising number of flash floods removed topsoil and accelerated desertification. It is important not to exaggerate the extent of the loss of fertility. The Cossacks still enjoyed high yields compared to other parts of Russia. However, the indications were that this could not continue without a change in practices.

One of the most intractable problems facing agriculture in the Don was insufficient water. This in area where there was an abundance of rivers, streams and lakes. The Don possessed 40 major rivers, dozens of minor ones, and countless other waterways. The River Don, of course, was by far the most important. One of the great rivers of Europe, the Don rose in Lake Ivanovskoe in Tula Province and flowed through the length of the Voisko, before emptying into the Sea of Azov. In all the Don flowed for 600 miles within the Cossack territory. It had seven chief tributaries: on the right bank were the Chir and Donets; on the left were the Khoper, the Medvedets, the Ilovlia, the Sal, and the Manich. With such a copious supply of water, it might seem odd that shortages were a constant problem.

A partial explanation was the absence of any large-scale irrigation projects. The Cossacks made almost no use of the area’s waterways for
irrigation, relying on rainfall which was infrequent and unpredictable. As early as the 1870s commentators on agriculture were identifying the lack of artificial irrigation as one of the key defects in Cossack agriculture. In a discussion on the state of agriculture in the Don, a journalist in the official journal of the Voisko noted that southern Russia, including the Don, had once supplied large parts of Europe with grain and had even exported small quantities to North America. Many of these markets had since been lost. He argued that the only way to restore the competitiveness of the area was to raise productivity of land which was ‘only possible with the correct distribution of moisture, i.e. by carrying out irrigation from drainage’. Twenty years later Maslakovets found that still no progress had been made in this area, and that the Cossacks appeared indifferent or even hostile whenever the matter was raised.

Yet the lack of progress should not have been such a cause for surprise. The digging of drainage and irrigation ditches and the construction of dams and reservoirs were an expensive business, requiring capital far in excess of what the ordinary Cossack possessed. Whatever surpluses Cossack farms produced were consumed by the costs of military service. Only the Voisko authorities could mobilize sufficient capital to carry out the necessary works. They did not act until after the 1905 Revolution when they belatedly introduced a programme of irrigation works.

The water shortage was exacerbated by falling river levels throughout the Voisko. Deforestation reduced the flow in many large rivers and dried up minor ones completely, damaging the livelihood of the local population. In Uriupinskaia Stanitsa, for example, the only waterway in 1875 was the River Khopper. Twenty years earlier there had been three tributaries to the Khopper: the Kamenka, the Korkhina and the Ol’shanka. These had since dried up, forcing the Cossacks to drive their cattle much further afield to find water, and depriving them of the fish which the rivers had also supplied. To take another example, fishing had been an important commercial activity in Razdorskaia Stanitsa but the income it produced shrank along with the river. Even the flow of the Don was dwindling by the turn of the century. The annual flooding of the river was sustained only by melting snow from Voronezh Guberniia. The thaw there began later and lasted longer than in the Don. Falling water levels were not compensated for by the rise in the frequency of flash floods. The effects of these were wholly negative. Crops were lost, livestock killed, topsoil removed; and the effluent left, when the waters retreated, was damaging to human health.

Dense forests had once covered large parts of the Don, particularly the upper Don. The total area of woodlands remaining in the Don at
the start of the twentieth century was 327,058 desiatiny or 2.1 per cent of the total land area. The majority of these woodlands, 64 per cent, was owned by the individual stanitsas. The remaining land was owned by the Voisko administration, nobles and peasants.24

As we have seen, trees were vital for the protection of soil and the prevention of drought. They were also an important economic resource providing fuel for heating, materials for construction and forage for animals. The transition from a natural steppe economy to an arable one had led inevitably to a slow haemorrhaging of the forests. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this steady attrition mutated into wholesale destruction. The greatest losses were suffered by woods belonging to the stanitsas. Between 1878 and 1898, 57 per cent of the stanitsa woods were cut down, a loss of 250,000 desiatiny.25 The 209,317 desiatiny of stanitsa woodlands remaining at the time of Maslakovets' report had fallen to 191,284 desiatiny by 1906.26 Even allowing for this slowing rate of destruction, the stanitsa woods were being cut down at an unsustainable rate. The southern okrugi had long since lost all their woods but at this rate the whole Voisko would soon be devoid of tree cover. Aside from the incalculable damage to the environment, the destruction of the woods left a permanent gap in the Cossack economy. The government in response had mounted a wholly inadequate reforestation programme.27

The environmental impact of the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources was not something that only became apparent to the authorities years later. By 1881 the War Ministry already had an accurate understanding of the crisis. In its annual report to the Tsar on the condition of all the Cossack voiska, the War Ministry gave an intelligent and succinct summary of the ongoing crisis.

Although in the present case the reason for the harvest failure was fortuitous, nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in the Don Oblast' to a very large degree, there exists a constant cause of such failure i.e. the lowering of the productivity of the soil from year to year. While the population of the Oblast' was small and the chief occupation livestock raising, only the very best land was put under the plough. And even this in such small quantities that there was the opportunity after three or four harvests to rest the land over several years and so reestablish its natural productivity. With the increase in population and the development of the southern ports, land of every type has gone under the plough, but the period of fallow has become altogether shorter. Along with this has gone the excessive destruction of
the woods and, consequently, the shallowing of rivers, the drying up of their sources and in general a decrease in the quantity of moisture both in the soil and in the atmosphere. These phenomena, however, which are characteristic of all our southern steppe zone, threaten, if circumstances do not change, to turn it into a wilderness good only for nomads. The way to avoid such a dismal future lies in the cultivation of woods, the construction of irrigation and the working out of a system of agriculture by means of science and experience which corresponds with the local climatic and soil conditions, and which would allow agriculture without exhausting the soil.28

Communications

Communications in the Don were abysmal even by the low standards of Tsarist Russia. The chairman of the Don Statistical Committee in the 1880s, S. Nomikosov, quipped that the philosopher who mused that to travel was to broaden the mind, had never visited the Don where ‘to travel was to inflict pain on oneself.’29 There were very few metalled roads in the Don. Most were only dirt tracks which were only passable between May and November. During the autumn and spring rains, the roads dissolved into the muddy slough which the Russians knew as the rasputitsa. This could isolate communities for weeks at time. Winter did not significantly improve matters in most of the Don, since it was too changeable to allow extensive travel. Only with the ending of the spring thaw did the condition of the roads make travel feasible, but, since this coincided with the start of field work, few people had the time to take advantage. Visiting some of the more remote parts of the Don was like mounting a full-scale expedition into the wilderness. Many of the journalists who set out from Rostov or Novocherkassk for the far corners of the Don gave their urban readers suitably dramatic accounts of their safaris and the exotic peoples and customs they found. The poor state of the roads was a serious impediment to economic development which every surveyor of the economic state of the Don recorded with weary regularity: Nomikosov in the 1880s, Maslovkovets in the 1890s, Grekov in the 1900s, and annually, the various surveys on the condition of the Don.

The extensive waterways did little more than facilitate local travel. The only completely navigable waterways in the Voisko were the Gulf of Azov and the River Don itself. The depth of the Don, however, varied from 18 metres to half a metre at its extremes.30 Falling river levels throughout the Voisko only made matters worse.
The one significant improvement in the transportation system was the construction of several railway lines through the Voisko. By 1884 six had been built connecting the Don with Central Russia, the Caucasus and the Volga, transforming the economic life of the surrounding areas. For those stanitsas situated on or close to a railway line, a swift and reliable alternative to cart or barge appeared which opened new markets hundreds of miles away. The local inhabitants responded enthusiastically to the new opportunities. In Uriupinskaia Stanitsa within a couple of years of opening, the railway had displaced the River Khoper as the main trade artery, even though it cost twice as much to send a pud of grain by rail as it did by barge. The advantage of speed and the guarantee that the grain would arrive dry at its destination (river barges often sank) more than compensated for the extra cost. The railways stimulated new commercial crops among the Cossacks linking the northern okrugi to the Moscow market and providing a much-needed cash income for some Cossacks.

Communications remained very poor up to the outbreak of the First World War. The railways were the one incontestable improvement but even they were not an unmixed blessing. They intensified the uneven economic development of the Voisko, bringing prosperity and opportunity to those near a railway line but leaving the majority of other communities isolated and impoverished. The poor communications continued to retard the overall economic development of the Voisko, particularly for communities situated away from the southern ports or the railway lines. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that, with the exception of the railways, communications in 1914 were little better than when the Cossacks first arrived in the Don 400 years earlier.

**Population**

The Cossacks were the largest social group living in the Don and technically the only people with any legal right to live there until 1798 when the government finally recognized the Cossack elite’s right to own serfs. At the same time, the Cossack elite were granted parity of status with the Russian nobility. Thereafter they were counted separately but were still considered as Cossacks. The peasantry were the only other significant social group resident in the Don before the emancipation. They were illegally brought into the Don by the Cossack elite who were desperate for labour on their estates. The Imperial Government was content most of the time to turn a blind eye to this as part of its trade off with the political elite in the Don. The peasantry had no legal existence until 1798, when they exchanged non-existence for the dubious privilege
of serfdom. The estates, on which the peasants were settled, were the communal property of all the Cossacks, much of it belonging to the individual stanitsas. The usurpation of Cossack land rights was to prove a running sore in the relationship between Cossack and peasant which only the Civil War decisively, and with great bloodshed, resolved.

The third group, the inogorodnie, did not exist before the emancipation. They had migrated to the Don from Ukraine and Central Russia. Their numbers and their poverty soon made them the most volatile element in the Voisko.

The Imperial Government had little accurate knowledge of the Don Voisko until the nineteenth century. Often it had no idea where settlements were, let alone who was living there. The Committee of 1819 began its work with a frank admission of ignorance. ‘The Voisko authorities did not have clear figures about the population of the Don inhabitants or about the quantity of land owned by the stanitsas, the chinovniki and so on. Similarly its information on land allowances was founded on a superficial and unreliable understanding’.32 The establishment of the Don Statistical Committee in 1822 was the first attempt to gather information on the Don in a systematic manner. Even so, it took forty years for the Committee to consistently gather annual data on such basic matters as births, deaths, caste and so on.

Before the 1820s most population figures were more or less informed guesses. The earlier the period, the greater the element of guesswork. The only figure that had been of any concern to the government, hence the only one that was recorded, was the number of male Cossacks. By combining several sources, it is possible to construct Table 1, which gives some indication of population size up to the second half of the nineteenth century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1625</th>
<th>1725</th>
<th>1806</th>
<th>1849</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Cossacks</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>27000</td>
<td>184341</td>
<td>257857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Cossacks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>273342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Peasants</td>
<td>118726</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Peasants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>122610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>27000</td>
<td>184341</td>
<td>784573*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This figure contains other social groups also resident on the Don.

Sources: The figures for 1625 and 1725 are from Nomikosov, Statisticheskoe Opisanie, p. 254; 1806 from Sbornik Oblastnogo Donskogo Statisticheskogo Komiteta (Novocherkassk, 1901), p. 33; for 1849 from RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 83.
After 1863 the Statistical Committee gathered figures annually. Each okrug was required to supply basic demographic information on births, deaths, sex, caste, religious affiliation and marriage. Table 2 gives the total population of the most important social groups between 1863 and 1914.

In just over 60 years, the population of the Voisko had quadrupled. Four times as many people had to be supported in 1914 as in 1849. The Cossack population had almost trebled creating an unprecedented pressure on resources. Nothing in their previous experience was any guide to the new situation. Not surprisingly, they responded by simply extending the area under the plough with all the environmental consequences we have seen. In addition, from 1875 the costs of military service sharply increased, forcing the Cossacks to extract more from a diminishing base. The old system of agriculture could probably have dealt with either of the two changes separately, but together they plunged the Cossack economy into a permanent state of crisis.

There are several other important conclusions to be drawn from this table. The first is that the Cossacks remained the largest single group down to the outbreak of the First World War but their relative dominance was shrinking. In 1863 they had made up 66 per cent of the population, but by 1914 only 42 per cent. The native peasantry, those who had been resident in the Don before the emancipation, remained constant accounting for approximately 30 per cent in 1863 and 26 per cent in 1914. In the immediate aftermath of the emancipation, the peasantry suffered a slight decline, and it was not until 1869 that their numbers passed the pre-emancipation figure of 306,716.33 The truly startling change was in the number of inogorodnie who went from almost statistical non-existence in 1863 to 20 per cent of the total population by 1914. The 147 registered in 1863 actually shrank the following year to 62.34

Table 2  The population of the Don Voisko 1863–1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1863</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cossacks</td>
<td>628,220</td>
<td>947,627</td>
<td>1,460,438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants</td>
<td>282,288</td>
<td>619,561</td>
<td>917,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inogorodnie</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>300,289</td>
<td>684,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>24,169</td>
<td>189,726</td>
<td>384,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>949,682</td>
<td>2,078,878</td>
<td>3,445,908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1863 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 81, l. 104–7; 1890 GARO, f. 353, op. 1., d. 380, l. 2–5; 1914 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 29–30.
The first substantial wave of migration came in 1865 when just over 28,000 were registered as living in the Don. From this point onwards, the numbers of inogorodnie rose steeply, swollen by new migrants and the descendants of earlier ones. Together with the native peasantry, they formed almost 47 per cent of the population in 1914. Within 50 years the Cossacks had been transformed from a large majority of the population in absolute and relative terms to a minority whose numerical significance continued to decline.

These statistics, however, mask some of the intricacies of settlement patterns. The different groups making up the population were not spread evenly throughout the Voisko. The Cossacks were the most widely dispersed group, but even they were sparsely represented in the southernmost okrugi. Table 3 shows the distribution of the population by soslovie in 1870 and 1914. The figures show the relative size of each soslovie within an okrug expressed as a percentage of the total population of the okrug.

The Don was divided by settlement patterns into three distinct zones. The first zone consisting of the first four okrugi in the table were overwhelmingly Cossack in 1870 and remained so until the First World War. The next two okrugi, Cherkasskii and Donetskii, had a much more mixed population. The final zone of consisted of Miuskii, which later became Taganrogskii and Rostovskii Okrugi. The population in this area consisted of the native peasantry of the Don whose dominance was similar to the Cossacks in the first zone. The balance between the Cossack

Table 3  Population of the Don Okrugi by Soslovie in 1870 and 1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Okrug</th>
<th>Population in 1870</th>
<th>Population in 1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cossacks</td>
<td>Peasants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Donskoi</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Donskoi</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ust-Medveditskii</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoperskii</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherkasskii</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donetskii</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miuskii</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>89.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sal’skii</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rostovskii</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taganrogskii</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1870 GARO, f. 353, op. 1. d. 166, l. 47–55; 1914 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 29–30.
population and the peasantry did not fluctuate widely over the period, but the arrival of the *inogorodnie* upset the balance between the two populations. Most of the *okrugi* had seen the numbers of *inogorodnie* double or even treble in less than 50 years.

Even the figures of settlement at the *okrug* level hide the true picture of *inogorodnie* settlements. The *inogorodnie* were fairly evenly distributed throughout the *Voisko*, but there were no distinct *inogorodnie* settlements unlike the peasant settlements in Taganrogskii and Rostovskii *Okruhi*. They lived willy-nilly in Cossack stanitsas, either hiring themselves as labourers, renting land or simply squatting. In 1895 the War Ministry voiced its disapproval of the settlement of outsiders on Cossack land and considered limiting or even removing the right of non-Cossack populations to settle on Cossack lands. But it was already too late for this to be a serious option as the *inogorodnie* had settled in their hundreds of thousands. It is hard to get an exact picture of the *inogorodnie* population of each stanitsa, because it was a shifting one and also because the stanitsas were not required to submit figures on the number of *inogorodnie* living among them. Some figures were collected by the Don Statistical Committee in 1902 but these were the only ones to my knowledge. These figures showed the varied nature of stanitsa settlements. Some stanitsas had virtually no *inogorodnie* while others had

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanitsa</th>
<th>Okrug</th>
<th>Cossack</th>
<th><em>Inogorodnie</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kremenskaia</td>
<td>Ust-Medveditskii</td>
<td>1,316</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archadinskaia</td>
<td>Ust-Medveditskii</td>
<td>2,751</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potemkinskaia</td>
<td>2nd Donskoi</td>
<td>9,849</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platovskaia</td>
<td>Sal'skii</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>446</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kотовskaia</td>
<td>Khoperskii</td>
<td>5,094</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirotinskaia</td>
<td>2nd Donskoi</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
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<td>Petrovskiaia</td>
<td>Khoperskii</td>
<td>4,555</td>
<td>738</td>
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<td>Romanovskiaia</td>
<td>1st Donskoi</td>
<td>5,138</td>
<td>901</td>
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<td>Mikhailovskiai</td>
<td>Khoperskii</td>
<td>14,359</td>
<td>933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konstantinovskia</td>
<td>1st Donskoi</td>
<td>8,812</td>
<td>4,051</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tsymlianskaia</td>
<td>1st Donskoi</td>
<td>7,255</td>
<td>4,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisavetovskia</td>
<td>Rostovskii</td>
<td>10,344</td>
<td>5,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uriupinskaia</td>
<td>Khoperskii</td>
<td>5,323</td>
<td>5,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starocherkasskaia</td>
<td>Cherkasski</td>
<td>11,446</td>
<td>11,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novocherkasskaia</td>
<td>Cherkasski</td>
<td>4,359</td>
<td>16,127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The country and the People of the Great Host of the Don

The Land and the People of the Great Host of the Don

Table 4 gives an impression, but only an impression, of the mixing of population.

The Cossacks’ attitude to the inogorodnie was a mixture of contempt, hatred and, behind these, a growing knot of fear. For if ever a redistribution of wealth took place, the only meaningful one would be from the Cossacks to the inogorodnie. The disparities in wealth between the two groups were enormous. As we have seen Cossacks as a caste owned around 85 per cent of the land in Voisko. In livestock, the true working capital of any farm, Cossack wealth was just as marked. Cossacks owned ten times as many horses and almost nine times as many cattle. Whatever sense of deference the inogorodnie had when they first arrived had long since vanished, and by 1914 they were waiting for the moment to assert their rights to an equal share of the Voisko’s resources.

Settlement patterns were influenced by religion as well as caste. The majority of the population of the Voisko were Orthodox, but there were significant religious minorities, particularly among the Cossacks. Peasants and inogorodnie were almost all Orthodox, while the Cossacks were divided into three main groups: the Orthodox, Old Believers and Buddhists. Earlier there had been a few Moslem stanitsas, but by 1900 there was only one left: Tatarskaia near Novocherkassk. The Orthodox Cossacks were spread all over the Don whereas the Old Believers and Buddhists were concentrated in particular areas. They demonstrate again how far from monolithic the Cossack tradition was.

‘History has shown that the Raskol in the Don Oblast’ has had a particularly solid base for a very long time.’ So the Ataman’s Chancellory ruefully acknowledged an unpleasant fact of life. Old Belief did indeed have a long history in the Don, going back to the Great Schism caused by Patriarch Nikon’s reforms in the mid-seventeenth century. Old Believers were active in the revolts of Razin and Bulavin. By the twentieth century, Old Believers were no longer persecuted but they continued to attract government suspicion. The Voisko authorities were supposed to take measures to secure the conversion of Old Believers but in reality they did little more than go through the motions. Each year, the Ataman’s report contained a formulaic condemnation of Old Belief and an optimistic assessment of the prospects for conversion.

The vitality of the Raskol is dependent upon on the one hand the absence of spiritual enlightenment and on the other the great influence of the leaders of the Raskol over the masses, their continuing enmity to the Orthodox Church and their forbidding any relationship with the Orthodox.
Orthodox missionaries found it virtually impossible to penetrate Old Believer communities. The one partial success the Orthodox Church managed to achieve with the Old Believers came with a small group, the *Edinoverie*, who continued to keep to the rites of Old Belief but acknowledged the authority of the Orthodox Church. They numbered about 5,000 and were found entirely in the First Donskoi Okrug.41

Old Believers were concentrated in the First and Second Donskoi Okrugi and Ust-Medveditskii Okrug: that is, in those areas most Cossack by caste. The proportion of the Cossack population made up by Old Believers remained constant between 10 and 11 per cent. In 1863 they numbered 71,684, or 11 per cent of the Cossack population.42 In 1900 there numbers had risen to 113,164 or 10.5 per cent of the Cossack population.43

The Old Believers were not a monolithic group but were made up of many different sects. The main division was between those with priests and those without priests. In 1895, the Ataman’s Chancellory collected some figures on the different sects. Out of a total Old Believer population of 124,381, almost 75 per cent belonged to sects accepting priests while 22 per cent belonged to those not accepting them. The remaining Old Believers belonged to a variety of smaller sects such as the Molokane, the Judaizers, the Skoptsi, Dukhobors and others.44 Old Believer communities tended to keep themselves to themselves and had as few contacts as possible with the Orthodox.

The most unusual group among the Cossacks were the Lamaist Buddhists. They were made up exclusively of Kalmyks, a Mongol tribe, who had arrived in the Don in the second half of the seventeenth century and had fought with the Cossacks against the Crimean Tatars. They settled in the trans-Don steppe, which became Sal’skii Okrug, and they remained steppe nomads. They were fully members of the Cossack caste and had the same service obligations as other Cossacks. Their numbers did not increase at the same rate as other Cossacks. In 1863 they numbered 21,885 which had only increased to 28,084 by 1900.45

The territory of the Don Cossacks was diverse in terms of its physical characteristics and the structure and distribution of its population. This diversity was unstable, constantly changing through the actions of the population and the response of the environment to those actions. It profoundly influenced all aspects of Cossack life from earning a living to political behaviour. Diversity, as much as a common tradition, determined Cossack life in the last years of Imperial Russia.
No Cossack was just an inhabitant of the territory in which he lived. He was the possessor of all his stanitsa’s natural resources. Ownership of arable land, pastures, meadows, rivers and woods was vested in the stanitsa and these resources were the communal property of all members of the stanitsa. The concept of communal property was deeply rooted and widely disseminated among the peasantry of Imperial Russia. The Cossacks in this respect can be seen as another example of a common peasant culture. This, however, would do scant justice to the Cossack sense of communal ownership which had grown from a culture completely alien to that of the Slavic peasantry.

When speaking of the economic resources of their territory, the Cossacks used the Mongol word *yurt*. Every Mongol *ulus*, or sub-division of a tribe, had a defined territory over which they had exclusive rights. No individual owned the natural resources of the territory as it was the patrimony of the whole tribe. For a nomadic people, the absolute necessities of life were pastures and water for their herds. Access to them was open to all members of the community and could not be restricted.¹ This did not make Mongol tribes either egalitarian or communitarian. They were neither. A family’s wealth was measured in its herds and household possessions which defined its status within the community. However, no-one, whatever their wealth and power, could claim exclusive rights over the tribe’s common patrimony.

There were many Russian words or phrases that could have expressed concepts of communal ownership, but the Cossacks chose a word that came from their enemies with whom they lived and fought. The lives of the Cossacks in the early years of their existence were analogous at many points with the tatar tribes who lived alongside them in the Don. Despite being enemies, the Cossacks absorbed many of their neighbours’
customs. The Cossacks fought like a nomadic people, they raised herds like them, and only began to diverge from them in the eighteenth century, when arable farming made its first appearance in the Don. Not surprisingly, therefore, when the Cossacks came to the point of defining their territory, nothing fitted as well as the Mongol concept of yurt which expressed a territorial claim and a set of beliefs about the ownership of natural resources.

The normative meaning of yurt remained a constant of Cossack life long after the people and the way of life that had given rise to it had vanished. As the Cossack economy moved in stages from a purely warrior society living on plunder to a pastural one and then to an arable one, it was possible that the normative content of yurt would have decayed and died, leaving only an empty linguistic trace of a defunct way of life. This did not happen, because the economy remained primarily devoted to stock-raising rather than arable farming. When the change in relative weighting of the economy did come in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was very swift: too swift too allow a new set of cultural values to replace the universally accepted meaning of yurt. To cope with the new conditions, particularly the ever present economic crisis from the mid-1870s, the Cossacks did not abandon their beliefs about the yurt but interpreted them in a new way. The new expression of these beliefs was again borrowed, this time from the repartitional communes of central Russia, but at its heart was the old nomadic concept of yurt. Paradoxically, just at the point at which communal ownership was threatened by new challenges elsewhere in the Empire, it was vigorously and successfully reaffirmed in the Don Voisko in response to those same challenges.

The origins of agriculture in the Don

Agriculture had come late to the Don. The original Cossacks lived by what they earned from military service, what they plundered and by what they hunted and fished. These Cossacks and their descendants had a deep enmity for agriculture, particularly crop cultivation. According to Svatikov, some of the first Cossacks were the last representatives of a once numerous class of wandering hunters and fishermen within Muscovy who had gradually been pushed to the extremes in the north and the south by the spread of agriculture. Within the territory of the Voisko, there was a total prohibition on farming. As late as the reign of Peter the Great, the Voisko authorities threatened death to any Cossack who sought to make his living in this way. The Cossacks detested
agriculture because they felt it was an occupation unworthy of a warrior caste, but above all because they associated it with serfdom and the hated social order of Muscovy.

The defeat of Stenka Razin and his execution in Moscow in 1672 marked the beginning of the end of the old freebooting way of life. The greater control exercised by the surrounding states deprived the Cossacks of the freedom of action they needed to carry out their raids. There had also been a change in the nature of migrants into the Don. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, men with families began to migrate. These men wanted a more stable existence than the glorious but short way of the warrior. The Cossack elite, who had initially opposed agriculture as much as the ordinary Cossacks, became enthusiastic proponents of it both for the rich rewards and the social cachet it offered. They seized great estates for themselves and imported thousands of peasants illegally into the Don to work them.

The Cossacks outside of the elite made the transition to a pastural economy without trauma. Stock raising had always been a feature of nomadic life and the Don was ideally suited to it. Like their nomadic enemies, the Cossacks raised horses, sheep and cattle. As we have seen, both Cossacks and nomads respected the ancient steppe tradition of not burning the meadows on which their enemies' livestock depended. When Rigel’man described their way of life at the end of the eighteenth century, grain cultivation was clearly secondary to stock-raising. Although agriculture did slowly spread, stock raising remained the primary economic activity of the Cossacks until late into the nineteenth century. Large herds could be maintained with small amounts of labour, which was always in short supply among the Cossacks because of military service. The Maslakovets Commission in 1898 stated that a type of natural steppe economy had predominated in the Don as late as the 1870s.

The most effective check on agriculture for most of the eighteenth century was the continued threat posed by the steppe nomads. Their raids made any extended stay outside the stockade perilous. During the eighteenth century, many stanitsas were burnt by the nomads. The last great nomadic raid into the Don was in 1769. The subsequent campaign against the nomads brought to a close the centuries old conflict between the Cossacks and their steppe enemies. Minor raids continued for long after but these no longer threatened the Cossacks' existence.

Agriculture developed only slowly and in a peculiar fashion in this frontier society. The earliest description of farming among the Cossacks
comes from Verkhne-Kurmoiarskaia Stanitsa in the Second Donskoi Okrug. When farming started here in the eighteenth century, it involved the whole stanitsa. All members would go into the fields together, carrying weapons as well as tools. Pickets and scouts would be posted and the field workers would have to be ready at a moment’s notice to abandon their work and flee to the safety of the stockade. Most field work was carried out no farther than a musket shot from the stanitsa settlement. Rather than working completely in common or as individuals, the Cossacks formed several small gangs or artels. Each worked as a separate unit, presumably dividing what they produced between them. Nevertheless, all the artels were mutually dependent on each other for their security and worked within sight of their neighbours. At night they either returned to the stockade or made camp together in the fields.

The ending of the nomadic threat opened up the broad expanses of the Don to settlement. It was now possible for those who had felt constrained by numbers in the stanitsa to move out and to create new settlements in the empty steppe. These new settlements, the khutora, remained integral parts of the stanitsa from which they had sprung. When Kotel’nikov wrote his account in 1824, Verkne-Kurmoiarskaia had 25 khutora. Across the Don, this colonization movement was repeated and had produced 1,295 khutora by the mid-nineteenth century.

For the Cossacks this was the golden age of agriculture. The natural resources of the Voisko had barely been touched. Whatever the exact size of the population, it was tiny in comparison to the supply of land which was literally there for the taking. Cossacks used land and other natural resources according to the formula ‘gde ugodno, skol’ko ugodno, (‘where and as much as you liked’) which gives some indication of how much land was available and how little pressure there was on it. The only condition placed on this was that the land had to be worked within a certain period otherwise someone else was free to take it. This was hardly a restrictive condition as, depending on the stanitsa, a Cossack had between one and four years to do something with the land he had claimed. An example of this was the Mechetinskaia Stanitsa, which was founded in 1808 on the site of an old tatar mosque. The stanitsa was surrounded by wilderness and each member could take as much of the yurt’s resources as he wanted.

Under these conditions a system of agriculture developed that was extensive rather than intensive. The quantity of land under the plough remained small, as the Cossacks had preferred stock-raising, as we have seen. When they worked the land, the Cossacks did not plough in
consolidated blocks, but in strips which ran in all directions. Perhaps this was a leftover from the time when it had been necessary for security to work close together. Arable land was worked until it became exhausted when it was abandoned for several years while it regained its fertility naturally. Given the Cossack preference for stock raising and the virtual absence of a market in grain, Cossacks had no incentive to produce grain beyond what they needed for domestic consumption. In Mechetinskaja Stanitsa arable farming remained a minor branch of its members’ economic activity for many years after its foundation. There was little competition for the resources of the yurt and the formula *gde ugodno, skol’ko ugodno*, admirably suited Cossack beliefs about the usage of the yurt.

These idyllic conditions lasted approximately 100 years from the last great raid of the nomads in 1769 until the 1870s. This was the formative period of Cossack agriculture and its practices remained deeply rooted in Cossack consciousness. It was the constant point of reference for Cossacks as they attempted to deal with the changed conditions of the later part of the nineteenth century. As late as 1874, *Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti* in a major survey of agriculture in the Don found that the majority of Cossacks still did not want to change the way they used the yurt. In stanitsa after stanitsa the Cossacks said, ‘The land is not divided but ploughed freely as our forefathers have done since time immemorial.’ The same attitude applied to other natural resources. In 1879 the inhabitants of an unnamed stanitsa rejected a plan to restrict the cutting of communal woods in order to preserve them. ‘They have always been sufficient in our time. They have been cut before us, we have cut them and they will be cut after us.’

Change was made more difficult to comprehend because it was so abrupt. Within the space of a generation, many stanitsas passed from a situation where the resources of the yurt appeared infinite to one in which scarcity was a fact of life. To take Mechetinskaia again, there were still many alive in the 1880s who could remember the early years of the stanitsa and the conditions that had prevailed then.

The old timers recalled that at that time there was no other settlement closer than a hundred verst to the stanitsa. All around was steppe, brimming with wild animals of various types. Grass grew to at least the height of a man and reeds in particular grew in dense masses on both banks. Wild fowl of different types were altogether plentiful and they said it was enough to walk half a verst along either bank to collect a cart load of eggs laid by these birds.
Clearly this description is laced with a large dose of nostalgia for the good old days. Even so, it is not a parody of the early years but one based on personal experience and supported by every investigation into the early years of Cossack agriculture. For Cossacks living through much leaner times, these must have been poignant tales.

However, no amount of nostalgia could disguise the unpalatable truth that the halcyon days of Cossack agriculture were coming to an end by the 1870s. Population increase and the rise in service costs suddenly gave a new value to arable land. Crop cultivation, not stock-rearing, offered the only means of meeting both demands. The competition for arable land intensified very rapidly, and it was on this issue that the battle for a redistribution of the yurt’s resources was fought.

The first indication that conditions were changing came as the continuous expansive use of land brought one stanitsa into contact with another. Stanitsa boundaries had always been vague, and even when there was a foundation charter for a stanitsa, it tended only to list the most obvious natural features such as rivers or lakes. The Law of 1835 was the first attempt to define stanitsa boundaries precisely, but it was only a partial success, sufficient to prevent more seizures of the yurt by the Cossack elite but not resolving disputes between stanitsas. Local custom, rather than the law or fences, fixed stanitsa boundaries. Usually this meant asking the oldest members of both stanitsas to walk the stanitsa boundaries as they remembered them with an icon in their hands. The Scottish traveller Donald Wallace-Mackenzie was told by the Cossacks of Kazanskaia Stanitsa in 1874 that until very recently it had been their custom to flog the boys of each stanitsa at every boundary marker when a dispute between stanitsas was resolved. The hope was that the boys would forget neither the flogging nor the boundary.

In the absence of precise and agreed boundaries, disputes became common and bitter when competition for resources intensified. There was no regularity in the stanitsa boundaries, nor was there any uniformity in the area belonging to each stanitsa. The biggest was Veshenskaia, with 178,583 desiatiny, while the smallest, Vladimirskaia, had only 16,940 desiatiny. No stanitsa saw much need to take the interests of a neighbouring stanitsa into account in fixing its boundaries. If it could be shown that a boundary ran along a particular line, then that was where it ran regardless of the disruption it caused to another stanitsa. Members of Alexandrovskaia Stanitsa complained to the local press about just such a situation in 1882.
The result of this circumstance is that the Cossacks of our stanitsa have land that is only three versty wide. Our allotments are therefore divided into five desiatiny close to the stanitsa and five far away from it. If someone thinks that five desiatiny are insufficient, then he must travel tens of versty to his distant allotment which is between 35 and 40 versty away. As you can see an extraordinarily convenient situation.\textsuperscript{24}

The hardening of stanitsa boundaries closed off the option of continued expansion to cope with increased population pressure. With no external solution available, the only alternative remained a reconsideration of the internal distribution of the yurt’s resources. Yet this was no easy matter. There was no precedent to follow in this situation and the old system had strong supporters, particularly those who stood to lose by any change. If the formula gde ugodno, skol’ko ugodno was to be abandoned, it was not at all clear what would replace it. Would it be a system in which resources were allocated according to family size, the number of males in a family, the number of males of serving age? How could those who stood to lose substantially by any redistribution be persuaded to surrender their land for the good of the community?

These were the problems that started to emerge in the second half of the nineteenth century. The rise in the cost of military service from 1875 (which will be dealt with in the next chapter) injected a high degree of urgency into an already fraught situation. If this were not enough, the Cossacks had to live with the growing threat of thousands of impoverished migrants who had appeared seemingly out of nowhere and were casting envious eyes at what to them appeared the incomparable wealth of the stanitsa yurts.

### The assertion of communal control

Under the old arrangements, as long as land was worked, no-one could take it. In effect, this had created a situation in which land was passed on from father to son or kept within an extended family.\textsuperscript{25} Inevitably, over the decades this would have produced anomalies in the amount of land held by different families as their circumstances changed according to the generational cycle, luck or acumen.

The distribution of landholdings between the members was distorted much more by the ways in which individuals and families had systematically abused the absence of any restraint on how much land they took. The original principle behind the allocation of the yurt’s resources was
that only what was needed was taken. Hence, the requirement that land had to be worked within a certain time or it returned to the common fund. However, many resourceful, ruthless and enterprising members of the stanitsa had been able to exploit the spirit of the law while remaining within its letter, creating a pattern of resource allocation in which, as one observer commented, ‘the quantity of land does not depend on the number of souls in a family but on the means each Cossack has at his disposal.’

It was easy for those who possessed sufficient means to grab land far in excess of what was necessary for their own needs. One favoured tactic was to mark out a large area with a plough. This was sufficient to establish a claim to that land and prevent anyone else from working it even though only the edges of the land were ploughed. Several other areas were similarly claimed until the individual had dozens or even hundreds of desiatiny at his disposal. What he could not work himself, was rented out to inogorodnie under the pretext that they were hired labourers working for himself. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa it was the custom that land that had been worked for two years was allowed to lie fallow for a year. The following autumn anyone who had finished field work could stake a claim to the land. This benefited the rich who because of their superior resources always brought in the harvest first. It was not uncommon by mid-nineteenth century to find families with allotments of over 200 desiatiny living alongside families with hardly any land at all. In one extraordinary case in Tepikinskaia Stanitsa, two brothers had been able to seize over 1000 desiatiny of land. The pair were a veritable agribusiness operating up to 40 ploughs and 75 harrows.

The claiming of free land by such means was an abuse but it did not stop there. Many of the wealthy were able to use their resources to exploit their poorer neighbours, forcing them either to work as labourers or hand over their allotments. Another’s troubles were often someone else’s opportunity. In another case from Razdorskaia, two wealthy neighbours coveted a field of a third neighbour who had fallen on hard times because of a fire. He could not plough his field in time so technically anyone could take it. His two neighbours, unknown to each other, set off early one autumn morning and began to plough the field. Because there was a thick fog they did not see each other until they met in the middle of the field where each understood immediately what the other was up to and almost came to blows as a result. This almost biblical tale illustrates the ruthlessness and lack of sentiment within the community in exploiting whatever opportunities came to hand.
As long as there was still sufficient land available for the majority of a stanitsa’s members, these abuses had not disturbed the tranquility of the community as a whole. While the majority of the community still had more to lose from any repartition than they would gain, there was no chance of any change in the use of the yurt’s resources. Those who suffered first were the classic victims of peasant society: widows, orphans, the ill, the disabled. Their plight on its own could not shift the traditional way of doing things. However, wider and wider circles of the Cossack community were drawn into the marginalized categories by the growth of population and the rise in service costs. When many previously solid members of the community found themselves relegated to the ranks of the poor and dispossessed, the old means of yurt allocation no longer appeared so equitable. Once this point had been reached in a stanitsa, it marked the opening of a long and bitter campaign to change the basis on which land was allocated.

The transition from one system of land usage to another varied from stanitsa to stanitsa and was indicative of the circumstances of each particular stanitsa and the protracted process the transition involved. In no stanitsa was it easy or swift. Just as among the peasantry, two thirds of the citizens’ support was necessary for any redistribution. Those who stood to lose used every device at their disposal to prevent such an occurrence. Although a minority, they used their wealth, their client networks and connections to those with power to block any change for years at a time. Even achieving the two-thirds majority was no guarantee that a redistribution would follow, as the citizens of Mikhailovskaia Stanitsa discovered.

Originally the citizens agreed to divide the land on 27 October 1865 but when they set down to work out the division, they met extraordinary difficulties and obstacles. Several of the wealthy citizens who were against the division said ‘our lives are at stake if the yurt is divided’ and they tried by every means to hinder the division. They intended to ply the land surveyor with drink and steal the plans from him in order to delay the work and its completion by the appointed time. Because of this they only succeeded in completing the repartition in 1869. The tensions within Mikhailovskaia Stanitsa were present in every stanitsa carrying out a repartition. Always the basic ingredient was a stark conflict between rich and poor. When Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, in its survey of stanitsas in 1874, found that the majority of
inhabitants still favoured the free use of land, it also picked up unmistakable hints that stanitsas were polarizing around this issue and that there existed strong opposition to the existing order within them. In one stanitsa those pushing for a redistribution claimed ‘a large part of the land is in the hands of the wealthy. They always have bread and hay, but the poor are destitute.’ In another stanitsa, the conflict between rich and poor was even more palpable: ‘the land is not divided because of the wealthy. They have several ploughs but the poor can only live by clubbing together. Two or three families share one plough. Those without cattle are completely without means, such as widows, wives of men on service, the senile and the crippled. They survive only by overwork.’

The conflict between the haves and have-nots that broke out into the open all over the Don in the last quarter of the nineteenth century had the potential to destroy the Cossacks as a community. It was approaching the point where Lenin’s model of peasant society would have been an accurate reflection of what was happening among the Cossacks. If the wealthy had been able to keep control of the land they used, the divisions within Cossack society would have become institutionalized. Instead, in stanitsa after stanitsa land was reclaimed and redistributed along more equitable lines. The underlying principle that the *yurt* belonged to the whole community was reasserted slowly and with difficulty.

According to the study commissioned for the General Staff in 1852, few stanitsas divided the land proportionally between its members. Just over twenty years later in its survey of 109 stanitsas *Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti* established that 40 divided the land according to the population while ‘in the remaining 69 stanitsas, *yurt* land is used freely, not limited either by quantity or place.’ Kharuzin, writing a few years after this, found that the movement to repartition continued to gather pace even if it had not quite reached a majority of the stanitsas. Through the 1880s and 1890s it continued, until by the end of the century Maslakovets could state that, apart from land set aside to pay for communal administration, all the remaining land in the stanitsa *yurts* was divided proportionally among the male population.

The triumph of the repartitional principle left many questions unanswered. There were many different types of land within a *yurt*: arable, pasture, hay meadows, water meadows, woods and gardens. Each stanitsa had to work out which part of its *yurt* was to be redistributed, on what basis and for how long. There was no blueprint or custom to follow and practice varied from stanitsa to stanitsa. How a particular
stanitsa interpreted the meaning of free and equal access to the \textit{yurt} depended on local beliefs about equity. What was constant was the belief in free and equal access.

**The new system in practice**

The struggle for a reallocation of the \textit{yurt}'s resources had been waged primarily over arable land, and this was the first part of the \textit{yurt} to be repartitioned. The transition from a predominantly pastural to a predominantly arable economy had happened in less than thirty years and was a result of the economic crisis through which the Cossacks were living. While Maslakovets could say that a natural steppe economy still existed in the Don in 1870, by the time of his report this had been replaced by an arable economy. Since 1870 there had been a 46 per cent increase in the amount of land under the plough, so that 61 per cent of all the land in stanitsa \textit{yurts} was given over to crops. Consequently the land available for stock raising shrank drastically, with harmful effects on the productivity of the land. By Maslakovets' time there was barely enough livestock to cover the working needs of the \textit{Voisko}. The painstaking efforts the Cossacks made to ensure a fair allocation of the arable were a reflection of its importance. Hay meadows, water meadows, pastures and woods were regulated in much more rough and ready fashion, although as these too came under greater pressure, tighter controls were introduced.

The method by which arable land was allocated is worth looking at in some detail, since it provided the basic model by which other parts of the \textit{yurt} came to be allocated. A firm commitment to carry out a repartition was only the beginning of an operation that lasted over a year. This decision was usually taken during the slack winter months, particularly over the Christmas holidays. The following autumn after the harvest the repartition began in earnest. A proportion of the \textit{yurt} would be set aside for the horse herds, unborn members of the stanitsa and land to be rented out to offset the costs of communal administration. Each stanitsa would have to decide whether its \textit{khutora} would receive their allocation in a separate block or whether there would be one general repartition. In Mikhailovskaia Stanitsa each \textit{khutor} received its allocation separately to divide between its members. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa there was no separate division between stanitsa and \textit{khutor} although each member could receive half his share in the place of his choice. If there was no separate division between the two, then it was highly likely that an individual's allotment would be split into sites several miles apart.
The next step was to decide whether the land should be divided by the inhabitants themselves or whether professional surveyors should be called in. Most Cossacks shared the peasant mistrust of educated people but the repartitioning of land in a Cossack stanitsa was a much more complex operation than in any peasant village. In Uriupinskaia, the members decided to employ professional surveyors, although they appointed delegates from the stanitsa and the khutora to keep an eye on them. The surveyors marked off poor land, land for roads and land that was to remain undivided. The arable land was then divided into strips 3 desiatiny wide and 50, 100 or 200 desiatiny in length. Each strip was given a number and the plans were delivered to the stanitsa administration. Every citizen was responsible for paying his share of the survey and any who refused had a portion of their land rented out to cover the cost.44

Dobrinskaia Stanitsa, which was a neighbour of Uriupinskaia and carried out a repartition at approximately the same time, decided to avoid the surveyors and use four trusted elders instead. They made the division relying on their eyes and experience (glazomep).45 The complexity of the operation, however, made such divisions extremely difficult. Thousands of members and tens of thousands of desiatiny were involved. To match the two was a herculean task. For some stanitsas the process proved so complicated that in the end they gave up and called in the surveyors.46

Once the land had been measured, it then had to be allocated. The most common method was for every male over seventeen years old, that is, at the start of his military service, to receive a share or pai. A widow was entitled to half a share while an orphan received his father’s share.47 This was a general rule and individual stanitsas decided according to their own customs. For example, Uriupinskaia and Razdorskaia gave every male born up to the time of the repartition a share.48 Another stanitsa which used this method, Malodelskaia, found that high infant mortality soon made the repartition much less equitable than it had seemed at the time.49

Once the land had been measured, it then had to be allocated, which was done by drawing lots.50 For every Cossack entitled to receive a share, this was a moment of great tension. Although there was a strong commitment to ensuring everyone received land of comparable quality, much still depended on the luck of the draw. Even those with only one share were unlikely to receive it in one place. For those entitled to two or more, their allotments might be scattered over several miles. As soon as the allocation was made, a fervent trading spree broke out as distant
land was exchanged for land closer to home, fathers and sons sought to consolidate their lots and so on. Decisions and agreements had to be made quickly. A description of the division in Razdorskaia gave a factual but dry account of what must have been an impassioned occasion.

The division of the stanitsa and *khutora* is carried out by lot. Each master has the right to receive half his land ie around 6 *desiatiny* in a part of the *yurt* chosen by him. The remaining half he receives wherever the lot falls. Due to this many of the inhabitants of the southern *khutora* receive their allotments in the northern part of the *yurt* and vice versa. In such cases an exchange of allotments is carried out by agreement.51

There were many problems with the new system. An immediate one faced by all the Cossacks was the exact location of their plots. Even with the use of surveyors this was not always clear although it tended to happen more often with the meadows rather than the arable as the former were divided much more approximately.

Many in the final analysis remain without an allotment not knowing where to look for it. Or they might begin to mow the allotment and then after several days, a new master with clear proof to it arrives. The mown hay is confiscated without compensation for their labour if both claimants cannot agree on this account.52

Longer term problems were less easily solved. Large quantities of productive land were lost in providing boundaries between allotments which always irritated outside observers although the Cossacks, who were not slow to complain, seemed to accept this as an inevitable consequence of the repartition. Time and labour were also lost in moving between allotments. Many stanitsa *yurts* were thousands of square *desiatiny* in size and there was nothing unusual about allotments being up to 50 miles apart. The time lost in travelling inevitably took its toll on productivity at harvest when the interval between the grain ripening and the autumn rains was all too short. Nor had the problem of the greater resources of the rich been eliminated. Many of those who lost land were able to regain access to it by renting the shares of their poorer neighbours.53 However, outweighing all the shortcomings of the new system was the radical restructuring of the usage of land, the most precious resource of any peasant society. While it did not create an equal society, it did remove the fundamental cause of inequality among the
Cossacks. Perhaps the most remarkable fact was that such a complex system managed to operate at all, let alone function with a high degree of effectiveness. Thousands of permutations of land and people were involved in any redistribution, but at no point before the First World War did the system break down.

Woods

Woods were an integral part of the stanitsa yurt and belonged to the whole community. What woods were left were distributed very unevenly through the Voisko, with the main dividing line falling between the upper and lower stanitsas. Unlike arable land, there was no custom of claiming exclusive use of woods for one person or family. In most cases, stanitsa members helped themselves to wood whenever they needed it. Such a lax system encouraged unlimited cutting with all the harmful consequences that we have seen. By the time the stanitsas attempted to impose controls on the woods, enormous damage had been done to them. The transition from a completely unrestricted policy to a more tightly regulated one was fitful, never very effective, and more often than not ignored by all sections of Cossack society.

In the lower stanitsas, conservation was no longer an issue since there were hardly any woodlands left. What little remained was kept either for community projects or for aid for people suffering hard times, especially through fire. In the upper stanitsas there were still sufficient woods left to make the attempt to preserve them worth the effort. Given the impossibility of policing illicit cutting of woods, stanitsas attempted to preserve them by transferring responsibility for specific sections of the woods to specific individuals. Two rudimentary systems were in operation. Under the first, each Cossack received a share of the wood which he could use for two or three years. However, he could only take as much wood as could be cut with one axe and the cutting was restricted to certain days of the year. Under the second system, each Cossack was given the use of the woods for much longer, between 10 and 17 years, on the understanding that sensible use was made of them. If he had used them judiciously, he would receive them again at the next repartition. However, if he had simply plundered them, he would lose his right to them and they would be given to someone else.

These general examples can be illustrated with a few specific instances. In Uriupinskaia Stanitsa in 1875, elaborate controls were in place. A section of the woods remained undivided, to be used to provide aid for those who had suffered through natural disaster and to meet communal
needs such as the building of grain warehouses or bridges. Remaining woods were allocated for 17 years in the following way. The woods were divided into equal parts, with each part representing 100 citizens. Each part was then subdivided into 10 and then into one, which was allocated to an individual Cossack. The Cossack, however, was not free to use his share as he wanted. He was only allowed to cut in extreme need and then only with the permission of his hundred. Illegal cutting was punished with fines on the first two occasions and with an extra turn of service on the third. In Petrovskaiia, Dobrinskaia, Katovskaia, and Tepinskaiia similar controls were in place. Other stanitsas did not bother to introduce tighter controls until much later, such as Mikhailovskaia in 1895.

By no stretch of the imagination can the attempt to preserve the woods through such controls be regarded as a success. There were too many ways to cut the woods outside of what was permitted. The chances of being caught were small, and even then the punishment was relatively light, rarely extending to being sent on an extra turn of service. If anything, the controls probably encouraged excessive cutting, since the worst that was likely to happen was the loss of them in the next repartition. If only stumps were left, it was a meaningless penalty. The continuing destruction of the woods was a measure of the failure of the Cossacks to protect them. The problem was that all sections of Cossack society, rich and poor, continued to use the woods as a free resource. Maslakovets commented drily that the biggest thieves were the Cossacks themselves, and he sharply criticized the stanitsa administration for turning a blind eye to these thefts which were so ruinous for the Voisko as a whole. On the other hand, attempts to take the woods out of stanitsa control were likely to end in total disaster. In 1879, rumours swept through an unnamed stanitsa that its woods were to be put under the direct control of the Voisko authorities. Rather than waiting to see if the rumours were true, the local Cossacks decided to move first while they still had the power. The whole stanitsa acting together cut down all the woods. It turned out that the rumours were untrue and the Voisko authorities had only intended a limited supervision. A well-meaning but misguided attempt by the authorities to preserve the woods had led to their wholesale destruction.

The failure to devise an effective means of control of the woods was a disaster for the Voisko as a whole. There was little incentive to preserve the woods and every incentive to plunder them in the belief that they would soon be gone anyway. The shortsightedness of this approach to one of the yurt’s most precious resources was obvious to all stanitsa
members; yet because they could not devise adequate and enforceable control mechanisms it became a case of each member for himself. This was the negative expression of the principle of free and equal use of the stanitsa yurt. Only when the community had a direct and active interest in the preservation of the woods could an effective system of control operate. A case from the Ministry of War files shows that this could happen. The citizens of a khutor belonging to Ostrovksaia Stanitsa had rented woods from the Voisko authorities for six years but were forbidden to cut any of them. Two Cossacks were caught stealing wood and the Voisko administration imposed the substantial fine of 576 roubles on the khutor. However, the two Cossacks were from another stanitsa and the khutor petitioned to have the fine transferred to them. The authorities agreed and seized the allotments of the guilty Cossacks to pay off the fine.61 This was an incident where the authorities and the local community co-operated to enforce an agreement, apprehend culprits and effectively punish them. Of course it helped that the two guilty men were from another stanitsa. But it did show that when it was in everyone's interest to preserve the woods an effective system could operate; however, such a coincidence of interest happened all too rarely.

Meadows, rivers and lakes

The stanitsa yurt included all the meadows, rivers and lakes within its territory. Again it was up to each stanitsa how to make the best use of these assets. Unlike arable land or the woods, there was not the same sense of urgency to rethink the use of these assets. Nevertheless, the pressures that had caused the rethinking of the use of arable land and the woods were at work on these resources as well. It was only a matter of time before the same cycle repeated itself.

Meadows were one of the gifts of the Don land, providing the Cossacks with fodder for their livestock through the winter. The meadows did not need to be prepared or looked after while the hay was growing. When it was ready, stanitsa members had only to scythe and stack the hay. For households struggling to keep their heads above water, the meadows were a precious possession, supplying winter feed only at the cost of the labour to gather it.

Usually the meadows were situated further away from the arable land, some of them many miles out in the steppe. Those closest to the settlement were brought under control earlier than those farther away. They were divided into shares along the lines of the arable land, but the farther out into the steppe one went the more approximate the divisions
became, until once more the principle of gde ugodno, skol’ko ugodno was operating. Even here, however, stanitsas limited the number of scythes used to the number of family allotments. This was designed to prevent the wealthy hiring 20 or 30 labourers to mow great swathes of the meadows, to the detriment of the community at large. For many Cossacks, however, particularly those at the head of a nuclear household, there was just not enough time to harvest the arable and the meadows. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa it was a two-day journey to the steppe meadows from some parts of the stanitsa, making it impossible to cut any hay. All that was left to them was to rent them out at a pittance to their wealthier neighbours who did have the time and resources to harvest the arable and the meadows. This was an expensive decision forced on them through necessity, and one whose consequences they and their livestock would feel through the coming winter when they were forced to buy feed from their wealthier neighbours. Grekov commented tartly: ‘Such decisions made poor people poorer.’

The other great natural resource of the Don was its many rivers, streams and pools. The Cossacks had free access to these, just as they did to other parts of the yurt. The rivers provided the Cossacks with an important supplement to their diet and a source of income for those stanitsas situated along the littorals of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. The Cossacks had fished since they arrived in the Don in the sixteenth century. They fished the rivers and lakes with as little thought for the future as when they cut down the woods. There were some general restrictions, such as a prohibition on all fishing from the mouth of the Don to 20 miles inland. This was impossible to enforce, and was ignored. Kharuzin found that fishing was unregulated in nearly all stanitsas and only a very few had more restrictive practices. Again, while population was low and Cossacks fished only for their own needs, there was no need for regulation. Population rise, commercial fishing and falling water levels produced the same crisis in this area of the yurt as in others. Within 20 years of Kharuzin’s survey, the level of fish stocks were dangerously low. By the time of Maslakovets’ report, the rivers had been over fished to point where stocks no longer replenished themselves. He called for a total ban on fishing between the breaking of the ice in March, when the fish migrated up the Don to their spawning grounds, until the end of May, when they made the return journey. Just as importantly, he called for the vigorous enforcement of such a ban. This seems to have been heeded, as Grekov, writing a few years after Maslakovets, reported that fishing was controlled to the same degree as arable and meadow land.
Conclusion

Within the space of thirty years, the Cossacks had been forced to fundamentally rethink the ways in which they used their yurt. The stanitsa yurt in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries had provided the Cossacks with an abundance of natural wealth which they took for granted would always be there. For 150 years this was true, but in the second half of the nineteenth century, it suddenly became clear to the Cossacks that the resources of the yurt were finite and approaching the point of exhaustion. To survive, the Cossacks had to change.

Change, however, was not easy. An entrenched and powerful minority vigorously opposed change and were none too concerned about the methods they used. They had seized a disproportionate share of the yurt’s assets and were determined to resist any attempt to upset the status quo. Yet in what must be a rare example, the rich minority found themselves forced to yield control of their most important asset to the impoverished majority. In most peasant societies, this wealthy minority would have found some way to transfer their de facto control over the land into a de jure one. They failed to do this and as a result lost control of their land.

This failure was rooted in the inveterate belief that the yurt was the common property of all the stanitsa. There was no way of legitimizing the seizure of the yurt’s assets by a small minority. Once the majority were determined on a redistribution, it was only a matter of time before that took place. The wealthy could delay the day of redistribution but not put it off indefinitely. They had no institutional mechanism to support their seizure of land. They could not turn to the state which had little desire to see its crack troops reduced to an impoverished mass. Nor was there any mechanism within the Voisko to enforce their control. Ultimately they had to submit to the power of the majority.

This triumph of the majority should not be sentimentalized or held up as an expression of some mystical notion of community binding the Cossacks together. It was motivated by the self-interest of the majority. Many of those who drove the redistribution through had not so long before opposed it just as firmly, ignoring the plight of their neighbours, who were already victims of the unequal distribution of the yurt’s resources. But the unshakable conviction that the yurt was the property of all was an overwhelming ideological weapon in the hands of those pushing for change. Ultimately it crippled those who opposed it. They could not and did not ever advance the claim that the land was their private property even when they had behaved as if it was. It
was the strength of this belief that allowed such a radical transformation to be carried out.

The magnitude of what had been achieved should not be underestimated, although it did not solve all problems. The Cossacks reasserted the principle that the natural resources of the Voisko belonged to all. With arable land and the meadows they redefined usage and created an effective and equitable system. However, with other parts of the yurt they were much less successful. Asserting that these resources belonged to the whole community, but then failing to devise any meaningful system to manage them in the interests of all, they invested a great deal of hope in self-restraint. But in a situation where the Cossacks were facing a daily struggle to support their families and to pay for military service, the temptation to plunder the unregulated resources of the Voisko was too great.

The Cossack’s beliefs about the stanitsa yurt were the product of their long contact with steppe peoples. The expression this principle took in the second half of the nineteenth century was taken from the repartitional communes of Russia, but the principle itself originated in a very different context. It enabled the Cossacks to stop and then reverse the swift disintegration of their community into a wealthy minority and an impoverished majority, but created problems because it provided no mechanism to balance free and equal access to certain resources with their controlled use. Redistribution alleviated the burden of impoverishment on the Cossacks for a time, but it did not solve it. Until the First World War, the Cossacks continued to struggle to find some way of matching the resources of their yurt to the burdens they needed to support.
The Crisis of the Cossack Yurt
1875–1914

‘The War Ministry imposes on itself in relation to the Cossack Armies
the twin obligations of maintaining their military strength as an army
while worrying at the same time about their civil prosperity as a people.’1
So the War Ministry defined its responsibilities to the Cossacks. Balancing
these two concerns was the chief preoccupation of the Ministry in
its relations with the various Cossack hosts. In 1863, the year of this
quotation, this was a statement of policy and did not express any
anxiety. Even ten years later, the War Ministry could restate its policy
in similar words and tones.2 In 1881, however, there was a change of
tone, a sense of urgency even, in its policy declaration. A complete
harvest failure in 1879 followed by an unusually dry winter had made
1881 ‘altogether difficult for all the Cossack hosts of European Russia.’3
By 1895 the War Ministry realized it was dealing not with isolated cases
of harvest failure or a breakdown in a particular Cossack Voisko, but a
systemic crisis in all the Cossack hosts which were kept going only by
large cash handouts from the government.4 Three years later, the War
Ministry established a commission under Lieutenant-General Maslakov-
vets to examine the causes of the collapse of living standards in the Don
Voisko, the worst affected, and to suggest possible remedies.5

The annual reports of the War Ministry provide a convenient yard-
stick to measure the accelerating crisis within the Cossack hosts, particu-
larly the Don. There can be no doubt that the whole Cossack system
was in deep crisis by the end of the nineteenth century and required
radical alteration if it was to survive. This was a matter of some concern
to the government which faced the prospect of losing a large chunk of
its cavalry, but to the Cossacks themselves it was much more. Their
survival as a people both physically and culturally was at stake. They
had to deal immediately with the problems of feeding their families,
providing corn for the spring sowing and generating sufficient surpluses to pay for their military service. This had always been the case but in the last quarter of the nineteenth century the resources the Cossacks possessed to meet these burdens dwindled while the costs spiralled upwards.

The burden of military service

The Cossacks were classified as irregular troops and were not integrated into the regular army. They performed functions similar to those of special forces in modern armies: reconnaissance, night raids, operations behind enemy lines. Speed, daring and surprise were the characteristics of the Cossacks. In appearance, equipment, and operation, they could not have been more different to the automatons of the regular army so beloved by nineteenth century monarchs. Nevertheless the Cossacks were effective in what they did and served the Russian army with distinction.

However, to the limited imagination of Nicholas I, Cossack peculiarities were a source of irritation rather than strength. He initiated the process of bringing them into line with the regular army. The Law of 1835 introduced some standardization into Cossack weapons, uniforms and training. In spite of this, Nicholas I was far from impressed when he witnessed the results for himself at a parade in Novocherkassk: ‘I expected to see 22 Cossack regiments but I saw only muzhiks’.6 After the campaign to suppress the Hungarian rising in 1849, new specifications were introduced for uniforms, weapons and horses which increased the cost of service to the Cossacks.7 Despite these changes, Cossack service was still recognizably what it had been in the eighteenth century. It was not until the era of the Great Reforms that Cossack service was radically altered as a new law on military service brought profound changes to the Cossack way of life.8

The Law of 1875 was part of the massive overhaul of the military that had been ongoing since the Crimean War. It established the parameters of Cossack service, with some later minor modifications, down to the end of the old regime and was directly responsible for the economic catastrophe that engulfed the Cossacks. The new law divided Cossack service into three basic categories: preparatory, active, and reserve. A Cossack entered the preparatory rank at the age of 17 and remained there for three years. At 21 he took the oath and transferred into the active service ranks for the next 12 years. Active service was divided into three turns of four years' duration. Only the first turn was spent outside

*Muzhik: a derogatory term for a peasant.
the Don. The second and third turns, 25–29 and 29–33 respectively, were spent at home on what was termed ‘privileged’ (l’gotnaia) service. Those on privileged service would be mobilized by turns in the event of an emergency. At 33 a Cossack transferred into the reserves where he remained for five years. This was followed by a theoretical lifelong stint in the militia but had no practical significance.

The new terms of military service and the regulations that accompanied them imposed prodigious new costs on every Cossack household which they could ill afford to meet. Before the new law, preparatory service barely existed as a meaningful category. Now a systematic and expensive new training program was introduced. Further, under the old system Cossacks returning from their tour of duty in the first turn did not have to maintain either a uniform or a horse. Usually they were sold on to units of the preparatory ranks about to enter service. Now Cossacks in units of the second turn of privileged service were obliged to maintain a uniform and horse throughout their time in the second turn. In the third turn, the requirement for the horse was dropped but they still had to maintain their uniform. To understand how these changes pushed the Cossack system remorselessly into debt and towards bankruptcy, it is necessary to look at the new structure of military service.

In the first year of preparatory service, the young Cossack was freed from all communal obligations to enable him to gather the money to pay for his military service. In his second year he had to attend four weeks at stanitsa camp doing basic military training, bringing only a sabre with him. In his third year, all the Cossacks of his year gathered for three weeks training in May at the okrug camp. For the okrug camp, he had to have a horse as well as a sabre. At the end of this camp he was ready, in theory, to take his place the following spring with the units of the first turn.

These seven weeks of training levied significant costs on the household of the young Cossack. In the first place, his family lost the labour of an adult worker at the busiest time of the year. In 1898 there were 15,474 Cossacks in the second and third years of preparatory service which deprived eight per cent of Cossack households of an adult labourer. Secondly, he had to transport himself to the camp, bring his equipment, pay for board and lodging while he was there, and get himself home again at the end of the camp. In the third year in addition he had to pay for the hire of a horse and the cost of feeding it while at camp. The combined cost for the second and third years of preparatory service was estimated by Maslakovets, using 1898 as his base year, at 222 roubles. The camps also cost the Voisko administration 154,673 roubles.
If the young Cossack had emerged as a fully trained cavalry trooper at the end of this training period, there might have been some justification for the costs it imposed on the Cossack family. But Maslakovets stated flatly that he was as untrained as when he had entered the preparatory period three years earlier. What little was learned in the four weeks’ training of the second year was long forgotten by the third year. In the third year, the situation was no better. To save money on feed, the horses were pastured some distance from the camps where they could graze freely. Each morning and evening they were brought to and from the camp, which took up to five hours as well as exhausting the horses in the process. The amount of time spent on training was negligible. Maslakovets contrasted this lamentable situation with that of peasant conscripts who were called up in January and underwent three months intensive training before joining their units in March. These three months of intensive training achieved far more than the three years of the preparatory period.12

Maslakovets’ report was a damning indictment of the whole preparatory system and it is difficult to disagree with him. He argued that there was no way the costs of the preparatory period could be justified by the results. The expenses of the training fell heavily on the family of the Cossack. No young Cossack was in a position to earn the 220 odd roubles to pay for his service. On the most optimistic estimate he could only earn between 60 or 70 roubles. In reality it was always his father’s household who paid.13 The only solution Maslakovets felt was to abolish the whole system of preparatory training and replace it with something much closer to the one used by the regular army. If the Cossacks joined their units in December and then went through three months intensive training, they would be ready by March to take their place in the units of the first turn. By calling them up in December, it would also save their family the cost of feeding them and their horses through the leanest time of the year.14

The transfer from the preparatory ranks to those of the first turn brought a raft of new expenses. Whereas for the training camps a Cossack could borrow equipment and hire a horse, he had to have his own when setting out for service. Before the Law of 1875 the uniform and equipment could have been picked up for between 30 and 40 roubles from units of the first turn transferring to privileged service.15 However, because these men now had to maintain their uniforms throughout their privileged service this source dried up. In addition, the government changed the specification of the uniforms, and kept on changing it, so they could neither be produced at home nor passed on at the end
of privileged service. Each year the government added to the list of essential equipment that the Cossack had to take with him, so much so that Maslakovets commented exasperatedly that ‘a Cossack going on service resembles not so much a light cavalry trooper but a mounted pedlar’. Far from being essential most of this kit could be dumped as soon as the Cossack entered a combat zone. The upshot of this was that virtually overnight the cost of a uniform and equipment soared from 30–40 to 100–120 roubles.

The biggest expense of all was a warhorse. Again the Law of 1875 closed off the option of buying one from returning first-turn units. The War Ministry also took the opportunity of the new law to raise the standard of the horse required. The combination of rising demand and standard led inexorably to a rise in price. The average price of a warhorse before the new law was 35 roubles, but by the time Maslakovets was writing it had risen to between 75 and 125 roubles.

Once the Cossack had left for service, the state became responsible for him. His family, however, still had to carry the cost of the loss of his labour. In 1898 the 24,675 men outside of the Don on the first turn of service represented 4.5 per cent of the total male population but 10 per cent of the male working population. This was no mean cost for an economy in which labour was a scarce commodity.

The transfer of the Cossack from the first to the second and then to the third turn brought some benefits but also many new costs to his family. The return of an adult labourer was an important boost to the household resources. However, the maintenance of his horse and equipment ready for mobilization at a moment’s notice was a heavy drain. The horse had to be fed and cared for for four years without being able to work for its keep, since heavy farm work would ruin it. In case a Cossack was tempted not to care properly for his horse and equipment, he had to attend two annual inspections at which sub-standard horses and kit would be rejected.

The annual summer camp of three weeks in May was a crushing burden for many Cossack households. Like preparatory service, a Cossack on privileged service had to bear all the costs of the summer camp himself. However, unlike a Cossack in preparatory service, a Cossack of the second and third turn was much more likely to be head of an independent household. His absence from the house, again at the busiest time of the year, deprived that household of half of its working strength, leaving his wife to manage on her own. When the Cossacks of privileged service were at camp, 20 per cent of the working male population was lost to the economy in addition to the 10 per cent already lost through
the first turn of service. 20 In all, taking into account journey times, probably at least a month’s labour was lost because of the annual summer camp.

The loss of a month’s labour in the summer was a heavy blow to the domestic economy of the Cossacks. But a general mobilization, depriving many households of half their labour force for many months, threatened to ruin thousands of Cossack families. The new system was tested for the first time during the war against the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and barely survived the experience. Emergency aid of 225,000 roubles had to be given to the families of the men mobilized from privileged service.21

It is hard to be precise about the total cost of service to the individual Cossack and his family since there are only estimates of the total cost. The most detailed breakdown of costs comes from Razdorskaia Stanitsa in 1881, which calculated that the final cost of military service for each Cossack in the stanitsa was between 1,090 and 1,339 roubles.22 Other sources suggest that this figure was broadly correct for the Don. 23 Whatever the precise figure it is clear that this was a prodigious burden for a peasant farm to bear.

The new service regulations of 1875 transformed the cost of service to the Cossacks. A whole new category of service was created, imposing heavy costs where virtually none had existed before. The cost of uniform and equipment was quadrupled at a stroke. The changes in regulations on the standard of a horse and the requirement to maintain the horse during the second turn pushed its price up remorselessly until by the end of the century it was more than double the price of what it had been before the new law. To these must be added the costs of the summer camp and the maintenance of the horse and equipment. The Law of 1875 compelled the Cossacks to engage in a desperate and reckless exploitation of their stanitsa yurt to raise the cash to pay for military service at the very moment those same resources were having to support an ever increasing population. Somehow the Cossacks had to square this circle.

The shrinking Cossack pai

Every adult Cossack was entitled to a share, or to use the Cossack term pai, of stanitsa land. The Committee of 1819 in the course of its long deliberations had calculated that 30 desiatiny of good land were needed to support a family and pay for military service. In due course, the Law of 1835 fixed this as the norm for each Cossack. Even when it was
introduced, not many Cossacks actually received this amount of land. The real figure was closer to 25 desiatiny but as population increased, the standard 30 desiatiny receded into the realms of fantasy.\textsuperscript{24} The Ataman’s Chancellory calculated in 1895 that if every Cossack was to receive only 25 desiatiny of good land, it would have to find another 12,606,925 desiatiny or, in other words, the Voisko would have to nearly double its size.\textsuperscript{25} This was reflected in the long term fall of the Cossack pai. In 1890 the size of the average share in the Voisko had fallen to 18.5 desiatiny at which point the Ataman’s Chancellory predicted that it would fall to 12 by 1910.\textsuperscript{26} In reality it had almost reached that figure by 1900 when average allotments were down to 13 desiatiny.\textsuperscript{27} The decline continued to the First World War by which point a Cossack could expect only 10.1 desiatiny or barely a third of what he was entitled to by law.\textsuperscript{28}

These figures referred to the Voisko as a whole and masked the variety of average holdings at the okrug level and even more within each individual stanitsa. In Sal’skii Okrug in 1914 the average allotment of good land was 23.3 desiatiny, not far from the government norm, while in Donetskii Okrug at the same time it was only 7.8 desiatiny.\textsuperscript{29} Figures for individual stanitsas are much more difficult to find, but in 1895 the Ataman’s Chancellory believed that in at least a third of the stanitsas the average share was only 9 or 10 desiatiny.\textsuperscript{30} In 1906 it found that in 5 stanitsas it was as low as 8 desiatiny, in 11 it was 9, and in another 22 had climbed to only 11 desiatiny.\textsuperscript{31}

On the evidence of these figures, it seems as if no other explanation of Cossack impoverishment is necessary. The average share was falling steadily as the population rose, until it was barely a third of the norm fixed by the government. This conclusion is reinforced when it is recalled that the norm of 30 desiatiny had been fixed before the sharp rise in the cost of military service brought about by the Law of 1875. Evidently, the shrinking allotments were a clear cause of Cossack impoverishment.

However, a certain caution is necessary here. What these figures were recording was the size of the average allotment, not the size of the average farm. Most stanitsas distributed land on the basis of the number of males in the family, meaning that most families were normally entitled to at least two shares. Nomikosov in the 1880s believed that each serviceman had about 67 desiatiny to support him.\textsuperscript{32} This figure declined as the average allotment declined so Maslakovets found that each independent household possessed on average 27 desiatiny.\textsuperscript{33} This information modifies but does not refute the preceding argument. The government was explicit that 30 desiatiny was the average share to which each male,
not each family was entitled to. It does mean, however, that the stark picture of the allotment figure alone is lightened when contrasted with farm sizes.

Rising population was not the only reason the size of the average pai was falling. From 1875, more and more Cossacks were turning to the stanitsa for subsidies to pay for the cost of military service. The only way the stanitsas had to pay for this was to rent out land or other parts of the yurt. While there were reserves of land, this did not impinge on the Cossacks of the stanitsa but once there were no reserves, renting of land had a direct bearing on the size of the average allotment. By the end of the century, 18 to 20 per cent of all stanitsa land was rented out to cover the cost of subsidies to Cossacks who could not pay for military service. Renting out stanitsa land offset some of the costs to the stanitsa administration, but this was only a palliative. By removing more land from the common fund, it cut further the size of the average allotment, thereby ensuring that more people would be forced to seek help. Once this spiral had started, it was extremely difficult to stop.

One of the few options open to the Voisko was the resettlement of surplus population either within the Voisko or to the Far East. Resettlement, however, was a sensitive business. A forced resettlement at the end of the eighteenth century had provoked a revolt in the upper stanitsas. 4,130 Don Cossack families were resettled in the Kuban in 1862 but the War Ministry took pains to emphasize that this had been a strictly voluntary process. Internal resettlement was also an option and in 1869 the Voisko authorities released 600,000 desiatiny of reserve land to create six new stanitsa yurts to resettle Cossacks from the most hard-pressed stanitsas. Despite the very generous entitlement of 40 desiatiny per soul, the policy had not been a success as the War Ministry conceded in 1895. ‘The Cossacks in general go there reluctantly and of those who resettle, many return to their former land-squeezed yurt. Others even prefer to settle in Siberia.’ Economic reasons on their own could not break the deep attachment the Cossacks felt for their native stanitsas, families and communities. Perhaps for this reason, if the break was to be made, it was easier to make a completely new start in the Far East than within the Voisko.

Resettlement offered only a minor palliative to the economic problems of the Cossacks. It was not popular either within the Voisko or outside of it. Even if it had been, there was no way the land fund within the Voisko could cope with the size of the problem. Land was available in Siberia or the Far East but easing the land shortage within the Voisko would have required hundreds of thousands of Cossacks to migrate to
Siberia. Voluntary resettlement on this scale was out of the question. One suspects also that the government would have been less than happy to see a large part of its cavalry disappearing from the western borders to the wilder-nesses of the Far East. If there was a solution to the problem, it had to come from within the Voisko itself.

**Agricultural technology and practice**

If an extensive solution was no longer possible, then what were the chances of an intensive one? Could more be produced from the same or smaller quantities of land? The change from a pastural to a cereal-based economy was in itself a more intensive use of land. As land under the plough expanded, so did the amount of grain produced. Unfortunately most of the increased production came about solely through the expansion of the sown area rather than through an improvement in yields. Maslakovets believed that it only just exceeded population growth.

Increased production based on expanding the area under plough was only a short-term solution. Substantive change had to come from changes in technology and practice. This was easy to say, and in fact was said very often, but difficult to achieve. Surveying the level of technology, the Ataman’s Chancellory in 1890 was pessimistic.

The method of working the land, the soil, the sowing and the harvesting of grain are virtually the same across the breadth of the Voisko, particularly among the Cossacks and the peasants. However, better methods of farming exist on several noble estates and on large farms. Therefore differences in the size of harvests depend mainly upon the location and above all on climatic conditions. In some places atmospheric conditions are more favourable for the harvest than others. Thus within one okrug it is possible to meet sharp fluctuations from a good harvest to a poor one. The harvest in the oblast’ is chiefly dependent on the timely distribution of water and the absence of drought.

As we have seen, Maslakovets concurred with this gloomy assessment of Cossack technology which made the Cossacks more dependent on factors over which they had no control, such as the weather.

Cossack technology was not quite as stagnant as these reports imply. There had been improvements: they were not of the spectacular kind, but were slower, more incremental. The Cossacks used both the heavy plough, the plug, and the light one, the sokha. These wooden tools were everywhere replaced with iron equivalents by the start of the
The Crisis of the Cossack Yurt 1875–1914

twentieth century. A new type of plough, the Bukker, which was lighter and more efficient than either of the traditional ploughs was widely used from the 1870s thanks to the influence of German colonists living alongside the Cossacks. In the hay meadows the sickle was giving way to the scythe, which was a much more effective tool. Improvements were also taking place in threshing, again under the influence of the German colonists. Cossacks had traditionally threshed the grain with flails but switched to a threshing wheel when they realized how much more efficient it was. By the turn of the century there was a factory producing these wheels in Rostov. Such changes were small, but more appropriate to the levels of technical knowledge of the Cossacks; indeed, they fitted closely with some modern organizations, such as ‘Intermediate Technology’, which are concerned with raising the productivity of peasant farming. Some noble farms did import the most modern machinery from England, but because no-one knew how to service it, more often than not it ended up rusting away in a yard once it had broken down.

There was no fixed system of crop rotation among the Cossacks. Practice varied from stanitsa to stanitsa and sometimes even within a stanitsa. The most common system seems to have been for the land to have been rotated on a five year cycle. A fallow field would be ploughed in the autumn or spring and sown with either flax, millet, or watermelons. For the next four years it would be sown with either winter or spring wheat after which the field would return to fallow. An alternative system was to sow millet in the first year of the cycle followed by wheat in the second, barley in the third, and oats or rice in the fourth.

Allowing land to recover its fertility on its own could take up to six years. The Cossacks did not sow legumes or grasses which would have restored nitrates to the soil and produced a crop as well. The temptation to plough fallow land before it had adequately recovered was often irresistible and appeared to be quite widespread. Inevitably the result was the exhaustion of the soil and an increased prospect of harvest failure.

The system of strip farming and the wide distances between strips worked by one family constantly attracted criticism. The losses in time, labour, and land that this entailed was a serious hindrance to the productivity of the land. Yet this was probably the most difficult of all the structural problems of Cossack agriculture to solve because it clashed directly with the cultural belief that access to the land should be as equal and fair as possible, not just in quantity but in quality as well. As long as this principle was widely accepted there was no way around the problem. Individuals, as we have seen, could exchange land by private agreement, and this was probably quite widespread; but it did not really
do more than eliminate some of the more extreme cases created by the allocation. Desirable as consolidation of land might have been from a point of view of rationality and productivity, it was a non-starter because of the cultural values of society. A solution to the problems of Cossack agriculture had to take into account the beliefs of the Cossacks.

There were many problems with Cossack technology. Their practices belonged to an earlier period when they had produced largely for their own consumption, selling what little was left over. When suddenly they had to produce substantially larger surpluses from the mid 1870s, they had neither the experience nor the technical knowledge to smooth the transition. Experience would come over the decades but at a very high price for the Voisko as a whole. Technical knowledge was available but those who possessed it were not part of the Cossack community. The Cossacks, like the peasants, viewed educated society, whether in its liberal or bureaucratic guise, with suspicion. A bitter campaign against the zemstvo in the 1870s entrenched Cossack suspicion of technical experts. Grekov for one recognized, in a way the Maslakovets did not, that it was pointless simply to issue orders to Cossacks about agricultural best practice. Improvement depended on working with them, not imposing solutions on them. Cossack practice was not a mindless following of tradition, it did demonstrate a capacity to change. Most change came through the German colonists who lived in Taganrogskii and Rostovskii Okrugi. There practices and techniques were readily adopted by the Cossacks and the peasants in the Don, precisely because they were not tainted by association with educated society. By the end of this period the Ataman’s Chancellory was commenting on the readiness of the population to use modern tools whenever they could get them. The cultural hostility between the educated elite and the people made the transition of technical knowledge particularly difficult in Tsarist Russia and the Don was no exception to this rule. It is important to remember, however, that this was not a problem confined to Tsarist Russia but one that is prevalent in many agrarian societies, even the most advanced. In England at the same period, farmers were much more likely to adopt new crops or methods from friends, family and neighbours than through reading technical journals or attending agricultural institutes.

The commercialization of the Cossack yurt

Like millions of peasants before and since, the Cossacks turned to the market as a means to meet their obligations to the state. Grain was the
primary commercial product, although others were developed with varying degrees of success. In some respects, the conditions were favourable. A railway network was being constructed within the *Voisko* and there was a strong demand for Russian grain in Western Europe. Apart from this, however, the prospects were bleak. The Cossacks entered the market in a major way in the 1870s to pay for their military service. Again as with many millions of peasants, it was a decision born of desperation, not rational calculation.

The Cossacks were not total strangers to the market economy before the 1870s. Some stanitsas had a long tradition of producing grain for the market. The upper Don had traded small amounts of grain to the lower Don, where the nomadic threat was still acute, and to other parts of the Empire. By the end of the eighteenth century Cossack grain was being traded internationally through the port of Taganrog. As Rostov developed, this provided another outlet and stimulus to the surrounding stanitsas. Because of the two ports, parts of the lower Don became much more involved in the grain trade than the upper Don even though they had started later. In the upper Don there were no large urban centres to supply and any grain had to be sold to the neighbouring provinces where there was stiff competition from other producers. The only way the Cossacks could compete in this market was to store grain until the price began to rise in the winter. Storage, however exposed the grain to pests and the danger of rotting.

The remoteness of the Don from the large population centres of the Empire and the dreadful state of communications within the *Voisko* seriously retarded the expansion of the grain trade. For most stanitsas, the only form of transport available was a cart pulled by oxen. To transport 100 *chetvert* of grain 100 kilometres required 20 carts, 40 oxen and two weeks. The oxen on this journey consumed three of the cartloads of grain. Rivers offered an alternative but the grain still had to be got to the embarkation points. In these circumstances only those stanitsas close to the southern ports had the opportunity to enter the market. Any development of the grain trade had to await an improvement in communications which came with the construction of the rail network.

It is difficult to give any estimation of the size of the grain trade before the last years of the nineteenth century because of the absence of precise statistics. The General Staff study estimated that approximately 500,000 *pudy* were sown each year between 1840–49 and 2,000,000 gathered. Half of this would be sold immediately and half retained for domestic consumption and next year’s sowing. Roughly 1,000,000 *pudy* of grain were being marketed each year. This was small given the
total area and potential of the Don. For most stanitsas grain production was still not an important part of their domestic economy. In Ust-Medveditskii and the First and Second Donskoï Okrugi, cattle raising was still more important than cereal production. Anecdotal evidence from other okrugi suggests the same. In a major survey of the contemporary economic position of the Cossacks in 1881, the writer noted that ‘not more than twenty years ago, agriculture in Donetskii Okrug was much less developed than at present. The Cossack cast 5 or 10 measures of grain on the land, exactly as much as he needed for his own consumption.’ Essentially what existed before the 1870s was production geared overwhelmingly towards domestic consumption.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, figures for the size of harvest became much more frequent. However, they do not distinguish between different producers in the Voisko, so it is impossible to correlate precisely the figures provided by the Ataman’s Chancellory with the Cossacks alone. Nevertheless, they do give an indication of the expansion of Cossack agriculture in this period. Table 5 shows the harvest in chetverty for ten years over a 22-year period.

The table shows the steady expansion of arable farming in the years 1892–1914. Unfortunately there are no figures for the 1870s and 1880s so it cannot be shown in the same way that these were the years that the Cossack economy switched from a predominantly pastoral to a predominantly arable one. However, every other piece of evidence points to the 1870s as the period when the crucial switch took place. Maslakovets estimated that since the 1870s the amount of land under the plough had almost increased by almost 50 per cent. The table also demonstrates that the harvest was not at all predictable or steady. It fluctuated widely within this period ranging from very good years such

Table 5  Grain harvest in Don Voisko 1892–1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total harvest</th>
<th>Food and seed corn</th>
<th>Surplus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>8,574,637</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>16,836,891</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>8,415,383</td>
<td>6,419,838</td>
<td>1,995,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>10,968,261</td>
<td>7,405,713</td>
<td>3,562,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>17,536,072</td>
<td>8,510,922</td>
<td>9,025,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>13,773,502</td>
<td>8,203,395</td>
<td>5,570,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>7,972,570</td>
<td>8,337,675</td>
<td>-365,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>14,945,962</td>
<td>8,710,572</td>
<td>6,235,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>32,553,256</td>
<td>10,204,050</td>
<td>22,349,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>22,614,318</td>
<td>14,989,574</td>
<td>7,624,744</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as 1904 and 1913 to desperately poor ones like 1892 (a famine year) and the even worse 1906. This did not make it easy to make long-term plans or investment decisions since there was no way of telling whether one would be struggling to survive or enjoying a bumper harvest.

The massive expansion in grain production was designed to meet the increased costs of service. Essentially, however, grain production was doing little more than keeping track with population increase. Between 1870 and 1898, the Cossack population increased by 1.6 times while grain cultivation increased by 1.8 times. There had been no qualitative breakthrough in Cossack agriculture. More was being produced because more was being sown. What this surplus produced for the Cossack family in cash terms we shall see in a later section. At the moment it is sufficient to note only that by itself it was not enough to pay for military service.

The expansion of commercial agriculture was not restricted to grain alone but extended to crops which had previously not been produced or had only existed for domestic consumption. As with grain, the growth of Rostov and Taganrog and the creation of the rail network were the vital stimuli for those stanitsas nearby. Other stanitsas remained as cut off as ever.

Market gardening offered a very lucrative income for those engaged in it. Starocherkasskaia, Bagaevskaia and Grushevskaja were the three most successful stanitsas, all of which were in the lower Don close to the ports. In the upper Don fewer stanitsas diversified in this way. Uriupinskaia, with its long commercial tradition and the advantage of a railway running through the stanitsa, was an exception. It became the centre of the watermelon trade serving the Moscow market. Around 100 wagon loads of watermelons were being sent to Moscow in 1875. Thirty years later the watermelon trade continued to thrive in Uriupinskaia Stanitsa.

On the whole, however, most stanitsas did not participate in the opportunities offered by market gardening. It was just the sort of intensive use of land that could have produced the surpluses necessary to pay for military service. Although it offered a high return, market gardening demanded a high degree of technical knowledge and attention, neither of which the Cossacks could offer. Indeed, Maslakovets went so far as to say that no other branch of the economy was conducted in such a ‘barbarian fashion’.

Wine production offered a solution more adaptable to the Cossack needs and experience. Parts of the lower Don were ideal for winegrowing and wine had been grown there since classical times. It was revived by
Peter the Great and developed by Ataman Platov after the Napoleonic Wars. He went so far as to bring masters from Burgundy and Champagne to provide technical knowledge. Unfortunately, when Platov died, the wine masters returned home and a series of bad winters and competition from the Crimea led to the collapse of wine production in the Don by the 1830s. Thereafter a slow revival began.

Wine, like market gardening, offered very high returns. A desiatina of grapes could produce a profit of 416 roubles. It also had the advantage that much of the work could be done by the aged, the infirm or children. The First Donskoi Okrug was the greatest producer of wine where it became so widespread that it began to replace grain as the major source of income. Razdorskaia and Tsymlianskaia were the two most important stanitsas producing respectively 60,000 and 25,000 vedra a year. In 1893 the value of the wine sold was 107,451 roubles while by 1914 this had increased to 357,529 roubles.

The remaining important commercial product was fish. The Cossacks had always fished, but in the late nineteenth century this became a major commercial operation. As previously pointed out, it was conducted with little thought for the future. Nevertheless, it did produce large sums of money for those Cossacks engaged in it. The most important stanitsas were Elizavetovskaia and Gnilovskaia, again in the lower Don. Annually it produced a return of approximately 1,000,000 roubles. The fish was usually sold to Armenian merchants, whom the Cossacks were convinced always cheated them.

It is very difficult to give any precise measurement of what all this economic activity produced for the average family. Estimations of the economic position of families were always based on partial and incomplete information. From this, general conclusions were extrapolated. However, what is abundantly clear is that Cossack living standards were in long-term decline and getting worse.

In 1881, Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti ran a series of detailed essays on the crisis within the Cossack economy. These made clear that the Cossack economy was wilting under the burden of military service. In Khoperskii, Ust-Medveditskii and Donetskii Okrugi, the author calculated the surpluses produced annually by an average family to pay for military service. In Khoperskii 46 roubles were left over to pay for military service, in Ust-Medveditskii 71 roubles and in Donetskii 101 roubles. Compared to peasant farms these were substantial surpluses but set against the costs of military service they were small. Unfortunately, the author does not give any figures for the actual cost of military service in these okrugi. However, if we take the figure of 1090 roubles produced in
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Razdorskaia stanitsa the year before, it is possible to estimate how long it would take a Cossack family to pay the costs of service. Therefore at the beginning of the 1880s, it would take a family in Khoperskii approximately 24 years to pay for military service of one of its members, 15 in Ust-Medveditskii and 11 in Donetskii. It was probably just about manageable to send one son on service over the long run for these families. To send two was beyond the means of all but the wealthiest.

In Maslakovets’ study, completed nearly twenty years after these, the situation had deteriorated substantially. The only precise figures he gives in cash terms for the cost of military service are those of the preparatory years. The two years’ training cost the average family 220 roubles. To this another 250 roubles had to be added for the uniform and horse, making total of 570 roubles before the Cossack had entered the first turn. Even without the precise cash costs for the years of privileged service it is possible to work out that Cossack living standards declined over the 20 years between the accounts in Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti and Maslakovets’ report.

Maslakovets compiled the most detailed annual budget for the average Cossack family at the time of writing. It was based on the service lists which each stanitsa was supposed to return, detailing the economic position of families about to send a son on service. Maslakovets based his expenditure figures on 36 of the 120 stanitsas.

Maslakovets calculated that the average family had 18 desiatiny of land which produced on average 294 puds of wheat. After the subtraction of domestic needs, livestock feed, and seed corn, 126 puds were left for sale. At current market prices this would give a return of 69 roubles. Income from other economic activity produced a further 95 roubles, giving a total of 164 roubles. The expenses the family incurred over the year came to 150 roubles which left a surplus for military service of 14 roubles. This was a minuscule amount when set against the costs of preparatory service alone. Compared to the surpluses produced in the three okrugi in the early 1880s, the surplus of 14 roubles represents a substantial decline even on the lowest figure of 46 roubles. If we take the lower figure of 1090 roubles for the cost of military service from Razdorskaia, then we have the ludicrous situation whereby a family producing a surplus of 14 roubles a year would need over almost 80 years to put a Cossack through his service. A family in this situation could only meet the demands of military service by selling livestock or other capital goods, which damaged its household further. This average family was immediately transformed into one of the very poorest by the costs of military service.
Other evidence testifies to the accelerating decline of living standards within the Don. In 1894 the number entitled to deferred military service on account of the family’s economic position was 5 per cent of the total eligible for service. In 1899 it had reached 26 per cent. More worrying still was the rise in the number excused service because they were physically unfit, many through malnutrition. Between 1888 and 1898 these rose from 6 to 9 per cent of the total.

One of the oddities of Tsarist Russia was the way in which institutions and social groups which were tottering on the brink of collapse would survive, often for several decades. The Cossacks were in this position, somehow managing to scrape the money together to pay for military service. The increasingly pessimistic surveys of the Cossack economy, however, were not wrong in their assessments. The collapse came during the 1905 Revolution, when 176,205 men between the ages of 18 and 38 were mobilized: 61 per cent of the total male working population. 1906 produced a harvest that was worse than the famine year of 1892, and led to a series of mutinies in Cossack regiments and stanitsas. Emergency aid to the families of every mobilized Cossack from the government of 100 roubles for each year that they were mobilized staved off complete bankruptcy.

The last years of the Imperial regime witnessed a slow recovery of the economy. Demobilization and a run of good harvests helped repair some of the damage in the years leading up to the First World War. This could not, however, disguise the fact that the Cossack economy could not sustain prolonged mobilizations.

**Stratification among the Cossacks**

After the Civil War émigré Cossacks vigorously promoted the myth that their society was egalitarian, a happy band of brothers living harmoniously, a society sharing resources and ignorant of class conflict until it arrived on Bolshevik bayonets. Soviet historiography, not surprisingly, rejected this view, and promoted its own myths of a society riven with class conflict that collapsed through its internal contradictions rather than through external agency. Any attempt to establish which of the two views is closer to the truth is beset by many problems, of which the most crippling is the scarcity of data. Much of the evidence is drawn from the provincial press, one-off surveys of particular stanitsas or the Voisko as a whole. What is lacking is any work that provided a dynamic picture of Cossack society over time as opposed to a snapshot of a particular time and place. As late as 1905 Grekov was lamenting the
absence of those precise statistical surveys that existed in other provinces which would allow a more informed survey of the distribution of wealth among the Cossacks. Maslakovets provided the most complete survey of the division of wealth within the community, using the standard tripartite family model of rich, middle, and poor. Land and livestock formed the basis for his analysis, although he did take account of the labour and tools available to each group. Maslakovets’ information is given in Table 6. The figure for land is desiatiny at the family’s disposal.

The wealthy family was a completely self-sufficient one. It consisted on average of 6.7 members, possessed a full complement of tools and could meet all its obligations, including military service without any damage to its household economy. This group consisted of approximately 21.6 per cent of the total Cossack population. The middle family had 5.09 members and most of the tools that it needed. Although it could satisfy its needs in a normal year, it had little or no reserves to withstand any setback. Military service was of course the biggest setback of all. This was the position of 45 per cent of the population. A poor family was in a desperate position. It had 3.55 members, could only get access to tools by clubbing together with other families, and had to hire labour to bring in the harvest. 33.4 per cent of the Cossack population found themselves in this group. This family could barely make ends meet in a good year. It had no chance whatsoever of raising the sums necessary for military service. Thus Maslakovets found that almost 80 per cent of the families within the Voisko could not afford to pay for military service without selling off whatever capital they owned or appealing to the stanitsa for help.

As far as stratification is concerned, Maslakovets found that there were substantial differences of wealth among the Cossacks. This could at first sight give some credence to the view of many Soviet historians

Table 6  Family inventories among the Cossacks 1898

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rich</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxen</td>
<td>7.86</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 23.
that a formerly homogenous community was disintegrating into one with a kulak minority, a barely sufficient mass in the middle, and a desperately poor minority at the bottom. However, other factors need to be taken into account before such conclusions can be drawn.

Land cannot be used as a means of measuring stratification within the community. Ownership was vested in the community which, as we have seen, was successful in restoring its control over the land, which was then distributed and redistributed according to Cossack notions of equity. Thus land was not the permanent property of any family and could not be passed on to heirs. It could, of course, be rented, and wealthy Cossacks did rent the land of the poor, or land from the stanitsa reserves if there were any. Unfortunately, there is no information on who was renting this land, for how long and for what purposes. By the turn of the century up to 20 per cent of land within the stanitsa was being rented out, possibly to Cossacks, possibly to inogorodnie. Only 11 stanitsas out of 120 were not renting any land. Although this represented a substantial quantity of land, it tells us little about stratification within the community.

A better indication of stratification would be family inventories. Even from the minimal list provided by Maslakovets we can see that differences in family wealth were substantial. Furthermore, all this was private property and could be passed on to the next generation. This could perhaps have formed the basis by which a minority of wealthy families separated themselves out from the struggling mass. Even this, however, would be an incorrect interpretation because it ignored a cultural factor affecting every Cossack family. This was the universal desire among young Cossacks to set up an independent household. In other words there were strong pressures within the Cossack family for a division of property as soon as possible. The chapter on the Cossack family will look at this process in detail. Suffice to say here that it was a very significant break on the accumulation of wealth within a family over one or more generations. Believing that family divisions made no economic sense, Grekov condemned the break up of the extended Cossack family. He argued correctly that the inevitable result of any division was to make several poor households out of one wealthy one. Yet the desire to found an independent household outweighed the drop in living standards which all recognized followed from a household division.

Wealth within the community whether in the form of land or property was constantly being circulated. At any one time there were wealthy, middle and poor families. This did not mean that Cossack society was becoming a class-based one. Much more likely it was a reflection of
Chayanov’s theory of wealth as a product of the biological cycle of the peasant family. The Cossacks as whole were becoming poorer due to population growth and military service. That much is clear. It is much less clear that economic differences were institutionalizing themselves within a once homogenous community.

Conclusion

The Cossack economy slid into a permanent state of crisis because of the changes in military service introduced by the Law of 1875. The quadrupling of the costs of military service at the point when population growth was diminishing the resources available to each family opened the road to ruin for the Cossack system. The Cossacks began to produce for the market with little experience or knowledge. They transformed their economy from a pastoral to a cereal-based one because it offered more people the chance to raise some of the money necessary for military service. Yet they were fighting a losing battle. The costs of warfare at the end of the nineteenth century were much greater than at the beginning. A peasant farm simply could not generate sufficient surpluses to pay for the cost of equipping and training a soldier at the start of the twentieth century. By the government’s own figures and reports, it should have been obvious that the resources of each Cossack were not up to paying for military service. The attempt to do so meant that thousands of Cossack households hovered permanently on the edge of ruin, needing only a gentle nudge to push them into the abyss.

This was clear as early as the 1880s. Every subsequent investigation reinforced this conclusion. Maslakovets, Grekov and, more recently, Robert McNeal all agreed on this. All three believed that the Cossack system had become an anachronism by this point and that the only solution to the problem was to abolish the Cossacks as a caste, transforming them into peasants. However, while accepting that the system could not pay for military service, it was no more feasible to abolish the Cossacks by a stroke of the bureaucrat’s pen than it was to abolish the Finns or the Latvians. Cossack identity amounted to more than a peculiar means of paying for military service. They had a historical memory, institutions and powerful sense of collective identity that gave them an existence in their own right, regardless of whether or not they were an efficacious means of paying for military service.
One of the characteristic features of peasant society is the exclusion of peasants from the political process. While this is not an absolute rule, there have been few peasant communities that have been able to exert some control over political structures above the village level. Far more frequently these structures are imposed on peasants and are designed to a greater or lesser degree to facilitate the exploitation of them. In response peasants have turned in on themselves, protecting the community against the attempt by outsiders to penetrate it. Solidarity was a survival strategy which protected but also isolated the village. This was both a strength and a weakness. It gave peasants remarkable defensive capabilities against powerful outside agencies, but it hindered co-ordination beyond the local level. Peasants have only rarely been able to channel their overwhelming numerical preponderance into effective political action. Even in cases where they have managed to do so, the failure to create stable political institutions led, after a brief triumph, to renewed subordination.

The Cossack voiska in general and the Don Cossacks in particular were unusual in the degree of control they exercised over the political structures above them. Up to the level of the stanitsa, which often had several thousand members, the administration was democratically elected and subject to popular control. The male Cossack population elected the stanitsa ataman, chose judges from its own community and, most important of all, participated in the communal assembly which retained extensive powers over the life of the local community down to the end of the Empire. This control over their local administration was of incalculable importance to the Cossacks’ sense of identity and self-image. In a society characterized by bureaucratic control at all levels, they stood out as free men participating in the political process. Just as
important, the assemblies provided the Cossacks with the means to link one stanitsa with another to coordinate political action, mobilizing tens of thousands in defence of their interests. Despite the manifest failings of the local administration and the continual intrusion of the state into local affairs, the image of a free people distinguished by their right and ability to participate in the political process remained undimmed in the eyes of the Cossacks.

For the Imperial Government, rural Russia was a source of constant anxiety. Despite the reputation for pervasiveness that the bureaucracy enjoyed, and its own pretensions to govern the lives of its inhabitants down to the smallest details, the Russian interior was one of the most under-governed societies in Europe. Between the desire of the bureaucracy for control and the reality of rural administration, there was a yawning gap which only began to be bridged after the emancipation in 1861. Until the emancipation of the serfs, the majority of rural residents were completely excluded from public jurisdiction and instead came under the authority of the landlord. Emancipation removed that authority, even though the state did not possess a sufficiently developed bureaucratic apparatus to replace the landlord in every village. Instead, the authority of the landlord was replaced by a system in which the peasants were collectively responsible for each other. Emancipation did not make peasants citizens in their own country, but reinforced their exclusion and sense of otherness. Peasants were not integrated into the nation and their alienation remained the most profound structural weakness of Tsarist Russia. The government for its part was deeply concerned about the problem of stability in rural Russia despite its repeated professions of belief in the loyalty of the simple people, the narod, to the tsar. Behind these professions lurked the spectre of Emel’ian Pugachev and the Pugachevshchina, which the government could not exorcise even a hundred years after Pugachev’s great rebellion.¹

If the government distrusted the peasants and wanted to control what was going on in their villages, they had even more reason to distrust the Cossacks. Like the peasants, the Cossacks were part of the narod, and belonged to a world that was alien to that of official Russia. More importantly, none of the great peasant revolts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would have posed such threats to the regime without the instigation, direction, and coherence given to them by the Cossacks. The Cossacks had been at the cutting edge of these rebellions in every sense. If the government was drawing up a list of which section of rural society was most in need of bureaucratic control, it would seem reasonable to find the Cossacks near the top of such a list and to expect
that great pains would be taken to achieve the desired level of control. Robert McNeal argued that this is in fact what happened:

In understanding the governance of the Cossacks in the reigns of the last three tsars, the romantic image of the wild horseman, brandishing pike or whip, is much less apposite than the figure of the dreary bureaucrat, plying his pen at a desk in St. Petersburg and never laying eyes on a rank-and-file Cossack unless he should chance to see one of the guards regiments in the street. In this era only faint images of Cossack self-rule remained, as bureaucratic institutions increasingly took charge, supervising closely whatever remained of local self-rule.²

McNeal’s argument finds support in the work of S. G. Svatikov, who charted the long decline of Cossack sovereignty from an independent state in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to a province of the Empire much like any other by the end of the nineteenth century.³

A strong case can be made for such views. Throughout the nineteenth century the government adopted a much more interventionist policy in its relationship with the local Cossack communities. At the same time it appeared that the local organs of self-government were decaying from within. Tales about the corruption of local officials, their venality, corruption, incompetence, and abuse of power were widespread. Moreover, the Cossacks themselves directed a constant stream of abuse at their local administration and its shortcomings. Under pressure externally and internally, the collapse of Cossack self-rule was averted only by the First World War.

The problem with this scenario is that the Cossack administration based in the stanitsas and the khutora not only did not collapse, but in the supreme crisis of the Civil War, they demonstrated vitality and flexibility. The stanitsa administration provided the Cossacks with the institutional means to mount the most potent challenge of any section of rural Russia to the Soviet regime. If Cossack autonomy had been thoroughly eradicated, if the local administration had been subsumed within the larger bureaucratic framework of Tsarist Russia, then the collapse of the Tsarist regime should have removed all co-ordinating mechanisms between the stanitsa and its khutora and between one stanitsa and another. Patently this did not happen. The Cossacks throughout the Civil War acted as communities based on their stanitsas and to a lesser degree on the recreated national assembly in Novocherkassk. Thus we have the paradox of a system of local government collapsing into decrepitude on the one hand while being able to command the
obedience of tens of thousands of human beings in a bloody civil war on the other.

The answer to the paradox lies, I believe, in the angle from which the local administration of the Don is viewed. Looked at from St. Petersburg as McNeal did, or from Novocherkassk as Svatikov did, bureaucratic control over the Cossack communities appears to be virtually complete, and those areas that remained uncontrolled appear riddled with corruption. If, however, we try to see the local administration at the level on which it operated, that is, the stanitsa and khutor, a different image emerges. This does not entirely negate the real loss of autonomy described by Svatikov and McNeal, but it substantially modifies it. The evidence of the local administration in action and its symbolic function for the Cossacks demonstrates the continuing vitality of Cossack selfgovernment down to the end of the Imperial regime and beyond. I will look at three key areas of the local administration: the communal assembly, known to the Cossacks as the sboyr (although they used the more common skhod as well); the functions and election of local officials; and the administration of justice. In clarifying these, the critical nexus of relationships that converged in the local administration which was not obvious when observed from St. Petersburg or Novocherkassk can be perceived.

The origins of Cossack self-government

The elemental unit of Cossack society was the stanitsa, which was descended from the fortified camps in which the Cossacks used to gather to spend the long winter months until the beginning of the campaigning season in the spring. In Verkne-Kurmoiarskaia Stanitsa, as winter set in, up to 100 Cossacks would meet to establish a camp, building a single hut in which they all lived.4 No doubt similar arrangements applied in other stanitsas. Having such large numbers of active, aggressive men in a confined space for a prolonged period carried a high risk of fratricidal violence. Yet there are no accounts at all in the historical record of any stanitsa tearing itself apart in this way. Mechanisms existed which successfully mediated relations between one Cossack and another.

The most important of these was probably a shared sense of identity and comradeship, of what it meant to be a Cossack. Loyalty to one’s comrades and trust in each other were essential qualities for survival in the dangerous world of the steppe. Mutual dependence bound the Cossacks together. This sense of shared values found institutional
expression in the forms of authority that the Cossacks created at both
the Voisko and the stanitsa level. Essentially the stanitsa organization
mirrored that of the Voisko. An assembly of all the Cossacks in the stan-
titsa decided all matters pertaining to the community, including the
election of the ataman and his assistants, the organization of military
service, the punishment of wrongdoers, and so on.

In the first stages of their existence as a self-conscious community,
Cossack political organization was based on democratic principles at
all levels, no doubt of a very rough and ready kind, but democratic
none the less. This tradition of anarchic democracy distinguished the
Cossacks from the sedentary and nomadic societies surrounding them,
both of which were rigidly hierarchical; the early democratic tradition
survived among the Cossacks and became a defining feature of their
sense of identity. Long after it had ceased to operate at the Voisko
level, it was preserved in the stanitsas and khutora substantially
unchanged until well into the nineteenth century, when the govern-
ment made the first serious attempts to exercise control over the local
administration.

The sbor

‘Everybody is subject to the will of the commune.’ This old Cossack
belief was confirmed to Mikhail Kharuzin many times during his stay
among them. Despite the government’s attempt to extend its control
over the system of local government, the Cossack sbor continued to
exercise powers that more properly belonged to the government in a
modern state. This can be seen even in the final major piece of legisla-
tion relating to the Cossack administration, passed by the government
in 1891. The Law Concerning the Social Administration of the Stanitsas of
the Cossack Armies represented the deepest penetration of the tsarist
regime into local Cossack affairs; but one cannot help being struck by
how shallow that penetration actually was.

The full text of the law was published in Donskaia Rech’ during August
and September 1891. Among the 26 duties given to the assembly were
the distribution of communal lands and other properties, the manage-
ment of elections, the supervision of officials, the preparation of lists
for military service, the administration of charity, the establishment of
grain reserves, the distribution of taxes, the collection of arrears, and
the removal of people harmful to the social order. In case the previous
25 points had missed anything, the final point made any matter touch-
ing on the life of the community as a whole the responsibility of the
sbor. This did not really leave a great deal to the competence of the government and does not fit in with the image of a regime exercising an ever tighter grip over local affairs. From this list alone, it is obvious that at the end of the nineteenth century the government continued to cede to the Cossack assembly the power to manage the most significant areas of Cossack life. This was a formal recognition of the powers of the Cossack assembly, not a subversion of an existing state apparatus. There were no state structures in any stanitsa. *De jure* and *de facto*, the Cossacks ran their own local affairs. Whether they ran them effectively or not is another matter.

The first description of any stanitsa *sbor* again comes from Verkhne-Kurmoiarskaia. The *sbor* traditionally convened on a Sunday evening with the whole stanitsa present. The discussion was extremely rowdy but at the end of business food and drink was provided and several toasts would be drunk. A later essay on the origins of the *sbor* argued that all the stanitsas conducted their *sbory* in a similarly raucous manner. The *sbor* was in effect both business meeting and social occasion.

As agriculture developed as a way of life among the Cossacks, it influenced the timing of the *sbor*. Sunday remained the normal day of business although more meetings were held in the autumn than the spring. On those Sundays and holidays where there were no meetings, Cossacks would still gather round the stanitsa hut to discuss the week’s events, exchange information or simply gossip. These meetings had no official character but they kept everyone informed about what was going on and provided an opportunity for opinions to be aired.

Most Cossacks belonged to both a stanitsa and a *khutor* and consequently had the right to participate in both assemblies. The stanitsa *sbor* was summoned by the ataman writing to the *khutor* ataman, informing him of the time and place of the meeting and its proposed agenda. The *khutor* *sbor* was summoned by the local ataman going through the streets, announcing the meeting. During the summer when the inhabitants were scattered through the fields, the *sbor* could be summoned in an emergency by the ataman or his assistant riding through the fields carrying the stanitsa banner. On seeing the banner, everyone was supposed to stop work immediately and go to the meeting.

One of the most cherished of Cossack freedoms was the right of every adult male to participate in the *sbor*. This had always been the Cossack way. Any man who was a member of the community was entitled to a say in its running. In this area the government was able to make significant inroads into the Cossack democratic tradition. The Law of 1870 restricted participation in the *sbor* to heads of household, bringing
Cossack practice into line with peasant Russia. According to Svatikov, this aroused strong resentment among the Cossacks because it was alien to their long tradition and had as its purpose the strengthening of the position of the ataman at the expense of the assembly, presumably by removing the rowdiest and least respectful section of society.\(^\text{12}\) It is difficult to know the extent to which it was enforced in practice, but even if it was enforced, its effect was likely to be mitigated by the Cossack habit of breaking away from the parental home as soon as possible, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The Law of 1891 introduced a further innovation in the functioning of the \textit{sbor} by substituting the direct democracy of every householder with a system of delegates. Only in a \textit{khutor} or stanitsa with less than 30 households was the system of direct democracy retained. Those with more than 30 but less than 300 sent 30 representatives to the \textit{sbor} while those with over 300 elected one delegate from every 10 households.\(^\text{13}\) Possibly this had more to do with trying to bring order to meetings where several thousand had the right to attend than a deliberate restriction of a democratic tradition. What evidently was an attempt to narrow the franchise, and a tacit admission that the Law of 1870 had not had the desired effect, was the exclusion of all men under 26 from the \textit{sbor}.

Women, as in peasant Russia, had no right to participate in the \textit{sbor}. Cossack tradition allowed a woman to be the head of a household if her husband was dead or absent on service, but she could only represent her household in the \textit{sbor} if she had no adult sons. Women were allowed to address the \textit{sbor} if they needed a special favour from the community.\(^\text{14}\)

The Cossack right to participate in the decision-making process of the community was considerably broader than usual among peasant communities. The right of young men to participate, even taking into account the restrictions created by the Laws of 1870 and 1891, provided a balance to the power of the patriarchs which was so marked elsewhere. This made for livelier meetings but, more importantly, influenced the balance of power between the generations in other ways, as we shall see.

Meetings took place in the stanitsa hut or \textit{izba} and were formally opened by the ataman. An article in \textit{Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti} described how the meeting was supposed to be conducted.

Everyone has the opportunity of casting their vote for the common good, of comparing different opinions on a particular issue and then arriving at a conclusion meeting the needs. Neither graft nor friend-
ship nor kinship must have any influence on the rightful course of business.\textsuperscript{15}

When the ataman thought that a matter had been discussed sufficiently he rang a bell to signal a vote. Voting seems to have take place by several methods. One was for those in favour of a motion to stand on one side and those against on the other, followed by a head count.\textsuperscript{16} Another method was for those in agreement to shout ‘\textit{Dobryi Chas}’ while those against yelled ‘\textit{Ne Nado}’.\textsuperscript{17} Presumably whichever was the louder carried the day. By law and tradition a two thirds majority was required for major issues but for minor ones a simple majority was sufficient. However there was also a strong tradition of presenting decisions that had been particularly divisive as unanimous. The minority would eventually fall silent and side with the majority.\textsuperscript{18} This in theory was how the \textit{sbor} was supposed to function.

The reality of a stanitsa \textit{sbor} was rather different. The first problem was getting a sufficient number of people to turn up to make the meeting quorate. The Law of 1891 acknowledged Cossack tradition by stipulating that no meeting could be quorate unless two thirds of those entitled to vote were in attendance.\textsuperscript{19} A similar rule operated among the peasantry. Quoracy could by no means be guaranteed, particularly for a stanitsa \textit{sbor}. The distance between a stanitsa and a \textit{khutor} might be many miles which meant that attendance involved considerable time and expense with the strong possibility than an insufficient number of other Cossacks would turn up to make the meeting quorate.\textsuperscript{20} In Veshenskaia Stanitsa the problems were particularly acute as it was one of the largest. In fact it had become so large that the only solution was to divide the stanitsa into three but to do this required a quorate \textit{sbor} which took several months to gather. The members would only come if all the field work was finished or if the \textit{sbor} fell in the middle of several days holidays such as New Year.\textsuperscript{21} In another article in \textit{Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti} a correspondent wrote that ‘the journey from the \textit{khutora} to the stanitsa is made with extreme reluctance and under duress. For many, to participate is a heavy punishment especially if the \textit{skhod} is on a weekday’.\textsuperscript{22} He also found that the Cossacks were reluctant to make the journey unless there was a guarantee of refreshment. As they explained with more than a hint of humour to him: ‘Just as without God we won’t cross our own porch but with God we will cross even over the sea, so without a round of drinks we won’t go a step further but with them- well that’s a different matter.’\textsuperscript{23}
The difficulties in obtaining a quorate sbor created a backlog in stanitsa business and ceaseless complaints by the Cossacks about the inefficiency of the administration. Stanitsa officials attempted to get round this by lying about the number of participants at a meeting, reducing the number of households on its lists, or forging the necessary number of signatures.24

A quorate sbor brought its own problems. At some of the larger stanitsas several thousand men would be present. Trying to conduct business with this number was very difficult, to put it mildly. Few stanitsas, if any, contained a building large enough to hold a full sbor. In summer this was not so important as meetings could be held outside but the majority of meetings took place in winter. One could not reasonably expect men to stand outside for hours in several degrees of frost.

When a sbor had convened, the ataman had to try to conduct this meeting with some degree of decorum. A full sbor was no place for the faint hearted. The opening of the meeting was the signal for a fearful din to erupt as everybody talked and nobody listened. An observer at one such sbor in Kamenskaia Stanitsa wrote, ‘These skhody with their hooliganism surpass everything that could be harmful for society: the cries and noise of the drunk, their swearing, their disobedience to the Ataman when he wants to call them to order.’25 The Cossacks told Kharuzin that ‘noisy Cossack speech is like water when a dam bursts’, while the old complained that the young shoved them aside to get up to the front to give their opinions.26 Sharp elbows and a strong voice were one of the prerequisites to having an influence in the sbor. When Veshenskaia Stanitsa finally achieved a quorate sbor, there were so many people there that it proved impossible to conduct any business at all. An onlooker at the meeting noted ‘everybody tries to bring his own opinion to the Ataman’s meeting, drowning out any dissenting opinions.’27 In 1882 a bitter attack on the conduct of such sbory appeared in Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti which summed up many of the complaints against them, along with a possible solution:

It has been repeatedly noted that the useless noise and bawling was greater when large numbers of people were present in the skhod and vice versa. There have been several stanitsa skhody consisting of deputies elected from the local communes about which there has been very favourable comment. In these skhody with their deputies there has been positively none of the noise and bedlam, the discussion of issues was well rounded, and the business of the skhod was conducted in a briefer time. In contrast, in full stanitsa skhody all the discussion
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is limited by yelling and even fights. Very often people do not arrive at a resolution of any question before they return home. In actual fact how can they possibly establish any order or discuss any issue with five hundred or a thousand people present at a meeting? (In many stanitsas there are more than a thousand heads of household). For such meetings our stanitsa buildings are too small; half of those who turn up are unable to get into the room and have to mill around outside the door. Being so far from the centre they are not only deprived of discussing present concerns but they cannot even hear what is being said.28

Another complaint frequently made against many stanitsa sbory was the amount of alcohol consumed by those present. As we have seen, it was frequently necessary to offer vodka as an inducement to attend. Alcohol was never far away throughout the meetings with Cossacks nipping off to the local tavern for a drink before, during and after the meeting. It was also common for the sbor to vote itself a round of drinks at the end of the meeting, to be paid for by communal funds.29 In 1869 a journalist for Donskoi Vestnik gave his impressions of what he believed was typical.

I have attended many stanitsa sbory but I have not yet seen one functioning properly. Always a half or at the very least a third of the members are either tipsy or hungover. For example, going on to the porch of the stanitsa building, very frequently the first person you will meet will be a drunk Cossack staggering out. Go into the first room and you will meet ten similar people. And who are these people? They are our esteemed Commune meeting to discuss communal business.30

Many observers also saw a more sinister motive behind the copious consumption of alcohol. Rather than simply being a sign of Cossack exuberance, they believed the drink was supplied by those who wished to manipulate the sbor for their own advantage.31

These descriptions would seem to demonstrate that whatever was left of Cossack self-government had degenerated into farce, and that the Cossacks were too feckless, irresponsible or drunk to manage their affairs in an effective manner. Such a conclusion would be wrong. Despite all its manifest failings, the stanitsa sbor continued to play an irreplaceable and effective role in the life of the Cossacks.

Those who observed and wrote about Cossack customs and institutions were not culturally part of the society they were describing. Their
education and profession separated them from those they were observing. Many, but not all, made little attempt to probe beyond the most obvious. Most of these observers had fixed notions about what constituted an orderly and efficient meeting: notions drawn largely from the world to which they belonged culturally. They used the standards of educated Russia to judge a society with different norms of behaviour and, not surprisingly, found that society wanting.

Cossack tradition in general and the tradition of the sbor in particular were very different. Formality or politeness had never been part of that tradition. The robust expression of opinions, the lack of respect for those holding office, the swearing and even fighting, stretched back to the earliest days of the Cossacks. What was happening in the nineteenth century was not a degeneration of a once effective system of government, but simply a continuation of the way Cossacks had always managed their affairs. The example of the sbor in Verkhne-Kurmoiarskaia Stanitsa showed that the sbory had always combined business with pleasure. They were social occasions, a chance to meet friends, relatives and neighbours, and to catch up on news. The consumption of alcohol was a natural extension of this. The Cossacks did not separate the business function of their gathering from its social one: the two were inextricably linked. This point escaped the attention of many observers of Cossack sbory.

The misunderstanding of the sbor went much deeper than simply a dispute over the proper conduct of meetings. For the Cossacks the sbor was the indispensable forum for conflicts within the community to be worked out and ultimately resolved. It was in this sphere that we can see its true value for the community whose instrument it was. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the struggle going on for most of the last quarter of the nineteenth century to redefine the principles on which land was allocated within the community.

The bitterness of this struggle, whatever its outcome, had the potential to polarize permanently the Cossack communities. If the wealthy had won the right to hold on to their land, then the mass of the Cossacks would have faced an even more rapid descent into poverty coupled with the overwhelming grievance that members of their own community were directly responsible. On the other hand, those that lost land as a result of a repartition had every reason to bear a grudge against their neighbours.

As matters came to a head in different stanitsas, it is hard to avoid the impression that violence was not far away. In Kazanskaia Stanitsa it was reported that 'before the division of land, disorder had reached such an
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extent that it had turned into a complete war of neighbour with neighbour and settlement with settlement.' Equally stark was the conflict in Bagaevskaia Stanitsa in 1882.

The skhod fell into two opposing camps. One side demanded the division of yurt land on the basis of the number of souls while the other, consisting of the wealthy members of the stanitsa, rejected this. They were able to plough an unlimited amount of communal land which obviously created a great deal of resentment from the poor.

There were similar accounts from Mikhailovskaia, Tsymlianskaia and Nikolaevskaia Stanitsas, among others. In every stanitsa, it was the sbor in which this issue was argued out, allowing a peaceful solution to a potentially violent problem. No sbor had a problem with quoracy on this issue and it was through the sbor that the transformation was carried out.

Nor was this the end of the sbor’s function in this process. The sbor was the means through which those who had lost were reconciled to the new order. This was done by the insistence of the community that such decisions be presented as unanimous, no matter how bitter the contest had been. The agreement over repartition reached by Chernysh evskaia Stanitsa, copied by Kharuzin, captured the dual function of the sbor perfectly:

October 6 1867. The citizens of Chernysh evskaia stanitsa of the Don Army have after many discussions and meetings decided unanimously that a repartition of the arable and pasture land between the inhabitants of the stanitsa and khutora is now necessary. At present the land is divided altogether unequally between the inhabitants which has led to a great deal of unpleasantness between those who have sufficient land and those who do not. In order to prevent such quarrels and unpleasantness over the inequality in land holdings we have decided to carry out a repartition according to the information of the land surveyors now conducting a survey.

It is not difficult to see through the rather mild language of the agreement to the intensity of the conflict that had just taken place within the stanitsa. The reports of conflict on this issue that we have seen earlier give an indication of the depths of emotion behind the bland description of ‘many discussions and meetings’ and ‘a great deal of
unpleasantness’. Yet to themselves and to the outside world the Cossacks presented the resolution of this most divisive issue as one ‘unanimously’ agreed upon. This was not a fiction but an essential part of the process of restoring community harmony. Those who had lost still had to live and work among their neighbours who had won. If they were unprepared to accept their losses then any hope of harmony within the community would have vanished, making an already difficult life immeasurably harder.

Only an institution that commanded widespread legitimacy and had deep roots within the community could have hoped to carry out such a transformation and gain the acceptance of all to the new order. A report from Kazanskaia Stanitsa in 1891 contrasted the second repartition of land, where everything was done in a businesslike fashion, with the first repartition, when the sbor had behaved like a panicked flock.36 The government could have imposed the same solution on the Cossacks, but it would have irrevocably damaged the sense of community that bound Cossacks together. When the Cossacks told Mikhail Kharuzin that ‘everybody depends on the will of the commune’ this was a statement of fact, not a rhetorical device. Even the author of the vehement attack on the conduct of the full stanitsa sbory, who was quoted at length, conceded that most Cossacks were aware of the value of their own administration and were prepared to use it without restriction: ‘In reality, by virtue of the strength of his tradition, a Cossack understands well his rights in the skhod and makes use of these rights without limitation, more often than not to the detriment of lawfulness and good order.’37 This was not the hallmark of an institution that was drifting into decrepitude but one that was vibrant and vigorous.

It was not surprising that some issues attracted little interest from the Cossacks and that few could be bothered to make the arduous journey from khutor to stanitsa to discuss them, while other issues found the Cossacks prepared for passionate and prolonged engagement. This is common to any democratic system but does not mean that it is unworkable or close to collapse. This rather obvious point was noted by an observer at the end of the nineteenth century.

Stanitsa sbory are of two types; the calm and the stormy. In the first matters are decided which are either of little importance to the commune or touch the vital interests of nobody and, therefore, the sbor proceeds peacefully and the matter is decided by the electorate. However, if the matter in hand touches the immediate interests of
different groups of the population or different people, then the delegates bring all their energy and all their passion into the debate, turning the meeting into a bedlam.\textsuperscript{38}

Even the most difficult issues did eventually reach a resolution. Such decisions took time, effort and energy on the part of all, but it was the \textit{sbor} that channelled and resolved these matters.

The \textit{sbor} was not just an inward looking institution. It could serve to mobilize thousands from different stanitsas in defence of Cossack interests. The anti-zemstvo campaign in the second half of the 1870s was a good example of this wider role. The Cossacks were ordered to elect delegates to the zemstvo and pay taxes to the new body. Everywhere in the Don, Cossacks refused to co-operate either in electing delegates or paying taxes.\textsuperscript{39}

The Cossacks expressed their outrage and organized their opposition through the \textit{sbor}. In Kamenskaia Stanitsa, a \textit{sbor} was held on 30 June 1881 to discuss the election of delegates to the zemstvo. As soon as the ataman mentioned the word zemstvo, the Cossacks vented their rage: ‘We don’t need the zemstvo, we don’t need the zemstvo! The zemstvo is a burden for us; it takes 1500 a year in salary for itself but it is of no use to us; we have served God and the Sovereign and we will serve them but we don’t need the zemstvo.’\textsuperscript{40} Ultimately the ataman could only restore order by giving into the wishes of the Cossacks and agreeing to the following resolution: ‘We have unanimously resolved: we do not want zemstvo institutions and we do not want to elect delegates to the commission.’\textsuperscript{41} The journalist, a supporter of the zemstvo, reported that similar ‘depressing information’ was received from Luganskaia, Gundorovskaia and Miliutinskaia Stanitsas.

In Luganskaia Stanitsa the anti-zemstvo campaign had become still more acrimonious. Members of the stanitsa had attacked and driven out land surveyors who had come to assess the land for taxes. In response the authorities had billeted soldiers from the regular army upon them. It was this that prompted the appeal to the rest of the Don.

We the Cossacks of Luganskaia stanitsa send this appeal to you by a trustworthy man from all our stanitsa for consideration by your \textit{skhod}. Let each stanitsa ataman summon its own \textit{skhod}, but do not ask the authorities because they have sold their very souls and honour for a good salary and an officers rank. Summon to the \textit{skhod} the common people. From them we expect help and it is to them that we turn.\textsuperscript{42}
The stand-off that had been reached between the Cossacks and the authorities was ended when Alexander III became Tsar. Cossack opposition chimed with his own inclinations and he abolished the zemstvo in the Don. What gave Cossack opposition its potency was its ability through the sbor to mobilize opinion within the stanitsa and then unite one stanitsa after another in opposing the measure. This ability to transcend their own immediate environment made Cossack opposition much more formidable than similar protests from peasant communities. The Imperial Government experienced it again during the 1905 Revolution and the Soviet regime would experience it during the Civil War.43

However, before moving on, we need to point out a significant difference between the Cossack sbor and the peasant skhod. The competence of the sbor was significantly less than that of the peasant skhod in relation to the individual household and what went on within its confines. Unlike the skhod, which had a vested interest in the internal affairs of its members’ household since the community as a whole was liable for each household’s redemption fees and taxation should a particular household default, the sbor had no such incentive. Cossacks had never been subject to the poll tax and they had always been the owners of their land so redemption fees were not applicable to them. This allowed the Cossack household considerably more autonomy than the corresponding peasant one. Mikhail Kharuzin quoted the Cossack saying ‘another’s house, a dark roof’ to characterize the more distant relationship between the Cossack household and the sbor.44 It was also very rare for a sbor to involve itself in the process of household division even if it was carried out against the wishes of the father.45

The reluctance to interfere in the internal affairs of the household extended to personal relationships as well. A press report from 1883 provided an interesting example of this. In a khutor belonging to Veshenskaia Stanitsa, a married Cossack, Evlampio Bodovskov, was having an affair with a certain Ul’iana Lamyshova about which Lamyshova constantly boasted to Bodovskov’s wife, Elena. Eventually the situation became more than Elena could bear so she wrote to her father-in-law complaining about the affair. He then brought the matter before the sbor which decided to flog the two lovers and Elena, although legally it had lost the right to do this since 1870. The two lovers submitted to the flogging but, not surprisingly, Elena resisted: ‘First of all Ul’iana Lamyshova was punished and then they laid Elena across a table. She struggled and repeated, ‘If I’m guilty send me to a court’. The crowd answered her, ‘This is a court, at least, its’ court enough for you.’46
The report made a particular point of emphasizing the trio were punished not because there had been a deviation from accepted norms, which there obviously had, but because the affair had been officially laid before the community, thereby forcing the community to acknowledge it and take action. Quite clearly the affair was public knowledge beforehand, given the boasting of Lamyshova and the nature of life in a small community; but as long as it was not thrust into the face of the community it could be ignored as a private matter.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the Cossacks as a community possessed an unusual degree of tolerance for adultery even if as individuals they might react very violently. Christine Worobec in her study of peasants in Central Russia at approximately the same time described the very different attitudes to deviance and the willingness of the Commune to enforce communal norms: ‘Russian peasants developed a set of behavioural norms and a moral code to buttress the status quo. They feared and punished severely delinquent activity that threatened the collective interest and community solidarity by challenging the subordination of woman to man, child to parent, young to old and weak to strong.’47

The Cossacks as a community were willing to recognize and tolerate a greater degree of individual autonomy than the peasant communities studied by Worobec. This can be perhaps be explained by a tradition in which individuality was prized, by an economic situation that did not make the community responsible for individual families, and the structure of their life which necessitated long absences for fathers, husbands and sons. Whatever the precise reason or combination of reasons, the willingness of the Cossack sbor to interfere in the private lives of its members was much less than in the corresponding peasant skhod.

**The stanitsa administration**

The sbor was the legislative element of the Cossack administration while the ataman and his assistants formed the executive branch. The office of ataman was almost as old as the Cossacks themselves, with only the earliest Cossack communities appearing not to have elected atamans.48 The position of ataman was a powerful one but he gained his position through a popular vote. This no longer applied to the position of the Nakaznyi Ataman, the chief official of the Voisko, but it remained so with regard to the stanista and khutor atamans.

The ataman continued to be part of the Cossack community of which he was head, rather than a professional bureaucrat without local ties. This did not make him the champion of the community against the
government, since his election had to be approved by the authorities in Novocherkassk. The ataman thus depended on both popular and governmental approval for his office. As well as balancing these demands, he usually sought to ensure that his term of office was personally profitable. The manner in which he mediated between the demands of the community, the government and his own personal interests depended primarily on his personality. The underdevelopment of the bureaucracy and the lack of close scrutiny on a day to day level by the community afforded the ataman considerable freedom of manoeuvre in his relations with the government and the community. He was neither a professional bureaucrat nor tool of his community.

The Law of 1891 was the final attempt to regulate the position of the ataman. Just as in the case of the sbor, the government was forced to concede sweeping autonomy to the ataman, probably far more than it would have liked. His responsibilities included explaining government laws, quashing malicious rumours, safeguarding property, arresting vagrants, deserters and criminals, convening the sbor, carrying out the decisions of the sbor, administering communal funds, preparing the lists of those eligible for service, and checking to see that their military equipment was the right standard. This was remarkably similar to the list of duties described by Kotel'nikov 70 years earlier. In fact, the only substantive change was that the ataman no longer had to deal with attacks by steppe nomads.

The government evidently had in mind some sort of bureaucratic high achiever when it formulated these demands. It must further have assumed that such types were commonplace in the Cossack territory since every settlement over 30 people was to have its own ataman. Such an extensive list of duties was a telling exhibition of the continuing weakness of the government’s administrative apparatus and does not fit in at all with the image of a bureaucracy remorselessly grinding down the remnants of Cossack self government.

As well as being an administrative genius, the government wished the ataman to be a paragon of virtue. He was required to be honest, sober, diligent, respectful to his superiors and considerate but firm to his subordinates. In common with most aspects of Tsarist Russia there was a crevice between the ideal and the reality. Few atamans lived up to the government’s ideal and most fell far short. A public service ethos was conspicuous only by its absence and the majority of atamans expected some profit from what had been an expensive investment. The attitude of the newly elected ataman in Kazanskaia Stanitsa was surely typical of most atamans who, having spent large sums of money getting themselves elected,
wasted no time before recouping the cost of the election: ‘And so having gathered into his hands the reigns of government and barely constrained by the rules of administration, he attempts to make good as far as possible his earlier expenditure on behalf of the community.’

In one respect the ataman had little choice but to be corrupt as the salary for what amounted to a full time and onerous job was minuscule. Payment was the responsibility of the commune which was extremely reluctant to pay a reasonable salary and often refused to pay anything at all. The usual response to this was for the ataman either to neglect his duties or use his position to exploit the opportunities open to him. This situation was unique neither to the Cossacks nor to Imperial Russia. Most traditional or developing societies cannot or will not pay their bureaucrats a living wage, expecting them to make up the difference by the corrupt use of their powers if not explicitly then at least implicitly. The Cossacks themselves did not expect much in the way of integrity from their atamans, as will become clear when we examine the electoral process. Their expectations, unlike the government’s, were much more likely to be fulfilled.

The local press was full of stories about the corruption of atamans and their cronies, in fact it was one of their favourite themes. A few examples gathered by a journalist travelling through the Don in 1891 give some idea of the level and type of corruption. In a khutor belonging to Razdorskaia Stanitsa, the ataman had rented out reserve land, but instead of paying the money into communal funds had used it to build himself a new house. In another case the ataman had appropriated money set aside for the building of a new church. When the sbor questioned him about this he became abusive and threatening, forcing the sbor to back down.

The opportunities for the misappropriation of communal funds were extensive, as record-keeping was minimal, and even where records were kept, ordinary Cossacks lacked the technical knowledge to audit them. This was particularly true in cases where the ataman had the co-operation of the pisar’ or secretary. The pisar’ could work either with the ataman or on his own account. In one notorious case the pisar’ to the ataman in Khoperskii Okrug was accused of offering medical exemptions from military service in return for substantial payments. Anyone responsible for issuing official documentation was well placed to add considerably to his income if he chose to do so.

The ataman was in a powerful position, occupying the space between the government and the community. His control of the sbor’s agenda, his wealth, his connections within and beyond the stanitsa gave him a pre-eminent place in the sbor. If there was a policy he did not like, he was
capable of mobilizing sufficient support to have it thrown out. In many cases, it was the ataman who led opposition to the redistribution of land. Nor was he a man to cross lightly. There were many means at his disposal to make life uncomfortable for those who he believed had insulted him. Atamans were notoriously touchy about their honour and dignity.

Despite all this, however, he could not simply do as he wished. Control over his salary gave the sbor some degree of influence over his behaviour, as one observer noted.

In the majority of cases, it is not the citizens who depend on the ataman but the ataman who depends on the citizens. Take the situation in the stanitsa skhody, who depends on whom? There the stanitsa atamans do not by any means think that they can have a strong influence on the Commune. On the contrary, the atamans even have to humble themselves before every drunk in the Commune. The ataman, you see, serves not by government appointment but through choice of the Commune, on which depends the setting of the size of his salary and so on.

The ataman had to choose the ground on which he fought carefully. If something infringed the vital interest of the Cossacks, they were prepared to defend them vigorously and without restraint. During the anti-zemstvo campaign, wherever atamans attempted to force acceptance of government policy they found that they were powerless to do so. When the Cossacks in Nizhne-Kundriucheskaia Stanitsa discovered that, at a poorly attended sbor, the ataman had pushed through a resolution in support of the zemstvo, their rage erupted. The next sbor, attended by everyone, was uncommonly rowdy even for the Cossacks, so much so that the ataman beat an undignified retreat. During the 1905 Revolution, anger at internal police service led to the physical ejection of the ataman from the sbor in Ust-Medveditskaia Stanitsa and the election of new ataman in his place. The old tradition of subjecting atamans to community judgement no longer took the violent forms it had in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but even in the twentieth century accountability of the ataman to the community remained a principle of Cossack tradition and practice.

Elections

One of the characteristic features of Imperial Russia was the jealousy with which the tsar and bureaucracy guarded their monopoly of the
political process. Even after the zemstvo had been established, the government continued to harass its representatives and interfere in its operations. This pattern was repeated during the brief period of the Duma’s existence between the 1905 and 1917 Revolutions. It is all the more remarkable therefore that the Cossacks were able to retain their ancient freedom of electing their atamans virtually without government interference. This official was responsible for tens of thousands of people, depending on the size of the stanitsa, but he could only become ataman through an election. The only government control on the elections was its approval of the candidate after his election. The contrast with the surrounding peasant communities could hardly have been greater and was not lost on the Cossacks. Beyond the village level, the peasantry had no control over the officials who exercised authority over them whether they were the justices of the peace or the detested land captains. Unlike the ataman, these were never part of the peasant community.

The first description of an election in a stanitsa again comes from Verkhne-Kurmoiarskaia. Originally, there were no elections and the ataman appeared to emerge through consensus. The first election was held in 1775 when several candidates presented themselves for the post. The author also noted the prominent role of vodka in the proceedings, something which was to remain an enduring part of the Cossack tradition. The first elections were held on the Feast of the Epiphany but for some reason were moved to New Year’s Day. The election took place with the minimum of formality. The outgoing ataman would surrender the symbols of his office, a staff and hat, laying them before the sbor. His assistant, the esaul, then called for nominations from the floor which were duly yelled out to him. The esaul needed sharp ears since the office was awarded to whomever he thought had received the loudest shouts.61

When Mikhail Kharuzin was visiting the Don a century later, the elections had developed in terms of their scale and cost if not in terms of sophistication. Elections for the stanitsa ataman were held every three years and as the great day approached the whole stanitsa, or at least the male section of it, was gripped by election fever. Usually there were several men vying for the post and each sought to build up a faction within the stanitsa. There were several ways of doing this. Sometimes the candidate would invite electors to dine with him, sometimes he would visit the house of his electors and share bread and salt with them, thus conferring honour on people who were below him in social status.62 However, with an electorate numbering many thousands in most stanitsas, there were limits to this type of electioneering. Less subtle means were needed.
‘Hospitality’ was the euphemism the Cossacks used to describe the second type of electioneering. Agents of one candidate took over a particular tavern and invited in any passing Cossack to drink his health. Not surprisingly Cossacks made it their business to be constantly passing different taverns. Whatever he wanted and in whatever quantities were provided free of charge. The taverns did a roaring trade at election time and were filled with ‘singing and dancing’. Kharuzin’s description of the elections is supported by accounts from many other sources.

A journalist from Donskaia Rech’ covered an election in an unnamed stanitsa in 1891. His carefully crafted report, although packaged for a newspaper, captured the essence of Cossack elections. He emphasized the excitement that swept through the stanitsa at election time and described the tactics of the candidates: ‘Seekers of these posts do not doze. They surreptitiously seek out through their agents hearty bawlers who in the skhod and outside it during election time harangue the voters with the praises of their candidate, his fantastic deeds, his incorruptible honour, his integrity and above all his sobriety.’ He was then accompanied by a Cossack acquaintance into an election meeting that was taking place in a tavern and described in detail what he found there.

Inside there are two tables with drinks and snacks. Sitting around are several of the stanitsa bigshots whom I know. There is a frightful din going on. Everyone is yelling, everyone is talking at once. Each tries to speak before his neighbour, interrupting him but no-one is listening. When I enter several people cry out in unison.

‘Semon Semonovich! Sit down, sit down. What do you want dear friend? Friendship! You can find it here.’

‘Do you know whose health we are drinking?’ whispers one of the party to me. ‘Ivan Tolstopuzov has thrown this party,’ my informant says quietly and with his eyes on the bottle, ‘in order to convince the skhod to support him. He wants to be ataman.’

‘I wouldn’t advise it’ I replied.

‘But what do you think? Are we right to elect him?’

‘Well if you’re drinking his health then I can only think that you intend to thrust this rogue on our Commune again.’

‘Yes that’s true. We didn’t ask him. He nominated himself and stood himself. (Already up to 10 people have gathered here and all are staggering from strong drink.) Today we will continue here but tomorrow we will go to the gypsy’s and the day after to Petrovna’s.’
The report was then rounded off on the day following the election. The weary Cossacks are sitting around discussing the candidate they have finally elected and wondering how they could possibly have elected such an ‘ass’ for ataman.

‘Who shouted for him? Who voted for such an ass?’
‘Asses like you and I,’ answered other Cossacks.
‘Where was he elected?’
‘What? You really don’t know? At the Gypsy’s, in the tavern, at Petrovna’s.’

In an election in Mitianskaia Stanitsa, a condescending report again emphasized the venality of the process and the indispensable role of vodka: ‘When faced with such important questions as the election of the stanitsa, the stanichniki’ don’t usually give it a lot of thought and decide the matter in a fairly original manner, ie whoever provided the most buckets of vodka will be ataman.’

What are we to make of these descriptions? They appear to offer a prima facie case that the Cossack elections had degenerated into a grotesque parody of the democratic process. The blatant corruption and the self-indulgent orgy were surely all signs that the Cossack system of self-government was devoid of any justification for its continuance. Yet venality and vodka were only the most visible parts of a much more complex ritual. That it should have attracted the attention of outside observers was not surprising especially since it confirmed what they and their readers already thought they knew and wanted confirmed. However, if one seeks to penetrate beyond the vodka fumes a very different picture emerges.

These reports reveal other features of the electoral process, perhaps inadvertently, that sustain a very different interpretation from the one outlined above. All the accounts of the elections emphasized the intense exhilaration that gripped the stanitsa during election time. Everyone was caught up in the campaign, engaging in passionate discussion of the merits of respective candidates. Cossacks of a stanitsa met, discussed, quarrelled, brawled, and voted as a community. What was taking place was not merely the election of an ataman, but the reaffirmation of a community’s collective identity, a ritual that reinforced the sense of belonging to a distinct and privileged group. What other social group in Tsarist Russia could do this, and on such a scale? Sometimes the

*Members of the stanista.
most obvious point of what was happening seemed to escape outside observers. The very sections of educated society that were struggling to gain access to the political process failed to appreciate what was taking place in front of their eyes. In a society characterized by government and bureaucratic monopoly of the political process, here were free men routinely electing their administration every three years.

The elections served a further purpose in binding the khutora to the stanitsa. The khutora were part of the stanitsa and had as much right to vote and participate as those Cossacks who actually lived in the stanitsa settlement. Cossacks were not isolated on their farmsteads or within their khutora but were part of a larger whole, looking beyond their immediate environment and accustomed to acting on a larger scale than their peasant neighbours. These triennial elections were one of the primary means by which the Cossacks asserted and confirmed who they were both to themselves and the outside world. They were a festival of Cossack identity.

The Cossacks were perfectly well aware that they were being bribed and that most of the candidates had dubious motives for wanting office. The conversation of the journalist in the tavern showed that clearly as did Mikhail Kharuzin’s discussions with the Cossacks earlier.68 The report of the election in Mitianskaia Stanitsa went on to complain that there were many honourable men in the stanitsa who would have made decent atamans, but since they were unwilling or unable to provide the requisite hospitality they were consistently ignored.69 This was to miss the point. What gave the elections their vitality was precisely this sense of festival. If people had merely turned up on the day of the election, cast their vote and returned home, one of their most important functions would have been lost and along with this the enthusiastic participation of the whole community. Cossacks like peasants everywhere endured a life of backbreaking toil from childhood until old age: that they should seize the opportunity to make merry when the occasion arose should not arouse either surprise or disapproval. Elections were one such occasion.

As for the motives of the ataman in seeking office, it would be a mistake to judge him according to modern standards of public service. He was not a bureaucrat in the modern sense, but an office-holder in a traditional society. Both the office-holder and the electorate expected him to profit from his time in office. It was not a question of if but of how much. Corrupt as many of them were, the atamans did have their roots in the local community and were amenable to pressure in a way that a centrally appointed bureaucrat would not be. While this meant that the
The Local Administration of the Don Cossacks

The ataman possessed an intimate degree of knowledge about the local community and the power to exploit that knowledge, it also meant that he was acutely aware of what exploitation was acceptable to the community and what was not. It was not as if the alternative, an official appointed by St. Petersburg or Novocherkassk, was particularly appealing. The bureaucracy at its lower levels was notorious for corruption and arbitrariness. The reality of some degree of local accountability placed limits on the level of corruption. The appointment of a bureaucrat would also have stopped the process of communal affirmation that the elections represented. In all these ways, the elections represented far more than the drunken binge so frequently commented upon and they played a vital role in the Cossacks’ sense of who they were and to what they belonged.

The administration of justice

One of the paradoxes of Imperial Russia was the co-existence of state power of the most centralized kind in some areas with the loosest forms in others. Thus on the one hand, the state had achieved for itself the monopoly on the legitimate use of armed force within its territory much earlier than most European states. On the other hand, it exercised no direct jurisdiction over the majority of its subjects until the 1905 Revolution when peasants were finally subjected to the same law code as everyone else.

The principle of equality before the law which was one of the building blocks of a modern society never took root in Imperial Russia, although great strides were made in this direction from the era of the Great Reforms. The slowness of the transition to a system of unitary law can in part be explained by the chaos that existed within the Imperial state in regard to its own laws. Between the Ulozhenie of 1649 and the Codification of the Russian Laws completed by Speransky in 1829, there was no attempt to codify Imperial law. Consequently officials were faced with a variety of laws, ordinances, secret directives which overlapped, contradicted and negated each other. Until the state rationalized its own rules, it had no hope of imposing a uniform legal system within the Empire as a whole. Tsarist Russia faced a particularly difficult task in this respect as it contained so many culturally diverse peoples who continued to run their lives according to their own laws, despite centuries of Muscovite and Imperial Rule.

Cossack law had evolved separately from Imperial law and was based on radically different principles. Custom and tradition were the
foundations of Cossack law, which had never been written down or codified.\textsuperscript{70} Svatikov argued that Muscovite and Imperial law were founded on autocracy, centralization and serfdom, while Cossack law was defined by popular sovereignty, self-administration, free use of natural resources, and political and civic freedom.\textsuperscript{71} Although flattering to the Cossacks, this comparison is not without foundation. The radical social and political egalitarianism of the early Cossack communities expressed itself in the rules which they created and under which they lived. Everyone, whether ataman or simple Cossack, was subject to one law, the law of the Cossacks. Justice was administered by the community and was no respecter of persons, as many atamans found to their cost. Often Cossack law clashed directly with Muscovite and Imperial Law particularly on issues such as the right of sanctuary. Even after the Cossacks were incorporated into the Empire, they continued to run their lives according to their own laws until well into the nineteenth century. Only then did the government make a determined effort to establish the primacy of its own law code over the local one. In contrast to its attempt to subordinate the sbor and the ataman, the government pursued the primacy of Imperial Law with much greater consistency and succeeded substantially in reducing Cossack autonomy in this fundamental area without ever quite destroying it.

The process of subordinating Cossack law to Imperial Law began with the Law of 1835 and continued with the Laws of 1870 and 1891. These laws progressively reduced the competence of the Cossack courts while expanding those of the state. The Law of 1835 delineated for the first time the jurisdiction of the Cossack courts and the punishments they could impose. The clear intention was to restrict the courts to disputes between neighbours, within the family, and petty crimes. The Law of 1870 tilted the balance heavily in favour of Imperial Law. Cossack courts were deprived of the right to impose corporal punishment and could only deal with family disputes, very minor thefts and quarrels over property. The Law of 1891 sought to reduce the courts to a cipher by restricting their remit to dealing with petty crime, and removing any property dispute involving more than 100 roubles.\textsuperscript{72}

It was one thing for the government to issue laws but quite another to enforce them. There is little doubt about the level of unhappiness of the Cossacks about the legal reforms. They were particularly bitter about the loss of the right to impose corporal punishment, which they believed made a mockery of the courts.\textsuperscript{73} Despite the government ban on corporal punishment, Cossack courts continued to impose it with the support of the community. The flogging of the trio mentioned earlier
was a case in point. An evaluation of the Law of 1891 by the War Ministry suggested that this was happening more systematically. While generally satisfied with the operation of the new law, it noted that Cossack courts continued to feel entitled to impose floggings and that further measures might be necessary in this regard. It is difficult to know how frequently Cossacks imposed their own law rather than Imperial law since they were hardly likely to broadcast the fact, but it seems safe to assume that it was in more than isolated incidents and or in trivial disputes. When a crime warranted it, Cossack communities applied the death penalty in horrific forms, just as peasants did, although it was wholly illegal in the eyes of the state. Within a narrowing framework, Cossack law continued to play an important part in the life of the community.

Cossack legal procedure was characterized by the almost complete absence of formality. The process began with the election of stanitsa judges, of whom twelve were elected each year, but only four were required to serve at one time. A minimum of two were required to hear any case and no judge could hear a case in which he had a personal interest. These requirements were laid down by the Law of 1891 but they were substantially in line with Cossack tradition. Being a judge was not a popular office since it was time consuming and had no salary. Moreover, there was the possibility of creating enemies. The stanitsa dealt with this reluctance by imposing it as a communal obligation which ensured that most men would have to serve at some point in their lives.

To bring a case was relatively simple, although like litigation everywhere it cost money. A written request was delivered to the ataman or one of the judges. This necessitated access to a literate person, normally the pisar’ who charged for his services. A date was then fixed for the hearing, usually Sunday after church. One of the judges introduced the case and was followed by the plaintiff who put his side and produced witnesses to support it. The defendant then did the same. After the depositions, the judges retired to consider their verdict, announced their decision and imposed penalties if appropriate. The case was then closed.

That was how cases were supposed to be conducted: the reality of course was nothing like this. Like any other appeal to the community, a court case was not only a contest between two individuals but an important social event. Kharuzin witnessed many court cases conducted by the Cossacks and gave a general account of their operation. The plaintiffs and defendants turned up in court with witnesses and family and friends to cheer them on and abuse the other side. Immediately upon the reading of the charges, a fierce quarrel would break out which occasionally
degenerated into a brawl. Women were regarded as particularly troublesome in these quarrels, as their voices were much more piercing than those of the men. The judges, for their part, did not regard it as part of their duties to preserve an Olympian detachment from the proceedings and frequently joined in the arguments, swore and cracked jokes.77

The conduct of court cases attracted a good deal of adverse comment. A report from the head of Cherkasskii Okrug in 1880 listed several of the failings of Cossack legal procedure. Among them were: failure to summon witnesses, defendants or plaintiff, or doing so only orally; failure to write down the decision of the court; arriving at a decision without consulting all the litigants; no attested copy of the decision made; disproportionate punishment for petty crime; depriving litigants of the right to appeal; corruption and illiteracy of the judges.78 That these problems were not unique to Cherkasskii Okrug was evident from Kharuzin’s descriptions. He reported that it was not uncommon for up to nine summonses to be issued before the accused appeared in court. Many witnesses refused to give evidence for fear of making enemies and even those who did testify expected vodka from their own side. Judges too often refused to begin consideration until they were supplied with vodka, doubtless maintaining equity by taking it from both sides.79

Many outside observers felt that the courts were an anachronism and unable to cope with the demands of contemporary life. Another article in Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti argued that if the state system, staffed by properly trained legal personnel, sometimes found it difficult to adjudicate the complex disputes of modern life, then what chance had these illiterate judges of reaching the correct decision: ‘It is clear that the pressure of new demands and circumstances in the life of the Don inhabitants have created new customs, new judicial relations which the frequently illiterate judges cannot satisfactorily codify. The bankruptcy of the court stems directly from this circumstance.’80

Unlike other areas of their life that were subject to criticism by outsiders, the Cossacks participated in the criticism of their courts. They complained of the interminable length of time it took to reach a decision, the expense in bringing a case and the difficulties in enforcing a decision once the court had finally made one.81 Given that these complaints have been and are levelled at legal systems throughout the world, there was an undeniable sense of frustration among the Cossacks over the courts, particularly over punishing criminals.

In spite of these criticisms, the courts still performed a significant function within the community. Above all, the Cossacks’ court system was familiar to the people it served, operated by people whom
everybody knew, and on principles which everyone understood. An article written in response to some of the attacks on the Cossack courts defended them precisely for these reasons, contrasting the different principles on which Cossack and Imperial courts operated: ‘The first decided the matter on the basis of popular custom while the latter decides on the basis of the existing laws, which, as I have said, have little in common with prevailing popular custom.’

The underlying principle of the Cossack court system was the restoration of harmony within the community. Restitution and reconciliation were the desired outcomes of the Cossack court process except in the case of outsiders. At every stage during the legal process, the disputing parties were asked to settle the matter themselves. When a Cossack first informed the ataman of his intention to bring a case, the ataman usually asked him to go back and sort out the problem himself. This was repeated before the court proceedings were formally opened and was urged throughout the hearings. So important was this that if the two disputing parties came to a private accommodation after the court’s verdict then this normally took priority over the court’s. Usually, it was much easier to reach an amicable compromise over such things as quarrels between spouses, drunkenness and fights. Property disputes were notoriously difficult to resolve without recourse to the law. Reconciliation was sealed with the drinking of copious amounts of vodka, with judges, plaintiffs, defendants and attendant supporters joining in.

This sort of solution was much easier to achieve in a court system that was characterized by informality and familiarity. Judges tended to have a personal knowledge of the defendants and plaintiffs, frequently taking this into account in reaching their verdict and sentence. Cossack courts recognized the damage that an unreconciled dispute could do in a small community if it was allowed to fester. It was as much a part of the Cossack court’s business to see that the disputing parties were reconciled as to pronounce on the rights and wrongs of a particular case. No less than quarrels in the sbor or over the election of the ataman, the end result of court activity had to be unanimity and harmony for the sake of the wider community. In this way, Cossack law and courts were an integral part of the mechanism by which Cossacks regulated their lives.

Criticism of their own legal system by the Cossacks did not imply support for the imposition of Imperial Law. Whatever the faults of the Cossack system, it was not an alien code imposed from the outside. The formality of the state system with its own rituals, procedures and aims was the opposite of the Cossack one. Designed to impress all with the
majesty and authority of the state, it was an intimidating and humiliating experience for Cossacks who, in common with many peasant cultures, found formal legal systems bewildering. When the community felt that their own courts were failing them, they did not turn to the state system, but resorted to a legal tradition completely outside the supervision of Imperial law.

Samosud, literally self-judgement, was the savage alter ego of the normally mild Cossack system of justice. It had strong parallels among peasant communities as well. Unlike the protracted, rambling and theatrical process of the standard court process with its emphasis on reconciliation, samosud was swift and violent. There was absolutely no attempt at reconciliation with the underlying principles being revenge and punishment of the most ferocious kind. In the government’s eyes it was illegal and an infringement of its own prerogatives, but in the eyes of the community it was a legitimate action carried out with the authority and approval of the community. Cossack communities were perfectly capable of distinguishing acts of violence committed by individuals for their own reasons from those carried out at the behest of the community. Individual murderers were likely to be handed over to the state to be dealt with. It is impossible to estimate the extent of samosud since community approval and solidarity made it extremely difficult for the government, and subsequently historians, to pursue any investigation. Yet it was a feature of Cossack life no less than in peasant communities, hidden for the most part, but occasionally emerging from the shadows which cloaked it.

Cossacks did not lightly resort to samosud, and for most breaches of the law were content to use either the soslovie, or state courts, whatever their complaints and grumbles about them. The principle exception to this was theft, above all theft of livestock. Horse and cattle rustlers could expect little mercy if they were caught in the act and would be lucky to escape with maiming. It was far more usual for them to be killed as this reduced the possibility of awkward questions and investigations. Rustling in the Don was highly organized and on a large scale with a chain existing from thieves to buyers. In Donetskii Okrug in one year alone 1,388 horses, 426 oxen and 192 other cattle were stolen. In the same year only one-tenth of thefts led to successful prosecutions. The failure of the state either to prevent theft or catch thieves spawned a wave of anger and frustration which was released through samosud.

Understandably the population is increasingly anxious as the number of horse and cattle thefts grows every year. This anxiety
expresses itself in savage forms of *samosud* on thieves... In Donetskii *Okrug* there were cases of public lynchings of inveterate thieves, unfortunately leading to penal servitude for several useful citizens.90

Certain aspects of Cossack life made them particularly vulnerable to horse and cattle theft. For several months each year the Cossacks allowed their livestock to wander free with minimal supervision. This was true above all in the wilderness of the trans-Don steppe where thousands of horses roamed unguarded for months at a time. Populated by only a few stanitsas and the seven Kalmyk *ulus*, it was ideal territory for rustlers. The occupation of the neighbouring Astrakhan and Stavropol Steppes by two other Kalmyk tribes, the Great and Little Derbet Hordes, who were completely outside state supervision, provided an untraceable outlet for stolen horses. A thriving trade in horses developed as horses stolen in one steppe were disposed of in another. Both Cossacks and Kalmyks participated in this trade.91

The loss of livestock was a catastrophic blow to most Cossack families whose economic position was already perilous. The monetary loss was accompanied by the loss of draught power, which, if it came during the spring sowing, put the family in a critical position. The theft of a war horse was the most disastrous of all. It had to be replaced immediately but hardly any Cossack family had cash reserves of 125 roubles. The only way was to sell off any other livestock the family possessed, with dire consequences for its future. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa between 1875 and 1880 a particularly large and well-organized gang had plunged the stanitsa into a crisis, reducing over twenty families to ruin as a result of their activities.

In summer and spring, the inhabitants literally camp with all their property and belongings in the field with the aim of preserving it intact. If on the other hand they had left it at home where the protection of the hearth was dependent on people who were old, weak, and unable for field work, they risked the loss of their hearth in the deep night.92

The theft of livestock had such dire consequences that ferocious retribution was exacted on those caught in the act. One such incident in Raponinskaia Stanitsa found its way into the press. Three Cossacks surprised a gang of Kalmyk rustlers and immediately raised the alarm in the nearby Perlazhinskii Khutor. Gathering a posse, the Cossacks pursued the Kalmyks into the steppe. They captured two of the gang, who
were beaten so severely that one of them died. The report commented on the general attitude to such incidents among the population: ‘Such savage punishments meted out by popular justice are eloquent testimony to the depths of bitterness of the people against thieves who threaten their livelihood and who feel insufficiently protected by the existing measures for deterring and punishing theft.’

It is important not to exaggerate the incidents of samosud. As we have said, it was not something that Cossacks used lightly. Those most likely to suffer it were thieves caught in the act and outsiders such as the Kalmyk gang who fitted both conditions. Where the offenders were part of the stanitsa, they were much more likely to be put through the normal judicial process. The gang operating in Razdorskaia escaped samosud, but were eventually exiled to Siberia through the decision of the stanitsa sbor. Such a decision required a two thirds majority of the stanitsa sbor which was no simple matter to achieve and gave some indication of the unwillingness of the population to apply the much swifter system of samosud against their own. In all, 21 people were exiled, a traumatic experience for the stanitsa, since all the gang had strong roots within the community.

**Conclusion**

The local administration of the Don Cossacks had always been rooted in their communities. Only in the nineteenth century did the government attempt to reach into the stanitsas and *khutory* to take control of the local administration. However, it achieved very mixed results largely due to the weakness of its own administration, its lack of consistency and, not least, the continuing vitality of local institutions. Where the government was consistent in its drive to undermine local institutions, it did achieve results, as for example in the assertion of Imperial law over Cossack law. Yet even here it did not establish itself as the single legitimate source of justice. Where the Cossacks felt that restrictions on them clashed with their own sense of what was appropriate, such as the use of corporal punishment, they ignored them. More challenging still to the government was the existence of a parallel system of justice which derived completely from the community and was invoked when the Cossacks felt that the state system was failing them. The community remained the ultimate repository of norms, not the state.

In other areas of the administration the government’s achievements were more ephemeral. Despite the arguments of McNeal and Svatikov, the Cossack administration continued to enjoy substantial autonomy.
and had far more influence over the daily lives of the Cossacks than the government. Cossacks elected their own administration and exerted control over its workings. There was no Justice of the Peace or Land Captain appointed from above to supervise and control the Cossack administration. Consequently, the administration remained an integral part of the community’s life, possessing widespread support within the stanitsa and giving the possibility of co-ordinated action on a scale impossible in peasant communities.

That the Cossack administration had many faults is obvious. It was creaky, cumbersome and slow. Corruption and venality were inherent parts of its operation. All women and many men were excluded from the sbor. No woman had a say in the election of the ataman or his assistants. Yet in spite of this, it continued to hold the loyalty of the whole community. The sbor was the focus of the community’s public life although it might have remained dormant for long periods. When issues were raised that went to the heart of the Cossacks’ existence, the sbor surged into life and became the arbiter of the community, with its decision accepted by all. Even the elections conducted on a tide of vodka were more than a chance for a good time at someone else’s expense. They represented a degree of community control over the administration to a level unparalleled elsewhere among the rural population. Just as importantly, the elections provided an opportunity to bring the whole stanitsa together, renewing the bonds between the stanitsa and khutora and proclaiming to the Cossacks and to the outside world that they were free men within the most autocratic state in Europe. In these ways the administration remained the instrument of the community which begot it. The collapse of the Imperial regime and subsequently the Provisional Government did not bring down with them the local administration of the Don Cossacks. Enjoying centuries of an unbroken tradition of self-government, the Cossack stanitsas survived both, and only succumbed to the massive violence of the Red Army during the Civil War.
Family and Community Among the Don Cossacks

A common history, a shared way of life and a set of self-governing institutions helped to preserve a collective identity among the Cossacks. But the cohesion of Cossack society did not stem primarily from these. Cossack solidarity was ultimately underpinned by a sense of family and community, in which the boundaries between the two were constantly being broken. As a result of this process, family and community were inextricably linked, creating a remarkable depth of consensus and common interest among the Cossacks. In the midst of endless economic crises and wider cultural change which threatened to dissolve the Cossacks into an amorphous mass of rural poor, it was the sense of family and community that stabilized and preserved the Cossacks as a separate people.

The Cossack family and community were shaped by the traditions of a warrior society and the experience of the frontier. A symbiosis existed between family and community. The community was the root of the family while familial links bound the community together. The ties between family and community were complex and multi-layered. Unravelling these ties leads into the heart of Cossack life: household structure, power relations within the family, the transmission of property, marriage, and more generally relations between men and women. In other words, the essence of what it was to be a Don Cossack in late Imperial Russia.

A common source of traditions defining family life did not rule out diversity. These traditions were broad enough to accommodate a variety of family structures and relationships. There was no archetypal Cossack family. Several variants existed that were influenced by whether the family was in the upper or lower Don, was Orthodox or a follower of Old Belief, the life cycle of its members, and so on. Then there were
other factors, more intangible but no less real in their repercussions for family life. The personalities of the individual men and women who made up each family may have left little mark on the historical record but doubtlessly had the decisive role in interpreting communal norms into the concrete experience of each separate family.

Pervading each Cossack family was an awareness of belonging to a distinct community which, while not diminishing the autonomy or singularity of each family, tended to pull it back towards the parent community. Familial and communal relations were not frozen and impervious to change. They evolved as the society itself evolved, but they changed much more slowly than other aspects of Cossack life in this period, providing stability in a time of transition.

The origin of the Cossack community and family

In the early stages of their existence the Cossacks formed communities, but not families. The harsh realities of steppe life offered little security to armed men and none at all to defenceless dependents. The most permanent homes the early Cossacks knew were the stockades in which they spent the winter. Consequently, few Cossacks married before the end of the seventeenth century.1 In Verkhne-Kurmoiarskaia Stanitsa there were no marriages before the reign of Peter the Great. When the history of the stanitsa was written in 1824, there were still people alive who remembered a Cossack of the stanitsa, Sergei Roskrevalin, who had lived until he was 95 and had been only the third Cossack in the stanitsa to take a wife.2

The community substituted itself for the family and became the focus of the Cossacks’ loyalty and commitment. The perils of life on the steppe forged a community with exceptionally close bonds between its members who were entirely dependent on each other for survival. If a Cossack was captured his comrade would seek either to rescue him or, if this was impossible, to seize a wealthy Turk to exchange for him. Before going on campaign Cossacks kissed the cross and swore an oath ‘to die together for each other, to stand one behind the other and so the glory of the Cossacks will not be lost’.3 The Cossack custom of odnosumstvo (‘one bag’), in which a group of Cossacks placed all their valuables in one bag as a mark of their trust in each other, dates from this era of Cossack history.4

A still more intense relationship was sworn brotherhood (pobratimstvo), corresponding to the concept of blood-brothers in other societies. This was a deeply rooted custom in many nomadic societies, including
the Mongols. Paul Ratchnevksy described the custom as it existed among the Mongols. ‘The oath of blood-brothership was, according to Pelliot, taken by members of different clans, and was regarded by the nomads as more binding than the tie of a direct blood relationship.’5 Similarly among the Cossacks, two friends swore to be faithful friends to each other until death, to rescue each other in need and to die for each other in battle. Mikhail Kharuzin, basing his work on the account of an earlier historian wrote:

in former times, sworn brotherhood was very widespread. It was a rare Cossack who – in the words of Timoshchenkov – did not have a so-called brother with whom he concluded a union in life and in death. It was the case that if one of the brothers during a battle with enemies had his horse killed, his brother did not abandon him, but dragged him on to his own horse. But if this was impossible then he himself dismounted and prepared fully to share in the fate of his brother. When one of the brothers fell into enemy captivity then the other looked for any means to rescue him.6

The emotional fervour which the original Cossacks felt for their comrades provided the cohesion necessary for a disparate and often desperate group of men to create viable communities. Unencumbered by traditional familial ties, and bound to each other by the hazards of steppe life, their communities became their families.

In the sixteenth century Ivan the Terrible had ordered the Cossacks to marry, but it was not until the reign of Peter the Great over a century later that the exclusively male communities changed conspicuously.7 From the eighteenth century the communal way of life based on one dwelling place gave way to individual family-based houses. This happened at approximately the same time as the Cossacks shifted from a nomadic way of life to a sedentary one. It remained a slow transition with many peculiarities, some of which were to have a lasting impact on Cossack family and communal life.

The first women to live permanently in the lower stanitsas, the first Cossack settlements, were captured from the Cossacks’ Tatar enemies.8 When the upper stanitsas were settled most of the women there tended to be of Great Russian origin. Many commentators in the nineteenth century noted the difference in physical features between Cossacks of the lower and upper Don. Bronevski wrote that the women in the lower Don were primarily of Tatar, Kalmyk and Turkish ethnicity, while those in the upper Don were Russian.9 Krasnov, in his study for the General
Staff, noted that in the lower Don there was strong tendency for Cossacks to have a darker skin, black eyes and black hair, while in the upper Don there was an equally pronounced tendency for fair hair, fair skins and light brown or grey eyes.10

Life for the first Cossack women must have been desolate. Seized in war and brought to live among men who were of a different culture, spoke a different language and practised a different religion, their lives were harsh. Nor did the Cossacks do anything to ease their plight, regarding them as chattels.11 Probably Cossacks first began to live with captured women some time in the early seventeenth century, although they neither married them nor regarded them as part of the Cossack community. Nevertheless, slowly the rudiments of family life began to emerge, although in a style peculiar to the Cossacks.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, instead of simply living with captured women, the Cossacks started to marry them in a secular ceremony, involving the couple themselves and the community. The couple approached the community gathered on the maidan, where the Cossack announced to the community his intention to take this woman as his wife. The couple offered a short prayer and bowed four times to each other. The groom then spoke: ‘You, say you will be a wife to me’ to which she replied, ‘You, say you will be a husband to me.’ He then placed his kaftan around the shoulders of the woman and they were now married in the eyes of the community.12 Divorce was an equally simple and prosaic matter. The couple again stood before the community on the maidan and the man declared, ‘Honourable stanitsa, she is no longer a wife to me and I am not a husband to her.’ He then removed his kaftan from her and they were divorced. Any man was free to take her as his wife.13 It was not unknown for a Cossack who was short of equipment before setting out on campaign to offer his wife in exchange for the missing kit.14

The stabilization of Cossack communities and their increasing permanency marked an improvement in the life of the women living among the Cossacks. Family life became more structured as a distinction evolved between family and community. Women and children were now included in the definition of community. The evidence relating to the first children is contradictory. Rigel’man claimed that the Cossacks regarded them as a nuisance and drowned them. Later on they began to allow male children to live while continuing to drown females, before finally allowing all children to live.15 While many societies practise some form of infanticide, it is hard to believe that any community could systematically destroy all its offspring. Other sources argued that children had
always been highly valued by the Cossacks. Kotel’nikov related that the birth of the first child in the stanitsa was the cause of great joy among all the Cossacks, not just the parents. Well into the eighteenth century, a child was as likely to be raised by the whole stanitsa as by its natural parents, who might be absent or dead.

The most significant change taking place in the Cossack communities in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was the rising prominence of women. The use of the word kazachka (Cossack woman) indicated the broadening of the notion of community to include women. Several trends converged to convince the Cossacks that women were more than merely prizes of war. The most important was the realization that women could contribute to the military needs of the Cossacks. When the Turks besieged the fortress of Azov in 1641, the Cossacks defending the city were ably assisted by their women.

During all these assaults, the women were not only unafraid to bring food, powder and other equipment, but also during the attacks hurled flaming barrels of pitch, hot oil, boiling water and other similar weapons. Just as the women were unafraid of these assaults, equally they did not fear bullets. The Turks could no more defend themselves against the women than they could against their husbands.

The defence of Azov was the most famous exploit of Cossack women, but it was not an isolated incident. Military activity continued to be a part of the Cossack woman’s life until the nineteenth century.

The shift from a nomadic to a settled way of life, but within the context of a frontier society, generated further changes in women’s lives. Permanent settlements arose on the sites of the old winter camps, but they were far from secure. The military commitments of the Cossacks and the threat posed by steppe nomads remained as great as ever. Until the end of the eighteenth century, Cossack settlements were frequently stripped of all active males for service in the Imperial armies, or in their own private campaigns against their steppe enemies, the Azovtsi and Nogai. Responsibility for the domestic economy fell on women alone for long periods. Of even more consequence for the status of women, particularly in the context of a warrior society, was their participation in the defence of their homes and community.

At the very least women were responsible for securing the elderly, the young, the sick, and the animals within the stockade if an attack was imminent, but if need arose women were also expected to engage the
nomads in battle.20 An essay in the provincial newspaper *Donskaia Rech'* described the situation as it had existed until the end of the 1820s.

Cossack women in the absence of their husbands and fathers put on male clothes and repulsed attacks of enemies and also formed cavalry units etc. Even as recently as sixty years ago, going into the fields to work with scythes, pitchforks and rakes, the women also took weapons. In case of need, at least one detachment of women transformed themselves into men and defended themselves courageously.21

The realization by male Cossacks of their dependency on women transformed the position of women within the Cossack communities. Women could now be accepted as integral members of the community, even if not fully equal members. No less significant was the impact that the hazardous conditions of the frontier must have had on women themselves. Thrust into situations where the safety and well-being of their families and communities depended on them, they became accustomed to taking decisions and showing initiative independently of men. The strength of character of Cossack women displayed in these years remained a feature of Cossack family and community life until the end of the old regime and, as we shall see, was remarked upon by all who studied Cossack customs and culture.

The period from the late seventeenth century until the end of the eighteenth century was one of profound reorganization of Cossack life as much socially as politically or economically. A society which had been exclusively male, and recognized no loyalties outside the warrior brotherhood, gave way to one in which family bonds existed alongside those of the community. The Cossack family was a creation, however, of a frontier society and therefore of notably different conditions from those that prevailed in the central Russian provinces. The structure and organization of the Cossack family reflected the frontier both in the continuing importance of the community and above all in the prominence of women.

**Household structure 1860–1914**

Cossack family life intersected around the *kuren*, the approximate equivalent of the Great Russian *izba* or the Ukrainian *khata*. *Kuren* was a derivation of the Mongol word *kuriyen*, meaning a defensive encampment of wagons drawn up in a circle.22 That the Cossacks took such an alien but appropriate word for an institution at the heart of their life is
indicative of their close relationship with the tatar peoples and life on the frontier. Whatever the similarities that existed between kuren, izba, and khata, they were not interchangeable and neither were the rules under which they operated. To understand better the contrasts and similarities between the households we will begin with a description of the traditional Russian peasant household.

The image that we have of the Russian peasant household is of an extended family made up of grandparents, married sons and their wives, unmarried daughters and several grandchildren. Inside this family there was a rigid hierarchy of authority and status based on gender and age. The grandfather, or bol’shak, presided over the family, wielding despotic authority. All members of the family were subordinate to his will which was reinforced by the estate administration during the time of serfdom and by the Commune in the post-emancipation period. The bol’shak was responsible for his family before the authorities, controlled the family finances, decided on the allocation of field work and inflicted punishment on disobedient members of the family, usually by means of a flogging. He delegated a small portion of his power to his wife who was responsible for the women in the household and wielded a similar degree of power over them. Such an unequal and oppressive hierarchy generated intense strains within the family, but the subordinate members had little choice other than to accept the situation and hope that one day they too would exercise such power. Of course the Russian peasant family was not static, and significant developments occurred in its structure in the post-emancipation period, as changing circumstances allowed challenges to the patriarchal household by both the younger generation and women.23 This remained, however, a gradual process in which the balance of power was still firmly tilted towards males and the older generation.

How closely did the Cossack household match this description? The Cossacks were widely seen as the most patriarchal section of an exceptionally patriarchal society.24 However there were significant distinguishing features of Cossack life which meant that the model of the family outlined above cannot be applied to the Cossacks without very substantial modifications.

It is impossible to speak with precision about the size of the Don Cossack family in the second half of the nineteenth century. The registers of the Ataman’s Chancellory did not record family size, so we are left with only fragmentary evidence. Some of the evidence came from the Don Statistical Committee, other pieces came from the observations of the provincial press and witnesses of Cossack life such as Kharuzin.
The average family size in 1881, according to the Don Statistical Committee, was 4.6 people, which it believed was a decline from what it had been in 1869, when the average size had been 6. This calculation was based on there being 303,044 families in a total population of 1,404,648, giving an average family size of 4.6.\textsuperscript{25} Since this figure included not just Cossacks but peasants and \textit{inogorodnie} as well, it is impossible to separate out a figure for the Cossack family from the total. The Don Statistical Committee gave an estimation of what it believed were the size and relative proportions of the Cossack family. Small families consisting of a father, mother and two children made up 60 per cent of the total, while medium families consisting of 6 to 9 people made up a further 30 per cent. Families with 10 or more people accounted for only 10 per cent of the total.\textsuperscript{26}

What seems clear from these figures was a definite preference for the nuclear family among the Cossacks. If so, it continued into the twentieth century. Grekov, in his study of the economy of the Don in 1905, stated that the extended family was increasingly rare among the Don Cossacks. The clear advantages in economies of scale that an extended family possessed were outweighed by the young couple’s determination to set up their own household as soon as possible, even though the probability was a severe drop in living standards for all concerned.\textsuperscript{27} Occasionally there were families containing up to 50 people scattered among many \textit{kureny} and even over several settlements. Such a family could have at their disposal capital of 10,000 roubles.\textsuperscript{28} These families, however, were wholly exceptional to the general trend of Cossack society.

These bare statistics reveal little about the cultural influences that determined family structure. Cossacks did not live in either an extended or nuclear family, but lived in both at different points in their life cycle. The majority of newlyweds spent some time living in the household of the husband’s parents, usually the four years the man was away on service. When he returned from military service, he had the accumulated pay of four years to help him and his wife set up on their own. A report in \textit{Donskia Oblastnyia Vedomosti} identified this as the point most likely for a young couple to set up their own household, and explained why sometimes the desire was thwarted.

As is well known, among us a large number of young Cossacks leave their family home on their return from service during which time they strive by every means to gather the wherewithal to be their own masters. And so intoxicated with sweet hopes, the Cossack returns home from service. But after a few days he is rudely awakened when
he discovers that his dreams cannot become reality because his father has rented his share of the land for the whole period of the division.\textsuperscript{29}

The fervent wish to be their own master was one of the features that, according to Kharuzin, distinguished Cossack tradition from the larger peasant society. What really distinguished the Cossacks, however, was not the desire to be their own master, which was strong in peasants as well, but the ability to fulfill this desire. The automatic right of each adult Cossack to a share of communal land, rather than that right belonging to the head of the household, which was the norm among the peasantry, was a powerful incentive for the Cossack to set up on his own.

Why should this yearning to set up a separate household be so strong? After all, it made no economic sense, and family links were of exceptional importance among the Cossacks. For the Cossacks, as for the peasantry, the answer was to be found in the tensions that the complex household generated among the different members. However close the family relationships, the strains of having several family units under one roof eventually made life impossible, particularly for the younger generation. This was true above all in the relationship of the different women in the household. Both general surveys and investigations carried out in individual stanitsas identified this relationship as the wedge that eventually split a complex household into its constituent parts.\textsuperscript{30}

In this respect Cossack experience was no different from the general experience of peasant Russia.\textsuperscript{31} It is not difficult to imagine why there should be such acute tensions between the mother-in-law and the daughters-in-law. The daughters-in-law were strangers in the house of their husbands’ parents and until the arrival of children were only connected through their relationship to the men. They and the mother-in-law would be in constant contact with each other, far more so than with any of the men, who were more likely to be out in the fields. This problem was exacerbated among the Cossacks since many of them left for service almost immediately after marrying, depriving the young wife even of the support of her husband.\textsuperscript{32} In such situations it is not surprising that the wife would exert intense pressure on her husband to set up their own household as soon as possible.

Cossack men were not likely to need much prompting to create their own household. The reasons ranged from the simple desire to be the master in their own home to more selfish ones of not wishing to support their younger brothers through service, or not wanting to expose their wives to the unwanted sexual advances of male relatives.\textsuperscript{33} Occasionally
household division came about through quarrels between the brothers, or it might be initiated by a father who did not want to help his son through military service.\textsuperscript{34} Whatever the reason or combination of reasons, there were a variety of factors pushing the extended household towards dissolution.

What they did not do, of course, was determine the exact time of any division which would be a matter for each household to sort out for itself. This would depend on the different personalities of the household, the wealth of the family at the time of the proposed partition and above all the marital status of the younger generation. It was unheard of for a single Cossack to set up his own household.

The broaching of the subject of a division, especially during the life of the father, was a delicate subject and had to be handled with tact. Again we encounter regional differences between the upper and lower Don. In the upper Don, where the authority of the head of the family was traditionally stronger, families were likely to stay together longer than in the lower Don, where Cossacks sought to move out of the parental home as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{35} Kharuzin and Nomikosov both stated that the normal reaction of a father to a demand for a division was refusal, and that it might take as long as two or three years for him to finally come around to accepting it.\textsuperscript{36} His blessing was indispensable since, if he withheld it, he was not obliged to give his sons anything.\textsuperscript{37} In the end most seem to have come round and sanctioned the division of their household if their sons were persistent enough.

Two circumstances contributed to the eventual crumbling of the father’s opposition to a division. One was the automatic entitlement to land of every adult male which guaranteed access to the most precious commodity of peasant society. This could not be refused on the grounds that the father did not want him to leave the household. The other was the lack of any institutional means for the father to enforce his will. No Cossack \textit{sbor} would interfere in the process of household division simply because the father was against it.\textsuperscript{38} This was in stark contrast to the communes described in Christine Worobec’s study where the institutional obstacles to division remained formidable even though not quite so absolute as in the time of serfdom.\textsuperscript{39} Despite the close bonds between family and community among the Cossacks, the \textit{sbor}, as we have seen, would only interfere in the affairs of the household in exceptional circumstances. The tradition of a warrior society, and a belief that a man who served in the army was a full member of the community, and therefore able to make his own decisions and his own mistakes, allowed for a greater degree of autonomy between family and community.
Even so, these considerations did not undermine the authority of the father to such an extent that he no longer had authority over his adult son. His control of the common family property gave him a significant lever in his dealings with the younger generation, but the end result of this was only to postpone a division, not to avoid one.

The kuren absorbed and shed members according to the marriage and generational cycle. These were the usual rhythms by which households formed, dissolved and reformed. However, the kuren was flexible enough to expand and contract in other circumstances if need arose. Most often this was the case if a family produced no sons but only daughters. Instead of the daughter taking up residence in her house of her husband’s parents, the husband would move into her parents’ home. This was not quite the straightforward and logical arrangement it might seem. It reversed the normal power relationships between husband and wife, placing the son-in-law in the vulnerable position normally associated with the daughter-in-law. Women had effective safeguards on their property when they married, but a man moving into his in-laws’ house had none. The best he could hope for was a written agreement witnessed by the commune, naming him as the heir to his father-in-law’s property. If this was not bad enough, a man in this position was the object of ridicule from his neighbours and suspicion from his in-laws. Not surprisingly, it was only men from poorer families who would accept such a role reversal. There are no statistics to reveal how many men did move in with their in-laws but, since it is usually noted by sources describing the Cossack family, it must have been fairly common. Given the economic crisis, the number of men having to swallow their pride and move in with their in-laws must have been getting larger rather than smaller.

The most uncomfortable predicament for a man was to enter into a marriage with a wealthy widow. Again it would only be poor men who would contemplate such a relationship. Unlike the son-in-law, who at least was marrying a young girl, a Cossack marrying a wealthy widow was entering into a relationship with a formidable older woman. Neither did marrying a wealthy widow give a poor Cossack access to her wealth. Her right to own property in her own name made him completely dependent on her financially. She was not at all reluctant to make use of this power, as the Cossacks informed Mikhail Kharuzin. ‘She herself will buy shirts and boots for him but she won’t give him a penny piece into his hands.’ Life for such men was a constant humiliation, suffering the jeers of their neighbours.

Children could also be taken into the kuren if a couple were childless to provide them with some security in their old age. An adopted child
was counted as a natural one, received his adopted father’s name and was expected to honour and obey his new parents. A modified version of this was the custom known as ‘feeding’ (vskormlenie) which placed the child somewhere between a member of the family and a hired hand. Usually a wealthy Cossack family would take a child from a poor one. He would keep his own name but have to obey his new parents.

The kuren was a complex and dynamic unit with its own life-cycle. It was a unit of production and consumption and economic rationale helped determine the rhythms of its existence. Cultural factors were no less important and at certain phases prevailed over economic ones. This was true above all in the decision of the younger generation to break away to found their own household, beginning the process again.

**Marriage**

Marriage was the pivotal social institution of Cossack society around which the most important relationships revolved. For the couple themselves it provided the only legitimate forum for sexual relations and the begetting of children. It was the source of the closest human relationships and occasionally the most destructive. Marriage brought together two families who through it entered into a series of reciprocal obligations and rights, and it represented the culmination of their strategies for security and prosperity. It allowed property and labour to be exchanged between families and across the generations. For the community at large, marriage signified a deepening of the attachments within the community. An institution that carried such a burden of expectations and responsibilities was far too important to be left to the desires of the young alone. The two individuals were only one link in a long chain, and considerably more was at stake than their personal happiness, which was frequently outweighed by other considerations.

Originally Cossacks selected their wives from whatever source was closest to hand. Later on, by custom and by law, they became more discriminating. The Law of 1835 forbade marriage with members of other soslovie, attempting to turn the Cossacks into a closed caste. The state was too weak to enforce this rule, but the Cossack tradition of marrying within the stanitsa was more important in achieving the same result. It was widely felt that if a Cossack had to look outside his own stanitsa for a wife then there must be something wrong with him. Marriage with a peasant or inogorochnie remained very rare.

Cossacks tended to marry early. The majority of weddings took place before the age of 20. This was before a Cossack left for service and
allowed his family to gain a replacement labourer. The survey from Berezovskaia and the surrounding stanitsas found 18 the usual age for marriage, while Kharuzin also concluded that early marriage was the norm for Cossacks, whether Orthodox or Old Believers. Unusually these conclusions can be partially born out by statistics. If we take a couple of years at random, we find that in 1870, 62.2 per cent of the men and 78.6 per cent of the women who married that year did so before the age of 20. In 1886, 62.7 per cent of the men and 81.7 per cent of the women married before their twentieth birthday. Since these figures are based on all the Orthodox living in the Voisko including peasants and inogorodnie, they are not as conclusive as they might be. Nevertheless they do support the impressionistic evidence of Kharuzin and the compilers of the surveys of customs in individual stanitsas.

Within the limitations of law and custom, Cossack marital strategies were designed to extend kinship networks as broadly as possible. This was accomplished by an extensive list of taboos on potential marriage partners which, according to Kharuzin, were strictly observed by Cossacks of both the Orthodox and Old Believer faiths. Kharuzin’s claim is supported by specific examples from two stanitsas. In Berezovskaia Stanitsa the taboos on marriage included the immediate family, uncles, aunts, step-brothers and sisters, sons and daughters-in-law, godsons and goddaughters, and godparents of the same child. The same taboos existed in Razdorskaia Stanitsa. Practice on the precise list of taboos varied from place to place, but the underlying principle behind them remained constant: to extend as far as possible kinship alliances. The network of family alliances was constantly being expanded, creating a labyrinthine tangle of connections within the stanitsa.

The selection of a marriage partner was a matter of great consequence. Apart from the personal wishes of the young couple there were many other considerations to be taken into account. The importance of women for the Cossack domestic economy was paramount; the girl, therefore, had to be hard-working, thrifty, healthy and have a good reputation within the stanitsa. These ideals were expressed in a number of typically blunt and earthy sayings, such as ‘A cow is chosen by its horns but a woman by her breasts.’ Depending on your point of view, this could imply that the choosing of a cow and a wife had no essential difference, or that the ability to reproduce was a vital part of the life cycle of rural society among both humans and animals, and that mistakes in judgement were potentially disastrous.

The choice of marriage partner had traditionally been a matter exclusively for the parents. At the time and since, this has been taken as an
example of the unreasonable power of the parents over their children. One would assume that most parents wanted the best for their children and sought to find the most suitable partner, even if they did feel that they were much better equipped to make that decision than their child. Bronevski, writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, argued that the choice of a husband or wife depended absolutely on the wishes of the parents, and he defended this on the grounds that they had much greater experience in these matters.55 Forty years on, another commentator believed that little had changed. In an article on coerced marriages and their consequences, the author, in a report littered with references to the ‘simple people’ and the ‘illiterate in our midst’, wrote that for the more enlightened members of the population marriage was a union freely entered into.

It is thus until we reach the lower layers of the population where the matter is settled very differently. The choice of the bride and bridegroom depends wholly on the will of the parents. The son is obliged to accept unconditionally as his wife a girl chosen by his parents who not only does not love him, but might actually detest him.56

The pressure on a girl to accept her parents’ choice was immense, and for those who had the strength of character to resist unpleasant consequences followed:

on coming of age, the parents of the young girl marry her off to a husband of their choice. The only restriction on this is the practice of obtaining the bride’s consent. Usually the consent is always given and only in exceptional circumstances is it refused. But then the grief of the daughter is great. There is such a scandal about her that she cannot expect to find a good match.57

Nevertheless, there were many indications that the absolute power of the parents in the selection of a marriage partner was beginning to decline by the late nineteenth century. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa, the parents picked a certain girl and then asked the son for his opinion. If he was favourably inclined they would send for the matchmakers and negotiations would begin in earnest. If not, they would look for another. Previously the parents would have ignored the son’s opinion but, as the Cossacks informed the journalist, ‘now the power of the parents is much reduced’.58
Kharuzin from his conversations with the Cossacks believed that opinions concerning the power of the parents over their children’s choice of partner varied greatly. He concluded that parental influence was stronger the earlier the marriage, over daughters than over sons, in the upper stanitsas than in the lower, and among the Old Believers than the Orthodox. On the whole he believed parental influence was less than it had been.\textsuperscript{59}

In spite of this it was extremely rare for a child to marry explicitly against the wishes of the parents. Such unions aroused considerable animosity within the stanitsa and any misfortune the couple suffered was seen as God’s judgement upon them. The damage that such a marriage created could take several years to repair and then often only with the help of other relatives as go-betweens.\textsuperscript{60} Marriage against the parents’ wishes, far from drawing the community closer together disrupted relations, creating animosity within and between families and with the wider community.

Once the parents had found a partner whom they thought was appropriate the negotiations began in earnest. The first stage was to summon a family council which all close relatives, including godparents, attended. The dominant influence at this meeting was the mother; as the Cossacks informed Kharuzin, ‘Here the mother is the big person.’\textsuperscript{61} This is in contrast to the situation among some peasants who excluded women from any role in family decision making.\textsuperscript{62} The family council was a formal occasion with drinks, greetings, discussions about the proposed match and eventually a decision. Sometimes the decision might be postponed to allow one or two of the relatives to check out the girl since ‘without seeing the goods there can be no trade.’\textsuperscript{63}

Once the family had agreed on the choice, the most delicate phase in the operation began: the approach to the girl’s family. A blunt request could lead to an equally blunt refusal, creating a deep sense of shame in the rejected family. To mediate the relationship there existed a professional group of matchmakers who were skilled in the subtle rituals of the proposal and subsequent negotiations.\textsuperscript{64} For some though even this left too much to chance. In Berezovskaia Stanitsa it was normal to take informal soundings of the likely reaction of the girl’s family before making a formal approach through the matchmakers. In this way the risks of a humiliating rejection were minimized.\textsuperscript{65}

Probably by the time the matchmakers arrived with the proposal it was no surprise to the girl’s family. If they were not interested they made a polite excuse thanking the other family for their kind interest, but explaining that they were not yet ready to give their daughter away
in marriage.\textsuperscript{66} If, however, they agreed in principle, the father informed the matchmakers that he needed time to talk the matter over with his family and he fixed a day for them to return when they would be given a definite answer. Once a positive answer had been received the family of the groom then made an open request for marriage by sending bread and salt to the girl’s family.\textsuperscript{67}

The acceptance by the girl’s family of an offer of marriage marked the opening of an lively debate over the matter of the kladka. The kladka was in effect a form of bride price. According to one tradition, it had originated in the distant past when it was alternative to capturing a wife in war.\textsuperscript{68} By the nineteenth century it had become a customary payment from the groom’s family to the bride’s and represented a symbolic compensation for the loss of her labour. Similar customs existed among the peasantry, where it was used to defray the costs of the wedding dress and other necessary expenditure.\textsuperscript{69} According to Cossack custom, however, the kladka went directly to the girl and could not be touched either by her natal or conjugal family.\textsuperscript{70} The negotiations over the kladka were protracted and frequently stormy, but they hardly ever failed once they reached this stage. The mother of the bride was the chief negotiator for her daughter on account of her intricate knowledge of the needs of the household economy.\textsuperscript{71} As well as the kladka, each girl had a trunk (sunduk) in which a dowry separate from the kladka was placed. Only when both families had agreed on the kladka and the dowry could the preparations move on to the next stage.

Once these negotiations had been completed, the betrothal of the couple took place. Both sides were now formally committed to the agreement and if one family backed out they would be liable to hefty compensation payments.\textsuperscript{72} A date was fixed for the wedding and the couple were duly married.

Cossack weddings were expensive affairs especially in the context of accelerating economic hardship. Every stage was accompanied by elaborate ceremonies involving the exchange of presents and the provision of hospitality. For the husband’s family in particular the expense was enormous, as the observer in Berezovskaia Stanitsa complained. He estimated the cost of a typical wedding to be between 50 and 100 roubles, more than the yearly surplus produced by the average Cossack farm.

Cossack weddings are extremely ruinous for the family of the man. Expenditure on the wedding feast and other necessities gets completely out of hand... If the government does not turn its attention
to this foolish custom and take measures to abolish it then sooner or later the majority of Cossacks will be reduced to poverty if a wedding is accompanied by a bad harvest or cattle plague.\textsuperscript{73}

Nor was he impressed by the way the Cossacks conducted themselves, particularly during the Church service, as he sourly recorded: ‘On the way to church they chatter ceaselessly, are drunk and are always singing. When they arrive at church the majority stand at the door talking and acting the fool.’\textsuperscript{74} In Luganskaia Stanitsa the observer believed that from start to finish Cossack weddings were purely commercial transactions and all the ceremonies attached to it were mere trappings.\textsuperscript{75}

Both observations missed the point. Cossack weddings were momentous events in the lives of the family and community. They were economic arrangements, but they were much more than that. They marked one of the great rites of passage of human life and in Cossack eyes amply justified the expenditure on them. Kharuzin was told many times that the two great worries of any father were having enough money to put his son through service and to pay for his wedding.\textsuperscript{76} To skimp upon weddings out of a bourgeois sense of prudence would have been inconceivable for a Cossack family. The resulting sense of shame in the eyes of friends and relatives would have been unbearable and not something the community would ever allow the families involved to forget. Likewise, the ceremonial surrounding the wedding was not simply trappings, but an indication of the significance of what was taking place for all concerned. Families followed such a complicated ritual and spent so lavishly precisely because marriage represented a crossroads in the lives of so many people.

**Marriage and divorce among the old believers**

The most secretive of all peasant communities in Russia were the Old Believers of whom there were tens of thousands among the Cossacks. They took great pains to ensure that outsiders knew as little of their affairs as possible, making the natural reticence of peasant communities appear positively welcoming in comparison. Nevertheless, enough chinks of light appear, to give some idea of their attitudes to marriage and divorce.

The tendency of Old Believers to marry young was more pronounced than among the Orthodox. Since nearly all Old Believers were Cossacks, it offers more confirmation that Cossacks married early. In 1870, 67.2 per cent of men and 76.6 per cent of women who married that year did
so before the age of 20. In 1886 the respective figures for men and women were 77.6 per cent and 87.7 per cent. Kharuzin noted the more pronounced tendency for early marriage among the Old Believers, even stating that in the past boys as young as 11 or 12 had been married to a woman up to 15 years older in order to bring an extra labourer into the family. In Berezovskaia Stanitsa the observer there talked with a Cossack who was involved in one of these marriages.

I asked him to tell me about his family. He answered that he already had three married sons. ‘How can that be?’ I said, ‘You can’t be more than thirty.’

‘Very simple,’ he replied, ‘I was married when I was twelve and my wife was already twenty-five. I am a father by marriage to my children, but only a brother by my beard.’

‘What possessed your parents to marry you off so young?’

‘Work,’ he replied.

Each community appeared to have followed its own customs and traditions. Many of the Old Believer sects did not have priests and retained the old Cossack custom of marrying before the community in a secular ceremony. In Ermozhin Khutor which was part of Verkhne-Chirskia Stanitsa an account of their ceremonies stated ‘they had no permanent priest and the marriage ceremony was carried out by a simple declaration of agreement between the groom and bride in front of witnesses.’ This was also the case in Kireev Khutor.

A more striking difference between the Old Believers and the Orthodox was the more relaxed attitude to divorce among Old Believers. Orthodoxy in general has always had a less rigid prohibition on divorce than Catholicism, allowing in certain circumstances up to three marriages. Among Orthodox Cossacks divorce was rare, although separation was more common. In contrast some Old Believers were matter of fact in their attitudes to divorce:

In the majority of cases it is wives who abandon their husbands. It is not only the young recently married ones, but very often women who leave their husbands as a memento three or four children when they desert them. An annulment of marriage or formal divorce between Old Believers does not present any difficulty for them. In any case the wife gathering her belongings or simply some necessary clothes abandons her husband and appears at her parents’ home, declaring to them that she and her husband have divorced.
A report from another Old Believer community supported the contention that divorce was a simple and straightforward affair.\textsuperscript{85}

Because of the secrecy of the Old Believer communities it is difficult to know how widespread these beliefs were or the extent to which journalists embellished their findings for their readers. Most communities wanted to get on with their lives with the minimum of outside interference and believed that the less outside authorities knew about them the better. The Old Believers tended to keep a distance even from the Orthodox Cossacks. There were clearly differences between the customs of the two faiths, but the scarcity of evidence makes it very difficult to go beyond rather general comparisons.

The transmission of property

In any society control of property is a source of power over other human beings. The power to give or withhold property, to include or exclude relatives from a share in the family property, is a tangible form of control over the behaviour of those relatives, and the closer that society is to the subsistence level then the greater the power is likely to be. For Cossacks, despite their relative wealth, the line between sufficiency and dearth was uncomfortably thin. Most Cossacks counted on the inheritance or transfer of some property from their parents when they set up independent households. The power of parents to control the distribution of property went some way to balancing the rights of sons to an automatic share of communal land. A complex series of rules determined who received what and under what circumstances. These rules varied in detail from stanitsa to stanitsa, but the broad principle, other things being equal, was that all the descendants were entitled to an equal share of their parents’ property.

Property rights among the Cossacks were vested within the family and individual. Most of the property belonging to men was subsumed into the common family fund, but women’s property was clearly and explicitly vested in them as individuals separate from their families.

Family property consisted of the \textit{kuren} itself, furnishings, outbuildings, barns, tools, livestock and cash in the family purse. Apart from marriage, the main transfer of property took place when the household divided. This division could take place on the death of either parent or while they were still alive.\textsuperscript{86} To begin with we can look at property that was to be transferred when the owner of that property died. The best way of probing the rules governing the transmission of property is to look at some of the extant wills. Because we are dealing with a culture
that was primarily oral, the number of written wills was relatively small. In Luganskaia Stanitsa for example it was rare for property owners to leave a written will. Instead there existed the practice of making a will verbally in front of two to four witnesses and for these to execute the will. In the case of quarrels the testimony of these witnesses was binding on all. Nevertheless the wills that do exist are worth looking at in some detail.

Mikhail Kharuzin included 20 written wills which he regarded as typical of Cossack practice. Although it is now impossible to check this statement absolutely, many of the customs they articulate can be supported by the surveys carried out in Berezovskaia, Razdorskaia and Luganskaia Stanitsas, all of which had details of the rules governing property within families. The first will was from Iaruzhenskaia Stanitsa.

20 March 1880. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I, the slave of God, the Cossack M.D. of the Don Army, being sound in mind and memory, have seen fit to draw up a last will and testament of all my goods.

I possess as my personal property in Iaruzhenskaia Stanitsa the following moveable and immoveable property: a hut with a storeroom and garden; a small wood with various types of trees; some horned cattle namely a pair of bulls and two cows. I bequeath on my death this property to my son the Cossack P. D. who with his children now lives with me. Until my death I retain control of this property in order that my aforementioned son now, just as in the past and in the future, will keep me as obliged by law and upon my death give me a Christian burial.

Any descendants who show themselves at the time of my death are not to receive any property. For example, my daughter-in-law and the wife of my deceased son who separated from me and who together with his children, my grandchildren, received his share in full at the time of the separation.

The most salient point of this will is the power of the father over his property and his determination to hold on to that property until the day of his death. His property was the source of his power over his son and he explicitly used it as a means of ensuring his son’s continuing obedience. In all the wills recorded by Kharuzin whoever was bequeathing property inserted this control clause. It would seem logical to assume that the wills recorded by Kharuzin were not exceptional in this
respect, which reinforces the point that control of property was a source of power. Although Cossacks like all peasants were required to support their aged parents and there was strong moral pressure to do so from the community, most parents preferred to rely on more tangible guarantees. Perhaps this was rooted in the awareness that even for a relatively wealthy Cossack life was precarious, and in the event of hardship one of the first economies might be at the expense of the parents. Besides, keeping control of the property ensured that the son could not alienate it or lose it while the father was still alive and thereby bring all the family to ruin, including the father.

The other interesting aspect of the will was the desire to prevent other relatives from claiming a share after the death of the testator. This exclusionary clause seems to have been common and is indicative that quarrels over property were habitual. In this case the testator’s other son had already received his share at the time of separation and his wife was not entitled to any more. It is likely, although not explicitly stated, that the son who was the beneficiary of the will had not received anything at the time of his brother’s separation. On the other hand, it was common for children who looked after their parents to receive something extra for their troubles.89

The will above was a relatively straightforward affair, but another will listed by Kharuzin illustrated some of the complications that arose if a father remarried:

December 9. In the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I the undersigned of Marinskaia Stanitsa of the Army of the Don, retired Uriadnik Maksim Boldyrev, drawing near to my old age and aware that death can sometimes arrive unexpectedly and in order that my remains may rest in peace, have determined to divide my moveable and immoveable property obtained by my labours in the following manner. a) a house with a wooden roof within the stanitsa, a cattle corral, all the domestic utensils, all the existing grain, the cattle and the sheep which will remain with me up to the hour of my death, I give all this property obtained by our common labour since 1864 to my second wife Vasiliia Denis. Boldyreva with the right to sell at her discretion. And on the death of Vasiliia anything that remains is to be received by whoever cares for her in her old age and buries her. b) I reserve the right to a pine kitchen and a wooden barn with a reed roof to be given at the time of my death to the church ministers for the commemoration of my soul. v) to my elder son and his children and to my younger son
Alexei (now a monk) and any other of my relatives I assign nothing out of this property because my sons were satisfied by appropriate shares and I will give them both the house which they must divide equally. If they take it into their heads to seek something from their stepmother then their requests are not to be accepted and I will not give them my blessing. g) this will must be accepted as valid at my death but until then I remain boss as now. I put my name to this will on this day 28 November 1871. The desire to retain control of property until the hour of his death, the explicit detailing of property and the exclusionary clause were all present again in this will. In addition, the testator felt compelled to protect his second wife against any claims made by his children from his first wife. Presumably his second wife was considerably younger and would outlive him and therefore needed to be assured of what was rightfully hers. Again there was a warning to the sons not to contest the will. The withholding of a blessing deprived the sons of their inheritance.

Both wills demonstrate the power of the father to bequeath his property at a time and in quantities of his choosing. In each case at least one of the children had separated before the will had been drawn up and had received their share of the family property at that time. Cossack custom generally sought to give all the children an equal share of the property, although the precise timing would depend on the situation in each family.

In many families, however, it was not just a matter of transferring property to direct descendants. Families were more complicated than this, containing adopted children, illegitimate children, sons-in-law living in the house of his wife’s parents, second wives, children from a second marriage and so on. The claims of each to a share of family property were determined by custom, but custom which allowed a considerable degree of latitude to the property owner in making his decision.

The most vulnerable members of the household were illegitimate children. Not only did they have to cope with hostility from other members of the family, particularly their mother’s husband, they had no right to common family property unless they were explicitly willed some. Occasionally, however, a father might accept an illegitimate child as his own, in which case the child would receive an equal share with other children. If the father rejected the child, the child’s position became akin to that of a semi-adopted one. In Luganskaia Stanitsa legitimate children always had priority over illegitimate ones, who
could only inherit if there were no other children. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa illegitimate children had no right to the common family property despite having spent many years working for the family and contributing to its income. They did, however, have an entitlement to a share of their mother’s property. None of these children had any rights to the property of their natural father since there was no way of proving paternity. Quite clearly the sins of the parents were being visited upon these unfortunate children.

Children that were adopted from outside the family had more rights, but these tended to vary from stanitsa to stanitsa. If he or she were the only child in the family then their position was much more secure. In Luganskaia Stanitsa an adopted child was counted as natural and possessed the same rights as other children. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa adopted children appeared to be little better off than illegitimate children and were entitled to nothing as of right, only what was specifically willed to them. Children who were brought into a family under the system of vskornlenie could only expect to receive some help with their military service and their marriage.

A son-in-law living in the house of his wife’s parents was not much better off, but at least he was an adult entering into a relationship over which he had some control. It was usual for a son-in-law to insist on written conditions to give him some measure of security:

1880 24 February. We the undersigned of the Oblast’ of the Don Army of Nizhne-Kurmoiarskaia Stanitsa, the Cossacks D.F.T. and I.E.Shch have concluded an agreement. Namely the first of us T. receives the latter Shch as a son-in-law for his daughter N for a period of ten years starting from the 1 June 1880 on the following conditions. 1) I, T. at the end of the said time will be obliged to divided with them a third part of my moveable and immovable property and domestic goods which are found in the stanitsa of Nizhne-Kurmoiarskaia on condition that my son-in-law and his wife, my daughter remain in dutiful obedience to me.

Even with written conditions the son-in-law’s position was precarious and disputes over property frequently ended up in the courts. Sometimes the position of the son-in-law became unbearable and he moved out of the household, forfeiting his right to property. Sometimes the father-in-law put pressure on him to leave, particularly if the agreement contained a clause obliging him to equip his son-in-law for military service.
Women and property

The most complex set of rules, and the least ambiguous, were those regarding the property of women. They are of sufficient importance to merit a separate section. One of the paradoxes of rural life in Imperial Russia was the extensive property rights of peasant women, and in particular their right to own property independently of their husband and his family. This was not just a nominal right, but one that could be enforced through the courts. English women did not gain this right until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. According to Rose Glickman, however, peasant women’s property rights were severely circumscribed. They possessed only rights over their own dowries, and had no rights over common family property unless there were exceptional circumstances, such as the absence of an adult male. Cossack women, like their peasant counterparts, possessed exclusive rights over their dowries, but unlike them possessed rights over the common family property. When the master of the Cossack household died without a will or if the household remained together after his death, control of the property passed not to adult sons but to the mother herself. In Luganskaia Stanitsa, for example, ‘power among them belongs to the father, but after his death to the mother. She has power while her husband is alive, but it is limited. After the death of the mother a limited power is transferred to the older brother.’

These rights were a reflection of women’s status within the Cossack communities and a form of power over the rest of the family. An overt demonstration of this power was contained in another will recorded by Kharuzin.

29 October 1880. I, the Cossack woman M. Z. with two sons S. and P.Z. and since my husband’s death a widow, being of sound mind and firm memory have drawn up the following will. I possess the following moveable and immovable property which is to be divided. In the khutor I have a three walled storeroom with a garden. I also possess the following livestock; three cows, three pairs of bulls, ten sheep, as well as some domestic lumber. This property which I have inherited and is mine by law is mine to manage as I see fit. Therefore I bequeath it forever to my son P. Z. and to his children. My other son S. and his family must not under any circumstances take legal action over my property since I have deprived him of his share on account of his disrespect for me. If after my death he begins legal action then I request the court and the authorities not to hear his
Women were capable of owning not just their own dowry, but the common family property as well. Cossack mothers were not under the authority of their sons but exercised quite far ranging authority over them, to the extent of depriving them of their share of the family property if they wished. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa a wife along with her husband possessed full rights over the common family property. As a widow, a wife could distribute this in what proportion she wanted among her children.

Like their mothers, girls too enjoyed extensive rights to property. These varied from stanitsa to stanitsa, but broadly speaking girls were entitled to an equal share with their brothers. In Luganskaia Stanitsa ‘unmarried daughters along with their brothers of the same mother have the same rights as them to the property of their parents’. This was also the case in Razdorskaia Stanitsa. There were other stanitsas where girls were only entitled to a half share, but this seems to have been the lowest figure. A girl had a right to a substantial share of family property in the event of her parents dying before she married, in many cases inheriting on an equal basis with her brothers.

It was more usual, however, for a woman to receive her share at the time she married. This property came in several forms. The most important was her trunk, the sunduk, which contained several items gathered over the years by her mother. The value of her trunk might range from a few roubles to several hundred, depending on the wealth of her family. The trunk contained shirts, skirts, bed linen, fur coats, boots and other items. In all circumstances this property remained exclusively the wife’s. Neither her husband nor his family had any rights to it. Even after her death, her husband and his family’s right to it were strictly limited. In Luganskaia Stanitsa it was the custom that ‘this property in the case of the death of the young wife remains in the alien family if there are children from the marriage. If there are not, the father of the husband is obliged to return it to the parents of the wife.’ In Berezovskaia and Razdorskaia Stanitsas similar rules surrounded property which the wife had brought into the marriage.

The responsibility for gathering the sunduk lay with a girl’s mother. Many fathers, however, also contributed to their daughter’s dowry. Frequently they would give livestock, vines or tools, depending on the wealth of their family. Just as with her trunk, there was no ambiguity
over ownership.\textsuperscript{113} With livestock the position could sometimes be more complicated. In Luganskaia Stanitsa livestock a woman brought with her remained her own, but any offspring they produced belonged to her husband’s family.\textsuperscript{114} Presumably this recognized the contribution of the husband’s family in the care of the wife’s livestock.

The kladka, which was supposedly the compensation from the family of the man to the woman’s family for the loss of her labour, went directly to the woman herself. In Berezovksaia Stanitsa ‘the kladka always remains the property of the women and even though she is a member of the husband’s family, she can dispose of it as she sees fit.’\textsuperscript{115} This was in addition to her dowry contained in the sunduk. Kharuzin also found the Cossacks unambiguous on this point: ‘everything given in the form of kladka becomes the property of the wife.’\textsuperscript{116}

In the wider context of peasant Russia such generous dowries were altogether unusual. Christine Worobec, referring to the peasants of central Russia, wrote: ‘Dowries were deliberately modest, as was the case with the Macedonian peasants, so as not to pose a “threat to the productive capital” of the receiving family. A bride had to depend on her new family’s goodwill and her own labour capacity for rights to their property.’\textsuperscript{117} No such principles were at work in the giving of dowries or other property to Cossack girls, which is another indication of the importance of women in Cossack society. A transfer of livestock, vines and tools represented a direct loss to the productive capacity of her own family and one that would in normal circumstances be permanent. An element of display may have accounted for some of this. But we should not rule out the affection that families, including the father, felt for their daughters.

The status of Cossack women

Some Cossacks explained to Mikhail Kharuzin ‘that the power of the father is from God and is like God’s. There is one father over everybody – God. He is the master of all. Thus it is with the father in the family.’\textsuperscript{118} A more straightforward description of the patriarchal nature of Cossack society and its justification is hard to imagine. Aspects of Cossack life lent credence to this unambiguous belief in male dominance. Women only had access to land in exceptional circumstances, were excluded in most cases from the public life of the community, and could not participate in the sbor, vote in elections for the stanitsa ataman or serve as judges. They carried a crushing domestic burden often alone for months or years. Yet the reality of the relations between men and women was much more complex than such pithy aphorisms suggested.
As we have seen, in the days when the Don was still a dangerous frontier zone, women were prominent in the running of the domestic economy and the defence of the community. As the frontier settled down it would seem probable that the position of women would have steadily become more debased as the conditions that gave rise to their elevated status vanished. However, this was not the case. The terms of Cossack military service meant that responsibilities continued to devolve on Cossack women that did not happen to live in the more settled areas until industrialization drew large numbers of peasant men off to the cities at the end of the nineteenth century.119

Through military service, all Cossack women had to accept the loss of their men at various points in their lives. The first loss usually occurred within weeks of a woman’s marriage as her husband was called up for military service. Then each year the men on privileged service were called up for one month in the summer, the busiest time of the agricultural year. In addition, there remained the possibility of a general mobilization, removing all the active men at a stroke. In short, Cossack women had to get used to the absence of their men both at the start of their married life and at various points during it. This had profound consequences for Cossack women, particularly in the running of household and farm.

Peasant agriculture traditionally had a strict division of labour.120 What a man did was seen as far more valuable than what a woman did, although a woman contributed at least as much to the survival of the farm and family as a man. The Cossacks were no different in this respect, regarding a man’s labour more highly.121 The difference, however, was that the sexual division of labour was of necessity much less rigid among Cossacks. Due to the frequent absence of husbands and occasionally all able-bodied men, Cossack women had to have an intimate knowledge of all aspects of farm life. In a report on Cossack women in 1868, Donskoi Vestnik noted, ‘Cossack women are not afraid of the scythe, the axe, the rake or the plough. In a word of anything that relates to the farm.’122 Of the four tools listed, only the rake was traditionally associated with women. The scythe, the plough and especially the axe were steeped in male sexual symbolism. The official gazette of the Voisko told a similar story:

During the whole period the man finds himself on service, all male work and duties around the farm are carried out by the young wife who remains behind and is now mistress. The majority of Cossack women of the Transdon stanitsas work the land themselves. They
sow the grain, they cut the hay with their own hands and manage the fisheries. Many of the women practice trades such as the making of fishing nets and agricultural tools e.g. ploughs, harrows, carts and the other small tools necessary in an agricultural economy.\textsuperscript{123}

Even when the man returned from the army, many women continued to do a disproportionate share of the work around the farm. It often took some time for young men back from the army to regain their taste for heavy agricultural labour.\textsuperscript{124} A major survey of the Cossack economy in the 1880s concluded that the best male workers were those over 40 rather than men in their prime. Summarizing the respective contributions of men and women to the domestic economy, the survey concluded:

in order to judge correctly the division of labour in the Cossack family and the degree of intensity, it is necessary to watch and observe at length Cossack men and women at their work. The Cossack woman bakes the bread, cooks the dinner, milks the cattle and feeds the chickens and swine. When she goes into the fields the work is carried out in a flash by her tireless hands. But the Cossack man if he comes to plough, ploughs less than a neighbouring peasant. If he goes to mow, he rests almost at every sheaf.\textsuperscript{125}

The author argued that Cossack women mollycoddled their men both as mothers and wives, and that a man did not finally commit himself to the farm until his three turns of military service were over.

Woman’s role in the domestic economy was undeniable even to the men around her. The labour of peasant women was equally vital to the survival of their farms and families, but peasant men could deny its value by dismissing it as women’s work. This could not happen in Cossack society. The structure of Cossack life made visible the absolute dependence of the farm and family upon her labour. Every man had to serve, and therefore had to have a wife who was capable of combining the traditional division of labour in her own person. Neither individual men nor the community could deny the contribution of women. In this way the value of women was publicly acknowledged and their status raised accordingly. Mikhail Kharuzin believed that a woman’s work and experience often enabled her to achieve a position of near-equality with her husband.\textsuperscript{126} Equally important, they helped to establish the essential humanity of women in the eyes of men which was far from universal among peasants.\textsuperscript{127} Economically women were
regarded as valuable, but this was only one aspect of their existence. Others need to be examined to understand women’s place in the Cossack community.

The most intimate areas of Cossack life, the relations between wife and husband, mother and daughter, father and daughter, brother and sister, told more about the status of women, but these were the most hidden of all from scrutiny. Cossacks themselves rarely recorded openly their attitudes to these matters, although they did sometimes pass them on to outside observers. It is through this filter with all its flaws that any attempt to understand the place of women within their community must be made.

Cossack women through their history, work and property rights were capable of establishing a position of authority within the community. While this might be true of women as a whole, it was not necessarily the experience of all individual women. Culturally determined roles laid down broad parameters of expectations and behaviour, but each woman had to give them concrete meaning in her family life. Much would depend on her own individual personality, those of other members of the family, and the dynamics that existed between them.

Like many peasant societies, the Cossacks had a preference for boys rather than girls. The Cossacks had sayings that were analogous to those of the wider peasant society regarding children: ‘A daughter you feed for other people, but a son you feed for yourself.’\textsuperscript{128} This was as much a recognition that eventually the daughter would establish herself in another household, while a son would remain, as an expression of preference for one over the other. Indeed in some stanitsas, Kharuzin was told that the Cossacks had no preference since a daughter could bring a son-in-law into the house.\textsuperscript{129} Cossacks did not use the fact of leaving as excuse to give as little as possible to their daughters, but made considerable gifts to them on the occasion of their marriage. Fathers contributed substantially to their daughters to ensure that they were as comfortable as possible in their new home. This is not the mark of a society that placed minimal value on girls. Daughters appear in the majority of cases to have been treated with affection and retained a great deal of affection for their natal home. Many sought to return home if the relationship with their in-laws became unbearable.\textsuperscript{130}

A woman was at her most vulnerable when she left the security and familiarity of her natal home to live in the house of her husband’s parents. She was a stranger entering an established household. The departure of her husband within days or weeks of marriage made her
position in the new household even more precarious than that of the newly married peasant woman. Without even the support of her husband, she had to adapt to the customs and habits of a strange family. Her place among them was tenuous. She was a wife, but her husband was absent. Without his presence she could not legitimately become a mother, the traditional way of securing her place within the new family.

The relationship with her new relatives could be particularly difficult. The new daughter-in-law found herself at the bottom of the family hierarchy, subordinate to her mother-in-law and any sisters-in-law. The most tense relationship was with the mother-in-law who could make her life truly disagreeable, beating her and complaining to her son about his wife.\(^\text{131}\)

Nor were female relatives the only source of difficulties. She was vulnerable to the unwanted sexual demands of other men in the household, particularly her father-in-law. It is difficult to know how widespread such incidents were, since those involved had every incentive to keep them hidden. The existence of a specific term to describe the coerced relationship between a father-in-law and daughter-in-law, *snokhachestvo*, suggested that it must have occurred with some frequency. Rose Glickman argued that it was seen almost as a right among male peasants.\(^\text{132}\) If this is so – which seems doubtful – it was certainly not true among the Cossacks. That it happened there can be no doubt. The structure of Cossack life might even have contributed towards it.

In the April session of the Kamenskaia stanitsa court two cases were heard which are characteristic of one of the common features of family life i.e. the relationship between the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law, particularly during the period when her husband was away on service. The account of the daughter-in-law is particularly interesting. In her own words she resisted her father-in-law for a long time, but eventually under the constant pressure of her father-in-law she finally gave in and entered into a criminal liaison with her father-in-law. This affair continued for twelve years while her husband was at home and while he was absent on service. Her husband on coming home suspected this relationship and tormented and harassed his wife greatly until she finally confessed her sin before her husband and the community. After this the unhappy woman and her father-in-law were committed for trial accused of incest.\(^\text{133}\)
The journalist described *snokhachestvo* as ‘one of the common features of family life’. However, the reaction of the son and then that of the wider community to this relationship do not suggest tolerance of such behaviour. The community referred it to a state court where the woman was cleared, but the father-in-law was jailed for three years. If *snokhachestvo* had been a mundane fact of life it need never have gone outside the family or the community. In another case a son who discovered his father had been sleeping with his wife reacted so violently that he almost killed him. The father took his son to court but the case was thrown out by the judges. In Razdorskaia Stanitsa the Cossacks placed *snokhachestvo* and rape in the same category, regarding both as vile crimes. Adultery, on the other hand, was seen as much less serious matter.

The problem with *snokhachestvo*, as with all crimes committed within the family, was detection. There would be enormous pressure on the woman to say nothing, because of the perpetrator’s and her own wish to avoid public scandal. This in turn makes it impossible to say how widespread it was. That *snokhachestvo* took place is beyond doubt. Yet this is far from stating that this was the norm for the society and was widely tolerated. Eve Levin, referring to this, argued that state and church law plus the pre-Christian traditions of the Slavs all unambiguously forbade this relationship. It is hard to believe that this was the experience of many daughters-in-law. Not all found themselves living with demonic in-laws. Most must have worked out some reasonably amicable understanding with their in-laws, but there was little point in recording the mundane norm, since no-one was interested.

Cossack society was relatively relaxed in its attitude to adultery. This was in contrast to peasant society where it was punished as a crime against the community. The absence of Cossack men for so long increased the opportunity for it to take place. The number of illegitimate births reported to the state was minuscule, but the number of words in Cossack dialect for an illegitimate child was substantial. Kharuzin found sixteen. Not surprisingly, the period of a Cossack’s return from service was a tense time. If his wife had been unfaithful it was likely that he would have heard about it in letters from home.

As the time for the husband to return from service draws near, it happens that he waits impatiently for the day when he can see his better half. But when he arrives home not only does he not pay his wife back for her infidelity, he also does not raise his hand to strike her, but turns from ferocity and anger to love and kindness.
Several of these unfaithful wives end their affair when their husband returns and again become good wives and mistresses. But others became accustomed to freedom during their husbands' absence and neglect all their duties in the home and in the field.\(^{139}\)

Possibly this is too sanguine a judgement of the husband's reaction. But the essential point was that the decision on how to react was one taken by the individuals themselves. It did not involve the community. Whatever the initial reaction might be, it seems to have been the case that as long as the affair ended when the Cossack returned home the matter was closed and life went on.\(^{140}\)

The same was true with male infidelity. Only in exceptional circumstances would the community intervene. If a man was having an affair his wife could not appeal to the community, but would have to rely on her own wits. If the following report is typical, it would appear that Cossack women were more than capable of doing so:

If the husband is unfaithful the wife will destroy his lover in the end. She breaks her windows, smashes her porch, encourages young boys to cut the tails of her cows and smear tar over her home and on a dark night will beat her severely so she should not take someone else's husband.\(^{141}\)

Given the structure of their lives, Cossacks had to take a more relaxed view of infidelity than peasants in central Russia. The frequent absence of husbands for long periods provided an opportunity which appears to have been taken advantage of sufficiently frequently to make draconian sanctions too difficult to impose, since they would have torn the community apart. Evidence from peasant communities experiencing heavy out-migration to the cities suggests that there too a softening of the harsh attitudes to adultery began to be apparent.\(^{142}\)

The ability of Cossack women to socialize with other women outside their own household provided further evidence of their freedom and self-confidence. Their role in the domestic economy facilitated interaction with the outside world, but the relationships they formed went beyond the purely economic. The close and institutionalized friendships that existed among Cossack men had their counterparts among Cossack women as well:

It is well known that when Cossacks leave for service, they are sent off at the same time to a particular regiment and by an ancient
custom refer to each other as ‘odnosumki’. Similarly their wives, when seeing off their husbands, by the same custom also address each other as ‘odnosumki’. From this time they are closely acquainted and for many this acquaintance, begun as a young woman, little by little is transformed into a close friendship for life . . .

When travelling from the khutor to the stanitsa a Cossack woman counts it her greatest pleasure to catch sight of her odnosumki, usually as they come out of church after the service. Here on the porch they question each other eagerly. Has anyone received a letter from the men on service? Who and when exactly? Are the men in good health? Is the service hard or easy? etc etc. It goes without saying that the mothers of the men on service participate happily in this question and answer session . . .

In such a way on almost every holiday and Sunday on leaving Church or sometimes after dinner either in the house or at the local store, the odnosumki of one regiment gather along with their mothers and the simply curious where frequently apart from the chat about the news from service, they read out their letters.143

Kharuzin also remarked upon the prevalence of such close relationships among Cossack women. The strongest relationships, just as with men, were based around military service. In the market place Kharuzin reported that it was quite common to hear arguments between different groups of women in which those who were odnosumki or polchanki invariably supported each other. ‘You’re no relative to me, but she is my polchanka – it’s necessary to respect her.’144

Cossack women had a formidable reputation not just within their own community, but outside it as well. All outside observers commented upon the strength of character of Cossack women and the respect they commanded within their own society. The Cossacks were supposedly the most patriarchal section of a general peasant culture that was steeped in patriarchy. However, the experience of Cossack women belied the image of all rural women as downtrodden beasts of burden. Sometimes this could take surprising expressions.

The Cossack Vasilii Alexandrevko summoned Marfa Alexandrevka for non-payment of 75 roubles for work carried out over half a year. During the investigation it emerged that Vasilii and Marfa were husband and wife. Marfa, after six months of married life, decided that she no longer wanted to live with her husband and drove him out of their house. The court decided in the plaintiff’s favour. Vasilii was to
receive 60 roubles from Marfa Alexandrevka for six months' work based on the average annual wage of a hired hand.145

Kinship and community

Kin and community were tied inseparably among the Cossacks. The closest family relationships were within the kuren. Kinship networks, however, extended far beyond individual kureny, reaching out in a variety of ways and entangling the whole stanitsa in a complex web of relationships that were real and not merely nominal. In this way the family merged into the wider community.

Familial duty and responsibility were weighty matters for the Cossacks. The Cossack conception of the family and its functions were much more broadly defined than in modern western society. Like peasants, Cossacks possessed a comprehensive and precise vocabulary to distinguish different kinship relations within the extended family. Many of these words have no equivalent in English. There were four basic categories of kinship recognized by the Cossacks; consanguinity, affinity, adoption and god-parentage. Blood and affinal links were counted as equal, but blood was seen as the ‘elder’ in much the same way that the position of brothers in a family was equal but the eldest was seen as special.146 The rich vocabulary to differentiate kin is in itself testimony to the importance of kinship within that society.

Mikhail Kharuzin identified nine words that approximate to the generic English term ‘relative’, as well as an intricate terminology for placing each member of a family in relation to one another. For example a woman would refer to her father-in-law as svekor and her mother-in-law as svekrov’ while her husband would refer to his father-in-law as test’ and his mother-in-law as teshcha. A brother-in-law on the husband’s side was called a dever’ while a sister-in-law on the husbands side was zolovka. A brother-in-law on the wife’s side was a shurin while a sister-in-law was svoiachenitsa. The fathers of the bride and groom would be svat to each other and the mothers would be svat’ia.147

In-laws and godparents were seen as integral members of the family and had a right to be consulted on all major matters such as the choice of a marriage partner for one of the children. They were honoured guests at family celebrations and holidays and a source of material support in an uncertain world.148 More than this, kinship webs knitted Cossack society together in a way that the legal definition of what a Cossack was could never have done on its own, reinforcing an already highly developed sense of group identity and cohesion.
Broad as the Cossack definition of the family was, fictive kinship extended it still further. The custom of two Cossacks swearing brotherhood to each other continued to be a feature of Cossack life throughout the nineteenth century.

Apart from the general sense of brotherhood there is among the Cossacks a separate personal sworn brotherhood. Two comrades give a vow to live for each other, to remain faithful to each other until death and to rescue each other in danger. They exchange crosses and sometimes swear in the church to remain friends. Then they kiss either the cross or the Gospels or an icon and regard themselves as sworn brothers.\textsuperscript{149}

In addition to blood brothers, there were also institutionalized friendships that in their intensity and longevity resembled relations between kin. Young lads who went off to the army together continued the old custom of \textit{odnosumstvo}, placing all their belongings in one bag. The relations between \textit{odnosumki} were lifelong.\textsuperscript{150} When the gang in Razdorskia Stanitsa (discussed in the last chapter) was finally sent into exile, among those who turned up to say a final goodbye to them were their \textit{odnosumki}. In spite of all the misery the gang had brought to the stanitsa, the bonds of \textit{odnosumstvo} still held.\textsuperscript{151} A special attachment also existed between those who served in the same regiment, \textit{polchaniki}. Such relationships fused the community, helping to cover the divisions that are inevitable among any people. They were not without military value either. Alone among the regiments of the Imperial Army, Cossack units did not disintegrate during the 1917 Revolution.

There was some evidence of change in people’s attitude to the community. Under the pressure of economic hardship and rising individualism, the sense of obligation of the individual to the community and the community to the individual was weakening. A writer in Bagaevskia Stanitsa lamented the ending of the old system of reciprocity and its replacement by a much harsher system of cash transaction. No doubt he idealized his description of the past, but he was probably correct in sensing that people and customs were changing:

If for example a Cossack needed a pair of oxen with a cart for a day or a horse and carriage he turned to his neighbour, his \textit{odnosumok}, or his \textit{polchanik} and the matter was settled. His request was received without refusal and his need was satisfied. Likewise if grain was short, he only needed to declare his grief to his kind neighbours and
they loaned to the Cossack 2 or 3 sacks of grain until the time God brought forth the new harvest . . .

But [now] if a Cossack has no grain even if he is lying down and dying, nobody, not his neighbour, his godparent, his father-in-law, nor even his brother will give him anything.\textsuperscript{152}

Cultural norms, however, changed much more slowly than social and economic conditions. The feeling of identity with the community remained strong. Even in their habitual mode of address for each other, ‘brother’, Cossacks were testifying to their ideal of community as family and family as community. None of this precluded conflict, but it was a recognition of the closeness of relationships within the community and a remembrance of the time when family and community had been one.

Conclusion

The Don Cossacks living in their stanitsas and \textit{khutora} possessed a remarkably high degree of cohesion. Family and community interacted to produce a society with strong social bonds which easily compensated for the centrifugal forces that exist in any human community. Both family and community were created by the particular tradition of the Cossacks and their ongoing way of life. The absolute identity that the Cossacks had felt in the beginning for their community had naturally become diluted as family ties became an alternative focus of loyalty. Even so, the sense of belonging to a community with a unique identity was deeply engraved on the Cossack psyche, making them the most cohesive of all the rural peoples of the Empire.

The Cossack family arose out of the community but at the same time the family in its extended form merged back into the community. The Cossack family differed in many ways from the those of the peasants of central Russia. Differences in landholding, inheritance customs, property rights produced a situation where no-one, not even the father in his prime, had absolute dominance. Once sons came of age, his position weakened further. Most striking of all was the position of women within the family and community. Although appearing to conform in many ways to the precepts of a patriarchal society, Cossack women were authoritative figures in both family and community. In many ways the image of the \textit{kazachka} was diametrically opposed to that of the peasant \textit{baba}, offering a much more positive image of what rural
women could be.¹⁵³ Nor was it just an image. The Cossack way of life depended absolutely on women and this was recognized by men. The Cossack community, bound by kinship, the common experience of military service and strong institutionalized friendships, survived all the changes of late Imperial Russia.
Late Imperial Russia was a dynamic polity, making great strides towards modernity. It was also riven with contradictions, most notably the lack of congruence between its political system on the one hand and its social and economic system on the other. Throughout the Empire, different peoples found themselves caught between these contradictions, pushed in one direction and pulled in another. The Don Cossacks were no exception to this. Changes in Late Imperial Russia threatened their identity, their way of life and even their very existence as a distinct people. However, their tradition, their institutions and their communities were sufficiently strong to withstand the buffeting from the forces of modernity. If anything, by the start of the First World War their sense of their own distinctiveness was stronger than ever as they shed remaining attachments to the dynasty. It is my belief that the Cossacks had taken the first steps towards recreating their own nation and state. The crises of world war, revolution and civil war intensified this process, but the Bolshevik victory stopped it in its tracks, destroying any possibility of a Cossack nation re-emerging on the Don steppe.

The Cossack tradition was half a millennium old by the twentieth century. Arising from the fusion of two very distinct cultures, that of the Mongol/Tatar steppe peoples and those of the sedentary Slavic areas, the Cossacks were a new synthesis of both, belonging exclusively to neither. The result was a tradition deeply rooted, but flexible enough to adapt and change as circumstances demanded. In the late nineteenth century, it was tested severely as the homogenizing forces of the modern world threatened to grind down Cossack distinctiveness. Population growth, a staggering increase in financial burdens, and the halting attempts by the state to forge a unitary national culture had the potential to destroy the Cossacks if their tradition lacked the resources to
respond adequately to these new challenges. This did not happen, and the Cossacks adapted themselves to the new situation while at the same time preserving the core features of their identity.

The crisis of the Cossack economy caused by population increase and the rise in the costs of military service posed the most acute threat to the Cossacks. It had the potential to polarize the community and institutionalize the divisions between an impoverished majority and a wealthy minority. Yet from within their tradition, they found a solution to arrest the seemingly inexorable division of their community and, as importantly, they possessed the institutions and sufficient shared values to impose this solution. Of course, in itself this did not end the economic crisis nor could it. The surplus a peasant farm produced was incapable of financing a fully equipped soldier in the twentieth century.

The reassertion of communal control over the resources of the Voisko enabled the Cossacks to survive the immediate crisis of the mid-1870s, even if in a way that mortgaged their future. The lurch from a predominantly pastoral economy to a cereal one wreaked havoc on the natural environment, enabling the Cossacks to survive in the short term, but providing no long-term solution to the dilemma of the costs of military service. Any solution to that had to come through a fundamental transformation of the structure of military service.

My analysis of the inability of the Cossacks to meet the costs of military service is broadly in line with that of contemporary commentators and more recent historians. However, I differ from them over the consequences of the collapse of the traditional way of financing military service. For Maslakovets, Grekov and McNeal, this was the end of the Cossacks and the beginning of their dissolution into an amorphous peasant mass. Yet human identity is far too irrational to permit such obvious solutions. The Cossacks possessed a historical tradition that rooted them in the Don, they possessed the memory of an independent state, and their institutions of local administration provided an effective, if rudimentary, system of management and mobilization. Most importantly, underpinning all else was a tightly knit, cohesive community united around a shared tradition and common values. What they lacked as long as the Empire lasted was an explicit articulation of the direction in which the trends in Cossack society were pointing. Ironically, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been full of intelligentsias looking for a nation. The Cossacks were unusual in being a nation in search of an intelligentsia.

This does not mean, of course, that the Cossacks were homogenous. They were divided by locality, religion, and wealth. Nor did the
prospect of a Cossack nation and state hold any appeal to the non-
Cossack population of the Don. There was no shortage of fractures and
apparently irreconcilable differences. Any putative Cossack state would
probably have been plagued with such problems. But it would hardly
have been unique in this. If stability, harmony and tolerance are the cri-
teria for successful nationhood, how many states in Eastern Europe
would have qualified in the inter-war period or even today?

In the event the Cossacks recreated their state under the most diffi-
cult conditions imaginable. Exhausted by the World War, engaged in a
civil war within the Voisko, and facing a new, more powerful Muscovite
enemy in the north, their state collapsed within three years. In spite of
this, the Cossacks had been the most determined and effective oppon-
ents of the Bolshevik regime, particularly when they were fighting in
the defence of their own Voisko. Their tradition and identity, far from
being moribund and at the point of collapse by 1914, was among the
most vital and potent of all those within the Empire. This singled them
out for special treatment by the victorious Soviet regime. Neither loss of
identity, nor internal decay, nor the imminent collapse of a system of
financing military service ended the Cossack tradition. It took the
power and the will of the totalitarian state to do that.
Notes

Introduction

1 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 29 June 1874.
2 By 1914, 73.9 per cent of Cossack men and 46.6 per cent of Cossack women were literate. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennno-Istoricheskii Arkhiv (hereafter RGVIA), f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 17.
8 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 May 1874.
9 See P. C. Huang, Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China (Stanford, 1985), p. 199; Tutino, From Insurrection to Revolution, p. 274.
12 Wcislo, Reforming Rural Russia, p. 85.
14 Gatrell, The Tsarist Economy, p. 63.
18 For the peasant attitude to schools see B. Eklof, Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture and Popular Pedagogy, 1861–1914 (Berkeley, 1986), p. 252.
20 See S. J. Seregny, Russian Teachers and Peasant Revolution: The Politics of Education in 1905 (Bloomington, 1989), p. 7; N. M. Frieden, Russian Physicians in
an Era of Reform and Revolution 1856–1905 (Princeton, 1981), pp. 4–5; even
army officers were not immune from this process: W. C. Fuller, Civil-Military
21 See S. L. Popkin, The Rational Peasant: the Political Economy of Rural Society in
22 V. N. Ratushniak, Sel’skoobrazovomoe Proizvodstvo Severnogo Kavkaza v
Kontse XIX–Nachale XX Veka (Rostov-na-Donu, 1989) p. 3.
23 M. Frenkin, Tragediia Krest’ianskikh Vostanii v Rossii 1918–1920gg (Jerusalim,
24 G. T. Robinson, Rural Russia Under the Old Regime (New York, 1932). The other
book is W. S. Vucinich, (ed.) The Peasant in Nineteenth Century Russia (Stan-
ford, 1968).
25 See R. L. Glickman, ‘Peasant Women and their Work’ in B. Farnsworth
C. D. Worobec, ‘Temptress or Virgin? The Precarious Sexual Position of
Women in Post-emancipation Ukrainian Peasant Society.’ Slavic Review, 49,
Relations in Rural Russia in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century’,
Outmigration and the Family Economy in Kostroma Province’ Slavic Review,
26 Recent exceptions to this are C. D. Worobec, ‘Death Ritual among Russian
and Ukrainian Peasants: Linkages between the Living and Dead’ in S. P. Frank
and M. D. Steinberg (eds) Cultures in Flux: Lower Class Values, Practices,
and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia (Princeton, 1994), pp. 11–33; V. Shevzov,
‘Chapels and the Ecclesial World of Pre-revolutionary Russian Peasants’
27 S. L. Hoch, Serfdom and Social Control in Russia: Petrovskoe, a village in Tambov
(Chicago, 1986).
28 C. D. Worobec, Peasant Russia: Family and Community in Post-Emancipation
Russia (Princeton, 1991). The author does acknowledge that some might cri-
icize central Russia as too big an area to make generalizations about but she
does defend her approach, p. 10.
32 T. M. Barrett ‘Line of Uncertainty: The Frontier in the North Caucasus’,
Society: Don Cossack Women 1861–1914’ in R. Marsh (ed.) Women in Russia
Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution: The Revolt of Ust-Medveditskaia
33 A. I. Rigelman, Istoriia O Donskikh Kazakhakh (Moscow, 1846: facsimile edition,
34 V. Bronevski, Istoriia Donskogo Voiska (3 vols, St. Petersburg, 1834); A. V. Sav-
el’ev, Trekhsotletie Voiska Donskogo 1570–1870 (St. Petersburg, 1872).

Kotel’nikov was a leading member of an Old Believer sect, the *dukhnosti*, that sought enlightenment through poverty, fasting and prayer. As an Old Believer he automatically attracted the suspicion of the authorities who in 1805 deprived him of his officer status. He regained it in 1815 for service during the Napoleonic Wars, but was arrested in 1817 for denouncing the local clergy and sentenced to four years in exile. In 1824 he was again arrested and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Eventually he was exiled to the Solovetskii Monastery, where he died.


RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 1–123.


The surveys were carried out respectively: Berezovskaia in *Donskoi Vestnik*, 18 March 1868; Razdorskaia in *Donskoi Vestnik* 4 August 1869; Luganskaia in *Donskii Oblastniia Vedomosti* 17 July 1876.


Robert McNeal also made use of Kharuzin. Occasionally we have used the same anecdote of Cossack life. Where possible I have tried to go back to the source from which Kharuzin himself took many of his anecdotes, *Donskii Oblastniia Vedomosti*.

1 **The Don Cossacks 1549–1920**


5 Astapenko, *Donskie Kazaki*, p. 9.
8 Astapenko, *Donskie Kazaki*, p. 9.
9 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 9.
10 This argument is labouriously traced by Savel’ev in the first part of his work, *Drevniaia Istoriia Kazachestva*, pp. 1–184.
14 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 17.
16 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, pp. 7–9.
29 *Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti*, 6 June 1879.
30 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 33.
32 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 45.
38 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 42.
39 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, pp. 61–5; 106.
40 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 42.
Notes

44 Savel’ev, *Trekhsotletie Voiska Donskogo*, p. 11.
47 As well as sources sited in the text, I have relied heavily on Paul Avrich’s *Russian Rebels* for this section.
48 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 100.
50 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 32.
54 The course of the rebellion is best described in Avrich, *Russian Rebels*, pp. 50–122.
56 Savel’ev, *Trekhsotletie Voiska Donskogo*, p. 44.
60 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, pp. 149–50.
64 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, pp. 119–120.
68 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 246.
71 Astapenko, *Donskie Kazaki*, p. 49.
73 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 274.
75 Astapenko, *Donskie Kazaki*, pp. 94–5.
77 Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 320.
80 See for example the requests for more Cossacks by several governors contained in RGVIA, f. 400, op. 3, d. 1328, ll. 1–129. In 1903 the governor of
Kherson reported that a delegation of Jews and Christians from Krivyi Rog, fearing pogroms, had requested a Cossack sotnia to be permanently stationed in the town and offered to pay all the expenses of the unit. RGVIA, f. 400, op. 3, d. 1328, l. 73.

81 McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, pp. 35–6.
82 Svatikov, Rossiia i Don, p. 356.
83 Svatikov, Rossiia i Don, pp. 379–81.
84 McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, pp. 4–5.
85 See for example Donskaia Rech’, 26 February 1905.
87 McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, p. 77.
88 For a fuller account of the Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution see O’Rourke, ‘The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution’.
89 Muzhev, Kazachestvo Dona, Kubana, Tereka, p. 79.
90 Astapenko, Donskie Kazaki, p. 117.
91 Astapenko, Donskie Kazaki, pp. 132–3.
92 V. Dobrynine, La Lutte contre le Bolshevisme dans la Russe Meridionale: Participation des Cosaques du Don a la Lutte, Mars 1917–Mars 1920 (Prague, 1920), p. 48. Dobrynine was a senior staff officer in the Don Army and his account is based on his own experiences of the Civil War in the Don. The work first appeared in Russian, but I have only been able to read it in a French translation. The original reference is V. Dobrynin, Bor’bas Bol’shevizmom na Iuge: Uchastie v Bor’be Donskogo Kazachestva: Fevral’1917 -Mart 1920 (Prague, 1920).
93 Astapenko, Donskie Kazaki, p. 135.
94 Dobrynine, La Lutte contre le Bolshevisme, p. 54.
95 Dobrynine, La Lutte contre le Bolshevisme, p. 61.

2 The Land and the People of the Great Host of the Don

1 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 21.
2 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 23. A further peculiarity of this stanitsa was that its members were all Moslem tatars. Most resettled in the Ottoman Empire after the Crimean War but 200 still remained at the start of the twentieth century.
3 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 1.
4 Nomikosov, Statistisches Opisanie, p. 54.
5 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3310, l. 1.
6 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 19–20. These are the landownership figures for 1898. The proportions might vary as nobles sold their land, or as land from the Voisko reserve was released to the stanitsas, but the basic structure was established. Land belonging to the stanitsas could not be sold, nor could communal peasant land. The inogorodnie were excluded from both these sources, thereby having to rent or buy whatever land they had the use of.
7 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2, d. 137, l. 110.
8 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3208, l. 34.
9 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 73.
10 This meteorological information was taken from two sources: RGVIA, f. 846. op. 16, d. 18721, l. 73–5: Grekov, Ocherki, pp. 7–8.
11 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 157, l. 18.
12 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 168, l. 22.
13 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 8.
14 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3208, l. 10.
15 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 16.
16 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 44.
17 Nomikosov, Statisticheskoe Opisanie, p. 110.
18 Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 28 February 1879.
19 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 44.
20 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 218, l. 19.
21 Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 4 October 1875.
22 Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 31 May 1880.
23 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 23.
24 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, ll. 39–40.
25 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 40.
26 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 197, l. 9.
27 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2. d. 137, l. 109.
28 RGVIA, f. op. 2, d. 137, l. 107–8.
29 Nomikosov, Statisticheskoe Opisanie, p. 103.
30 Nomikosov, Statisticheskoe Opisanie, p. 110.
31 Donskiiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 11 October 1875.
33 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 209, l. 1.
34 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 96, ll. 5–12.
35 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 209, l. 1.
36 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2, d. 154, l. 101.
37 Baluev, Istoricheskie i Statisticheskie Opisaniia, p. 15.
38 Baluev, Istoricheskie i Statisticheskie Opisaniia, p. 11.
39 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3208, l. 8.
40 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3208, l. 8
41 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 380, l. 6–7.
42 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 81, pp. 110–11.
43 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3310, l. 9. The total number of Old Believers in this year was 131,164, which meant that Cossacks formed nearly 90 per cent of Old Believers.
44 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 157, l. 4.
45 1863 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 81, l. 110–11; 1900 Baluev, Istoricheskie i Statisticheskie Opisaniia, p. 13.

3 The Cossack Yurt

2 Svatikov, Rossiiia i Don, pp. 7–8.
3 Markov, Krest'iane na Donu, p. 62.
4 Markov, Krest'iane na Donu, p. 62.
5 Svatikov, Rossiia i Don, p. 192. Svatikov stated that Uriupinskaia Stanitsa in the upper Don was the centre of an organized racket which lasted for decades, directing peasants to the estates of the wealthy Cossacks in the lower Don. This experience obviously benefited Uriupinskaia, which later became one of the most commercially successful of all the stanitsas.

6 Rigel'man, Istorii o Donskikh Kazakakh, p. 173.
7 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 24.
8 Kotel'nikov, Istoricheskoe Svedenie, pp. 26–7.
10 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 373.
11 Kotel'nikov, Istoricheskoe Svedenie, p. 38.
12 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 93.
13 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 23 April 1874; Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 10–11.
14 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 8 August 1881.
15 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 11.
16 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 8 August 1881.
17 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 23 April 1874.
18 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 18 April 1879.
19 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 8 August 1881.
20 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 3.
21 Kotel'nikov, Istoricheskoe Svedenie, p. 11.
23 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 20 April 1874.
24 Donskoi Golos, 1 August 1882.
25 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 125.
26 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 11.
27 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 12.
28 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 3 July 1876.
29 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 125.
30 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 15 October 1875.
31 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 13.
32 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 3 July 1876.
33 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 22.
34 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 19.
35 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 1 November 1875.
36 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 23 April 1874.
37 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 125.
38 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 20 April 1874.
39 Kharuzin, Svedenie O Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 10.
40 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 23.
41 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 25.
42 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 1 November 1875.
43 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 30 April 1880.
44 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 4 October 1875.
45 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 15 October 1875.
4 The Crisis of the Cossack Yurt 1875–1914

1 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2, d. 119, l. 113. (Underlining in the original)
2 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2, d. 130, l. 57. The War Ministry aims ‘towards the unification of the Cossacks in their civilian life with the rest of the population of the Empire and towards the formation from the Cossacks of such military forces as can compare with the regular army in case of European War’.
3 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2, d. 137, l. 107. See the quotation in Chapter 2 (pp. 79–80) about the state of agriculture in the Don Voisko taken from the same report.
4 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2, d. 154, l. 98. In 1895 the government paid out 3,588,000 roubles to the Cossack armies.
5 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2, d. 159, l. 40.
6 Svatikov, Rossia i Don, p. 329.
7 Captain Medvedev, Sluzhba Donskogo Voiska v Sviazi c ero ekonomicheskim Polezheniem (Moscow, 1899) p. 18.
8 For a detailed description of the terms of Cossack military service up to 1875, see McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, pp. 23–49.
9 McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, p. 58.
10 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 2.
11 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 2.
12 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 3–4.
13 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 3.
14 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 4.
15 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 7.
Notes

16 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 7.
17 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 9.
18 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 9–10.
19 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 5.
20 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 5.
21 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 October 1881.
22 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 30 July 1880.
23 McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, p. 201.
24 Kharuzin believed that 25 desiatiny was the norm when he visited the Don in the late 1870s. Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obschchinakh na Donu, p. 8.
25 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 157, l. 5.
26 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3208, l. 11.
27 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3310, l. 11.
28 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 6.
29 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 6.
30 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 157, l. 5.
31 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 197, l. 6.
32 Nomikosov, Statisticheskoe Opisanie, p. 356.
33 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 25.
34 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 21.
35 RGVIA, f. 1, op. 2, d. 119, l. 116–17.
36 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 157, l. 5.
37 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 26.
38 GARO, f. 46, op. 1, d. 3208, l. 34.
39 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 37; 76. Maslakovets felt that this plough was not really suitable for the heavy steppe soils. RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 27.
40 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 75.
41 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 127.
42 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 4 October 1875.
43 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 68.
44 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 18 October 1875.
45 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 26.
46 See for example Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obschchinakh na Donu, pp. 31–32.
47 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 138.
48 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 22.
50 Pronshtein, Zemlia Donskaiia, p. 86.
51 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 130.
52 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 130.
53 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 110–11.
54 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 130.
55 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 95.
56 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 3 October 1881.
57 This table was compiled from the following sources: 1892: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 150, l. 18; 1893: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 150, l. 18; 1895: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 157, l. 18; 1898: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 168, l. 22; 1904: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 190, l. 23; 1905: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 193, l. 22; 1906: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 197, l. 21; 1908: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61,
d. 201, l. 19; 1913: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 218, l. 21; 1914: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 21. The archive contained information only on these years.

58 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 26.
59 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 26.
60 Donskiiia Oblastniia Vedomosti, 29 October 1875.
61 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 89.
62 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 37.
63 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, l. 159–60.
64 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 36.
65 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 94.
66 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 150, l. 19: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 222, l. 23.
67 See for example 1906, a disaster by every other economic index. Fishing still produced an income of over a million roubles: RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 197, l. 23.
68 Donskiiia Oblastniia Vedomosti, 22 September, 6 October 1881.
69 Donskiiia Oblastniia Vedomosti, 6 October 1881.
70 McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, p. 200.
71 Donskiiia Oblastniia Vedomosti, 30 July 1880.
72 I could not find any record of these lists in the catalogues in either Rostov or Moscow so I do not know whether they are not catalogued or no longer exist.
73 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 24.
74 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 6.
75 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 6.
76 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 197, l. 4.
77 See my article ‘The Don Cossacks in the 1905 Revolution: The Revolt of Ust-Medvedevskaiia Stanitsa’.
78 Grekov, Ocherki, p. 41.
79 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 23–4.
80 See for example Kirienko, Revoliutsiia i Donskoe Kazachestvo, pp. 12–13; or Ermolin, Revoliutsiia i Kazachestvo, p. 16.
81 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 61, d. 1948, l. 21.
82 Grekov, Ocherki, pp. 139–40.

5 The Local Administration of the Don Cossacks

1 For the best discussion of the problems of rural administration in the post-emancipation period see Wcislo, Reforming Rural Russia.
2 McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, p. 84.
3 Svatikov, Rossiia i Don, pp. 1–4.
4 Kotel’nikov, Istoricheskoie Svedenie, pp. 5–6.
5 Svatikov, Rossiia i Don, p. 40.
6 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 283.
7 Donskaia Rech’, 13 August 1891.
8 Kotel’nikov, Istoricheskoie Svedenie, p. 16.
9 Donskiiia Oblastniia Vedomosti, 6 June 1879.
10 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 287.
12 Svatikov, Rossiia i Don, pp. 353–4.
13 Donskaia Rech’, 13 August 1891.
14 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 288.
15 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 June 1879.
16 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, pp. 288–9.
17 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 June 1879.
18 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 June 1879.
19 Donskaia Rech’, 13 August 1891.
20 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 290.
21 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 20 January 1879.
22 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 June 1879.
23 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 June 1879.
25 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 13 October 1879.
26 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, pp. 288–91.
27 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 20 January 1879.
28 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 16 January 1882.
29 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 June 1879.
30 Donskoii Vestnik, 15 October 1869.
31 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 13 October 1879; Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 16 January 1882.
32 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 20.
33 Donskoii Golos, 4 April 1882.
34 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 1 November 1875; Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 13 October 1879; Donskoii Golos, 22 August 1882.
35 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, pp. 25–6.
36 Donskaia Rech’, 10 September 1891.
37 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 16 January 1882.
38 Donskaia Rech’, 13 June 1898.
39 Svatikov, Rossiia i Don, p. 381; McNeal, Tsar and Cossack, pp. 103–10.
40 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 30 July 1881.
41 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 30 July 1881.
43 O’Rourke, ‘The Don Cossacks during the 1905 Revolution’.
44 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 287.
45 Nomikosov, Statisticheskie Opisanie, p. 321.
46 Donskoii Golos, 1883 (no other date given).
47 Worobec, Peasant Russia, p. 13.
48 Kotel’nikov, Istoricheskoe Svedenie, p. 18.
49 Donskaia Rech’, 15 August 1891.
50 Kotel’nikov, Istoricheskoe Svedenie, p. 20.
51 Donskaia Rech’, 8 November 1888.
52 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 297.
53 Donskaia Rech’, 14 March 1891.
54 RGVIA, f. 330, op. 50, d. 1159, ll. 1–18.
55 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 293.
56 See for example Donskoii Golos, 4 April 1882.
57 Donskaia Rech’, 12 December 1891.
58 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 22 December 1879.
6 Family and Community Among the Don Cossacks

2 Kotel’nikov, Istoricheskoe Svedenie, p. 7.
3 Donskaia Rech', 3 July 1888.
4 Kotel'nikov, Istoricheskoe Svedenie, p. 13.
6 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, pp. 81–2.
9 Bronevski, Istoriiia Donskogo Voiska, vol. 3, pp. 170–722. He went on to say that the women of the upper Don were boring conversationalists and indifferent lovers.
10 RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, p. 112.
11 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 163.
13 Kotelnikov, Istoricheskoе Svedenie, pp. 14–15. Possibly this type of divorce might have its origins in Islamic culture rather than Christian. It is certainly closer to the former than the latter. I am grateful to Dr Peter Biller for this suggestion.
15 Rigel'man, Istoriiia o Donskikh Kazakakh, p. 25.
16 Kotelnikov, Istoricheskoе Svedenie, p. 7.
17 Bronevski, Istoriiia Donskogo Voiska, vol. 3, 123.
18 Rigel'man, Istoriiia o Donskikh Kazakakh, pp. 82–3.
21 Donskaia Rech', 3 July 1888.
22 Khodarkovsky, Where Two Worlds Met, p. 22.
23 For a discussion of the pre-emancipation family see Hoch, Serfdom and Social Control, esp. chapter 5, pp. 160–86. The post-emancipation period is dealt with in Worobec, Peasant Russia, esp. chapter 6, pp. 175–216. For the impact of out-migration on the peasant household see Engel, Between the Fields and the City, pp. 34–63.
24 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 95.
25 Nomikosov, Statisticheskoe Opisanie, pp. 251–2.
26 Nomikosov, Statisticheskoe Opisanie, p. 321.
27 Grekov, Ocherki, pp. 139–41.
28 Nomikosov, Statisticheskoe Opisanie, p. 321. Kharuzin also mentions the existence of such large families: Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh, p. 218.
29 Donskii Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.

Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 228.

**Donskoi Vestnik**, 11 August 1869; *Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti*, 17 July 1876.

RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 18721, ll. 112–13.


Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 90.

**Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti**, 17 July 1876.


Svatikov, *Rossiia i Don*, p. 331.

Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 113.


GARO f. 353, op. 1, d. 166, l. 88–9.

GARO f. 353, op. 1, d. 306, l. 51–2.

Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 95.

**Donskoi Vestnik**, 18 March 1868.

**Donskoi Vestnik**, 4 August 1869.


**Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti**, 22 January 1874.

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Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 112.

**Donskoi Vestnik**, 4 August 1869; Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 112.


Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 117.


**Donskoi Vestnik**, 18 March 1868.

Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 120.

Kharuzin, *Svedenie o Kazatskikh Obshchinakh*, p. 121.

**Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti**, 29 January 1874.


73 Donskoi Vestnik, 25 March 1868.
74 Ibid.
75 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
76 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 116.
77 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 166, l. 95–6.
78 GARO, f. 353, op. 1, d. 306, l. 63–4.
79 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 102.
80 Donskoi Vestnik, 18 March 1868.
81 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 6 May 1874.
82 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 5 July 1878.
83 Donskoi Vestnik, 11 August 1869.
84 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 2 February 1877.
85 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 5 July 1878.
86 Donskoi Vestnik, 11 August 1869.
87 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
88 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, pp. 239–40.
89 Donskoi Vestnik, 11 August 1869.
90 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, pp. 201–2.
91 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 234.
92 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, pp. 91–2.
93 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
94 Donskoi Vestnik, 11 August 1869.
95 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
96 Donskoi Vestnik, 11 August 1869
97 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 246.
98 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 89.
99 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
101 R. Glickman, ‘Peasant Women and their Work’ in B. Farnsworth and
102 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 205; Nomikosov (ed.), Sta-
   tisticheskoie Opisanie, p. 321; Donskoi Vestnik, 11 August 1869.
103 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
104 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 241.
105 Donskoi Vestnik, 11 August 1869.
106 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
107 Donskoi Vestnik, 11 August 1869.
108 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 245.
110 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
111 Donskoi Vestnik, 25 March 1868; Donskoi Vestnik, 4 August 1869.
112 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 197.
113 Donskoi Vestnik, 25 March 1868.
114 Donskiia Oblastnyia Vedomosti, 17 July 1876.
115 Donskoi Vestnik, 25 March 1868.
116 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 196.
117 Worobec, Peasant Russia, p. 63.
118 Kharuzin, Svedenie o Kazatskiikh Obshchinakh, p. 205.
119 Engel, Between Field and City, p. 46.

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For a discussion on the poor image of the peasant woman see Frierson, Peasant Icons, pp. 161–80.
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