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A Success Story : The German Colonists in New Russia and Bessarabia, 1787-1914

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Immigration

In 1763, the new Tsarina Catherine II invited foreigners from all other countries to settle in Russian towns and some sparsely populated areas of her Empire and entrusted a special office in St. Petersburg with the administration of the "foreign colonists." Most of the German immigrants in the following three years were sent to the Volga region around Saratov, and a few small groups settled near the capital. When later the Russian position in the South had been strengthened by the results of her First Turkish War and the annexation of the Crimea, "New Russia," (the later provinces of Kherson, Ekaterinoslav, and Tavrida) was opened for settlement by German colonists. From 1787 to 1796 immigrants from Danzig and the surrounding Werder travelled to New Russia. The Mennonites, a Baptist sect with Dutch origins, founded several colonies on the Dnepr south of Ekaterinoslav and around the later Aleksandrovsk, in the "Khortica" district. The Lutherans were settled in villages near Elisavetgrad and Ekaterinoslav, where some Catholics from the earlier wave of immigration were transferred, too. Preference was given to the Mennonites; they got twice as much financial support and land as the Lutherans. However, the money was distributed in such small instalments that the Mennonites were not able to buy the necessary work animals and agricultural tools. Also many of the horses and cattle which they had brought from Danzig were stolen by their unruly neighbors.¹

In 1800, Tsar Paul I entrusted assessors with the inspection the colonies on the Volga, around St. Petersburg, and in New Russia. Kontenius, the assessor for the Southern colonies, found the German settlers in a deplorable state, for which he blamed the former government.² If the "Human Capital"³ invested in New Russia was to be saved, additional money had to be spent. Above all, the foreign colonists were again put under the control of a special administration which had been abolished by Catherine in 1783. In St. Petersburg a "Board of State Economy, Guardianship of Foreigners and Rural Husbandry" attached to the Senat, and in Ekaterinoslav an "Office of Guardianship of New Russian Foreign Settlers" were established. Paul I granted to all colonists another five tax-free years and to the Mennonites a special charter, which Potemkin had promised them in 1787. Upon Paul I's order, the colonists were given the money embezzled by corrupt officials and fraudulent merchants. In addition he deducted the colonists' travel expenses from their debt to the crown. He also made efforts to attract more Mennonites. Before he could reap the fruits of his endeavors, however, he was killed.⁴

Under the reign of his son Alexander I, large groups of Bulgarians and Germans were directed to New Russia and Bessarabia. There was a big influx of Mennonites during the years 1804-06, and thereafter a steady trickle of Mennonite

immigrants well into the 1830s. All of them were sent to Tavrida, where they founded a series of colonies along the Molochna river. During the years 1803/4 and 1808/9 large parties of emigrants from South West and West Germany, following the invitations of Russian agents, embarked at Ulm and sailed down the Danube via Vienna and Budapest to the Moldavian principalities. Some disembarked at Budapest and took the land route to Galicia. They established colonies in the hinterland of Odessa, along the Molochna river, and on the Crimean peninsula. In 1813, Alexander I found the German colonists recently settled by the Prussian King in Poland in a desperate state and sent them to New Russia in spite of the ministry of interior's resistance. The bureaucrats had warned that Russia had not yet digested the former immigrants.⁵ These "Warsaw" colonists built their villages in the southern part of the newly acquired province of Bessarabia. In 1817 some Pietistic circles in Württemberg had developed into Chiliastic groups. Instigated by the Baltic Baroness von Krüdener, who saw in Napoleon the antichrist and in the pious Alexander I the saviour who would lead the faithful to the place of salvation in the East, the Chiliasts headed for mount Ararat in Transcaucasia. Some of them, however, accepted the offer of the Russian government to stay in New Russia.⁶ They were joined by the followers of a Catholic, but at the same time Chiliastic priest. They settled in Bessarabia in 1822.⁷ Lutheran and Catholic emigrants from West Prussia and Hesse were given land north of Mariupol' after 1823.⁸

The Russian government made use of the economic distress of the people in the German South-West, caused by over-population, war damages and high taxes imposed by the absolutistic rulers, and several crop failures in the second decade of the 19th century. The government was interested especially in sectarians like the Mennonites, the Pietists, and the Chiliasts, since it was hoped that they would prove as successful as the Moravian Brethren in Sarepta, a small, but prospering model colony on the Volga.⁹

Despite the fact that Alexander I renewed orders to improve the situation, the transfer of the Germans was poorly organized. They paid a high death toll especially in the quarantine stations. These stations in the border towns Dubossary and Ovidiopol' consisted of three or four huts built of mud in which both sick and healthy immigrants were packed like sardines. Others had to camp outdoors for several weeks. A total of one sixth of the 1803/4 German immigrants died here.¹⁰ The colonists hoped to be settled on their future land as soon as possible, but there was not enough free state land left, since Catherine II and Potemkin had awarded noblemen and state officials with huge estates. The immigrants had to wait until the crown could buy back the necessary land from private owners. Waiting not only led to moral decline, but also to higher debts to the crown which the settlers had to pay off after the tax free period.¹¹

The privileges of the colonists were defined in Catherine's decree of 1763 and the settlement plans for the Volga region and for New Russia of the following year. The colonists were given financial aid for the journey to and inside Russia. State loans were meant to enable them to buy two oxen, one cow, a plow and a harrow. Their communities were to receive enough land to provide each family with the use of 30 *desiatiny* (1 *desiatina* = 1.09 hectares or 2.7 U. S. acres) of arable land. In New Russia the Mennonites were granted a land share (*nadel*) of 65 and

the other German immigrants of the 19th century were endowed with a *nadel* of 60 *desiatiny*. The colonists were not allowed to sell, mortgage or subdivide their shares among heirs. In New Russia they were discharged from taxes for 10 years and in the Volga region for 30 years. They were exempted from military service and granted religious freedom. After the big influx of poor settlers in 1803 Alexander I introduced minimum requirements with regard to the applicants' property and capabilities. In 1819, the immigration of foreigners with the exception of Mennonites and Bulgarians was officially suspended.¹²

The Mennonite Model of Agriculture

Due to their larger starting capital and greater agricultural experience the Mennonites on the eastern bank of the Molochna made faster progress than the Lutheran and Catholic colonists on the other side of the river, since over half of the latter had been craftsmen in their former homes and had spent their last money on the journey to New Russia. In 1806 the majority of these colonists still lived in mud huts (*zemlianky*). Some had not yet recovered from the illnesses of the transfer.¹³ With their German tools and horses, the Mennonites could plow, seed, and harrow one *desiatina* within two days, while their neighbors had to work with their Russian tools and oxen for four days to achieve the same results. The Mennonites saved additional time by using scythes instead of sickles, and transporting the sheaves from the field to the barn on their big German carriages.¹⁴

In 1830, an "Agricultural Society" was formed in the Molochna Mennonite district which oversaw the introduction of a four-fields system with fallow and crop rotation. The fallow was harrowed in the autumn, and could absorb more moisture in the spring. The neighboring Lutherans and Catholics took over the fallow from the Mennonites, while the German colonists near Odessa only introduced the four-fields system in the 1860s and the Bessarabian colonists never adopted it at all. The "Agricultural Society" made efforts to improve stock-breeding too. In each village a herd with the best sheep was separated from the rest in order to improve the quality of the wool. Johann Cornies, the chairman of the Society, had dictatorial powers over his fellow-believers. He forced them to plant trees along the roads and bushes to protect the fields. The agents of the Society made sure that the peasants painted their houses and fences every year. Offenders were punished with forced labor in the communal sheep-breeding station or even flogged.¹⁵

The foundation of the town and harbor of Berdiansk on the Sea of Azov in 1831 improved the situation of the colonists on both banks of the Molochna. In 1838, the Lutherans and Catholics planted wheat on 36% and the Mennonites on 43% of their fields, and sold it to the merchants in Berdiansk.¹⁶ In 1851, the Molochna Mennonites obtained about half of their income from the sale of wheat, and 15% from the sale of wool. Due to the greater distance from seaports, the Khortica Mennonites concentrated on stockfarming, and sold sheep, cattle, horses, and wool to the merchant and neighboring estate owners.¹⁷ When the Crimean War interrupted the export of wheat and when the American Civil War increased the demand for Russian wool soon thereafter, the expansion of farming at the cost of ranching came to a halt. After the end of both wars, however, it gained new

momentum. By 1875 the average Mennonite peasant devoted more than half of his land to farming. The big sheep-herds of the former period had disappeared.¹⁸

Earlier than any other group of peasants including the Lutheran and Catholic colonists the Mennonites introduced plows with three or more shares and later also sowing, mowing and threshing machines. In 1886 every second German peasant, but only every 7th Bulgarian, and every 20th state peasant in the Berdiansk county possessed a mowing machine.¹⁹ In 1914, the average Mennonite peasant on the Molochna had six horses, five cows, two carriages, two plows—most of them with several shares—and 1.5 sowing machines. About half of the Mennonites possessed mowing and threshing machines, and one fourth of them harvester-reapers.²⁰

The Agriculture of the Lutheran and Catholic Colonists

The Mennonites were “admirable”, the Bulgarians “incomparable”, but the Germans, “unbearable”, New Russia’s General Gouvernor Richelieu wrote in a letter in 1804. He insisted that it was their own fault that their harvest was below the average. Without external help they would die of hunger.²¹ The inspector of the colonies around Odessa complained in 1811 that many of the settlers had not the faintest notion of agriculture, but were too arrogant to imitate the Russian peasants.²² In Germany more than half of them had been wine-growers, artisans, day-laborers, soldiers and so on. Only the villages founded by Germans who had lived in Hungary for about 25 years and had joined the parties of emigrants when they passed through their temporary home country fared better. After the harsh “French winter” in 1812 the local authorities had to support the German colonists with food and seeds. The government sent assessors to the colonies. They reported that many settlers were dispirited, since they had lost part of their family during the journey to Russia. Others died or fell ill, since they were not used to the climate, had only water and food of low quality, and insufficient clothing for the cold winter. Many settlers had not been able to buy the necessary oxen and tools because of general price increases. The immigrants of 1808/9 had not received the promised mills. The Colonial Administration found “lazy, wicked, and disobedient” peasants among the German colonists whose behaviour it intended to correct through fines and corporal punishment. The Germans had to be forced to repair their houses and stables, plant mulberry trees, breed merino-sheep, and make silk, Kontenius ruled. When he and the assessors inspected the colonies, they examined the efforts and achievements of each individual peasant and punished some of the less diligent with forced labor within their villages or in public gardens and deprived a few of their land shares.²³

With the exception of the immediate period after the Napoleonic Wars, the prices for wheat were low in the 1810s and 1820s. Also, in the early twenties much of the crops was devoured by locusts. During the Russian-Turkish War of 1829-30, troops were billeted in the Bessarabian colonies. Many peasants fell victim to the plague brought into the villages by the soldiers. In 1833, New Russia experienced a total crop failure followed by a poor harvest in 1834. Following harvests, however, were good and their economy recovered.²⁴ From then on, Russian wheat was in constant demand on the West European market, and the German peasants

turned more and more their meadows land into grain fields. In the Liebental colonies for example, the proportion of grain fields increased from 30% in 1848 to 38% ten years later. This was made possible by the availability of improved plows and harrows.²⁵

In the first half of the 19th century, however, sheep-farming played an important role, especially in those colonies located far from any seaport. The colonial administration had distributed merino sheep among the villages in order to further the production of fine wool. The number of sheep, however, decreased when the colonists needed the land for the more profitable wheat in the 1860s.²⁶ In the 1880s, the German peasants were using about 2/3rds of their shares for field crops and only 1/3rd for pasture and hay, most of which was for their horses and cows. Two years before the war, German peasants in Kherson province were reaping about 500 kg of wheat and other peasants about 270 kg from one *desiatina*.²⁷

The Extension of the German Real Estate

At the time of the liberation of the Russian peasantry, the colonists were “the only rural group whose economy was in good shape.” They did not run model farms but worked fast and rationally.²⁸ With the law of June 4, 1871, the reforms of Alexander II were introduced into the colonies too. The “Welfare Committee for the Foreign Settlers in Southern Russia,” which had hitherto exempted them from the general administration, was disbanded. Their privileges, exemption from military service, for example, were abolished, though the government took great care to preserve some of the colonists’ time-tested voluntary institutions. The strict prohibition against subdividing the 60 to 65 *desiatiny* shares among the heirs, or selling or mortgaging them, was lifted, although such activities were subject to the agreement of the community. With a majority of two thirds, a village assembly could now change the communal landholding system. It could allot the shares permanently to the individual peasants who would have to pay land taxes according to the size of their holdings. However, in that case the landowners would have been permitted to sell their land to anyone, even externals. For the German colonies, that possibility was the main argument against any privatization.²⁹

Due to that agrarian order on the one hand and also because of the large number of their children on the other, a class of landless families emerged and increased, especially after the 1860s, when the last reserve land allotted to the old colonies had been distributed among new families. That landless class brought forward its demands so boisterously that the government intervened on its behalf. The law of 1871 gave the landless the right to vote in the village assemblies where they would press their luckier brothers to help them acquire their own real estate.³⁰

In January, 1865, the Minister of State Domains placed the “liquor rent capital” at the disposal of the colonists to help finance land purchases. During the first ten tax-free years the state had leased the right to sell liquor within the Lutheran and Catholic colonies to outsiders. These revenues were to be spent for the maintenance of churches and schools and salaries of the priests. When the tax-free period expired, the colonies had to cover these expenses by themselves.

Some of the original capital remained and grew by interest returns during the following years. That sum was used to grant a total of 40 loans for the purchase of real estate, which covered up to half of the land price at a low interest rate of 6%. With the liquidation of the colonial administration in 1871 this financial source disappeared.³¹

When a colonist died leaving only minor children, they were placed under the care of a guardian. The land share of the deceased was leased and his movable property put up for public sale. To increase the profit of the auction the bidders were granted the possibility to pay the price in small instalments. For the control of the guardians and the administration of the orphans' property an "orphans' elder" was elected. The elder would lend out the money or, in most cases, promissory notes with 6% interest. Although most elders administered the entrusted capital in an orderly and honest way, they had difficulties collecting the money from the debtor, when the orphan had come of age. For this reason, the colonies of the Liebental district near Odessa created an "Orphans' and Savings Bank" in 1830. The bank dealt with the debtors and paid the capital to the adult orphans with 5% interest.³² In 1866 the representatives of the colonists advocated the creation of a bank in each German *volost'*, in which the communal as well as the orphans' capital should be deposited. The *volost'* banks were to grant loans for the purchase of land to communes, associations of settlers or individuals up to the amount of 2/3rds of the fire-insurance value of the farmsteads of the buyers or their guarantors. In 1869 the Ministry agreed to the establishment of such "Orphans', Loan, and Savings Banks" in all German districts.³³

The Mennonites founded two such banks, one in Ekaterinoslav province and the other one in Tavrida. As the Mennonites put up for public sale not only the movable property but also the orphan's title to a land share, large sums were deposited in their banks. In 1890 the capital of the Khortica bank amounted to 1, 2 million and the capital of the Molochna bank to 800,000 rubles.³⁴ Since the Orphans' Banks of the Lutheran and Catholic colonies sold only the movable property of the deceased, they received less money than their Mennonite counterparts. Their seven banks in Kherson province worked with about 1 million rubles of orphans' capital while the corresponding banks in Tavrida and Bessarabia controlled about 1/2 million rubles each.³⁵

In 1867, the Ministry of State Domains agreed also to the petition of the Kuchurgan and Liebental district offices in Kherson province and the mixed landowner-landless commission of the Khortica and Mariupol' Mennonites to devote the revenues of the hitherto existing communal sheep farms to land purchases. Usually the colonial districts leased the land of these former farms to interested colonists in plots of 4 to 5 *desiatiny*. The "sheep farm capital" of the German colonies in Kherson provinces amounted to about 400,000 rubles in 1890. The Lutheran-Catholic colonial district on the west bank of the Molochna river also converted the 6,500 *desiatiny* of its communal sheep-breeding enterprise into a source of revenues for the settlement of their landless class. The annual income of 50-60,000 rubles enabled them to buy 38,000 *desiatiny* for 1.3 million rubles by 1890.³⁶ The Mennonites on the other side of the river had to find another source of income, since they had parcelled out their "sheep land" to landless families in 1866. A survey revealed that the landowners had hitherto used more than the

shares of 65 *desiatiny*, to which they were entitled. That “surplus” land and the strips gained, when the salt roads leading through Mennonite territory from the Crimean salt fields to the North were narrowed, was leased to interested peasants. The revenues were spent mainly for the resettlement of the landless parishioners. New, “daughter” colonial districts reserved part of their land for the same purpose. Under the influence of their German neighbors even the villages of the Molokan sect set aside part of their land for the purchase of land for their rising generation. However, the rest of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Moldavian villages had no such source of regular revenues.³⁷

The Germans could rely on an “extreme solidarity in their social and economic life.” They were ready to vouch for each other vis-a-vis the banks. Such guarantees were unknown in Ukrainian or Russian villages, where the peasants could not obtain large loans, as the value of their buildings was small. In addition, German colonists were able to get private credit with an interest rate of 10–12% from their wealthier countrymen, while outsiders demanded 24% or more. Ukrainian peasants usually could not turn to richer fellow villagers, as those tended to leave the *mir*, the redistribution commune, when they had acquired some wealth.³⁸

When “mother” colonies bought land, the resettlers had to procure part of the purchase sum themselves and to repay the credit in annual instalments which then could be used for further transactions. The Mennonite *volost'* Nikolaifeld, for example, had cleared off its debt within 18 years. For 2/3rds of their purchases the German mother colonies of Kherson province had received credit covering half of the price by mortgaging the land to the *zemstvo* bank of the province. To sum up, in most cases the resettlement of the landless was financed by bank credit, a communal loan from the orphans' or sheep capital and a contribution by the individual settlers.³⁹

The first few private estates were granted to those colonists who promised to raise merino sheep. As a result of the Crimean War part of the Tatars and Nogays left Tavrida for Anatolia. After the liberation of Bulgaria from Turkish rule many Bulgars returned to their former homeland. German individual colonists, associations of settlers and communes took the opportunity to purchase the abandoned auls and villages cheaply. But in most cases the colonists bought the land from noble landowners who had been deprived of their cheap labor by the abolition of serfdom, who did not live on their estates and who entrusted the economic management to employees who did not make strong efforts to further the interests of their masters.⁴⁰

The number of Germans had grown from 68,000 in 1834, when the mass immigration ended, to 277,000 in 1890. A map of the distribution of colonies in 1848 would show agglomerations of German colonies in southern Bessarabia, the hinterland of Odessa, along the Dnepr, on both sides of the Molochna, north of Mariupol' and some single colonies on the Crimea, while a map from 1914 would illustrate the spread of the colonies into almost all counties of the New Russian provinces, and the emergence of new colonial districts, especially on the Crimea.

By 1890 the German colonists had added 362 villages on purchased property and 237 hamlets on rented land to the original 220 colonies founded on crown land. Nevertheless about 2/3rds of the former colonists lived in the so-called mother

colonies. The Germans had received a total of about 656,000 *desiatiny* of crown land and established new colonies on almost the same amount of purchased land by 1890. But there were big differences between the four provinces. In Ekaterinoslav province the land held by colonies had tripled, in Kherson and Tavrida province the holdings had doubled while they rose only about one third in Bessarubia. While the former German colonists constituted only 3.5% of the peasant population, their colonies owned more than 12% of the overall peasant land in Ekaterinoslav province, whether *nadel* or private. On average, each German male census person disposed of 15 *desiatiny*, while each Ukrainian/Russian census person disposed of 4 *desiatiny*. But the distribution among the colonists was very uneven. Despite the big resettlements during the last two decades in 1890, more than 39% of the German families in the Kherson province had neither crown nor private land. And it made a great difference to the peasants, whether they cultivated crown, private or rented land. In order to dispose of crown land, whether by selling or mortgaging, the colonists first had to redeem the *nadel*, i. e. to pay the 20-fold land tax. Tenants could lose their land to more solvent tenants or purchasers. Therefore most of their buildings had a provisional character. Their appearance differed markedly from the farms of the landowners.

More than 1 million *desiatiny* were acquired on an individual basis especially in Tavrida province. 89% of the German private landowners were "settler-possessors," as the former colonists were officially called since the reform of 1871. In 1890, colonies, associations of settlers and individual colonists had leased 1/2 million *desiatiny* from neighboring landowners. Most of the private estates of Tavrida and Ekaterinoslav province were situated in the home districts of the colonists and the areas deserted by the Tatars and Nogays after the end of the Crimean War. Since land had always been cheaper in Tavrida than in Ekaterinoslav province, the colonists had also acquired bigger estates in the former province. Among the landowners in Ekaterinoslav and Tavrida provinces and especially among those with large estates, the Mennonites were over-proportionally represented, with 220 estates. For only about 1/4th of the colonists were Mennonites, while the Lutherans formed about half and the Catholics the remaining fourth of the former colonists. Therefore even the Lutheran absolute majority of 257 estates was not commensurate with their share in the population. Catholics had acquired only 37 private farms.

The increase in the German land-holdings in New Russia slowed down in the 1890s, since the colonists had begun to buy cheaper real estate in the Land of the Don Cossacks, the Caucasus and Sibiria. But the expansion gained new momentum in the following decade, when the funds of the colonies had recovered from the large purchases of the previous decades.

Crafts and Industry

Lots of weavers, tailors, dyers, and shoemakers had immigrated to New Russia and Bessarabia, but only few blacksmiths, carpenters, joiners and turners had settled in the colonies. Their number, however, grew steadily, as the villagers demanded more and improved agricultural tools and carriages. After the 1850s the German artisans sold their tools and agricultural machines not only to their

countrymen, but also to other nationalities. Russians, Tatars, and Bulgarians were particularly interested in the big and solid carriages with iron axels, and in the superior plows the Germans and especially the Mennonites produced and used themselves.⁴¹

The German colonists established factories which produced woolen cloth, beer and vinegar, bricks and roofing tiles. For some years the starch factory of a Molochna Mennonite was the biggest in the Empire. The most important enterprises of the colonists, however, were mills and plants for agricultural tools and machines. During and after the Crimean War, Mennonites and Lutherans built steam mills within the colonies, the capitals of the New Russian provinces, and the centers of the counties. In Ekaterinoslav province more than half of the steam mills belonged to Mennonites.⁴²

In 1879, the share of the province Ekaterinoslav in the overall Russian production of agricultural tools and machines amounted to 10.5%, to which the tiny Mennonite colony Khortica contributed three quarters. When the government imposed customs on the import of ironware, domestic production increased rapidly. New Russia took the lead over the Western and Baltic provinces, and raised its share to almost 50% in 1911. In Odessa the enterprise of the former blacksmith Höhn developed into the country's biggest producer of plows with 1,200 workers in 1912.⁴³

Most of the other factories were located in German colonies or near-by towns like Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav and were owned by Mennonite and Lutheran entrepreneurs. A Mennonite clock-maker established the first factory and two of his apprentices the next factories in Khortica, Einlage and other German villages. Several colonies lost their rural character. "That's not a village, that's a whole town," the governor of Tavrida exclaimed, when he visited Khortica in 1898.⁴⁴ The Khortica entrepreneurs built a church, school and hospital for and granted loans to their Orthodox workers for the building of houses. In 1914, less than a quarter of the inhabitants of Halbstadt and less than 10% of those of Neu-Halbstadt were Mennonites. Works producing agricultural machinery, however, were situated in Lutheran colonies too, especially in Hoffental and Neu-Nassau on the other side of the Molochna.⁴⁵

Main Reasons for the Success of the German Colonists

The financial support and the privileges granted by the government helped the colonists to overcome the initial difficulties and to make quicker progress than the state peasants. No German family lost its young workers by military recruiting. When general military service was introduced in Russia in 1874, the Mennonites were allowed to serve in forestry units administered by their own representatives.⁴⁶ The taxes of the Mennonites had been fixed permanently at 15 copecks. Between 1812 and 1840 a Mennonite census person paid 1/3rd and between 1841 and 1869 only 1/11th of the taxes a Lutheran or Catholic colonist or a state peasant was charged. Therefore, the Mennonite colonies were able to invest more capital in their private and communal economy and institutions like schools, plantations, and sheep-breeding stations.⁴⁷

At the time of foundation, the colonies were to receive enough land to provide

each family with 60 to 65 *desiatiny* for hereditary use. In practice, the communes assigned only the farmstead to the peasants for permanent use. The plow-lands and meadows were divided into fields commensurate with the quality of the soil and the distance from the settlement. In these fields each peasant received a share, and had to plant the crop determined by the community. Therefore each peasant had about 20-30 plots distributed over the whole area of the communal land. The pastures were used jointly. The German colonies did not practice the redistribution (*peredel'*) among the male revision or actually present souls like Russian villages. But the plots were periodically —usually every three or four years— distributed by lots between the entitled families (*pereverstka*). The number of the entitled families did not increase, since according to the “colonial law” one son inherited the whole share and had to pay off his brothers and sisters.⁴⁸

When the colonial laws were brought into line with the post-emancipation rules for the other peasants, the commune could still veto any excessive subdivision. Therefore the German peasants could use their own and their families working capacity and their draft animals, tools and machines more economically than the former state and noble peasants, the size of whose plots decreased steadily. A colonist with 60 *desiatiny* could devote more land to market production than a peasant with a smaller plot and could invest the gains in advanced machinery, and in the rent or purchase of additional land.⁴⁹

Because of the land-holding system, social and professional differentiation in the German villages progressed much faster than in the Russian villages. Usually the colonists had many children. The majority of male children had either to rent and, if possible, to buy land, or to take up a craft, while even Ukrainian and Russian artisans had a legal title to a land share. Therefore they did not have to make a final decision between farming and crafts. German peasants and artisans were informed about the technological progress in other countries. Some of them, like the clock-maker and founder of the first factory in Khortica, had been trained in Western Prussia. All German colonists had attended elementary and some of them also secondary village schools.

While the land surveyors usually legalized the situation created spontaneously by the Russian state peasants, the villages of the foreigners were marked before or shortly after their arrival. The government put aside reserve and surplus land and apportioned it to the colonists when the next generations needed more space. The administration took care that the houses were built at a sufficient and regular distance from one another. This fires could not spread as easily as in Russian villages. The average colony in Berdiansk county, for example, consisted of 50 the average village of state peasants of 231 farms (1893). The peasants had to cover long distances to reach their fields, and in many cases they had to leave the farmstead for more than one day, while the colonists could return home every night, take care of their families and livestock, and transport the sheaves from the field to the barn in fewer days.⁵⁰

With the help of the village mayors the colonial administration controlled every detail of the colonists' life. It endowed the village elders with great power over their countrymen. They could even threaten a negligent colonist to deprive him of his farm and implement the threat, if the peasant did not improve his ways. The mayor of Kleinliebental, for example, inspected the farms and found

that 35 colonists had not repaired their fences or chimneys. He did not hesitate to punish them with forced labor for the commune.⁵¹

In the Mennonite colonies no pubs or taverns invited the peasants to spend their time and money drinking alcohol. One visitor remarked: "The acquired good cannot be squandered, and serves as a means for extended business".⁵² Russian and Ukrainian peasants got tight on Sundays, and other festive days. While the Protestants celebrated only 12, the Orthodox peasants enjoyed three times as many church holidays a year: June alone had seven. Since they had to sleep off their intoxication, they could only work for four to five days a week, while the Protestants worked six days a week. The Protestants celebrated weddings for only one day: the Russians often celebrated for ten days. No Russian communal meeting got along without alcohol, while Protestant christenings, funerals, and communal meetings were no reason to drink.⁵³ In 1827, however, the Governing Senate overruled the opposition of the colonial administration and introduced the liqueur rent system to the colonies. Lutheran pastors, Russian assessors and other visitors deplored the ruinous influence of the pubs on the economic situation of the colonists. The pastors and sexton-teachers preached against excessive drinking, the village elders punished alcohol addicts with fines, lashes, and as a last resort, with the expropriation of the addicts' property. Two decades later the local authorities had won the battle.⁵⁴ Catholics drank more than Mennonites and Lutherans. The thousand inhabitants of the Catholic village Selz, for example, had the choice between three vodka-pubs and twenty wine-taverns. The Catholic ministers had little influence on the peasants, since in many cases they were Poles with little knowledge of German and the colonists' problems, especially during the first decades, and literacy was not a precondition to become a member of the Catholic parish.⁵⁵

The first generation's success depended on its previous experience. The rural and urban proletarians, who had left their native country in order to improve their economic situation, fared worse than the religiously motivated emigrants. The Mennonites of the second and following waves sold their farms in Prussia and brought money, German horses, cattle, carriages, and tools to the Molochna. The Russian government gave preference to the immigration of all kinds of sectarians, since the Moravian Brethren at Sarepta had won recognition as skilled artisans, and the Mennonites as model farmers.

The government restrained the colonists from dividing their shares. That rule corresponded to Mennonite traditions. The Germans coming from areas with the tradition of property division among heirs had to submit to the law. When the last reserve lands were distributed among the growing population in the 1850s, the colonists tried to earn enough money to help their sons to establish themselves as independent farmers. No colonist could be content with passing his father's heritage on to the next generation—a problem the Russian peasants were spared due to the communal land-holding system.

After the first years of adjustment, the German colonists were always some years ahead of the Russian peasants. While the latter still concentrated on stock-farming, the Germans were already plowing the greater part of their shares and had reduced their pastures radically. Earlier than their neighbors, they put butter and cheese on the markets of the New Russian towns. When the demand for

agricultural tools increased, German artisans took up that lucrative business.

A visitor to the Liebental colonies “felt strongly that he lived among Germans who want to reproduce here their former native country.”⁵⁶ The Germans had immigrated with Western property conceptions. According to the principles of Roman law the soil should, as far as possible, belong to somebody. The colonists could not understand that Russian peasants regarded the soil as a gift of God belonging to everybody like air, sunlight, and water. In his historical-statistical survey of Kherson province, an officer of the Russian general staff wrote in the early sixties: The colonists “are our Americans who change our wild desert into marvellous villages with gardens and leas, our capitalist farmers who become richer and richer from year to year, occupy more and more land, attribute value to the land, and raise the price for labor by their extraordinary demand.” Their main features were, he added, “the full understanding for the necessity of hard work, the simplicity of life coming near to stoicism, the understanding of the social advantage of mutual help, and of the duties toward the government.”⁵⁷

After sawing and harvesting, the German colonist put his tools in order and stored them in a dry place, a Russian observer remarked. Just in case a tool broke, the German had a reserve piece. Thus he did not lose time and his farm-hands were never idle. Having finished his work, the Russian neighbor left his tools lying around, exposed to the weather, and only thought about cleaning or repairing them just before he wanted to use them once more. Since the workshop of the blacksmith was humming with activity then, he had to wait several days and was not able to finish the field work in time. The German plowed the field in the autumn to enable it to absorb more moisture and harrowed the field several times in the spring pulling the weeds in time. The Russian peasant however, neglected to do so believing that the harvest depended solely on the weather.⁵⁸

When a German peasant complained about his fate, the Mennonite entrepreneur Hildebrand liked to quote the favorite poem of his former mentor:

“O man take care of all your time!
Of all the hours that time hath lent,
That e’ev now are lost from view,
Not e’en a single brief moment
Will e’er return to comfort you.”⁵⁹

In the same spirit the elder of the Mennonite parish in Ohrloff on the Molochna appealed to his fellow-believers:

“The time is short. O Man: be wise!
Of all your moments make the most.
In blink of eye they’re gone, you’ll find.
You sail one voyage on this coast --
Leave a good reckoning behind.”⁶⁰

NOTES

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