
BULGARIANS AND GERMANS IN BESSARABIA: THE IMAGE OF THE NEIGHBOURS

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Abstract

Bulgarians and Germans along with other ethnic groups such as Moldovians, Ukrainians, Albanians, Gypsies, etc. inhabited the territory of Bessarabia until 1940 when, in keeping with an agreement between the USSR and Germany, the mass of German colonists' descendants were repatriated to their historical fatherland. This study explores the collective memory of Bulgarians about their German neighbours. It is based on biographical and thematic interviews of men and women, which, in their young age, have had personal experience of the contacts with German people. From the information provided, it is clear that, in general, the Bulgarians in Bessarabia remember Germans as rich people with ordered settlements. Clear is the image of the honest, hardworking, proud and disciplined owners, possessors of plenty of good lands, pastures, water and wells, of large and fed horses, and of sheep, pigs, ducks etc. – excellent farmers and livestock breeders. Very often the Bulgarians emphasize the exceptional entrepreneurship, skills and mastery of the Germans in different directions. They are remembered as very good craftsmen, who trained the people in the surrounding villages in construction, carpentry, cooperage, shoemaking, furriery, blacksmithing, cart making, etc. The narratives provide a rich source for investigation of the ethnic boundaries construction in Bessarabia in the first decades of the 20th century.

Keywords: *Bulgarians, Germans, Bessarabia, collective memory, ethnic boundaries.*

Bulgarians and Germans along with other ethnic groups such as Moldovans, Ukrainians, Albanians, Gypsies, etc. coexisted on the territory of Bessarabia until 1940 when, in keeping with an agreement between the USSR and Germany, the mass of German colonists' descendants were repatriated to their historical father-

land¹. The collective memory concerning the Bulgarians' neighbours in the past is still in existence and can be detected "on the field" although concrete historical memories have grown faint. With each succeeding generation and in view of the changing social frame (Халбвакс 1996), processes of generalization, molding and interpretation of images and knowledge of the past take place. The name "Germans" in itself, which gained ground and gradually comprised several groups of German-speaking population on the territory of present-day South Ukraine (e.g. Лях 2005), originally defined according to ethnic, linguistic and confessional affiliation, makes those tendencies obvious. It should be noted in brief here that the population groups migrating in mass to the Russian Empire and to Bessarabia in particular early in the 19th century, came from various regions of Germany and Poland and spoke various predominantly German dialects but also certain Slavic languages (e.g. the so called *kashubi*) (Шмидт 2015; Шорников 2011).

Among the numerous memories concerning the Germans and their presence in Bessarabia, recorded in the course of our field studies, the words of an elderly interlocutor, a woman, from the village of Delzhiler/Dimitrovka, Tatarbunar region, Odessa district, Ukraine are particularly worth noting ("And why are you saying that Bulgarians can't learn to work and live like the Germans?") "*Well, because, you see, Bulgarians ... what did God mess up the tongues for? These're Bulgarians, those're Russians, those others Moldovans... Custom's this way, tradition's this way*". Although it sounds too "essentialist" referring to the Biblical Tower of Babylon parable and divine predestination in the discrepancies among distinct peoples and languages, the elderly interlocutor actually voices the problem of relationships between Bulgarians and Germans in Bessarabia, the essence of their mutual contacts as well as interrelations in the field of culture in general.

The programmes for research in Bessarabia, elaborated upon and implemented so far on Bulgarian side, concern the problem of connections, the extent of interrelations, the notions held of each other and the type of coexistence between the various groups of population in the region studied (Пимпирева 2010; comp. also Думиника 2016). In this sense, the present study is an attempt to expand and optimize a long-existing but not entirely systematic and consistent research by Bulgarian scholars among the Bulgarian and Gagauz communities in Bessarabia², drawing attention to their neighbours as well, in this case the Germans, and studying the forms of communication and interrelations between them. The purpose, however, is not research on the Germans themselves and their culture³, but by building upon field

¹ Here the term repatriation is used although certain discussions exist as to the connotations of the process and various terms like "deportation" and even "exile" have been in use.

² Concerning research by Bulgarian scholars and projects undertaken earlier see e.g. Петров 2000; Матанова 2013.

³ Over the last few decades a vast body of literary sources has accumulated as to the history, culture, evolution, livelihood and traditions of the Germans within the Russian Empire and especially in Bessarabia, see e.g. Остроух, Шервуд 1993; Brandes 1993; Радова, Капустин 2006; Козак,

ethnographic materials collected predominantly in Bulgarian settlements, to trace Bulgarians' perception of them; to reveal certain aspects in communication between them and the specific essence of their connections and notions about each other. The aim is also to offer at least a general outline of aspects of a certain culture standing forth as pliable to alien impact and changeable as against those defying such impact; to show mechanisms determining adaptation and interrelations between cultures in the region studied as well as the perception of these mechanisms as a frontier: when and how that border is crossed and when it remains insurmountable.

The problem of the presence of Germans, among other population groups in Bessarabia, has attracted attention ever since the earliest studies of the region. Nearly all the authors tackling with colonists settling in the Russian Empire of those times and their culture, language, customs and mores touch upon the subject, some of them focusing on it. Here the names of A. A. Velitzin, B. Cludt, A. A. Klaus, A. Skalkovski, G. Pisarevski, J. Titorov, N. Derzhavin, etc. appear eminent. As many of present-day researchers note, it is predominantly after the 1990s that scholar interest in German settlers in the Russian Empire has increased considerably, altogether with multiplication of viewpoints as to their significance and impact on the history and culture of the various regions they lived in and/or inhabit at present in more compact groups (comp. Бобылева, Толстых 2010; Беликова 2011; Каненбег-Сандул 2014).

The present paper does not aim to trace all these views and interpretations in detail. Nevertheless, particularly worth mentioning are the studies of certain scholars Bulgarianists from Moldova such as Saveliy Novakov who draws attention to the interrelations between Bulgarian and German colonists, in economic aspect, as well as Olga Radova (Karanastas) and Sergey Kapustin who studies the settling of Germans and demographic evolution in Bessarabia during the 19th and 20th centuries (Новаков 2010; Radova, Kapustin 2006). The book "Bessarabia. German colonists in the Black Sea coastal region" by Ute Schmidt, a descendant of Bessarabian Germans, is of particular interest where the author also addresses the problem of connections and relationships between German-speaking migrant groups and their neighbours in the region. On the whole, it is important to note, as E. Lyah points out, confirming general methodology trend in the studies that "to understand oneself is merely possible at present in juxtaposition with the others, to get to know a certain people can only be achieved by studying its interrelations with other peoples" (Лях 2005).

As Ana Luleva notes, above all "the diaspora conceptions are interested in and emphasize collective identity, its preservation, transmission and protection". Frequently, in spite of the fragmentation of a nation, it is represented as united and unchangeable (Лулєва 2012: 348–349). The subject thus stated does not only concern the dynamics in a diaspora culture and identity, the stability and changes in the

Матвеев; Бобылева, Vocharova 1999; Лях 2005; Шмидт 2015; Шевчук 2008; Улянова 2010; Беликова 2011 and the sources quoted in those studies. On the one hand, this is part of democratization processes in post-Soviet societies, and in science in particular, latter becoming open to various subjects and problems; on the other hand, this is a natural result of processes of revival and stimulation of ethnic identity in present-day Ukraine, Moldova and Russia.

migration conditions as well as cultural interrelations. Thus, the nature of such processes can be viewed distinctly as essence-defining for the culture itself and its evolution, outlining the parameters, the directions and ways in which this takes place as well as the segments, the spheres or, to be more precise, the cultural mechanisms functioning as a boundary – unsurmountable in some cases and pliable, dynamic and unstable in others (comp. Барт 2006: 18–19). In this sense, skepticism appears justified in regard to the “childhood disease” of anthropology, namely “ethnographic description of daily life which structures it as a specific local world, as a” mosaic of cultural distinctions separate from one another instead of as a network of mutually connected and intertwining cultural variations” (Jenkins as quoted in Лјулева 2006: 50). Here, however, we would like to add that in certain cases the network can be thicker, “densely knitted” or disrupted at some spots.

In another of her studies on population groups in the southern part of the Black Sea coast, A. Luleva writes about the enormous significance of scholar discourse in the process of defining the nature and changes in the relationships among the various communities and the borderlines between them. According to her, “ethnic identities are not merely a structure historically emerging but also a structure produced by researchers which has reverse effect and impact on the communities in question” (Лјулева 2006: 52). No doubt, such an impact is particularly relevant for the cases considered here. Due to the fact that the Germans left Bessarabia in the mass and consequently one of the sides in the communication and interrelations we intend to outline is no longer available for observation, in all likelihood, the structuring of our notions and knowledge in regard to that side, to its overall image will increasingly become a matter of search and interest, of trust or lack of trust in scholars and the results of their research. In any case, reference to their competence will be more frequent, which will inevitably reflect on the extent of its impact.

In pages that follow we will address another aspect of these interrelations, still to do with the work of researcher and the methods enabling him to understand culture and, respectively, influence it. The reference is to field research, which among a number of other things, is also a sphere of immediate contacts and exchange of information, ideas and emotion. Direct field experience clearly testifies concerning the spheres of contact as well as concerning cultural isolation between Bulgarians and Germans. The processes of changeability and dynamics concern not merely separate cultural domains, operating partially. They rather permeate the tissue of culture, leaving less visible or more durable traces, thoroughly reshaping its whole contours. In this respect, of particular importance appear to be the small but easily noticeable and indicative distinctions between the overall way of life and mentalities of Bulgarian settlements in Bolgrad region where they are compactly settled, having stable socio-cultural models of behaviour, customs, mores, etc., and on the other hand, the villages in the rest of the region (Tarutin, Arciz and Sarat). In the latter, the Bulgarians lived in immediate coexistence with the numerous German settlements in the vicinity. The proverbial hospitality of Bessarabian Bulgarians, an invariable traditional trait of theirs we repeatedly experienced, finds a specific expression. In

most Bulgarian villages one can witness a table set and even taken outside a house, loaded with all kinds of food hosts possess and are able to procure in a haste whereas in the village of Burgujij, Arciz region we came across a case where everything in the table was well planned, precisely calculated and delicately purposeful: providing a portion for everyone seated at the table and excluding the rest of the people present since they had been unanticipated. This kind of distinctions would most probably have escaped our attention if it had not been expressed the “emic” evaluation, the “insider” opinion of an interlocutor of ours who voiced the assumption that this kind of etiquette observed in Burgujij, is probably due to the powerful German influence on its inhabitants in the past.

It is worth mentioning some of our direct impressions as to the vision, the state and culture of the settlements of former German colony in Bessarabia and their present-day population: the ones we were able to visit in the course of the field research. In general, they have been understudied by ethnologists (either from Bulgaria or from elsewhere) although they are inhabited at present mostly by Bulgarian and Gagauz population. The settlements visited by our team were as follows: Gorna and Dolna Albota, Sofievka in the Tarakliya region, Moldova as well as Krasnoe and Luzhanka in the Tarutin region, Ukraine. The processes of inward migration, the mobility of diverse groups of people which resulted in the formation of these villages in their present-day shape (e.g. Шорников 2012) offer the opportunity to trace their culture and evolution within a complex economic, social and ethnic environment. After the 1940s when the Bessarabian Germans were repatriated to Germany, the villages were inhabited by people from nearby and faraway parts – mostly Bulgarian and Gagauzian population from the Bolgrad region in Ukraine and from the Tarakliya region in Moldova (namely from the villages Chiyshiy, Novy Troyan, Pandukliy, the town of Tarakliya, etc.) as well as Ukrainians from the west part of the country, etc. The processes of migration continued until well into the 1970s and 1980s (Водинчар, Георгиев, Лазаров 2009).

As a specific type of new settlements with mixed population, the villages visited display a different model of historical and cultural development, a “combination” of various traditions and languages. Although “foreign” influence and interference are also characteristic of Bulgarian colonies established earlier, some two hundred years ago, the extent of preservation of ethnic-based tradition and homogeneity as well as the process of ethno-cultural transmission itself are far more stable. On the other hand, in the past and especially at present, the problem of the expression of ethnic identity and interrelations and mutual influences between the diverse communities, languages, traditions related to it in the new-formed mixed settlements is particularly significant and topical in everyday life. In those villages one could often hear the expression that they represent a *miniature Soviet Union* or a *USSR combined team* with some of the places encompassing representatives of over ten nationalities (e.g. the village of Krasnoe, Tarutin county, Ukraine).

Former inhabitants of the German colonies or descendants of people who used to live there arrive from Germany almost every summer (e.g. Щербакoвa, inter-

net publication). At present, a Society of Bessarabian Germans based in Schtutgard functions in Germany; visits to Ukraine and Moldova are organized, contact is maintained with settlements populated by Germans in the past. Descendants visit their birthplaces tracking out former houses (sites) and the relatives' graves. The visits of Bessarabian Germans who left their native places in Bessarabia years ago are often attended with concerts of local amateur artist group at the village Houses of Culture, performances at schools and kindergartens, etc. Recently, some representatives of local institutions (e.g. in the villages of Kazba/Lozhanka and Krasnoe) have engaged in joint projects with descendants of German colonists and cherish hopes for more intense and fruitful future contacts in diverse spheres of economic and spiritual life of their settlements (AIEFEM № 779-III⁴). Nearly everywhere in the ex-German colonies memorial tablets have been set with inscriptions concerning the year of settlement establishment, ethnic affiliation of the population, etc. The memory of settlements life in the past and German presence in them is kept up on both sides – the former German settlers and their present inhabitants; yet, understandably enough, the former ones are the more active and significant participants in the process.

In conclusion to these notes, one could say that the following parallel is outlined. Doubtlessly, in our days the Bessarabian Germans exert a favourable impact on regeneration and preservation of the memory of their ex-colonies as well as on supporting these settlements' standing and future development (especially in view of the situation in the Ukraine and Moldova in the post-Soviet period). Similarly, the significant role of German colonists in the past stands out as being vehicles and promoters of modernizing elements and a number of changes in the cultural life of the rest of the Bessarabia population.⁵ These more general preliminary observations actually raise the question, as already mentioned, to what extent the processes of interrelations and mutual influences can be viewed as an overall civilizational choice or whether they are mere concrete ethno-cultural loans; in which correlation also these phenomena are presented in the cases studied and how far former determine the latter.

⁴ Archives of the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum.

⁵ Generally, as M. Belikova says, the view of Germans and Menonites as model of modernization of everyday culture, prevails in historiography (Беликова 2011). At this point, as V. Kretinin reasonably notes, one must also bear in mind the opinion of the German researcher of Bessarabian origin Ute Schmidt. According to her, the German colonies represented a social experimental model, an example which was to demonstrate the opportunities of local farming, the rise of prosperity of the villagers' in cases when they enjoyed individual freedom, were self-governed and profited from support... ". She believes that Bessarabian Germans acted as pioneers implementing rational employment of natural resources and innovative methods to develop and improve farming produce with support from the state. The author expresses the opinion that the foreign colonists' experience was to provide an example for the local population who looked to the Russian aristocracy and landlords to grant them rights similar to those of the Germans (Крети́нин 2010). With regard to the role of Menonites part for the economic development of the Russian territories newly acquired at the time and the selection of these migrants on the professional and social scale comp. Kanenberg-Sandul 2015.

The representations of Germans are based above all on the widespread opinion that they are rich, well-to-do, of a higher standing in every respect as compared to the Bulgarians who, in spite of certain differences, also landed in Bessarabia as colonists. Almost always respondents see the possession of plenty of and better land as the major cause for this. Farming and economic advantages of the Germans over the other groups, including Bulgarians, as well as the favourable comparison to the local Moldovian and Ukrainian population in Bessarabia are frequently attributed to the fact that “*they settled the foremost and best places... Arciz, Old Shampanoz, Novosyolovka*” (AIEFEM № 779-III: 83). The experience and knowledge commanded by German colonists, the good order and discipline reigning in their settlements, their social life, etc., rank only lower in the appraisal. Things, however, are interconnected and mutually conditioned although not all interlocutors are aware of that. It is not a matter of chance that the Germans’ fabled wealth, the possession of plenty of rich land is also accounted for by the fact that they did not have many children: usually one son, hardly more than two, and certainly by a different system of inheritance as compared to the Bulgarians. The words of Evgenia N. Dimova, born in 1926, from the village of Delzhiler are highly revealing: “*a German even, when his wife dies, he takes on his brother’s wife for a wife*”. This circumstance, in the interlocutors’ opinion, is responsible for the fact that with the land of Germans’ is far less fragmented. One of the advantages which, according to Ute Schmidt, the German colonists had over the rest of the population, including the Russian serf villagers, is exactly the minorate, i.e. the undivided inheritance which allowed the establishment of infant colonies, emigration and higher professional differentiation (ШМИДТ 2015: 304).

Compared to the Bulgarians, an interlocutor of ours points out, the Germans engaged in selling grain themselves extremely seldom, “*because he has [grain], I can’t even tell how much*”. To put it in his own words, the Germans “*had no end of grain, old grain caught out on new grain*”. The same respondent notes yet another factor for rich harvests among the Germans which refers to differences in the selection and possession of other sorts of crop as against the ones familiar to and used by the Bulgarians (e.g. peas). Hence the resulting borderlines, social and economic, between the two groups, often regarded as unsurmountable, although some of these crops were later taken over and employed by the Bulgarians as well.⁶

⁶ Moreover, the Germans in their turn also experienced impact on the part of the Bulgarians and, in a more general sense, from “across-the-Danube” migrants who brought over and spread throughout Bessarabia and the New Russia provinces the so called wheat sort called *arnautka* (Новаков 2010: 48). None of the informers we encountered touched upon this fact. According to Novakov, along with the *tzigayska* sheepbreed, waterwheels used for irrigation of vegetable gardens and cultivation of certain grape varieties, cheese production, etc., this sort of wheat was among the innovations introduced into Bessarabia lands by Bulgarian and Gagauz migrants coming from the Balkans. At this point one could only dispute the mention of cheese production which is not widespread in Bulgarian villages even today, let alone the fact that until the mid-20th century it was totally unfamiliar. Actually, what is meant here is not homemade but manufacture production in centres like Tarakliya and Bolgrad, which, in all likelihood, the Bulgarians themselves took over from the local Moldavian population and the so called *chobani* (shepherds) (Думиника 2016: 114). One way or another,

Informants from the village of Delzhiler, Tatarbuniar region, Ukraine especially emphasize the difference in day schedule and work organization in harvest time, pointing out that in spite of the shorter workday, the Germans achieved higher productivity. According to their narrative, the Bulgarian villagers worked from dark to dark and anyone late for work or early in going home from the fields was mocked and ridiculed. On the contrary, the Germans went out to work as late as after sunrise and called it a day while it was still light and whoever worked until dark deserved ridicule.

In addition to the more plentiful and richer land the better and more modern farm equipment, the different sorts of crop, etc. in regard to Germans, our respondents never fail to mention their specific farming methods, their pure-bred, large and well-fed horses. “*Germans didn’t keep oxes, their horses were like beasts*”⁷.

The better and richer land is sometimes viewed as precondition for the breeding of better animals, especially horses, among German colonists. It is frequently emphasized that all depends on what one feeds them on and the way one does it. In the German villages, according to Maria Shishkova, the *taloka*⁸ was good. As a child, our interlocutor could hardly have given much notice and distinguished between breeds. In her opinion, the horses were of the same kind that the Bulgarians had: “*Like ours but more fed*” (AIEFEM № 779- III : 17–19). The way of stock raising, the conditions and the better feed were certainly of major importance, especially in those days. Although frequently focused upon as being the rule, the better conditions and the way of horse raising among the Germans (“*When a horse does he grow good? When you have what to feed him good on*”), other factors are also referred to. A few of the more knowledgeable and observant among our interlocutors inform about essential differences between the horsebreeds the Bulgarians and the Germans possessed: “*A-aah, of course. It is another breed*”. Most probably all that reflected on the conduct of the owners of stouter and well fed horses’ who undoubtedly displayed greater self-conceit and enjoyed prestige and peculiar “privileges”:

these concrete facts disclose the “reverse” side as well – the Bulgarian contribution to the processes of mutual influences between colonists regarding which memories among our respondents have been registered far less frequently. We could assume that they would largely be determinative for the Germans’ collective memory rather than for that of the Bulgarians in regard to their former neighbours. Nevertheless, the field research of such memories, in addition to what has been done by S. Novakov on the ground of records and sources, appears pressing.

⁷ One should note here that at the beginning, during settlement of German-speaking colonists in Bessarabia, the Russian authorities provided each family with a pair of oxen and a cow. Shortly afterwards, however, as early as in the 1840s they proceeded to use horses in land cultivation following the tradition in places they came from. Gradually, a specific colonist horse breed emerged, well suited to the local conditions and particularly esteemed in the Romanian army (ШМИДТ 2015: 196–197). The Bulgarians and especially the local Moldavian population part of whom also had standing of colonists, continued to employ oxen for a long time. This indicates that the ethos itself, the inner ethno-cultural prerequisites are essential for group evolution, rather than formal colonist status (i.e. outward conditions), as Ute Schmidt put it (ШМИДТ 2015: 304–305).

⁸ Taloka (Russ.) – pasture.

“Gotta make way for him from a far... That sort of nation they were... I guess unconscious ...well-off and no more consider other humans as humans”.

Most respondents have a distinct mental picture of the way German villages looked. Some of them visited them in their childhood, others have been there later after their inhabitants had already left Bessarabia. Even today, in Bulgarian villages of the area studied there are the so-called “German frontons” houses and “German *bourdei*” yards which, along with their specific appearance, are viewed as symbolizing high quality and durability. Originally, the question which houses and yards are nicer and better arranged is unhesitatingly answered by some interlocutors that the German ones are better. However, their explanations make it evident that at present houses of the Bulgarians are strikingly different from those in the past. Yet, even a child, such as granny Maria Shishkova was in those days, was capable of detecting and grasping the existing inequality among the Germans, the fact that not all of them were equally rich. The picture is further expanded by Nikolay Georgiev from the Seliolu/ Holmskoe village, who regards the differences in settlement arrangement and housing yard space among the Germans and the Bulgarians as directly related to their way of life and neighbourly social relations: “*Let’s say the Germans, them, their streets are afar one from another. Ours – narrow streets. Because, you see, you have to go to the neighbour. But they maybe don’t go to neighbours. He has everything. He has enough of everything*”.

According to some respondents, apart from their appearance and architecture, the houses of Germans differ from those of the Bulgarians in the way their construction was approached. Although *medzhia*, a traditional form of mutual assistance was widespread among the Bessarabia Bulgarians, our interlocutor Ivan Uzun ascribed it predominantly to the Germans. Obviously, however, many of the material conditions, benefits and comforts depended not only on property but wealth also depended on the individual person. Whether the yard and the house were clean and well arranged, in M. Shishkova’s opinion: “*Well, it depends on the owner*”. According to her, among the Germans, too, disordered, dirty and neglected yards were likewise to be found. To “our folks” it was clear that the Germans’ wealth and money were not merely derived from their richer land but from practicing various other activities as well.

The Bulgarians often point out the fact that the Germans made themselves a great many of the equipment and tools they employed, that there were a great number of craftsmen in their villages – *mastera/maistori* who used to make them. In most cases, the answer to the question – “Did workmen from Bulgarian villages use to be trained by the Germans?” – is that many young boys went to serve as farm help or apprentices and learn the craft. From the narratives of informants it becomes evident that seeing the Germans had better equipment, “our folks” bought it over mostly from them.

⁹ Bourdey – cellar.

The sporadic data we have at present indicate that the Bulgarians from certain villages – e. g. Bourgudzhi/Vinogradovka, Artsis region (actually trained and directly influenced by the Germans' skills and craftsmanship) also produced agricultural tools whose qualities did not fall short of the German fittings and goods. The purchase of equipment furniture, etc. was particularly frequent in the period immediately preceding the leave of the inhabitants of German villages for Germany. However, such purchases were not always possible. One of the main reasons pointed out again was the lack of funds. Second in importance was the fact that for good plows, carts, etc. heavier horses were needed, i. e., limited monetary and material circumstances hindered possession and mass use of such equipment by Bulgarians. The third possible answer comes to confirm the fact that providing the first two conditions were present, people in the Bulgarian villages were also able to afford similar inventory, tools and equipment. Obviously, at a later stage, some wealthy farmers acquired everything the Germans from the neighbouring villages had owned and made themselves: "*The richer ones – they used to buy*". The poorer ones did it gradually, i.e. they learned from the Germans.

Apart from the purchase of equipment and inventory, the relationships between Bulgarians and Germans were also came to about in view of the fact that a great number of Bulgarians were employed in farms of richer Germans. Usually Bulgarians, Moldovans and other representatives of the surrounding population were hired as *argati*¹⁰ with German families. According to data collected, these were mostly young healthy people, predominantly men, but reports also exist of female servants, *sluzhanki*, engaged in farming as well as housework.

Numerous narratives by informants from various Bulgarian settlements emphasize the fact that on servants hiring and probation the German landlords particularly insisted that the candidate should feed well and regularly and refrain from lies and theft. In addition to the good nourishment of the workers, endurance and hard work, however, the Germans highly appreciated, according to our interlocutors' stories, the qualities of honesty and loyalty to the landlords. The widespread practice of employing Bulgarians in German households was mainly limited to seasonal farm work. N. Georgiev asserts that the poorer Bulgarians were unable to engage in ploughing in the autumn since they preferred to engage in transportation work (*na kiriya*) and transport wheat to the harbour in the town of Kilia while serving the Germans, so as to make money and get grain as well.

The stories of this interlocutor bear evidence to the good attitude, correctness and exigence Germans displayed to Bulgarians and all other workmen hired on their farms. In regard to the feelings and actions of Bulgarians who did not always come up to these expectations, our informants often use the pejorative expression *our Bulgarianians*. The story of another respondent, Dmitry I. Gaydarzhi (born 1957), from the village of Delzhiler, makes evident the exceptional honesty of Germans who in some cases, although rarely, failed to act properly but commanded mechanisms

¹⁰ Argati – farmhands.

to correct each other's conduct. On one occasion of a promise given to a Bulgarian but unfulfilled for a barter of barley for maize, another German villager received the Bulgarian and performed the service, commenting on his fellow villager's conduct as follows: "I'll teach him later. Why did he promised you'd provide maize? We'll sort it out later".

This example is relevant to the problem of the famed order and discipline reigning in Bessarabia German settlements (Титоров 1903: 52). Our respondents often focus upon these traits in the German way of life, which, however, could hardly be regarded as standing out in contrast to the order characteristic of Bulgarian villages. As a rule, the notions stem from post-war observations and experiences and the period of collective farm formation when rural organization drastically changed. Apart from that, data are available as to the existence of such phenomena among the Bulgarians as well during the period under examination, although related to the Romanian domination regime (Бонева 2009) and, in all likelihood, to the influence of neighbouring colonies.

Along with the rest farm work, grape harvest and grape sale provide a recurring subject in the narratives. Particularly curious is the following story of an interlocutor from the village of Divitliy/Delen, Artsiz region, which reveals further aspects in the neighbour relationships and also discloses certain differences in manners as regards attitude to labour and its "fruits". The case concerns the fact that Bulgarians hired to pick grapes in neighbouring German villages were forced to wear *setki* (nets) over their mouths while at work if they wanted a higher wage. With no such nets they had the permission to both pick and eat grapes whereas they received a lower pay from their employers.

Despite the good memories and high opinion the Bulgarians have kept concerning their neighbours in the past, almost none of them mentions intermarriages. A marriage to a German, despite the closeness of the settlements, was an exception, the different confession and traditions being decisive in this matter. It is well known that some of the Bessarabian Germans were affiliated to Catholicism, others are Protestants, Menonites, etc. (Шмидт 2015; Радова, Капустин 2007: 291–292). According to our respondents, marriages between Germans and Bulgarians did not take place, because they largely belonged to different social strata despite their equal standing of colonists: „Did Bulgarians marry the Germans?” “No, as these Germans were rich”.

Nevertheless, attempts to live “the German way” were made. In 1903 J. Titorov wrote: „Fifty years ago only a German carter could produce those wooden, bogies bound in iron, known in Bessarabia as “maliyoshki” (singular “maliyoshka”) or “nemtsoyki” (singular “nemtsoyka”), and for fifty years now the Bulgarian carters have been making the same kind of bogies, even better ones” (Титоров 1903: 50). According to the collected ethnographic information concerning the 1940s, i.e. about half a century after that author's observations, it is still impossible to claim that the Bulgarians have fully assimilated the skills the Germans were famous for and that the tendency noted by J. Titorov is a complete process.

Many informants speak of Bulgarians who attempted to learn and live like Germans, yet almost invariably, according to their assertions, this did not result in lasting success. Apart from such statements, studies on traditions of Bessarabian Bulgarians of the field of agriculture, livestock breeding and their overall economic life also indicate that, despite sharing experience, knowledge and technology with the neighbours, this by no means led to radical transformations in their economic customs and full alignment with those of the Germans. An issue in itself is the fact, compared to other spheres of culture, here the influences (not merely on the part of the Germans) are most significant and, amongst other elements of the material lifestyle (clothing, architecture, etc.¹¹), they largely lend the specific Bessarabian tint to the local Bulgarian culture.

The experience of living after the German model – like them but, in a sense, among them, could be traced through Dimitar Derendzhi's life story. „The case“ of Dimitar is particularly informative, because he lives in the former German village of Kazba (now Luzhanka, Tarutinski District, Ukraine). Also he comes from the neighboring Bulgarian village of Kuparan, merely six kilometers off. He moved to Kazba in the 1950s but had visited the German village before, while its inhabitants had not left Bessarabia yet. He had gained his own impressions of them, although, as with most informants, they date back to his childhood and are at times vague and not sufficiently reliable. Along the information about the good water and the wells in the German yards, which were built in one line (“on one level”) for the whole street, sometimes two in one yard, and somewhere outside the road; about the honest, respectful and literate owners, the emphasis is on D. Derendzhi's statement that, *“at the very least, as they saw how the Germans lived, they started living in a more cultural way”*. This tendency is also corroborated by a number of other interlocutors of ours, through diverse concrete examples. At the same time, assertions ending in the refrain, *“to live the German way, one should probably be born a German”* provide no exception.

Similar statements directly bring in the view voiced by Ulf Hannerz as regards border in its anthropological, ethnographic sense, a view according to which “it is not to be conceived as a borderline but rather as an area where one thing merges into another, where contours blur, ambiguity, changeability occur” (quoted following Лулева 2006: 46). Within this space of contacts and interactions, all social and cultural activities are certainly to be incorporated while bearing in mind that as regards the diverse historical and culture experience spheres as well as the diverse time periods and borderline states these activities take place varying in degree and ratios.

The following information is also to be taken into consideration here. At the time the Germans were leaving for Germany in 1940, the moment proved to be extremely convenient for people from neighbouring villages to acquire whatever they needed at bargain prices. However, one could often hear stories mentioning that not only Bulgarians but also other people from nearby villages plundered furniture, animals,

¹¹ On the manifestations of ethnic specificity in the material culture of the Bulgarians from Bessarabia compare the observations of L. Markova (Маркова 1974).

etc. left behind by the Germans. It appears that such assertions do not come from direct witnesses, apart from the fact that such not cases were by no means common. Acts of this kind might have occurred but evidently this happened after the Germans had already left their settlements and concerns runaway fowl, other small animals and abandoned property which they had been unable to find buyers for. It is certain that a great number of things were left behind after the departure of Germans and our informants therefore kept repeating: “*What can you take in a single cart? And you know what they say? Well, you are going to move, who is going to buy it all... Won't be anyone to buy*”. Except for the economic “effect” of expatriates’ fate, these statements disclose the philosophy of their entire life. They evidently refer to the notion of the temporary sojourn in those lands of the Bulgarians as well (as with the Germans themselves) and the awareness that after its end, which will come true someday, property that has been accumulated and preserved through the labour of so many generations, may be wasted.

Despite repeated information that the Germans have better land, are richer, more enterprising and clever, in the stories of our informants there is no envy or hatred expressed in relation their ex-neighbours. Rather, there is respect close to awe of people with whom they can hardly compare: *they lived well*, but this almost always followed by the additions that *they are good people*. Along with the moral judgments, these definitions also reflect the purely physical qualities, clothing, appearance, etc., which are also often considered as „superior“ to the Bulgarians: *there were no such beautiful people, but Germans [were] understandably*.

From the information provided, it is clear that, in general, the Bulgarians in Bessarabia have especially good memories of their neighbours from the past: the Germans with their rich and ordered settlements. Clear is the image of the honest, hard-working, proud and disciplined owners, possessors of plenty of good land, pastures, water and wells, of large and fed horses, and of sheep, pigs, ducks etc. – excellent farmers and livestock breeders. The Germans are referred to as unsurpassed sausage producers, whose regard for quality foods and good nutrition has been notorious. And even today the expression *German work* is synonymous with integrity and work well-done. Very often the Bulgarians emphasize the exceptional enterprise, skills and mastery of the Germans in various spheres. They are remembered as very good craftsmen, who trained the people in the surrounding villages in construction, carpentry, cooperage, shoemaking, furriery, smithery, cart making, etc.

The Germans, according to the Bulgarians, did not tolerate drinking, lies, theft and punished these vices severely.

The shaping of such notions (sounding much too idyllic at times), as already noted, is likely to have been influenced by the early childhood or youth when our informants gained their impressions, as well as the fact that after the mass relocation of the Germans from Bessarabia in 1940 the, opportunity for longer observations, more finely shaded, as it were, on their life and character no longer existed. What remains is childhood experience and information transmitted by previous generations. This memory has a particular value since it is formed, reflected, and in a

sense relevant only to a precisely defined historical moment – the years preceding the repatriation itself.

It should be emphasized that part of the Bulgarians' notions concerning the Germans have been formed in our days, in the course of the visits of descendants of former colonists to their native villages in today's Ukraine and Moldova. Undoubtedly, such contacts provide grounds for transferring to the past some more general views and long-established images of modern Western prosperity and well-being. Last but not least, one should not lose sight of the fact that the times of extraordinary destabilization and socioeconomic uncertainty in the post-Soviet societies after the collapse of the USSR likewise exert a powerful impact on shaping and venting the Bulgarians' memory as regards wealthy and prosperous neighbours. Set against such a background, the economic and various other achievements of German colonists of the past stand in rank contrast to the disrupted collective farms, the unemployment and overall deadlock situation in post-socialist Ukraine and Moldova (e.g. Янчева 2013). In a way, all this lends additional appreciation and appears to function so as to transfer and search for a specific ideal, a pattern of prosperity from the past into our times.

In spite of processes of imagining and shaping of the collective memory under the impact of diverse factors, we should point out here that the memories recorded in the field, though predominantly dating back to childhood, are in most cases concrete, sometimes surprisingly intense, involving appraisal and comparison. They tangibly highlight the role of the borders, i. e. the extent and essence of the mutual contacts between Germans and Bulgarians. The men are familiar mostly with customs and manners of the Germans, their settlements and farming activities whereas women visited their villages less frequently, less often seek employment with them, were less interested and during the studied period people were less mobile. The spheres in which the representatives of the two groups have more intensively communicated: agriculture and livestock breeding, crafts, wage labour, transportation, trade and markets – are clearly and sometimes strictly differentiated.

These are the contact areas between the various groups in Bessarabia, their culture grew convergent to a high extent, acquiring a great number of common features, becoming, shaping itself as *Bessarabian*, one could say. Beyond these activities, a wide range of "inner" spheres have emerged, preserved and reproduced over a long period as they had been "brought over" into Bessarabia: family and calendar rituals, songs and folklore, world view, magic and healing practices, etc.

The information is scanty concerning the existence of any type of contacts beyond business and trade connections or mere, friendly visits between Bulgarians and Germans. Being together took place mostly at fairs and bazaars; individual connections and friendships are less frequently mentioned. Informants from the villages of Koparan and Kazba several times referred to Germans visiting the village and meeting the *stariki* (elderly people). It remains uncertain whether this had been arranged to negotiate business or for some other purpose. We are not clear as to whether such meetings sometimes also occurred spontaneously or whether occasionally Germans attended holidays or other important events in Bulgarian villages and vice versa.

Informants from the village of Delzhiler report that in the 1930s, people from a neighbouring German village came with their equipment to help extinguish a fire. It stands to reason that such information would prove harder “to glean” on the field since in those times our informants were either children or very young people. One can assume, however, that even if such contacts did exist, they must have been rare and did not determine the essence of the relationships between two studied groups.

* * *

The relationships between the Bessarabia Bulgarians and Germans were restricted to the sphere of material and technological knowledge, skills and achievements.

Far better dressed and provided for, more modern and educated, the Germans provided a model to imitate, especially as regards economic practices and material gains. Attempts to introduce their model into Bulgarian settlements, although indirect and not purposeful, kept cropping up throughout the period under study. In most cases, they resulted from individual initiatives, being rather fragmentary and unsystematic. Processes of interrelationships and influences, however, did take place and the effects are marked even in culture of the Bessarabia Bulgarians today, particularly in villages in the immediate vicinity of those of the Germans.

On the other hand, the socioeconomic distance, the different religion and language and a number of other specific cultural aspects functioned as sustaining barriers in the interaction process, difficult to overcome and, in some cases insurmountable.

As reasonably noted by E. Lyah, better understanding of the problem of “isolation of the German-speaking colonists is impossible without taking into account the fact that in the 19th century (and, in this particular case, until the middle of the 20th century – a.c.) ethnic estrangement was the norm for both the German and the rest of the rural communities in Ukraine insofar as in their social activities the contract partners of the colonists (as rural population) were predominantly Ukrainian, Russian, Bulgarian and other peasants”. “The isolation of the German-speaking colonists”, the author asserts, “is not so much ethnical as it is rather social in essence and in this respect the German peasant in his socio-cultural characteristics comes much closer to his Ukrainian counterpart than to the German entrepreneur or social activist while lifestyle practices of the Ukrainian peasants and the German-speaking colonists exhibit far more common rather than distinctive features: such as traditionalism, conservatism, relative closeness of community life, high impact of ethnic and religious estrangement, etc” (Лях 2005).

Nevertheless, the question remains open for further discussion as to the ways socio-economic and daily life culture boundaries between Bulgarians and Germans, perceived as almost complete opposites in this respect, actually function as contact areas between both groups (intertwining to a far greater extent as compared to many others). In spite of the differences, it is in those spheres that the Bulgarians are subject to the most powerful impact on the part of the Germans which results

in a certain intermingling of the both cultures. This distinctly discloses the essence of the borderlines themselves as a field of interaction and change. Parallel to that, the relationships and interactions described do not reduce but rather reinforce the ethno-cultural distrust rooted in different confession, language, family and kinship traditions, failing to stimulate intermarriages or promote other direct or as frequent contacts. Consequently, the field of relationships encompasses diverse levels and degrees of intertwining (compare Лулева 2006: 52). These relationships are by no means to be regarded as a uniform and coherent wave, smooth in intensity and flow, as a completely “reversed” mirrored image equal in intensity and way of formation to the constellation and substantivization of the ethnic. On the contrary, the issue of ethnic boundaries should involve elucidation of the diverse forms, levels and ways to set these borders, the problem, as a matter of fact, of their being conditioned by time periods, environment and circumstances amidst which the process takes place.

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