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Crown Gypsies of Bessarabia and Russia's State Policy (1828–1836)

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Abstract

In the early 19th century, Russia incorporated Bessarabia that was home to both sedentary and nomadic Gypsies. By the 1810s, Russia already had accumulated its own experience of sedentarizing Gypsies. In 1828, the territory of the Bessarabia Region became the target of another campaign launched to bind Gypsies to land. The experience obtained could be later leveraged in other regions of the Russian Empire. The government allocated land to Gypsies, provided them with money to buy seed grain, agricultural tools and implements, timber to construct housing and farm buildings. However, the campaign failed. In the paper, we will review the campaign in terms of its key events, identify the role of the central government and local authorities in the way they put the campaign into operation and formulate the outcomes of the effort. The primary material for the paper includes documents of the Russian and Moldovan historical archives, which are introduced for the scholarly use for the first time.

Keywords: Gypsies, Russian Empire, state policy, settled life, Bessarabia, crown Gypsies, Faraonovka, Kair.

1. Introduction

In the early 19th century, the Russian Empire had the Gypsy population of 14-15 thousand people who were registered by the local police (Shaidurov, 2017: 1212). Later, the size of the group increased both through its natural growth and as a result of the newly added territories and near-border migration.

In 1812, under the terms of the Treaty of Bucharest, concluded by Russia and Turkey, the Bessarabia Region was ceded to Russia. The consequence was a large group of nomadic and sedentary Gypsies in South Russia, which were owned by local landlords and monasteries or were personally free individuals.

Beginning in the 1780s, the government took various steps to end vagrancy among Gypsies. In a relatively short period (1780s–1810s), it tested different approaches to address this issue. However, neither liberal nor military and police methods had any positive effects.

The next campaign initially comprised only the Bessarabia Region. The implementation process involved both the central authorities in St. Petersburg (Senate, Ministry of Finance) and Bessarabia's local government (Chancery of the Novorossiysk and Bessarabia Governor General, Bessarabian Civil Governor, Regional Council of Bessarabia, Office for Crown Gypsies). In the late 1820s and the first half of the 1830s, officials for the first time acted based on pragmatic considerations useful for the state – not only they required that Gypsies abandon their migration traditions and shift to settled lifestyles, but also created conditions favorable for this move (allocated land plots, tax preferences, cash benefits). By implementing the campaign, the authorities gained new knowledge in dealing with the issue, and the insights were harnessed in the activities carried on by Count Kiselev since 1839.

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2. Sources and Methods

This paper will analyze the process of peasantizing the Gypsy community in Bessarabia between the 1820s and 1830s.

The history of Bessarabian Gypsies was reflected in a wide array of written sources of the 19th century. These are some legislative acts that regulated the situation of Gypsies in Bessarabia after its accession to the Russian Empire in 1812. These documents were published in the “Complete Code of Laws of the Russian Empire” (Polnoye sobraniye zakonov Rossiyskoy imperii) and are well known to researchers. It is these sources that are mainly referred to in the works on the Gypsy history (Crowe, 2004: 151–161). We cannot also reject the published historical sources. But they do not allow for a complete and realistic picture of what happened in Russia in the historical period under review. Handling this obstacle requires identifying and analyzing archival historical sources.

In our research work, we focus mainly on archival documents. To explore the history of Bessarabian Gypsies, we utilized documents preserved by the Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg, in its fond collections. The fond of the Executive Police Department contains correspondence maintained by officials on the activities of the commissions established by Novorossiysk and Bessarabia Governor General M. Vorontsov to provide settlement arrangements for Bessarabian Gypsies. Documents from the State Council’s Department of State Economy enable a restoration for the views adopted by ministers and other public figures engaged in the decision-making process related to Gypsies’ living conditions in Bessarabia. The surviving documents in the Department of State Property of the Ministry of Finance gave us the opportunity to estimate the amount of financial aid and other support the Bessarabian Gypsies received from the state when they were settled down in state-owned settlements. Historical sources from these and other fonds of the Russian State Historical Archive complement each other and allow us to retrace of the actual history of Bessarabian Gypsies.

Researchers, who worked between the 1960s and 1970s, indicated the fact that there is no data on the ethnic composition of the Bessarabian population before 1835 (Grosul, Budak, 1967: 61; Kabuzan, 1974: 25). However, this gap can be filled in with statistical data from the files stored in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova. For example, in the fond “Senators presiding in the Divans of Moldavia and Wallachia (1808–1812)” comprises several files that provide information on the ethnic composition (NARM. F. 1. Op. 1. D. 3246). Importantly, the fonds of this archive are a treasure chest of materials on the number of serf and free Gypsies in towns and villages of Bessarabia. The fonds also preserved census audits for Gypsy villages, such as Faraonovka and Kair as of 1835 (NARM. F. 134. Op. 2. D. 576), and the records provide an opportunity to identify not only what the size of the communities was, but also who and what the people were. A number of files can supply data on Gypsies from the Ottoman Empire, who moved to Russia and were registered as crown Gypsies (NARM. F. 134. Op. 3. D. 17).

Reconstructing the history of Gypsies in Russia requires harnessing a wide array of historical sources.

In terms of methodology, we aim to review the Gypsy history through the lens of the modernization theory, because we deal here with a typical example of (non-)transformation of a traditional society into a modern one. The leadership of the Russian Empire sought to build its activities on the statement by Emperor Nicholas I which read that “a well-organized state has no room for nomadism.” The paper uses various research methods such as a comparative and historical approach, historical and chronological method, quantitative methods, etc.

3. Discussion

The Russian historiography only offers a patchy history of Gypsies in Bessarabia. The existing limited historiography can be divided into three stages: 1) 1820s – 1917; 2) 1917 – 1991; 3) from 1992 to the present day.

First publications which had references to Bessarabian Gypsies, appeared in the mid-19th century. These were dedicated descriptions of the history and the contemporary state of the Bessarabia Region. The authors belonged to the military and government officials. Very few of them substantiate their accounts with documents and own observations. The most well-known material was collected by Captain A. Zashchuk (Zashchuk, 1862: 174–180), which would be widely used in the subsequent period. For example, the author of the almanac “Bessarabia,” P.A. Krushevan, noted: “As borrowed with minor changes from A. Zashchuk’s highly valuable work that has become a bibliographical rarity” (Krushevan, 1903: 193). Zashchuk provided useful information rather than simply stating the fact that Gypsies “are roaming the land and have only reached the earliest stage of development, no better than wild peoples” (Zashchuk, 1862: 177). He gave some data on the trends in the number of Gypsies in Bessarabia over time since its accession to Russia until 1858. Great historical and ethnographic significance can be attached to the information on the life of Gypsies. Zashchuk delivered a description of the Mikleshuany estate that was owned by the Căpriansa monastery (Zashchuk, 1862: 177–176).

An attempt to transform Gypsies into Cossacks of the Danube (Novorossiysk) Cossack Host is described in A. Yegunov’s publication “On the Gypsies of Bessarabia” (Yegunov, 1864: 109–123). Being a member of the Regional Statistical Committee, he included reliable statistics related to Gypsies of Bessarabia in 1857–1858 (X census) in his work. In addition, he demonstrates knowledge of literature on Gypsies, quoting excerpts from a book by Richard Liebig “The Gypsies. Nature and Geography” (St. Petersburg, 1864), newly published in Russia (Yegunov, 1864: 112). However, further on, Yegunov provides quotations on

several pages from a colleague in the Statistical Committee, V.V. Gubkin, citing data on the Faraonovka and Kair Gypsies for the 1840s and 1850s, and in the end, he speaks to support those state and public figures who believed that Gypsies could be successfully socialized in Russia only by applying police methods.

In the early Soviet years, the Bolsheviks paid much attention to the situation of ethnic minorities and national borderlands. In 1918, L.S. Berg published his work “Bessarabia: country – people – economy” (Berg, 1918) in the “Native studies” [Rodinovedeniye] series, which devoted several pages to Gypsies. However, this information has predominantly a descriptive nature and covers only the period between the 1830s and 1850s (Berg, 1918: 146–147). In 1923, Berg published the book “The population of Bessarabia. Ethnographic composition and size.” The author retained the previous material on Gypsies in his newly released work, essentially enriching it with data on the size of the Gypsy population based on the First General Census of the Russian Empire of 1897. These works can be referred to the first period of research into the history of Bessarabian Gypsies (Berg, 1923: 37–38). These works can be referred to the first period of research into the history of Bessarabian Gypsies.

The second period features a strict scholarly approach to research. Authors of scarce works relied on known and accessible to them archival documents in their explorations. In the 1960s and 1970s, Gypsies of Bessarabia were spotlighted by Soviet historians, and the interest was linked to with the study of the forming ethnic structure, distinctions in the economic and demographic development of Bessarabia. We can emphasize the study by Ya.S. Grosul and I.G. Budak – “Essays on the history of the national economy of Bessarabia (1812–1861)” (1967). Here, the authors concentrated on the economic progression of Bessarabia. Based on previously published information (A. Zashchuk), they gave incomplete data on the number of Gypsies in Bessarabia (Grosul, Budak, 1967: 62). Analyzing the state policy, they emphasized the fact that serfdom in Bessarabia was only extended to Gypsies, and this situation was resulted from its peculiar status of a borderland region (Grosul, Budak, 1967: 38). Great value can be attached to the information on the amount of taxes that Gypsies had to pay.

Some aspects of the history of Bessarabian Gypsies are displayed in the monograph by V.S. Zelenchuk “The population of Bessarabia and the Dniester region in the 19th century. (Ethnic and socio-demographic processes)” (Naseleniye Bessarabii i Podnestrovyia v 19 v. (Etnicheskiye i sotsialno-demograficheskiye protsessy, 1979).

These historians made use of available sources to determine key areas in the study of Bessarabian Gypsies. The exploration into their scholarly heritage enables us to identify the aspects that they did not study for various reasons.

Currently, there are no dedicated research works that discover the history of Gypsies in Bessarabia. The search can identify general works which, as their predecessors, provide information on Gypsy population in the region. In most cases, their authors build their study on well-known published legal acts and statutory regulations, statistical materials, social and political essays (Smirnova-Seslavinskaya, 2014: 141–164). However, it is a very rare case today when scholars are introducing new archival documents into research and analysis (Shaidurov, 2017: 1207–2018).

4. Results

In the early 19 century, Bessarabia was the least populated part of the Principality of Moldavia with a total share of 50 % in its territory. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–1812, the lands between the Prut, Dniester and Danube rivers were ceded to the Russian Empire under the Treaty of Bucharest. In 1818–1828, the Bessarabia Region received legislatively formalized administrative bodies, namely the Bessarabian Supreme (Regional since 1828) Council, Bessarabian Regional Government (1813–1828) and others.

Securing the new lands required that the Russian authorities facilitated their settlement and economic development. Bulgarians and Gagauzes began to move to Bessarabia from the border Moldovan counties. Beginning in 1814, Bessarabia saw the foundation of several German and Jewish agricultural colonies. At the same time, the government launched the resettlement of state peasants from central and Little Russian governorates. Migrations in Bessarabia resulted into a community of multi-ethnic population in the region. The approximate proportions of various ethnolocal groups can be demonstrated by the population of the Akkerman city (1817–1819) (see Table 1).

Table 1. The population of Akkerman by ethnic background (NARM. F. 5. Op. 2. D. 496. Our counting)

<i>ethnic group</i>	<i>no. of people</i>
Great Russians	255
Little Russians	1,795
Greeks	465
Armenians	600
Gypsies	97
Moldovans	871

Bulgarians	403
Jews	159
Total	4,645

We can see from the data above that the largest portion had the Ukrainian ethnolocal group, accounting for almost 40 % of the population. It was followed by Moldovans (19 %), Armenians (13 %) and Greeks (10 %). Gypsies were the smallest group that accounted for only 2 % of the city's population.

A closer look at the gender structure of the city population confirms that migrants formed a larger community (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2. The population of Akkerman by gender ([NARM. F. 5. Op. 2. D. 496. Our counting](#))

<i>ethnic group</i>	<i>male settlers</i>	<i>female settlers</i>
Great Russians	171	84
Little Russians	1,161	634
Greeks	228	237
Armenians	299	301
Gypsies	44	53
Moldovans	519	352
Bulgarians	208	195
Jews	80	79
Total	2,710	1,935

The group of Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan settlers was dominated by the male population – this category exceeded the female population by almost 1.4 to 2 times. On the other hand, the city's indigenous communities (Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians and Gypsies) reveal a balanced gender structure.

It is evident that Gypsies were the smallest group at that time. Their share accounted for approx. 2 % of both the total number of residents and families. In the future, this trend would continue to exist.

One of the sources that contributed the growth the Gypsy population in Bessarabia was the resettlement of Moldovan Gypsies. The resettlement process typically proceeded in small groups. On the one hand, the groups consisted of fugitive Gypsy serfs. For example, in 1818, the Bessarabia Supreme Council heard a case where 40 Gypsies of Prince Alexander Kantakuzen, who fled from the Principality of Moldavia to Russia, were to be returned to the registration place ([NARM. F. 3. Op. 1. D. 30](#)). Once in Bessarabia, fugitive Gypsies were detained by local authorities ([NARM. F. 3. Op. 1. D. 30. L. 1](#)). A brief inquiry, conducted by the local police, revealed that they were subject to the possessory right, and this gave the grounds to return them to their lawful owner. We can suggest that some fugitive Gypsies managed to stay in Russia.

Another example of the resettlement of Gypsies from Turkish Moldavia to Bessarabia can be traced back to 1830–1831. This event at the time brought seven families consisting of 25 people to Bessarabia ([NARM. F. 134. Op. 3. D. 17. L. 4](#)). Initially, the responsibility for their fate was assigned to the Office of Foreign Colonists for the Southern Krai (territory), which cascaded the task of their settlement to the regional authorities in Kishinev. In late 1830, the Bessarabian Vice-Governor ordered that the arriving Gypsies be ranked in the category of crown subjects, which was done by the Regional Treasury Chamber.

Despite the continuously small size of the community, the Bessarabian Gypsies found themselves in the focus of the tsar's government and Russian administration of Bessarabia (Novorossiysk Governor-General, Civil Governor, Treasury Chamber). This was reflected both in fragmentary references to Gypsies in the legislative acts and in the release of special regulations and legal acts with regards to the ethnic group.

One of the first references to the Gypsies of Bessarabia can be found in the Charter of the Bessarabia Region dated April 29, 1818 ([PSZ RI-I. Vol. 35. No. 27357](#)). The section "On the rights and benefits of residents," among other groups, distinguishes Gypsies as belonging to the Crown and landlords. Managing crown (state-owned) Gypsies was the responsibility of the Regional Government. The Charter retained the existing taxation system. Crown Gypsies, like other tax-paying classes, had to pay the main state tax, so called *dazhdiya*, "on the basis of the certificates that they have" ([PSZ RI-I. Vol. 35. No. 27357](#)). Gypsies were deprived of the right to start any state military and civil service, as was the case with Bessarabian Jews ([PSZ RI-I. Vol. 35. No. 27357](#)). This incapacity survived in the reign of Emperor Nicholas I ([RGIA. F. 1286. Op. 5. 1833. D. 137](#)).

The situation of Gypsy serfs in Bessarabia differed fundamentally from that of serfs in the Russian Empire, where the monopoly to own serfs was recognized for the nobility already under Catherine II. In the Bessarabian Region, serf (house) Gypsies could be owned not only by the nobility, but also by the clergy,

boiernași¹, mazil² and merchants. Unlike crown Gypsies, serf Gypsies were exempted from paying state and public taxes and duties, performing work only for their owners (PSZ RI-I. Vol. 35. No. 27357).

In 1828, Nicholas I approved the “Statute on the administration of the Bessarabian Region” (PSZ RI-II. Vol. 3. No. 1834). Its preamble (§ 1) acknowledged that all classes in the Bessarabian Region, including crown and serf Gypsies, retained the rights and benefits that they previously enjoyed. One fact had crucial importance – the conscript obligation, one of the most serious natural duties for tax-paying classes, was not applicable to them (§ 2). As the government made efforts to prevent further proliferation of serfdom in Bessarabia, serf Gypsies could only be used “for personal and courtyard services, and not for settlement on land” (§ 4). To supervise crown Gypsies of Bessarabia, the law established the Office for State Gypsies in the Regional Board (PSZ RI-II. Vol. 3. Digest of Staff.: 97).

In 1820, Emperor Alexander I turned his attention to the situation of Bessarabian Gypsies. At the same time, acting through State Secretary Count Kapodistrias, the ruler instructed the Governor-General of Novorossia and Bessarabia, Count Mikhail Vorontsov, to collect complete information on Gypsies in Bessarabia to ensure their proper settlement (RGIA. F. 1152. Op. 1. 1828. D. 140. L. 8). This meant that the government again showed a desire to cultivate sedentary life styles among Gypsies.

Preparatory activities took several years. The administration created special commissions in three uyezds (districts) of the Bessarabian region to collect data on landlords’ and crown Gypsies. In other uyezds, which had small Gypsy population, this task was assigned to district police captains. In the same period, a census of landlords’ Gypsies was carried out, and further regulations were imposed to settle their situation. For example, the regulations stipulated that landlords did “not allow them (Gypsies – V.Sh.) wander about at will,” but used in domestic work and land cultivation (RGIA. F. 1152. Op. 1. 1828. D. 140. L. 8). At the same time, a ban was introduced prohibiting on selling Gypsies separately (RGIA. F. 1152. Op. 1. 1828. D. 140. L. 8). This measure was subsequently bolstered by the Senate’s Department of Laws that charged the Bessarabia Region Council with putting it into practice (RGIA. F. 1152. Op. 1. 1828. D. 140. L. 9-10).

With regard to crown Gypsies, the efforts by the Vorontsov administration were liberal. The commissions launched in the uyezds were to poll free Gypsies who led the nomadic life, for their desire to settle down in cities or villages. Vorontsov proposed those of them who expressed a desire to create a permanent farmstead, to provide a 15-year grace for taxes and duties (RGIA. F. 1152. Op. 1. 1828. D. 140. L. 9). However, the documents failed to clearly specify what this grace was supposed to look like – full or partial exemptions from monetary and in kind taxes.

Already in 1828, preparatory work was complete, and Governor-General of Novorossiysk and Bessarabia Count Mikhail Vorontsov executed a project to sedentarize Gypsies, which by its content was comparable to the projects to establish foreign colonies in Russia in Catherine II’s era and Jewish agricultural colonies under the reign of Alexander I. Vorontsov believed that granting land to nomadic Gypsies and giving them state financial support would enable the administration to “encourage these nomadic people into founding a solid settlement basis and solicit them with funds to build up farmsteads, as well as to convince them that the Government cares about their well-being” (PSZ RI-II. Vol. 4. No. 2665). This proposal was supported by Minister of Finance Count Yegor Kankrin and approved by Nicholas I on February 8, 1829, after it was discussed in the State Council.

As it became a legally binding instrument, the opinion of the State Council initiated a new attempt to transform Gypsies into a sedentary population. We can see a change in rhetoric as early as in the preamble, which indicated a turn in the government’s policy. Law-makers used new wording to determine the solution for issues related to the situation of the Gypsies, such as “encourage,” “take care,” or “provide some benefits” (PSZ RI-II. Vol. 4. No. 2665). This confirms that to achieve its goal, the bureaucracy rejected the forceful police measures that had been applied in previous years, and employed “soft power.” This shift was linked, among other things, to the fact that new officials came to power who had completed training, including rhetoric courses, in Russian institutions of higher education (Shchukina, Egorenkova, 2017: 376-384). The attempt stood very strong chances of success, because part of crown Gypsies already had settled homes in cities and villages in Bessarabia in the first third of the 19th century. What were the key provisions of the new campaign that the authorities planned to bring to life in Bessarabia?

Over almost 5 decades, no regulatory and legal acts were elaborated in such a detailed way as it was the case with the law of 1829. We should first pay attention to the fact that the government confined its implementation to the Bessarabia Region. The experience gained here could later be leveraged in projects throughout Russia. In addition, in case of Bessarabia, implementing the activities would require fewer material resources, which would help avoid their dissipation.

It was planned to allocate vacant state lands to provide arrangements for Gypsies’ settlement. A Gypsy family could receive a 30 dessiatine (dessiatine – a Russian unit of area equivalent to approximately 2.7 acres or 10,800 square metres) land plot whatever the size of the family was. Since the settlements were founded

¹ Boiernași is a social estate in the Principality of Moldavia, whose members were granted the personal nobility rights after Bessarabia was integrated into the Russian Empire.

² Mazil is a semi-privileged social estate in the Principality of Moldavia, whose members were equalized in rights with the Odnodvortsi class (those possessing only their own farmsteads) after Bessarabia was integrated into the Russian Empire.

from scratch, they were in need of resources for housing and farmstead construction. Instead of the timber required for this purpose, the Ministry of Finance offered to give each family 23 rubles 50 kopecks “just as all the settlers who moved to Bessarabia from internal provinces received” (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 117). The dedicated state budget was supposed to buy “2 chetverts of different bread grains per each family” (chetvert – a measure of grain equivalent to about 210 l) (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 117). To lighten the financial situation of Gypsy farmsteads, the Ministry of Finance backed up Count Vorontsov’s initiative to grant Gypsies a 4-year exemption from state taxes and military service (PSZ RI-II. Vol. 4. No. 2665). These steps were to facilitate the fastest adaptation of Gypsies to a new way of life.

The evaluation and selection of vacant land plots by representatives of Gypsy communities dragged on for 2 years. In 1829, the process was hindered by the plague epidemic that spread Bessarabia. In 1830, they examined some of the plots, and it was not until September that they chose plot No. 12 with an area of approx. 5 thousand dessiatines of land suitable for tillage. The Senate, based on the recommendation from the Land Survey Department, legally attached this land plot, located in the Akkerman uezd, to Gypsies only on March 5, 1831 (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 118).

In 1831, Gypsies encountered new difficulties. The lands they chose were categorized over several years as obrok (taxed) land plots rented out by the Bessarabia Treasury Chamber. Its tenant in 1830-1831 was retired captain Bachev. The Treasury Chamber made all the appropriate arrangements already in 1830 to early terminate the lease agreement from the spring of 1831, which was permitted under the terms of the agreement (early termination, for example, might take place when status of the lands was changed from obrok plots to state-owned ones).

In July 1831, 40 Gypsies arrived in the former obrok land for haymaking. However, they managed to mow down “only 5 haystacks of a mediocre size... And that would do for only 5 farmsteads” (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 123). By that time, the greater part of the grass had already been mown down by Bachev. The local administration ordered that the already mown hay should be divided between the former tenant and the Gypsies. The Gypsies also retained the whole harvest of bread, sown by Bachev. This position of the administration is explained not so much by its commitment to the task of supporting Gypsies in a new home, but rather by the intention to collect from Bachev the arrears in payment for using the obrok land.

By the autumn of 1831, plot No. 12 was inhabited by 65 families. By late October 1831, 55 Gypsy families plowed fields and sowed them with rye and winter wheat. To purchase seed grain, the Bessarabia Treasury Chamber, as agreed by the Ministry of Finance, allotted 749 rubles 40 kopecks to the Office for Crown Gypsies, which was responsible for supporting Gypsies. (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 126). Following the proposal submitted by Civil Governor of Bessarabia Pahlen, the State Council approved in 1831 the allotment of additional funds in the amount of 549 rubles to purchase plows and other necessary agricultural implements. (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 126).

Southern Bessarabia was an area lacking forest. Particularly urgent need was felt for timber. By late 1831, Gypsies had to construct mud huts instead of above-ground huts, because they were only able to buy timber for 10 houses (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 127).

Gypsies had to buy firewood at their expense. However, they were given support by the local administration. The Bessarabia Treasury Chamber instructed the forest ranger of Bendery uezd to sell firewood to Gypsies, which were cut in the state forests on the precipices of the Dniester, at the prices of firewood from solid wood (14 rubles 40 kopecks in assignments¹ per sazhen²). Despite the fact that Gypsies were allowed to defer payment for the firewood to the Treasury, they had to pay to 2 ruble 40 kopecks in assignments to each wood chopper (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 126).

The campaign of 1829 – 1831 resulted into first two state-owned Gypsy settlements, Faraonovka and Kair, in the Akkerman uezd. In total, they had been allotted almost 10 thousand dessiatines of land by 1835. Since 1831, the Treasury provided Gypsies with various types of support to the amount of 58,615 rubles 71 kopecks 1/4 of the kopeck, including 16,771 rubles 71 kopecks without repayment (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 173). According to the census of 1835, there were 184 families (385 men and 349 women) in Faraonovka, and 198 families (369 men and 312 women) in Kair (NARM. F. 134. Op. 2. D. 576. L. 1 – 38).

The census, carried out by officials of the Regional Treasury Chamber, recorded not only the total population of Gypsy settlements. The statistical information provided in the census documents allows us to speak of the size of families as well as the gender age structure of the Gypsy society.

Let us review the size of Gypsy families in the Faraonovka village (see [Table 3](#)).

¹ In the Russian Empire, in the first half of the 19th century, prices were quoted in rubles in assignments (paper money) and silver (silver coins). The exchange rate of assignments to silver was never stable. In 1830, the exchange rate in Moscow was 4 rubles in assignments for 1 ruble in silver. A firm exchange rate was achieved as a result of the monetary reform of Ye.F. Kankrin.

² Sazhen – a Russian non-metric unit of measure, equivalent to 9.7127 m³

Table 3. The size of Gypsy families who lived in the Faraonovka village, Akkerman uezd, Bessarabia Region, 1835 (NARM. F. 134. Op. 2. D. 576. L. 1 – 38. Our counting.)

number of members in a family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
number of families	5	25	43	30	26	18	14	11	2	1

As the table above suggests, small families predominate in this community – the percentage of families consisting of 3–4 people amounted to 42 % (25 and 17 % of the total number). On the other hand, large families with 8 or more members accounted for only 8 % of all families. This picture is not normal for a Gypsy community. Probably, it was the consequence of the preference policy pursued by the tsarist administration. A meaningful fact is that the land plot was allotted to a family no matter how many members it included. The same is true to the allocated money loans that Gypsies received to buy grain, agricultural implements and construction wood. This context tempted to divide a large patriarchal family into several small independent families and receive a larger amount from the government than the sum that a traditional multi-generation Gypsy family could count on.

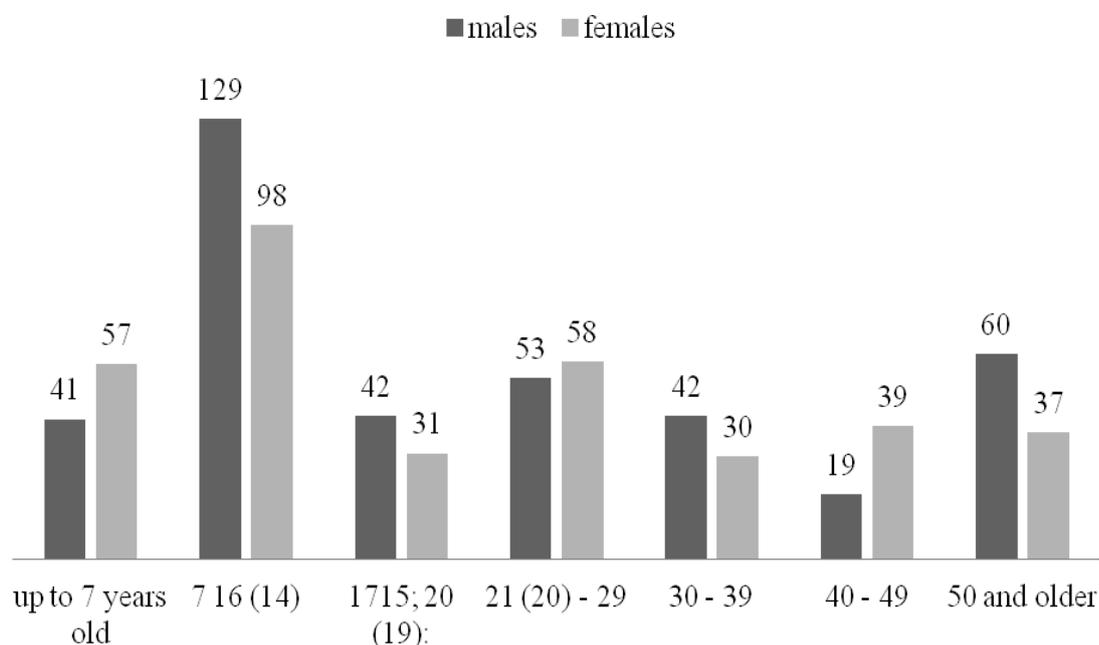


Fig. 1. The gender and age structure of the Gypsy community in Faraonovka, 1835 (NARM. F. 134. Op. 2. D. 576. L. 1 – 38. Our counting).

The analysis of the data provided shows a slight predominance of the male population (about 52.4 %), which is particularly visible in the age group from 7 to 16 (14) years and over 50 years (see Figure 1). However, the age group between 40 and 49 had almost twice as fewer men as women. In general, the people in the Gypsy community, who were incapable of work, amounted to 13 % (children aged under 7) as of the period under review. The partially able-bodied population (44 %) includes age groups of men and women aged from 7 to 16 (14) and elderly people over 50. The percentage of the fully able-bodied population aged from 16 (14) to 49 was equal to 43 %. In general, the demographic conditions in the Gypsy community were favorable, as the dependency ratio¹ shows: the ratio of children under the age of 16 (14) to the adult able-bodied population was 1.04; the ratio of elderly people aged 50 and above to the adult able-bodied population was 0.31 (NARM. F. 134. Op. 2. D. 576. L. 1 – 38). The relatively small number of women and men aged from 30 to 49 (only 18 % of the total population) was the result of the plague epidemic that swept South Russia, including Bessarabia, in 1828.

Controversies arose among senior statesmen involved in the campaign to peasantize Bessarabian Gypsies, already in 1835. Governor-General of Novorossiysk and Bessarabia Mikhail Vorontsov, at the suggestion of Civil Governor of Bessarabia Pavel Fedorov, said in his proposal, addressed to the Minister of Finance, Yegor Kankrin, dated November 30, 1835, that “although this settlement (of Gypsies in Faraonovka and Kair – V.Sh.) showed some promise for the possibility of transforming this nomadic people, but the

¹ $k=n_1/n_2$, where n_1 – the population incapable of work (children, elderly people), n_2 - able-bodied population.

outcome did not meet the expectations of the Government” (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 168). The root cause, as viewed by Vorontsov, was in the “ingrained inclinations (of Gypsies – V.Sh.) to a nomadic life that posed a major barrier to achieving the planned goal” (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 168). However, he made a substantial reservation further in his letter, pointing out that harsh years of bad harvest ensued “shortly after the settlement was established. This circumstance greatly affected the Gypsies and almost completely disrupted this settlement campaign” (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 168). With this phrase Vorontsov repudiated his own assertion about the causes of the failure to settle Gypsies in Bessarabia. The further content of Vorontsov’s letter reveals his true intentions: he needed land to accommodate parts of the newly formed Danube Cossack Host (1828–1868). As for Gypsies, he believed that they should be registered in the existing state-owned settlements of the Bessarabia Region, and the vacant lands should be given to the Cossacks. This approach to handle the situation can be explained solely by Vorontsov’s strategic and military aspirations – one of the challenges that he as Governor-General of a vast border region had to address was to ensure security at the borders. It was the Cossacks who, in the reign of Nicholas I, in accordance with the Provisions on Cossack Hosts, were liable for lifelong military service in the border regions from the Danube to the Pacific Ocean.

However, such an approach adopted by Vorontsov provoked a mixed reaction from Minister of Finance Yegor Kankrin, known for his thrifty ways regarding the state treasury. By allocating considerable sums, he sought to achieve a positive result. It was the above letter by Vorontsov that provided Kankrin with serious arguments that supported the continuing campaign to sedentarize Gypsies in Bessarabia. Expressing his opinion, he first pointed out that “the chief local authority admits that the modest success of effort to settle down crown Gypsies is linked not to the substance of the matter itself, but to the combination of accidental circumstances, namely to lean years, from which it can be seen that by overcoming these obstacles, with proper care and perseverance taken by the Government, we can hope that crown Gypsies will finally abandon this wild nomadism to choose a sedentary lifestyle” (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 182).

Kankrin also rejected Vorontsov’s proposal to relocate Gypsies in existing state-owned settlements. He argued for this by saying that “the registration of crown Gypsies in state-owned settlements will only encumber agricultural village communities with the heavy burden of paying taxes for those Gypsies” (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 183).

At the same time, Kankrin, understanding the need to allot lands for the Danube Cossack Host, offered Vorontsov a compromise solution: to move Gypsies in the state-owned settlements of Bessarabia to the rank of Cossacks and transfer the lands they occupied to the disposal of the host administration.

It is important to take note of one significant reservation made by Kankrin: Gypsies living in Faraonovka and Kair to be allotted 30 dessiatines of land per family, as specified by the effective laws, and hand over the surplus of land to Cossack stanitsas (rural localities). Therefore, he actually shielded Gypsies from attempts by the local administration to strip them of the land. Vorontsov himself pointed out in his letter that there were about 150 families in the Gypsy settlements (RGIA. F. 379. Op. 2. D. 35. L. 170). It was a small number of Gypsy families settled in these localities that constituted his main argument for seizing the land in favor of the Cossack Host.

In all likelihood, Kankrin, who prepared his report on this issue for the Committee of Ministers in the second half of January 1836, had more reliable data recorded in the census documents on Faraonovka and Kair.

Already February 18, 1836, the Committee of Ministers approved the opinion of Minister of Finance Kankrin (PSZ RI-II. Vol. 11. No. 8883). This document opened a new page in the history of Gypsies in the Russian Empire – the government set out on a journey to “Cossackize” Gypsies.

5. Conclusion

The accession of the Bessarabia Region by the Russian Empire in 1812 contributed to a significant increase in the size of the Gypsy population. Being representatives of various ethnocultural groups, Gypsies led both sedentary and nomadic lifestyles. It was until the early 1820s that the authorities shifted focus on them and made a new attempt to modernize the Gypsy society.

The campaign of 1828 – 1836 differed from previous efforts as it had a limited area of implementation and received a detailed evaluation of all aspects. Its core was formed on the principles of state pragmatism, and their implementation was to turn Gypsies into an organic element of the “well-ordered state,” and the principles of paternalism – it was the first time that the state not only required that Gypsies move to a settled way of life, but also created all necessary conditions for the transformation: it allotted land, granted exemption from in kind and monetary taxes, allocated money to purchase agricultural implements and seed grains.

The campaign had a mixed result. A beneficial and practical result of the measures taken was the foundation of two Gypsy villages with the population of 1415 people by the middle of 1835. However, a range of objective (drought, poor harvest, epidemics) and subjective (bureaucratization, inability of local officials to deal with emerging problems, etc.) factors did not allow the government to accomplish the initiative.

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Коронные цыгане Бессарабии и государственная политика России (1828–1836)

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Аннотация. В начале XIX в. в состав России была включена Бессарабия, где проживали оседлые и кочевые цыгане. К 1810-м гг. в России уже был собственный опыт перевода цыган к оседлости. В 1828 г. на территории Бессарабской области была начата очередная кампания по прикреплению цыган к земле. Полученный опыт мог быть в дальнейшем использован в других регионах Российской империи. Государство выделило цыганам землю, предоставило деньги для покупки семенного зерна, сельскохозяйственных орудий труда, леса для строительства жилья и хозяйственных построек. Но эта кампания провалилась. В статье мы рассмотрим основные события, выясним роль центральных и местных органов управления в ее реализации, определим результаты кампании. Основной материал для написания статьи – документы исторических архивов России и Молдовы, которые впервые вводятся в научный оборот.

Ключевые слова: цыгане, Российская империя, государственная политика, оседлость, Бессарабия, коронные цыгане, Фараоновка, Каир.

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