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In Monde(s) 2013/2 No 4 , pages 105 to 125
Publisher Armand Colin

ISSN 2261-6268
ISBN 9782200928629
DOI 10.3917/e.mond.132.0105
Uploaded: 10/02/2013

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Résumé

La Commission Karp en son contexte, ou comment les Soviétiques découvrirent l'Asie centrale rurale

En 1925, le Bureau pour l'Asie centrale du parti communiste d'URSS commanda une enquête sur les campagnes, qui aboutit à la publication d'une série intitulée *Le Village centrasiatique moderne*. Elle alliait une méthodologie prérévolutionnaire à un intérêt soviétique pour la stratification sociale, tandis que l'économie d'avant 1917, adoptée comme point de référence, et le profil des commissaires y révélaient l'héritage du pouvoir colonial tsariste.

Mots-clés : Union soviétique – Asie centrale – Ouzbékistan – Statistique – Réforme agraire.

Abstract

In 1925, the USSR Communist Party's Central Asian Bureau ordered an inquiry on the countryside, resulting in the series The Modern Central Asian Village. It combined pre-revolutionary methods with Soviet attention to social stratification, while the benchmark of the pre-1917 economy and the composition of the commission revealed the heritage of Tsarist colonial rule.

Keywords: *Soviet Union – Central Asia – Uzbekistan – Statistics – Land Reform.*

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In the mid-1920s, the Soviet regime implemented a set of measures that aimed at the economic and political transformation of Central Asia. The most notorious of them was the "national delimitation" of the Central Asian republics. Between 1924 and 1925, negotiations between Moscow and representatives of the local pro-Bolshevik élites led to the re-definition of the Central Asian space as new "national" republics and autonomous provinces: the Uzbek and Turkmen Socialist Soviet republics (SSRs), the Kara-Kirgiz (then Kirgiz) and Karakalpak Autonomous Provinces, the Tajik and Kirgiz (then Kazakh) Autonomous SSRs. All these administrative units apart from Karakalpakstan subsequently obtained the status of SSRs and became independent in 1991, leading to the present five "Stans".

Another ideologically meaningful (rather than economically effective) initiative was the land-and-water reform in sedentary areas, which took place in some provinces of present-day Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan between 1925 and 1927. This reform differed from the one which had engulfed the nomadic lands inhabited by Kazakhs and Kirghiz in 1921-1922. The latter aimed at "decolonizing" some districts by forcibly expelling Russian and European settlers and by distributing the land they had occupied. The reform of the mid-1920s, instead, was meant to appease the land hunger of the sedentary Muslim population in districts where irrigated agriculture prevailed, through expropriation of "excess" land and its distribution, together with large amounts of State-owned land and new irrigation works. Land consolidation measures accompanied or followed the land reform. While subjectively it would be anachronistic to consider these policies as a prelude to the following dekulakisation, it is true that the land reform was a reference point for the latter, which was portrayed as a correction or completion of the 1925-1927 reform.

Recent scholarship regards both "national delimitation" and the land-and-water reform as tools that the Soviet regime used to integrate the territory and population of Central Asia into its ideological, administrative, and economic framework.[1] The same can be said of other measures, *e.g.* the definition of sub-national administrative units, and the establishment of a grain supply chain for cotton-growing districts and, conversely, the definition of procurement devices for cotton and animal raw materials (silk, wool, hides, sheepskin). The goal of these policies was to grapple, control, and possibly transform what had been one of the most culturally impenetrable peripheries of the Russian empire. In the mid-1920s, and even later, Soviet Central Asia was not an entirely "pacified" region: armed bands were still active, in particular along its southern borders. Its economy, which the revolution and civil war had shattered, had just started reco-

1 *E.g.* Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Roma, Viella, 2009.

vering:[2] the mid-1920s were crucial for the restoration of material and immaterial infrastructure (credit, seed selection) and capital stocks (tools, draught animals). Only such a recovery would allow Moscow to showcase the achievements of Socialism in Central Asia as a model for the liberation of the "peoples of the East".

In sum, administrative and economic frailty, combined with the desire to foster social and political change, were the background to the Soviet need to "see like a State" in Central Asia, in particular in its overwhelmingly Muslim rural areas. While the Tsarist regime had outsourced some important functions (*e.g.* allotment of taxation, most land-related contracts) to the "native administration", under Soviet rule land relations became politically relevant and had to be monitored more directly. Landownership patterns and labour contracts were the variables through which native rural society could become "legible" and fit Soviet priorities. Nonetheless, the kind of expertise the Soviet administration could rely upon was largely pre-revolutionary. On one hand, it had to build upon a corpus of colonial knowledge, which included ethnography, agronomy, and Tsarist bureaucratic practices. In these fields, the role of the native Muslim population was that of objects of inquiry or, at best, of mediators (translators, etc.). On the other hand, most of the intellectual tools through which early Soviet scholarship dealt with the economy of peasant households had been created before 1917.[3] All this accumulated knowledge could be falsified, but also came to help with its terminology, techniques, and experience of the field.

The "Karp commission" embodies this entanglement of pre-Soviet knowhow and Soviet priorities. Economic change was undoubtedly State-driven but, due to the relative weakness of the State itself in Central Asia at this conjuncture, it was subject to compromise and failure. These circumstances are visible in the zigzags of the commission's own genesis and history, which we will follow through a variety of sources. These include the commission's publications, in particular the series of monographs known as *The Modern Central Asian Village* (*Sovremennyi kishlak i aul Srednei Azii*).[4] One must also look at their echoes in the records of various Party organs, and above all at the commission's own files, which are to be found among the documents of the plenipotentiary of the Labour and Defence Council (*Sovet Truda i Oborony*, STO in acronym) in Central Asia.[5]

2 Marco Buttino, *La rivoluzione capovolta,* Napoli, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2004.

3 Alessandro Stanziani, *L'économie en révolution. Le cas russe, 1870-1930*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1998.

4 *Kishlak* is the Russified version of *qishloq*, the winter (*qish*) quarters of the nomadic pastoralist population and, in sedentary areas, the village or countryside. The Russian word *aul* refers to the nomadic encampment and was an administrative unit before 1917.

5 These files constitute the *fond* r-1 in the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan (TsGARUz). The STO gathered the representatives of the republics, the economy, and the people's commissariats, and acted as a

The Karp commission led what was at the same time the first Soviet, and one of the last colonial inquiries about rural Central Asia. In the following paragraphs, we are going to analyse its twofold nature, while examining it in the specific context of the land-and-water reform. We will distinguish between the Karp commission as an institution, with its official function and budget, and the commission's enquiry, with its antecedents, methodology, and results. These two aspects will be brought together when we will discuss the resonance of the inquiry's published results among experts and Party leaders.

Institutional profile

It was not just in Central Asia that the Soviet regime had difficulties in understanding and controlling the countryside and its inhabitants: to a different extent, this was also true in Russia proper. After having defeated the White forces (and even during the civil war itself) the Bolsheviks became engaged in a sort of war against their own peasantry. This struggle, analysed by among others Andrea Graziosi[6], left unhealed wounds in the relations between Soviet power and the peasants. In an attempt to highlight the pro-peasantry features of the New Economic Policy, between May 1924 and the first months of 1925 the all-Union party adopted a new attitude, condensed into Zinoviev's slogan "Face to the village" (*Litsom k derevne*). The beginning of this campaign is conventionally seen in the 13th all-Union Party congress in May 1924.[7] This shift spurred initiatives to attain a better knowledge of the social life of the villages, if nothing else in order to "study the objective conditions in which the activity of Party and Soviet organizations took place".[8]

In Central Asia, a key agency in this process was the Central Asian Bureau (SredAzBiuro) of the Party's central committee.[9] In 1924-1925, this Bureau intended to tackle agrarian issues not only in nomadic and resettlement areas, but also in the southern oases, where irrigated agriculture prevailed. On the occasion of its meeting of December 28th, 1924, the executive commission of the Bureau appointed the three leading members of a commission in charge of collecting and organising all the materials produced by all the committees, groups, etc.

"clearing house" between them. The STO plenipotentiary in Central Asia (UpolSTO) was an essential step of the chain of command between Moscow and the region.

6 Andrea Graziosi, *La grande guerra contadina in URSS*, Napoli, ESI, 1998.

7 Markus Wehner, « Licom k derevne : Sowjetmacht und Bauernfrage, 1924-1925 », *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* (1994/1), p. 20-48 ; Stephan Merl, *Der Agrarmarkt und die Neue Ökonomische Politik*, München-Wien, Oldenbourg, 1981, p. 40-49 ; Tracy McDonald, *Face to the Village. The Riazan Countryside under Soviet Rule, 1921-1930* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2011), p. 4.

8 Summary of the expenses, UpolSTO, [early 1925], TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, ll. 14-15, here l. 15.

9 On this organ: Shoshana Keller, "The Central Asian Bureau, an Essential Tool in Governing Soviet Turkestan", *Central Asian Survey* (2003/2-3), p. 281-297; Christian Teichmann, "Cultivating the Periphery: Bolshevik Civilising Missions and 'Colonialism' in Soviet Central Asia", *Comparativ* (2003/1), p. 34-52.

who had dealt with "land use, land organisation works, and the land stock" in Central Asia. The head of the commission was Dunaev, the deputy head of the council of people's commissars of the Uzbek SSR and, shortly after, the chair of its planning commission (Gosplan). Working with him were Andreev and, above all, Asfendiarov, the former people's commissar of the Turkestan republic who had played a leading role in the management of land reform of the early 1920s.[10] While it is unclear what materials this commission produced, it is quite likely that it soon included other members, such as Shelekhes, the plenipotentiary of the Labour and Defence Council in Central Asia. Then, in early February 1925, the executive commission of the SredAzBiuro approved the commencement of a thorough inquiry "on the countryside".[11] Six weeks later, the secretary of the Bureau, Isaak A. Zelenskii, presented a report on land relations in Central Asia, which called for the compilation of a thorough study, to be presented to the central committee of the all-Union party.[12] This preliminary report on agrarian relations led to the constitution of a more focused commission for the study of a sample of sedentary and nomadic "villages" (*kishlak* and *aul*, respectively); parallel to this, a Bureau commission composed by Zelenskii himself, Shelekhes, Rykunov (of the Central Asian Water Administration), and others, started preparing a report on land relations.[13] If the land-and-water reform was in the air, it was not mentioned – at least not by Zelenskii – other than as a slogan coming from the countryside itself, the Bolsheviks being the "firemen" who kept it under control.[14]

The commission charged with the sample study was guided by Karp, an expert in irrigation works. It included, among others, Rykunov, but also agronomists and economists (such as Foteev) and a representative of the *koshchi* (poor peasants') union (Odeli). When Karp defined the affiliation of the commission he presided, he referred to it as a "Commission of the Central Asian Bureau":[15] and yet its files are not to be found among those of the Bureau itself[16], but among those of the STO plenipotentiary (UpolSTO) in Central Asia.

10 Ispolkomissia SredAzBiuro, minute, 28 December 1924, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 16, d. 1175, ll. 1-16, here l. 11.

11 *Ibid.*, minute, 1st February 1925, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 16, d. 1175, ll. 57-60, here l. 57.

12 With a different title: Isaak Zelenskii, "O zemel'no-vodnoi reforme v Srednei Azii" (On the land-and-water reform in Central Asia), in I. S. Kraskii, ed., Sredne-aziatskoe Byuro TsK VKP(b), *Zemel'no-vodnaya reforma v Srednei Azii. Sbornik materialov* (The land-and-water reform in Central Asia. Collected materials), Moskva-Leningrad, Moskovskii rabochii, 1927, p. 3-27.

13 Ispolkomissia SredAzBiuro, *protokol*, 19 March 1925, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 16, d. 1175, ll. 88-98, here ll. 89, 93.

14 Larisa Z. Kunakova, *Zemel'no-vodnaya reforma v Ferganskoi doline (1925-1926 gg.)* (The land-and-water reform in the Fergana valley, 1925-1926), Osh, Iz-vo Gospedinstituta, 1962, p. 92.

15 Karp to the District Statistical Bureau of Gidjuvan, 19 April 1926, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 343, l. 98.

16 *Fond* 62 of the former all-Union Party archive, now Russian State Archive for Socio-Political History (RGASPI) in Moscow.

This is because a "first", more technical, "Karp commission" already existed, well before any all-Union Party organ had officially decided to turn its "face to the countryside" or, more specifically, considered agrarian relations in Central Asia as a top issue on its agenda. In January or February 1924, five agricultural experts, economists and technicians met in Tashkent under the chairmanship of Karp. They gathered on the premises of the UpolSTO and defined themselves as the "UpolSTO commission for the inquiry of the countryside".[17] Besides Karp, the commissioners were Magidovich, Mitkevich, Yaroshevich, and Putilov. The commission would meet again and its ranks would increase, to include Yurii Poslavskii and Berezov, at the end of February. Minutes of most meetings of this UpolSTO commission are available throughout 1925 and there is no doubt that this commission gradually transformed itself in the "second" Karp commission which was officially created in the spring of 1925. The very names of many of the authors of the latter's publication, *The Modern Central Asian Village*, are to be found in the proceedings of this "first" UpolSTO-backed commission after May 1925: the Karp commission started its "second life" under the SredAzBiuro, but retained its *liaison* with the UpolSTO.[18] This change in the commission's affiliation had a minor impact: it only meant the addition of three more cantons to the original working plans[19], and created some discontinuity between the Karp commission and some previous inquiries by the Water Administration and the Statistical Committees, whose materials the "first" commission intended to appropriate.[20] More generally, it highlighted the commission's political, rather than merely technical, relevance.

At any rate, fieldwork could not begin before the thaw, and when all the staff had been recruited. The Karp commission was initially supposed to finish its fieldwork in two months and a half (April to June 1925). In practice, the commissioners and their staff were still scouting the villages in August 1925, while the Statistical Direction provided some additional data (*e.g.* prices, bazaar days, etc.) in October or even in 1926.[21] Moreover, the elaboration of these raw data should have taken three months, but it actually occupied the commission for eight. As a result, the end of the commission's activity was put off to April 1926.[22] This means that its results were made avai-

17 UpolSTO commission for the inquiry of the village, *Protokol* n° 1, [before 23 February 1925], TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, l. 1.

18 Minutes: TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, ll. 3-4 [24 February 1925], 27-29 [29 March 1925], ll. 54-56 [19 May 1925], 61-62 [3 June 1925], and so on.

19 UpolSTO commission for the inquiry of the village, minute, n° 4, 24 February 1925, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, ll. 3-4; Organisational plan, [after mid-March 1925], *ibid.*, ll. 126-138, here l. 127.

20 Ivi, l. 130; *List of the localities where budget inquiries took place in 1924*, [early 1925], *ibid*., ll. 16-18.

21 Karp to the District Statistical Bureau of Gidjuvan, 19 April 1926, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 343, l. 98.

22 *Conclusion on the Commission's Work*, Financial-credit section of the UpolSTO (autumn 1925), TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, ll. 117-118.

lable only after the official completion of the land-and-water reform in the three "core provinces" of the Uzbek SSR (Tashkent, Samarkand, Fergana) in February 1926: the inquiry, instead of providing the necessary knowhow to carry out the reform, was more correctly regarded at the moment of its publication as a historical document, portraying the situation in the countryside *before* the first significant measure aiming at the transformation of agrarian relations.

The prolongation of the work of the Karp commission beyond what had been initially forecast had important consequences for its budgetary sustainability. Once the fieldwork and the collection of materials concluded, the commission lacked funding to process and publish them.[23] In his search for money, Karp skillfully played on the commission's multiple institutional *liaisons*, maneuvering in the midst of inter-institutional animosities between its potential sponsors, in particular the SredAzBiuro and the Central Cotton Committee.[24] In the end, the Central Asian Water Administration was the first source of funding, contributing for 25,000 rubles out of its original total budget of 67,580.[25] Individual republics, namely Uzbekistan (some 23,950 rubles) and the Kirghiz republic (ca. 7,980 rubles), paid the rest. The Turkmen republic should have participated with 10,645 rubles, but in the late autumn of 1925 it pulled out of the commission's work to conduct its own inquiry.[26] The Uzbeks and Kirghiz, together with the Central Asian Water Administration and, this time, the Uzbek Cotton Committee, would also cover part of the publishing expenses.[27] The commission for administrative delimitation offered 3,000 rubles, perhaps as a payment for data provided by the Karp commission.[28] Republican communist parties participated indirectly and only after the shift in institutional affiliation: each central committee created a special commission to recruit translators and "Party workers".[29] In short, from the budgetary viewpoint the Karp's inquiry was a State-led initiative, rather than a Party-led one, and it retained its anchorage in regional, rather than all-Union, policy-making.

23 Karp to Grigoriants, 28 December 1925, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 113, l. 456.

24 *Id*; Karp and Shelekhes to the SNK UzSSR, 30 December 1925, TsGARUz, *ibid*., ll. 461-463. The Central Cotton Committee was the all-Union organ that governed the cultivation, procurement, and ginning of this fibre.

25 Karp to SNK UzSSR, 17 June 1925, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 113, l. 24.

26 *Note on the Financial Situation of the Commission on August 1st, 1925*, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, ll. 67-68; summary of its work, [November-December 1925], *ibid.*, ll. 91-94.

27 *On the Question of Searching for Financial Means*, [end 1925], TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, l. 100.

28 *Id*.

29 Organisational plan, [after mid-March 1925], TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, ll. 126-138, here l. 130.

Intellectual background and inquiry methods

In order to understand how the Karp commission carried out its fieldwork and organised its findings, it is useful to sketch out the intellectual background of the commissioners and the clerical and technical staff who assisted them. Some had collaborated on a few prerevolutionary or early Soviet inquiries and partial censuses: their results, as well as the practical experience of their compilation, can be regarded as the cluster of theoretical and practical knowledge which constituted the basis of the Karp commission's own work. Both the commissioners' and experts' background and this heterogeneous bundle of previous research had deep roots in the history of Russian statistics since the late 19th century. In the following paragraphs we will explore these roots and see how they combined with practical circumstances and the priorities of Soviet power in the mid-1920s.

The team Karp led in the long fieldwork phase of the commission's activity consisted of 29 people. Staff were recruited through academic institutions (the Central Asian State University in Tashkent-SAGU), military organizations, and the apparatus of the Soviet State itself (*e.g.* one commissioner came from the all-Union people's commissariat for internal trade). Those who belonged to the Party or to State institutions were paid by their permanent employers, not from the commission's own budget.[30] Despite the link with the Central Asian Bureau, party elements seem to have played a relatively minor role: in particular, some of the "young people" who helped the commissioners on the spot seem to have been Bolshevik militants.[31] In the final phase eight more people joined the commission to provide advice on specific issues; among them, there were six professors of SAGU. The latter's Institute of Soil Studies and Geobotanics acted as a consultant, too. The Central Asian Water Administration and various cotton organisations were also involved, each in their field of expertise.

The commission could count on a staff of some twenty people: in June 1925, one third of them consisted of local translators and interpreters. Out of the other fourteen only three have vaguely Muslim names, but it is hard to tell what their background was.[32] One exception is a Mustafa Buraliev (or Buralkiev, possibly a Tatar), who had graduated in Oriental Studies at the Red Army Academy in Moscow. Hence, local collaborators were certainly involved, but the leadership of the inquiry was solidly in the hands of

30 Correspondence between Karp and various institutions, Summer 1925, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 113, ll. 147, 151; Karp commission [?] to a Party provincial committee [?], 30 September 1925, *ibid.*, l. 320.

31 Gleb N. Cherdantsev, "Sovremennyi kishlak i aul Srednei Azii. (Kriticheskii ocherk)" (The Modern Central Asian Village. Critical Essay), *Narodnoe khoziaistvo Srednei Azii* (The National Economy of Central Asia) (hereafter *NKhSA*), December (1927/12), p. 197-204, here p. 199.

32 Karp and Suslov to UpolSTO, 1st [?] June 1925, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 113, ll. 60-61.

Russian or European elements. Native notions about agriculture and irrigation, thus, could at best be appraised indirectly, when they were not ignored altogether. Moreover, in Autumn, when the commission moved to the analysis of the materials, "native" staff decreased: the commission then counted fifteen "economists" (all of them Russian or European, including two women), two "senior economists", three consultants, two statisticians and two accountants. Among them, we find some prominent experts on agrarian relations in Soviet Central Asia. This is the case of L. Pogorelskii, and Yurii M. Poslavskii: a "consultant" who would write a virulent critique of the commission's result.

Karp and his commission were not the first who tried to understand Central Asian economy and society: they could rely upon a corpus of datasets and studies published under the Tsarist regime, as well as on a smaller number of post-revolutionary statistical surveys and censuses. In the first category fell the works of the republican (especially Uzbek) Central Statistical Directions and those of the Central Asian Water Administration, as well as the controversial 1917-1920 Turkestan census. The latter covered the main oases, with their irrigated agriculture and sedentary population, and included some nomadic or "semi-nomadic" districts, especially in the Syr-Daria and the Semirechie provinces. Yet, this census was not reliable: at that time, the region was in turmoil because of the revolution and civil war. Rural areas (Fergana in particular) were not easily accessible and data were compiled haphazardly, by relying on pre-1917 values or extrapolating from them. In 1925, when the land reform took place in Uzbekistan, it was clear that this census was not a solid source of information.[33] Finally, there were the materials of the commission for administrative delimitation, whose relation with the Karp commission we will discuss below.

Besides these "extensive" datasets, there existed a few studies which included the analysis of peasant households' budgets. Some of them were carried out before the revolution; the most widely cited had been carried out in 1915, but was published as *Budgets of 45 households of the Fergana province* by the Economic Council of the Turkestan Republic only in 1924.[34] The relatively marginal position of cotton in the general design of the Karp inquiry marks the difference between the work of this commission and some other studies of peasant households' budgets. In 1924 the "Seminar on Agricultural Economy and Organisation" of SAGU's Faculty of Agriculture published a series of studies titled "Profile of

33 Administration for Land Consolidation to Commissariat of Agriculture, [beginning of 1926], TsGARUz, f. r-226, op. 1, d. 23, ll. 1-3, here l. 2.

34 *Byudzhety 45 khoziaistv Ferganskoi oblasti po obsledovaniu 1915 g.*, Tashkent, Izdanie Ekonomicheskogo Soveshchania TSSR, [1924]. For a list of surveys of peasant households' budgets in the region, which does not however mention the Karp commission, see Sergei N. Abashin, "Semeinyi byudzhet sel'skikh Uzbekov" (The Household Budget of Rural Uzbeks), *Vostok* (2000/2), p. 61-77, here p. 61-65.

the cotton economy". The monographs about Fergana and the Hungry Steppe were authored by I.M. Foteev and K. Arasimovich.[35] Despite the fact that these authors studied cotton-growing households only, some elements of this inquiry anticipate what one would see in *The Modern Central Asian Village*. First, both the inquiries focus on peasant households' budgets; second, they analyse the budgets over the same lapse of time (from March to March); third, both look very closely at an extremely small sample of households (under 10 elements).

This raises the question of whether such a small sample could be considered as representative. Both the Karp commission and SAGU's agriculture specialists a couple of years before solved this problem by choosing "typical" households: a notion so characteristic of Russian statistics at that time, that it requires a short digression. There is quite an extensive literature on the history of statistics in general, and on its history in Russia and the USSR in particular. Martine Mespoulet has thoroughly discussed the nature and methodological problems related to the choice of "typical villages" and, within them, "typical households".[36] One of the products of the Great Reforms in Russia was the establishment of local self-government bodies (*zemstvo*) in a number of provinces. Yet, no *zemstvo*s had existed either in the steppe areas inhabited by the Kazakhs (or Kirghiz, as they were called at that time) or in Turkestan, *i.e.* in the territory where the Karp commission was operating. Similarly to the flourishing of monograph studies on single French villages mentioned by Marc Bloch and studied by Alain Desrosières[37], the *zemstvo*s carried out their own statistical surveys and published them. Since 1870, and above all after the first national conference of the *zemstvo*s in 1887, the opportunities for local statisticians to compare their methods and results multiplied themselves and efforts to harmonise local practices became visible. The method of sample surveying itself was thoroughly discussed, together with the sampling techniques to be used. In practice, a sample survey does not look at the whole population, but, as the name suggests, at a sample within it. This is what makes a sample survey different from a census, which, by definition, does not exclude any element of the population concerned. Because sample surveys were less costly, the *zemstvo*s used them to obtain "snapshots" of the economic and social situation between two censuses. Sample censuses were also employed by the local offices of the Russian State Statistical

35 I. M. Foteev, *Tip khlopkovogo khoziaistva Fergany*, (Profile of the Cotton Economy of Fergana), Tashkent, SAGU, 1924; K. Arasimovich, *Tip khlopkovogo khoziaistva Golodnoi Stepi* (Profile of the Cotton Economy of the Hungry Steppe), Tashkent, SAGU, 1924.

36 Martine Mespoulet, *Statistique et révolution en Russie. Un compromis impossible (1880-1930)*, Rennes, PUR, 2001, p. 79-90 ; Martine Mespoulet, Alain Blum, *L'anarchie bureaucratique. Statistique et pouvoir sous Staline*, Paris, La Découverte, 2003, p. 301.

37 Alain Desrosières, *La politique des grands nombres,* Paris, La Découverte, 2000, chap. 7.

Committee, for instance in 1870 to study the Terek Cossacks, and again between 1876 and 1881.[38]

The first national conference of *zemstvo*s consecrated sample surveying, by stating at which conditions its results would be acceptable and comparable.[39] One of these conditions was "typicality" in the choice of the sample (villages and households): a "typical village" was characterised by "the most important economic features and the peculiarities of each specific area"[40], while "typicality" was defined as "conformity to the local usual environment".[41] Of course, in order to know about this "environment", statisticians had to rely upon previous censuses, and hope that the latter were reliable. If the census were inaccurate, "typicality" would be ill-defined – and the sample with it. This definition of "typicality" had an important logical implication: in order to identify "typical villages" that could reunite the maximum "typical characteristics" of a given area, it was advisable to define areas that were as homogeneous as possible. In other words, the "population" in question was defined in order to create a better sample of it. This is the reason why sample statistics was intimately related to the first experiments in the delimitation in economically homogeneous areas, which would combine with the redefinition of administrative boundaries in the early Soviet period.

A specific commission had been charged with revising pre-1917 boundaries so that they could make sense from an economic point of view. Indeed, the new notion of district, now called *rayon*, first occurred in the land reform (starting in late 1925), when it simply meant a group of contiguous cantons. This commission, however, had more ambitious goals and a more rigorous approach, at least on paper. Its activity, though related to the operation of delimitation of the national republics and autonomous provinces of Central Asia, does not seem to have influenced the latter in a decisive manner. Administrative units were ultimately modified in 1927, replacing the former cantons (*volosti*) with the new, larger *rayony*, and suppressing the level which had existed between cantons and provinces. Despite economic reasons were still relevant, in 1927 the need to simplify and make Soviet institutions closer to the citizen was also important.

38 Martine Mespoulet, Alain Blum, *Anarchie bureaucratique*, *op. cit*., p. 301 (cf. note 36).

39 Nikolai A. Svavitskii, "Kombinatsionnye tablitsy, kak priem izuchenia tipov i faktorov krest'yanskogo khoziaistva v zemskikh podvornykh perepisyakh" (Cross-Tabulation as a Method for the Study of the Types and Factors of the Peasant Economy in the *Zemstvo* Household Censuses), *Vestnik Statistiki* (1924/10-12), p. 99-164, here p. 106, in Martine Mespoulet, *Statistique et révolution*, *op. cit*., p. 82 (cf. note 36).

40 A. A. Gur'ev, "Proiskhozhdenie vyborochnogo issledovania i pervye ego opyty v Rossii" (The Emergence of Sample Surveying and its First Experiences in Russia), *Vestnik statistiki* (1921/1-4), p. 1-48, here p. 16, in Martine Mespoulet, *Statistique et révolution*, *op. cit*., p. 80 (cf. note 36).

41 *Id.*

One could describe the relation between the commission for delimitation and the Karp commission of inquiry on the Central Asian countryside as a reciprocal exchange of ideas and materials, in the context of a shared methodological mindset. The former could have provided evidence useful to the latter, if its work had progressed more quickly: as it happened only three cantons in Fergana and one in Khorezm were studied by both commissions in time for the materials to be shared. In the case of districts located in the province of Bukhara, or in that of Pishpek (now Bishkek), no materials from this commission were available. In those cases, the Karp commission collected its own data, which they then probably shared with the commission for administrative delimitation. In addition, where administrative delimitation had not yet occurred, the Karp commission had to define some "territorial units", but it is not clear whether they were subsequently endorsed.[42]

Both the commission for delimitation and the Karp commission used the methods of Professor Nikolai N. Kazhanov, who in the mid-1920s was one of the most prominent experts on the delimitation of territorial units for administrative and economic policy purposes.[43] Kazhanov's method had been used in SAGU's inquiries on cotton culture mentioned above; in addition, teaching in Tashkent himself, this scholar influenced an entire generation of regional agricultural economists.[44] His method was described as "biological theory": in their search for characteristic features, territorial planners should look at natural elements, namely the nature of the soil, precipitation, etc. According to Kazhanov it was from these, and from these only, that possible crops and yields depended. In this perspective, "specialisation consisted in the preference given to the crop that [already] prevailed in a given area".[45] Yet, it was not the only theoretical framework available in those years. The famous agricultural economist Aleksandr V. Chayanov had been engaged in these debates.[46] In 1921, when the definition of economic regions at all levels was discussed throughout Soviet Russia, N. Nikitin had pointed at two other methods: Aleksandr N. Chelintsev's and Aleksandr I. Skvortsov's, both formulated in 1910.[47] Kazhanov seem to have exercised a very strong influence in the 1920s, but in the last years of the decade his star declined. In 1929-1930, scholars spoke openly of a "Kazhanov deviation" (*kazhanov-*

42 Minute, n° 10, 3 June 1925, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 305, ll. 61-62.

43 I. M. Foteev, *Tip khlopkovogo khoziaistva Fergany*, *op. cit*., p. 2 (cf. note 35).

44 *Id.*

45 Henri Chambre, *La pianificazione territoriale nella Unione Sovietica. Introduzione allo studio delle regioni economiche sovietiche*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1975 (in french 1959), p. 191.

46 *Id.;* on Chayanov, cf. Alessandro Stanziani, *L'économie en révolution, op. cit.* (cf. note 3).

47 Henri Chambre, *La pianificazione territoriale nella Unione Sovietica, op. cit.,* p. 188 (cf. note 45). Kazhanov, however, was a pupil and friend of Skvortsov's, while Chelintsev collaborated with Kazhanov's own pupil Poslavskii.

shchina) and publicly denounced his ideas: among them, the same Foteev who had referred to Kazhanov while writing on Fergana.[48] What was wrong with Kazhanov's theory? By looking at the natural conditions of agricultural activity, and in particular at the land as a factor of production, it had a scent of Marxist materialism. What it neglected, it seems, were "social relations". From the perspective of State-led industrialisation and social transformation that would emerge from the ashes of the New Economic Policy, Kazhanov's "biological theory" sounded too fatalistic: if everything depended on the nature of soil, precipitation, etc., what room was left for socialist agency, and for the Bolshevik State in particular? The influence of Kazhanov's ideas on Karp's *Modern Central Asian Village* may indeed explain at least part of the skepticism and misfortune surrounding this inquiry in later years.

How did the Karp commission translate these theories and the rich patrimony of experience of Russian pre-revolutionary statistics into practice? First, it identified sub-districts on the basis of the features of local agriculture; second, it chose "typical villages" within them. The latter always included the "centre" of these sub-districts and, "whenever possible", villages where "institutions that [were] important for the life of the inhabitants" were located: Party cells, of course, but also schools, markets, and so on. If a "typical village" had none of these, it was dropped in favour of the nearest village possessing them. Although agriculture constituted the most important object of inquiry, as reflected in the final publication, the Karp commission scrutinised other aspects: industry, credit, trade, the situation of co-operatives, "cultural and educational institutions", and party and Soviet institutions. True, the last aspect was only included in the first three volumes, because otherwise it would have sounded repetitive. The "typicality" criterion was therefore employed laxly, in order to allow the discussion of institutional aspects that were peripheral in Kazhanov's approach, but essential to appreciate the degree of sovietisation of the Central Asian countryside – or, more probably, its disappointing absence.

Within the village at first the commissioners scrutinised all households individually, then isolated three groups: first, those who "sold their labour"; second, those who neither "sold" nor "bought" it; third, those who "bought labour". In these categories, the commission sampled households within the "wealth layer" (usually defined on the basis of the land and capital stock owned) that made up the relative majority of each "labour category", and, within that "wealth layer", it chose the households which were "average" in all other variables

48 I. Foteev, "O 'teorii' prof. Kazhanova" (On prof. Kazhanov's 'Theory'), *Na agrarnom fronte* (1930/7), p. 73 *sq*., in Henri Chambre, *La pianificazione territoriale nella Unione Sovietica, op. cit.,* p. 207 (cf. note 45).

(number of members etc.).[49] It is worth noting a few points: first, the idea of "typicality" is applied, but neither thoroughly nor rigorously, in the selection of the relative majority "wealth layer"; second, typical Soviet criteria intervene in the first skimming (sale/purchase of labour) and the variable defining the "layers" (wealth); third, the first classification takes place on the basis of labour relations, not of wealth. On the contrary, an early "general instruction" to the Karp commission had ordered the classification of households first on the basis of landownership ("wealth layer"), then of their "labour category", and subsequently to apply the relative majority rule as above. Similarly, on the occasion of the land-and-water reform new "ascribed identities" would essentially depend on the surface of possessed land. It is therefore interesting that the Karp commission ultimately prioritized labour relations over landownership as a social marker, as this reflects the absence of uniform views about the criteria through which the Central Asian countryside should be understood and reorganized.

In the case of agriculture, commissioners and their assistants studied the economic life of the sampled households throughout one year using a typical budget questionnaire. The choice of studying budgets from March to March was quite sensible. "March to March" meant from one sowing to the next, and at the same time "from one Nowruz to the next", as Foteev acknowledged – Nowruz (March 21st) being the beginning of the new year according to the solar Iranian calendar. Although changes in the capital stock or patrimony were recorded when they occurred, in the final publication expenses and gains were re-classified and only the sum for the year was reported. The tables in this section of *The Modern Central Asian Village* also allow a glimpse in prices and consumption patterns.

From the historian's viewpoint, these pieces of information are useful in order to reconstruct a reliable basket of consumer goods for Central Asia, which was different from that of the European parts of the USSR used to calculate the general level of consumer prices. Moreover, the budgets show the household's dependence on the market for its subsistence or, inversely, the rate of marketed agricultural production on its total. The latter, also known as "market-orientedness" or "marketability" (in Russian, *tovarnost'*) depended on many factors: the crop mix, but also relative prices, internal consumption, etc. In Central Asia a high *tovarnost'* coincided with (and symbolised) the prevalence of cotton culture on food crops. This dependence on the market could bring about tragic consequences in case of the abrupt interruption of grain shipments (as during the revolution and civil war) or when wheat prices peaked.

49 N. Cherdantsev, "Sovremennyi kishlak i aul Srednei Azii", *op. cit.*, p. 201 (cf. note 31).

Was attention to *tovarnost'* a specifically Soviet or a "colonial" trait? We cannot answer unequivocally: it is true that the Soviet State in the 1920s was obsessed, with some reason, by grain marketings and the extraction of surplus from the countryside. Nonetheless, the idea of *tovarnost'* was present before the revolution, both in European Russia and in Central Asia, in the study of peasant household budgets. When looking at Turkestan, *tovarnost'* was a synonym of progress, because it embodied the integration of this region in the Russian empire and in the world market, as well as the advance from "natural" to "monetary economy". It is not by chance that the term *tovarnost'* was sometimes used interchangeably with *denezhnost'* –a derivate of the word "money" (*den'gi*). The authors of *The Modern Central Asian Village* also used the term *tovarnost'* with a positive connotation or, at least, lamented the regression into a non-monetary economy after 1917.

The Modern Central Asian Village: limitations and criticisms

The most important achievement of the Karp commission – the collection *The Modern Central Asian Village* – was tainted by many shortcomings. First of all, the final publication was one fourth short of the original plan. That plan had initially grown from the study of seventeen to twenty cantons. This number soon decreased again to sixteen: nine in Uzbekistan, three in the Kirghiz autonomous republic, and four in Turkmenistan – the three cantons in Tajikistan disappeared altogether. The Turkmen republic would pull out of the inquiry before the end of 1925. This led to a disproportionate focus on the Uzbek republic with eight volumes, and only two on the cantons of Osh and Pishpek in modern Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, even though all volumes are dated 1927, the last four volumes had not actually seen the light by December of that year.[50] In other words, the publication of materials was slow and much less ambitious than the original programme, reflecting the slowness of the fieldwork. Second, the commission cost more than anticipated, so that time and energy were wasted on fund-raising for the publication. On the other hand, the lack of funding could serve as an excuse for the commission's shortcomings. When Karp illustrated the costs of the inquiry one year after its beginning, he declared himself sceptical about the possibility of extending the results obtained for single villages (however "typical") to entire districts.[51]

He was not wrong in being so dismissive: the first semi-official review of the commission's work in 1927 was far from a panegyric. Writing for the official organ of the Central Asian Economic Council, the agriculture specialist Cherdantsev lamented methodological flaws, which were triggered by the asymmetry between the commission's goals and the time

50 *Id.*

51 Explanatory note, 9 April 1926, TsGARUz, f. r-1, op. 1, d. 113, ll. 472-476, here ll. p. 474-475.

and means it had at its disposal. Cherdantsev pointed at the striking differences in quality between various sections of the inquiry, as well as the different relative importance of each topic (industry, educational institutions, etc.) in each monograph. Above all, he stigmatised the fact that the commission had focused on too many aspects, as well as the inadequacy of methods it had used to assess sectors other than agriculture: while for the latter the commissioners could rely on the long experience of *zemstvo* statistics, nothing similar was available for the study of industry, still less for the assessment of Soviet socialisation through schools, hospitals, and so on. These aspects were described on the basis of interviews with representatives of specific institutions. The latter, though, were seldom questioned individually: more often, the commissioner listened to more than one at the same time.[52] In good or bad faith, this practice inevitably meant that the speakers underwent some kind of social pressure. This may have led to more complete information, but also to biased judgments.

More substantial objections came from a "consultant" of the Karp commission, Yurii M. Poslavskii. He is the probable author of a long (144 pages) typed essay about "The characteristics of the agrarian question in Central Asia based on the materials of the commission for the inquiry of the village and *aul*".[53] Although it is not dated, the completion of fieldwork in Autumn 1925 constitutes its *post quem* term. The document is particularly interesting because of some *marginalia*, probably by the SredAzBiuro's first secretary, Zelenskii. The author of this report tried to sketch the overall picture of agrarian relations in Central Asia and draw some policy-relevant conclusions from it. When the Karp inquiry was commissioned, the reform was in the air, but there was no explicit relation between the two initiatives. Between March and September 1925, though, the situation gradually changed: a pragmatic and "revolutionary" approach to the land issue in Central Asia replaced the more abstract interest in "agrarian relations" and "land organisation".[54] The turning point was Zelenskii's report to the Party's Political Bureau on September 24th about the "land reforms" in Central Asia.[55] All things considered, it is legitimate to suppose that Poslavskii had been commissioned to write this manuscript in preparation for Zelenskii's September report. The criticisms Poslavskii expressed, thus, reflect the problematic nature of the

52 G. N. Cherdantsev, "Sovremennyi kishlak i aul Srednei Azii", *op. cit.,* p. 201 (cf. note 31).

53 *Kharakeristiki agrarnogo voprosa v Srednei Azii po dannym komissii po obsledovaniu kishlaka i aula* (Summer 1925), RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 217.

54 Politbiuro, minute, 2 May 1925, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 163, d. 491, l. 39; SredAzBiuro, executive commission, minute, 28 June 1925, RGASPI, f. 62, op. 1, d. 85, l. 106.

55 This led to the creation of another commission, to report to the Political Bureau one week later: Politbiuro, minute, 24 September 1925, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 163, d. 507, l. 34; Politbiuro, minute, 1st October 1925, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 163, d. 508, l. 18.

link between the evidence supplied by Karp's inquiry and the evidence which was needed to put some flesh on the ideological skeleton of the land reform.

As summarised by Carr and Davies[56], in 1898 Lenin had reproduced Marx's idea that, in a capitalist system, rural society would become polarised. This was not compatible with the troubling presence of "middling peasants" in the Russian countryside. The revolution led to equalisation in landownership (at least in Russia) and made polarisation still more improbable: yet the New Economic Policy, with the economic recovery it brought about, seemed to encourage "differentiation". The existence of poor hired labourers was at the same time an issue to be solved and, as a symptom of "differentiation", a necessary precondition of revolutionary change. The debate on "differentiation", how to measure it, and whether it should be encouraged or levelled out, was theoretically thick in 1925-1927. This is why the Karp commission had to pay attention to these signs of "differentiation" and "stratification", in its final publications even more than in its fieldwork. This was the cultural background to the commission's activity and Poslavskii's comments.

While sharing some of the Karp commission's theoretical basis (*e.g.* Kazhanov's theories), Poslavskii demolished many of its results. First, he insisted on the impossibility of using categories typical of the European parts of the Soviet Union to explain social relations in Central Asia.[57] Poslavskii was opposed to the classification of the rural population using semi-automatic operational definitions, based on the acreage of land possessed. The commission itself had hesitated between "wealth (landownership) layers" and "labour categories" as the foremost criterion of classification. Poslavskii defined land as a factor of production: hence, land could not be considered separately from capital and, conversely, the farming household's capital (especially draught animals and agricultural implements) should be central, and not peripheral, as happened in *The Modern Central Asian Village*. According to Poslavskii "the presence of landless households, small landowners, households renting or letting land [did] not by any means signify either rural overpopulation or social differentiation in the village".[58] In Fergana the cleavage between those who gave and those who took land for rent was transversal to any classification based on land. In the district of Balykchi – he wrote – peasants were so poor that they would sell their land for a "handful" of grain. Poverty consisted in the lack of capital: those who had some land but no ox, would rent their plots out in exchange for

56 Edward H. Carr, Robert W. Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1969), part 1, p. 18-23.

57 *Dopolnenie k ocherku t. Poslavskogo* (Addendum to comrade Poslavskii's essay), RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 217, l. 3.

58 *Kharakeristiki agrarnogo voprosa*, [Summer 1925], RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 217, l. 53.

it, till the land themselves, and give up all the harvest.[59]

Poslavskii tolerated land rent and big landownership. He lamented that large areas around Tashkent lay fallow because Soviet power discouraged rent, while its redistribution would have triggered neither equalisation nor growth, but only decline in output.[60] In the district of Kitab (Qashqa-Darya), the *kulaki* – if one needed to identify them – would rather be found among landless households, than among large landowners: they were selling fruit, wheat, and other agricultural goods on the private market.[61] "Labour-selling" and "labour-buying" categories were not viable either, because they said nothing about the true reasons for impoverishment: in non-irrigated, rain-fed areas, small landowners worked as daily labourers because their techniques were primitive and they were incapable of supporting themselves.[62] Therefore, land redistribution alone made little sense, and land should not be given to very poor peasants who lacked the means to cultivate it.[63] To those who looked for signs of capitalistic relations, Poslavskii replied that those were paradoxically visible in the dependence of peasants on Soviet credit.[64]

This explains Zelenskii's disappointed *marginalia*: he wanted a theoretical basis for the land reform, which was now on the Party's agenda, whilst Poslavskii had written yet another essay on "the agrarian structure" of the region. This also explains why Poslavskii's report was never published, nor disseminated. It may even explain why the journal of the Central Asian Economic Council, where book reviews were usually signed, published in 1926 Poslavskii's harsh review of Zel'kina's *agitprop* booklet "Land reform in Uzbekistan" with his initials only.[65] In it, Poslavskii insisted on the same idea: "differentiation" could not be seen if one looked at the countryside through the prism of landownership. Zel'kina had first attempted a comprehensive sketch of agrarian relations, but failed to provide a correct analysis of the latter. Zel'kina relied on surveys by the Uzbek people's commissariat for agriculture just before the reform: in this way, she reproduced the same policy-relevant categories as her sources. Some months later the same journal published Poslavskii's article "On the agrarian question in the Zeravshan province", warning the reader in a footnote that "the editorial board [did] fundamentally disagree with some of the author's positions" and "the article [was] printed as a contribution to discussion" only.[66] Here, the economist insisted on the relation between city and

59 *Ibid.*, l. 117.
60 *Ibid.*, ll. 106, 114.
61 *Ibid.*, l. 133.
62 *Ibid.*, l. 35.
63 *Ibid.*, l. 6.
64 *Ibid.*, l. 83.

65 Yu. P[oslavskii], review of: E. Zel'kina, *Zemel'naya reforma v Uzbekistane*, Tashkent, Uzgosizdat, 1925; *NKhSA*, (January-February, 1926/12-13), p. 192-193.

66 Yu. Poslavskii, "K agrarnomu voprosu v Zeravshanskoi oblasti" (On the Agrarian Question in the Zeravshan

countryside in the region of Bukhara, explaining that the latter depended on the former not for trade, but for credit.

> "The differentiation took place between different social groups on the basis of social-political power and the ownership of capital, thus the land did not constitute a *condition* of this differentiation, but only a *consequence* of it and a *symptom* of political and patrimonial power".[67]

Did Poslavskii's doubts reflect the Party agenda or did they constitute an attempt to undermine it? When he criticised attempts to reduce "differentiation" to landownership layers, was Poslavskii inviting his readers to look for it elsewhere, or did he think that the concept itself was futile? It is difficult to answer this question. What we know is that Poslavskii's readers did not appreciate his pointing at the need for a more complex approach. If he was just trying to help, his effort was not gratefully accepted, but rather shunned.

Something old, something new?

We have shown how the Karp commission was born as an initiative of the plenipotentiary of the Labour and Defence Council in Central Asia, with the goal of explaining the economic and social reality the sovietisation of the countryside had to cope with. In its "first life" the Karp commission aimed at drafting a balance sheet of Soviet power in the villages, showing where social patterns and modes of production had remained impermeable to the impact of the revolution. Then, in March 1925, SredAzBiuro "captured" the Karp commission, whose focus shifted to "agrarian relations". This study combined two different approaches. First, because of the long tradition of Russian statistics in the study of the peasantry, Karp and his collaborators largely employed the study of individual households' budgets; second, because of the parallel process of administrative delimitation, the commission used Kazhanov's theories as the basis of its own sampling procedure.

The original mission of the Karp commission was not immediately related to the land-and-water reform, which started in December 1925 and was largely based on *ad hoc* surveys. The inquiry could not have a serious impact on the implementation of the land reform because it produced isolated monograph studies, but no synthesis. The commissioners identified "layers" and explored agrarian relations because they were imbued with the same political and ideological debates that were also wielded to promote the land reform, rather than because they meant to prepare the latter: indeed, the reform became an urgent official task only after the completion of the commission's fieldwork. In practice, the identification of "classes" and the corresponding stigmatisation of enemies were left to local and Republican Party and Soviet organisations, who could not be aware of the fruit of the com-

Province), *NKhSA*, (November-December, 1926/11-12), p. 21-34.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

missioners' efforts for the simple fact that they would be published much later.

It was rather the reform that influenced the Karp commission. First, they adapted their publication plans: as Cherdantsev's review explained, *The Modern Central Asian Village* became, after the reform, a historical document rather than an economic analysis. Second, and more important, the land reform and its needs determined the negative judgement expressed on Karp's work, as the latter proved to be of little practical and theoretical use.

Was the Karp commission a "colonial" or a "Soviet" endeavour? It was both the former and the latter. The very notions of "colonial" and "Soviet" are problematic, because some pre-revolutionary statistical techniques had been invented and implemented in the Russian "metropole", before being exported to Central Asia; and because *any* countryside was a "colony" of the industrialised city, in the eyes of some Bolsheviks. Here we propose to see the "colonial" component of the Karp inquiry in two other respects: first, the staff involved, which was made up of old Turkestani hands and embodied some of the top priorities of the late Tsarist agenda in Central Asia. The chairman was an irrigation specialist and the Central Asian Water Administration provided both funding and knowledge basis. Second, the economy of colonial Turkestan constituted the explicit benchmark against which the Karp commission assessed the situation in 1925. The "modernity" in the title of the resulting monographs was no doubt related to Soviet rule. Nonetheless, through the pages, this term had a more practical meaning: the authors liked to refer to the economic progress experienced in the Tsarist period, and to the sharp post-1917 crisis. In this respect, the Karp inquiry and its published results are a symptom of the change which had occurred in the Soviet public discourse on Tsarist rule in Turkestan between the beginning and the middle of the 1920s. The dominant discourse among Central Asian communists, temporarily seconded by Moscow, was initially imbued with the anti-colonial rhetoric that led to the 1921-1922 land reform among the Kazakhs and Kirghiz. The Bolshevik upsurge was seen as a form of anti-imperialist liberation.[68] The general tone of *The Modern Central Asian Village*, especially in the chapters consecrated to agriculture, is somewhat different: while socialist progress is praised, economic growth is portrayed as the "recovery" of previous levels and patterns of production.

Ultimately though, the most significant element of continuity between Turkestan's colonial past and the new Soviet situation, as reflected in the activity of the Karp commission, resides in the marginalization of native agency in the inquiry itself. With the exception of translators, basically no Central Asians participated in the

68 Georgii I. Safarov, *Kolonial'naya revolyutsiya: opyt Turkestana* (Colonial Revolution: the Turkestan Experience), Leningrad, Priboy, 1924 (reprinted by Society for Central Asian Studies, *Reprint Series*, n° 4, London, 1985).

inquiry. Among the staff, at least one of the pair of Muslim names reveals a probable Tatar origin, and surely its bearer had gone through a thorough process of Soviet socialization. Central Asians appear as numbers filling in the cases of cross-tabulations or, when they are lucky enough to be "typical", they are interviewed in order to reconstruct their yearly budget. Local categories are not ignored, but they are interpreted through the prism of a blend of previously existing ethnographic knowledge and new political priorities.