

RUSSIAN CITIES AND NATIONAL CULTURE *

M. G. RABINOVICH

USSR Academy of Sciences

N. N. Mikloukho - Maklay Institute of Ethnography

Moscow

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Today, the urban population in all industrialized countries the world over is larger than the rural one. In the USSR urban population gradually increases, as every new census shows. The problem of urbanization has existed for quite a long time, and now no one will deny the great influence of the city and urban culture on all the spheres of national life. Without urban ethnography the picture of national culture would undoubtedly be incomplete.

Contemporary studies of the city should rely on the analysis of ancient and medieval cities, because many elements of urban life are traceable to a very remote past. This is of particular importance when we study cultural traditions of a nation. If tradition is analysed as a process, rather than a fossilised imprint of the past, it becomes clear that in this process the city and the village were not always opposed. They rather contributed to it, complementing each other, and thus stimulating ethnocultural traditions.

Formerly the latter statement was seriously challenged. In the past, and even at the turn of the century Russian cities were considered as a "government fantasy", a "forceful accident"¹ in national life. The foundation of national culture was specified, according to many scholars, by a vast mass of the rural population, in which small cities did not count much, and were never viewed as "genuine", "economically important" or as "cities in scientific terms". However, the leading role of the urban population in politics, sciences and professional culture were never argued. But traditional national culture was often believed to develop without participation of urban population. Moreover, the city

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1. See N. P. Ogarev. "Letters to One of the Many". In: *Izbranniye sotsialno-politicheskiye i filosofskiyе proizvedeniya*. Vol. 1. Moscow 1952; p. 677.

was regarded as a factor that irons out, and even destroys traditional culture.

Further insight into the problem and fresh materials make it possible to question the idea claiming that the role of cities in the development of traditional culture was insignificant, if not negative. This is a general question pertinent to virtually the entire world. Within the framework of this paper we shall use factual material characterizing primarily Russian cities (1800 - 1861) which will be compared with other Soviet and foreign cities.

The problem of the emergence and role of the cities is considered in numerous writings.² Scholars tend to believe that the city has many and diverse functions which are very important for the development of a country and the world as a whole. We stress the importance of a city as a local economic and cultural centre in relations with the rural population.

For this reason, it would be odd if a city became alien to traditional national culture. National culture was always its basis and nutritive medium. This, however, does not mean that the urban population did not vigorously develop old cultural values into new ones as well as the material and spiritual culture of the entire nation.

A city emerged in a rural environment and for a certain time remained under rural influence. There was hardly a phenomenon belonging to the spiritual or material culture of a nation, which once adopted by city residents was not adapted to their vital and cultural requirements. Later, sometimes dozens or even hundreds of years later, many of them made their way back to the countryside together with urban innovations and in the form of urban influence. Even when a city looks like a breakaway easily acquiring non-ethnic form of culture (cinema, modernist trends in art, architecture) these forms of culture were pushed to the countryside in a form furnished with many important features inherent in urban and rural national culture. Thus, from remote past when cities and citizens appeared, the cultural influence of the city and countryside worked both ways. The city was never alien to traditional national culture, but rather its active maker, not unlike the countryside.

Let us illustrate this idea with some examples, mainly from material culture, because the major role played by the city in making the spiritual culture of the nation has never been doubted.

2. See V. P. Semyonov-Tyanshansky. *Gorod i derevnya v Evropeiskoy Rossii (City and Village in the European Russia)*. St. Petersburg, 1910; N. A. Rozhkov. *Gorod i derevnya v russkoy istorii. Kratkiy ocherk ekonomicheskoy zhizni Rossii (City and Village in Russian History. A Brief Essay of Economic Life in Russia)*. Petersburg, 1918.

V. V. Karlov. "Concerning Factors of Economic and Political Development of the Russian City in the Middle Ages. An Outline of the Problem". In: *Russkiy gorod. Istorisko-metodologicheskii sbornik*. Moscow, 1976; Rabinovich. *Ocherki etnografii russkogo feodalnogo goroda (Russian Feudal City. Ethnographic Essays)*. Moscow, 1976; Rabinovich; *Ocherki etnografii russkogo feodalnogo goroda (Russian Feudal City. Ethnographic Essays)* Moscow 1978. E. Ennen. *Die europaische Stadt des Mittelalters*. Göttingen, 1975; Rabinovich. On the problem of Defining the Concept of the 'City' for the Sake of Ethnographic Studies". In: *Ethnologia Slavica*. J. XVI, Bratislava, 1984; V. Yu. Krupyanskaya, N. S. Polishchuk. *Kultura i byt gornozavodskogo Urala. Konets 19 nachalo 20 vv (Culture and Life of the Mining Urals. Late 19th and Early 20th century)* Moscow, 1971; L. A. Anokhina, M. N. Shmeceleva. *Byt gorodskogo naseleniya srednei polosy RSFSR v proshlom i nastoyashchem (Urban Life in Central Part of the Russian Federation in the Past and Present)*.

So, we begin with occupations, a field which seems to distinguish most a city from a village. Indeed, the city is primarily viewed as a centre of industry and trade, and the countryside has always been involved in crop farming, stock-breeding, apiculture, and other things constituting agriculture. This is the main distinction between the city and the village from the viewpoint of social distribution of labour.

There are handicrafts in the countryside, but the city folk also is not alien to rural occupations such as cultivation (including crop farming) and stock-breeding. For low-income groups they constituted an important source of subsistence, making them confident in their future. West European cities were not an exception.³ However, these occupations played more than an auxiliary role in urban life. Some of them, such as vegetable, fruit and melon growing become highly productive in the city. P. G. Ryndzyunsky reasonably noted that these occupations were as important as crafts and trade, because they were involved in commodity exchange.⁴ Small Russian cities, such as Rostov, Dmitrov or Mozhaik, provided vegetables for the entire Central Russia, including neighbouring cities and villages. Cities developed new varieties of vegetables and fruits, which acquired major importance for the agriculture of the entire country and outside its borders. We can mention as examples cherries of the Vladimirskaia variety, Nezhin cucumbers, Pavlosky water-melons and cucumbers. As is known potatoes came to Europe from America. But, it is also a fact that in Russia and many other European countries potatoes were spread mostly via cities, where they were grown first as a kitchen-garden culture.

Stock-breeding was a very important occupation of city residents. They produced meat, milk, wool, leather and bones for carving. City pastures were regarded as very important things. As a fortified settlement, the city in the Middle ages established the grazing of animals under the supervision of herdsmen. Probably this practice was introduced in the cities earlier than in the villages where at first, uncontrolled grazing on nearby pastures was predominant (much so because there were few households in Medieval villages).

At first, houses of the city commoners were virtually similar to those of village folk. House plots in the city had all sorts of barns and sheds, as well as facilities for the procession of crops typical of village households. But from the start, every urban house was, at the same time, a craftsmans' workshop. What is more important, urban houses began to develop and sophisticate much earlier than in the village. Archaeological evidence shows that in the 12th-13th centuries in big cities (like Novgorod) houses were more complex in plan. They had three compartments; a living one, an antechamber and a compartment for animals, or two living compartments connected by cold compartment. There were also five-wall houses in which the wall divided the living compartment into two sections. Only several centuries later three chamber nad five-wall houses became a traditional dwelling of peasant families. At that time, in the city there were houses with several rooms, though five-wall and three-chamber houses were prevalent in small cities.

3. V. V. Stoklitskaya - Tereshkovich. *Osnovniye problemy istorii srednevekovogo goroda 10 - 15 vv.* (Main Problems of the History of Medieval City of 10th - 15th Centuries). Moscow, 1960, pp. 55 - 56.

4. P. G. Rundzinsky. "Main Factors of City Genesis in the Second Half of the 18th Century in Russia). In: *Ruskiy gorod Moscow*, 1976, pp. 107, 120 - 121.

Houses in Russian villages are still decorated with fine ornamentation of windows and frontals. However, it is possible that carving, which is one of the best samples of Russian traditional art, also originated in the cities. When houses were built to face the street the tradition emerged to decorate their window panels and frontals with wood carvings.⁵ This tradition was soon adopted by the village. That is why window panels of rural houses are often decorated in a "classical" architectural style - baroque, empire and even modernism. But there are also very ancient elements in house decorations aimed to protect a house from evil forces. The roof-ridge is styled as a horse head and the bench at the entrance styled likewise (the bench itself is called "konik", horsy) as are ornamented panels of doors and windows. These traditions emerged before the emergence of cities. We can see that in building materials, design, planning and decoration, traditional Russian houses, both rural and urban, are very similar.

Layouts of settlements suggest mutual influences between city and village. The oldest city centre (detinets in Russian) was built at random, like all rural settlements; city-like streets, apparently, suggested the same arrangement for the villages.

Folk costume was also a product of interaction between villages and cities. In the past century and until the turn of this century, the Russian "urban" female costume, or the "pair" (blouse and skirt made of the same commercial fabric) was distinguished from the traditional and more festive costume with a poneva or from a sarafan. But sarafan was also an urban element of the costume which appeared at an earlier date. Some 600 years ago Russian chronicles mentioned the word "sarafan", "sarafanets" which was of Oriental origin and meant male rather than female clothes.⁶ But, in 15-16th centuries sarafan became a favourite garment of city women. Its cut changed; the sarafan lost sleeves, it was made of best cloth, decorated with laces and rich buttons. Certain scholars believe that there was an earlier type of female garment that later became known as sarafan.⁷ Undoubtedly, the sarafan-dominated female fashion emerged in the city and later spread to the countryside, mostly among the Russians of the northern areas.⁸ The process was very long. It began in the 16th-17th centuries and lasted up to the 19th century. From the north sarafan made its way south edging off the Russian female costume with a fine woven poneva worn around the waist. In the city, poneva was dismissed in the 16th-17th centuries. In the south, sarafan was the exclusive female garment in the city and in the countryside ponevas were still in use. At the turn of the 20th century sarafan continued to oust poneva step-by-step from the southern countryside. At the same time, a new city fashion known as a pair (which appeared in the 18th century) came to the village. We

5. Rabinovich. *Russkoye zhilische 13 - 17 vv. Drevneye zhilische narodov vostochnoy Evropy* (Russian Dwelling of the 13th - 17th Centuries. Ancient Dwelling of East European Peoples). Moscow, 1975, p.223.

6. *Russkiye. Istoriko - etnograficheskiy atlas* (The Russian. A Historical Ethnographic Atlas). Maps 38 - 40, Moscow, 1957.

7. *Polnoye sobraniye russkikh letopisey* (Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles). Vol. 12, Moscow 1965, p. 27, (year 1377).

8. B. A. Kufin. *Materialnaya kultura russkoy Meschery* (Material Culture of the Russian Meschera). Pt. 1, Moscow, 1926, pp. 110 - 120; G. S. Maslova, *narodnaya odezhda russkikh, ukrainsev i belorussov v 19 - nachale 20 v. Vostochnoslavjanskij etnograficheskiy sbornik* (Folk Costume of the Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians in the 19th and Early 20th Century. East - Slavic Ethnographic Collection). Moscow 1956, pp. 640 - 642.

clearly see that city folk took part in shaping traditional Russian costume (specifically, the north Russian costume with sarafan). In small northern Russian cities some hundred years ago wives of commoners and merchants wore traditional sarafans and kokoshnik headgears.⁹ However some women wore more fashionable dresses, bournous cloaks and hats.

However city costume was distinguished from rural one by leather footwear. Even in the past century rural residents in Western Europe wore hard sabots. In Eastern Europe they wore more flexible 'lapti' shoes. Russian peasants were called 'lapotniki' (from lap-ti) for almost a millenium. In many Russian cities archeological digs reveal among the "massive material" thousands of leather pieces, dozens and even hundreds of pieces of footwear and even good porshni shoes, chobot and more conventional knee-boots. And only several lapti shoes were found. They were made of leather strips rather than bark. Only in the 19th century, with a more considerable influx of rural residents, lapti shoes became more common, but only as a footwear for of males. Analysis of excavated boots shows that often they were neatly made of coloured leather (black, yellow, green or red) and decorated with stamping and embroidery. In the past century decorated boots (bottle or accordion-shaped, according to fashion) were an attribute of a village fop; well-to-do peasants also wore knee-boots or low koty-boots, and poor peasants continued to wear lapti. Thus, leather shoes entered the traditional folk costume under the influence of the city.

When we see now a folk choir in traditional Russian costumes - men in kosovorotka blouse and knee-boots, and women in sarafans, kokoshnik headgears and coloured elegant boots, we do not even suspect that this is an urban costume, which came to the countryside long ago and became the national Russian fashion. Sarfan became a typical traditional female costume. A woman in traditional Russian costume is associated with a sarafan, not with poneva (either in the city or in a village). The same holds true of the chukha overall, popularity known as "cherkesska" which symbolizes the traditional male costume in the entire Caucasus. E. N. Studenetskaya notes that the chokha was initially worn in the city.¹⁰ This garment came to Russia, apparently in the 16th century (probably when Ivan the Terrible married Maria Temryukovna who was accompanied by many fashionably dressed men from the Caucasus) under the name of chuga and underwent minor changes.

It seems that rural tradition was especially stubborn in eating, because food products and dishes, or the national cuisine, depends on economic distinctions. Land farmers usually made dishes of flour, groats, vegetables and milk and stock breeders ate more milk and meat. Poor families used to eat shchi and kasha and lived from hand to mouth. A rich man had a more diverse diet with a dozen or more fish and meat dishes. This holds

9. See A. P. Shevyakov. *Tipy goroda Galicha*. Nauchnyi arkhiv Geograficheskogo obschestva SSR (Types of the City of Galich. Scientific Archives of the Geographic Society of the USSR). Section XVIII, inv. 1, No. 23.

10. E. N. Studenetskaya. "Common Features in Mens' Clothes of the Peoples of Northern Caucasus and Their Reflection in Terminology". In: *Problemy kartografirovaniya i yazikoznaniya v etnografii*. Leningrad, 1974, p. 263

true of the city¹¹ and the village. European diet was also influenced by religion (Orthodox and Catholic Christianity and sometimes Islam). Orthodox Christians had more than 200 fasting days a year. During these days meat and milk were banned, and fish allowed. Hence, a wide range of fish food is characteristic of the Russian cuisine. In the 19th-20th centuries tea became very popular in the countryside where it was called "the samovar luxury".¹²

The study of utensils and tableware - wooden, metal and clay shows how the city and the village exchanged their best achievements in this field. The oldest Slavic vessel used for making food was a clay pot¹³ which came to the city from the countryside together with wooden spoons, plates, salt-cellars and ladles. Later, they were all produced in the city together with deep plates and bowls. The village, in turn, got commercial big glasses and porcelain cups. Fine tableware became one of the most important crafts in the city and village.

The social and family life of city residents revealed close links with the village. Rural customs and rituals survived in the city until the past century. Family rituals were also similar: marriage rituals, birth and baptism and funeral rites.¹⁴ Marrymaking arranged by young people was picturesque and entertaining in winter and summer. Folk carnivals were similar in the city and in the village. Entertainment by ancient pranksters was ousted in the 18th-19th centuries by performances of vagabond actors and a specific folk theatre, the favourite entertainment of villagers and city residents. More information about these important and interesting problems can be found in special literature.¹⁵

We have considered some of the aspects of folk life in which the elements of urban and rural culture are closely interwoven. Now let us draw some conclusions.

The city, as a settlement, emerged later than the village and for a certain time relied on the traditions that had evolved in the countryside. It took time for the city to assimilate those traditions and enrich them. Later on, these traditions returned to the village in a more developed, modified, and almost unrecognizable form. The village assimilated them. The lasting exchange of cultural values produced a single popular culture. In addition, we must not forget that not a single nation lives in isolation from other peoples of the world, as far as economy, politics and culture are concerned. And in these relations without which not a single national culture can evolve whatever its distinctions, the city plays a major part.

The city cannot be considered as existing outside national culture. Urban culture is an

11. Rabinovich. "Eating Habits in Russian Towns in the 16th - 19th Centuries. The Main Phases of Development". In: *Food in Change*. Edinburgh, 1986.

12. Rabinovich. *Ocherki materialnoy kultury ruskogo feodalnogo goroda (Russian Feudal City: Essays of Material Culture)*, Moscow, 1988.

13. S. A. Tokarev. "Concerning Cultural Community of East Slavic Peoples". In: *Sovetskaya Etnografiya*. 1964, No. 2, p. 26.

14. *Russkiy narodniy svadebeniy obryad (Russian Folk Marriage Ritual)* Ed. by K. V. Chistov. Leningrad, 1978, pp. 27 - 28; *Kiev and Kiev Region Ethnography. Tradition and Contemporaneity*. Kiev, 1986 (in Ukrainian).

15. A. F. Nekrylova. *Russkiye narodniye gorodskiyе prazdniki, uveseleniya i zrelischa, Konets 18 - nachalo 20 v (Russian Folk City Holidays, Merrymaking and Entertainment. Late 18th and Early 20th Century)*. Leningrad, 1984; A. A. Belkin. *Russkiye skomorokhi (Russian Pranksters)*. Moscow, 1975.

integral part of traditional national culture, and an active element of its development.

RUSKI GRADOVI I NACIONALNE KULTURE

Sažetak

U čitavu industrijskom svijetu urbana je populacija pretežna u odnosu na seosku. U SSSR-u urbana populacija, kao što ovi podaci pokazuju, je u porastu. Problem urbanizacije dugoga je vijeka i nitko ne može poreći njegovu ulogu u nacionalnom životu. Bez urbane etnologije slika nacionalne kulture bila bi napotpuna.

