

IREX Short-Term Grant Spring 2002, Uzbekistan  
Russell Zanca, Ph.D.  
Northeastern Illinois University

## Research Report

The purpose of my spring 2002 research centered on archival investigation and informant interviewing. The entire trip lasted from mid-May through mid-June. Overall, the research seems a success, although new restrictions had been placed on archival access that I hadn't expected due to the ease with which I used them last year. Nevertheless, although my time working in the Uzbekistan State Historical Archive was restricted to under two weeks, I think I was able to collect materials relevant to my interests.

The STG in part enabled me to conduct the second phase of a joint ethnographic-historical project into the period of collectivization in Uzbekistan. Historian Dr. Marianne Kamp of the University of Wyoming and I are the two principal investigators of a multi-year (and now multilateral owing to the embrace of the project by Uzbek colleagues) project examining various aspects of the social history of collectivization with an emphasis on eyewitness recollections. During the period I am reporting, I worked without Dr.

Kamp; I worked on this occasion with host colleagues from the Yosh Olimlar (Young Scholars) Society.

In 2002 my fieldwork took me to Nurota, a mountainous and semi-desert region of central Uzbekistan in Navoi province. It lies approximately 150 miles north by northwest of Samarkand. In the political district of Nurota perhaps one-third of the population pursues a pastoralist way of life, depending mainly on herds of Qorakul sheep, goats, and cattle for most of their income. The entire area has long been associated with sheep breeding and pastoralism. For the success of our project, we consider it essential to represent different areas of Uzbekistan because of the various orientations toward agriculture and food procurement found in this country--forms of economy that also differed seventy-odd years ago.

Over the course of nearly two weeks, my host colleague, sociologist Dr. Komil Kalonov, and I interviewed 14 elderly people who had witnessed the collectivization process. These interviews included nine men and five women of various socio-economic and political/ideological/confessional backgrounds, including "kulaks" and party workers. We actually tried to conduct 17 interviews, but three of our informants, including a woman said to have been 106,

were simply too old to help us in the memory recovery process.

Kalonov and I worked with a set of interview questionnaires that Kamp and I wrote last year--and used in fact during the first phase of the project on cotton collectives in Namangan and Andijan. Kalonov and I modified the questionnaires in order better to reflect local lifestyle and economy particularities of Nurota. Since I had previously worked in Nurota in 1998 (on an applied USAID-authorized project), I had contacts who facilitated our work, through introductions on official and informal levels. In addition, our driver from Tashkent had an old friend living in the urban center of Nurota, who also was to play a substantial role in finding our cultural consultants (aka informants).

Once again, my experience in working rather independently in a tightly controlled police state was good on the whole. We had a few minor encounters with officialdom that occasionally expressed skepticism about our intentions, but delays were very minor. With one exception, our informants, who, I should add, had absolutely no idea that we were coming, rarely showed any sort of skittishness or reluctance to indulge us and tell us what they could remember. Perhaps their advanced age in part accounts for their relative openness. Whatever the

case, we were generally treated very politely, and the elderly informants often seemed quite eager to share what may have been long unexpressed memories of their early lives. Many became more animated throughout the course of given interviews. On average, our interviews have lasted two hours.

Of course, it's also the case that elderly people (and in our project 80 is about the lowest age) need considerably more time for interviewing than younger people; one really has to work at their pace and appreciate the fact that they may want to share reminiscences about topics that are beyond the scope of collectivization--referring to topics as well as time frames. That being said, their stores of knowledge, while hardly "complete" or without their faults, enrich the printed historical data; informants' information of this caliber is priceless. More importantly and unfortunately, it will also soon be lost to us forever. Many of these remembrances have not really been shared even with their own children and grandchildren, so there is no substitute for eyewitness accounts regardless of the questionable aspects of any given individual's responses.

Our biggest problem was the fact that most of the people in this region of Uzbekistan are not native Uzbek but native Tajik speakers. However, we

received enormous translation help from the person who lodged us. Moreover, since we tape recorded and filmed almost all of our interviews, we will have a way to verify translations should contradictions or suspect statements emerge as we translate. The recorded work should prove helpful in documenting the very ethno-linguistic diversity of Uzbekistan.

While all of the responses given by our 14 interviewees have not been tabulated and quantified just yet, I was more than slightly surprised that most of our informants generally seem to have supported Stalinist collectivization, especially because of the material improvements to daily life as well as universal schooling for boys and girls. The general support for the system also characterized our findings from 2001. We are very keen to see if this will continue to be the case in the three other parts of Uzbekistan in which we are planning to work in 2003 and 2004.

In order to conduct this kind of research in Uzbekistan today, scholars should combine policies of selective decorum, boldness, and a simple willingness not to take no for an answer when circumstances warrant it, especially if that "no" turns out to be a major impediment to your reading something or talking to someone that may really further one's

scholarly goals. Furthermore, I simply cannot say enough about the continued importance of cultivating good relations with people willing to help one at the local level, which is vital to enable the outsider to become less of an alien and alienating presence in tightly knit, small scale and relatively isolated places. Reciprocity will characterize any close or useful relationship (as it does almost anywhere, albeit the terms may be different from culture to culture), and the thing that one has to know are the appropriate matters of exchange.

Having previously worked in the State Archive, I enjoy cordial relations with the main archivists, which is no mean matter when trying to access documents quickly. I was looking for documents pertaining to both the kinds of research reports about the logistical aspects of collective farm construction in addition to the reports that detailed the issues and problems of the establishment of collectivization. I am very interested in the normative literature about collective life in various aspects of the country, which envisions a world of "must bes" and "supposed tos." More generally, I collected materials (photocopied) documents relating to the main industry of the region; in this case pastorlaim and sheep raising. The STG proved instrumental in meeting some of my own logistical needs, including payments for my

driver and his services, paying for housing in Nurota, buying very needed groceries for the household where we were housed, paying my collegial assistant from Tashkent, and last but not least, purchasing small but much appreciated gifts for our informants. In the latter category of gifts, I include soaps and teas as well as sugar, candies, and pens and pencils. I was also able to use my funds to defray photocopying costs, and to buy books and maps in Tashkent. I am grateful to IREX for the monetary support.