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Anthropology Book Forum

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Pastoralism and Pastoralists Since the Bonze Age till the Present: an Environmental Interpretation of Historical Phenomenon

Review by Olena Smyntyna

The Ecology of Pastoralism

by Nick P. Kardulias (editor)

University Press of Colorado, 2015

The Ecology of Pastoralism is an outstanding collection of papers edited by Nick P. Kardulias, well-known in the scientific community through his works in the field of prehistoric archaeology and ethnography of the Mediterranean region and Midwestern United States. The basic idea of this anthology originally was born about 15 years ago in frames of special sessions of Annual Meeting of the Central States Anthropological Society and Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (both in Chicago in 1999) organized by the volume editor Nick Kardualis and his colleague, Mark T. Shutes (1947-2001), specialist in the field of economic anthropology and comparative ethnographic analysis. Although the book took a while to crystallize, I highly recommended it for reading and careful examination.

Kardulias states that the fundamental goal of the book is “to explore the ways pastoralism is embedded in an environment whose framework is set by the terrain, the distribution of vital resources, and the needs of the animals herders tend” (p. xiv). And this goal is successfully reached with the help of a refined combination of geographic and chronological frames of the project. Profound case studies in the volume cover target areas of Asia (Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Mongolia, some parts of Russia and China, Iran and Turkmenistan), Africa (Chad Basin), Europe (Ireland and Greek island Dokos) and the New World (Southwestern United States) and deal with the period of time since the Early Bronze Age (i.e., from the very beginning of the pastoralism as historical and ecological phenomenon) through the Early Iron Age (the period of its highest development) till the present. Selection of environments with

principally different characteristics of climate and natural resources available for groups of population associated with different civilizations and historical epochs provides readers not only with freshly published research data (with no doubts, very interesting even *per se*), but also opens for inquisitive minds broad possibilities of comparisons through time and space, across cultures and civilizations, stimulating in such a way to further cognition of pastoralism in its environment and a deeper understanding of mechanisms in their interaction.

Such a unique and alluring combination of geographic and chronological frames are possible due to a synthesis of different national schools and methodological approaches drawn from a rather broad range of scientific disciplines. The volume has contributions from archaeologists, anthropologists, ethnographers, sociologists and specialists in environmental reconstructions and GIS-added modelling from United States, Australia and Russian Federation.

In spite of the international and interdisciplinary composition of the book contributors, the volume is not theoretically eclectic or amorphous. The theoretical frames of the anthology are clearly formulated by Nick P. Kardulias in Chapter 1. He understands pastoralism as a peculiar human adaptive strategy, which covers not only “basic subsistence but also the network of social, political, and religious institutions of the respective societies” (p. 1). This theoretization is followed by a contribution of Claudia Chang (Chapter 2) devoted to the reconstruction of history of studies of Eurasian steppe nomads with special emphasis on the theoretical differences in the conceptualization of pastoralism in both Western and also Soviet and post-Soviet science. These two chapters provide an exhaustive outline of both past and present field of pastoralism studies, and supply the reader with references to the most important and relevant theories and empirical datasets published in relation to the subject under study.

In Chapter 3, Nikolay N. Kradin proposes his own historical vision of pastoralists in this large scale region, which also includes reflections about social and political structure of the nomads. He does so based on the results of over a century long field studies of climate, livelihood and subsistence strategy of nomads of Inner Asia, which he views as including southern Siberia and the Trans-Baikal region of Russia, Sinkiang, Inner Mongolia, northern Shensi, northern Shansi and Manchuria of China and Mongolia.

The series of contributions that follow provide detailed case studies of several nomadic groups, which are important for understanding the connection between pastoralists' history and culture and their environment. Hodayun Sidky (Chapter 4) models subsistence strategies based on peculiar transhumances practiced by the Hunzakutz people who live in the western Karakoram Mountains of northern Pakistan. Erik G. Johannesson (Chapter 5) reconstructs processes of nomadic pastoralism

adoption in the Xiongnu region, Mongolia, and the subsequent emergence of the first nomadic state there in the third century BCE. Michelle Negus Cleary (Chapter 6) examines the Late Iron Age fortified enclosures and system of canals of ancient Chorasmia oasis in Central Asia as integral elements of a proliferated system of control of local environment and domination in the oasis practiced by the pastoralists. Mark Moritz (Chapter 7, first published in *Geography Research Forum* (volume 25, 2005) and reprinted here with the permission) discusses the role of the neo-patrimonial state in the lives of Chad Basin nomadic population (FulBe Mare'en pastoralists).

Lawrence A. Kuznar (Chapter 8) reveals the flexibility of the Navajo (Dineh) of the American Southwest land use system, and detects shifts in their mode of life through the time. Two following chapters by Mike T. Shutes are based on his field studies in Ireland. In Chapter 9, he demonstrates that localized agnatic kinship bonds could be regarded as the fundamental background of the social organization of the Rural Irish Parish. In Chapter 10, he argues that adoption of animal husbandry there brings substantial changes in existing social links. Nick P. Kardulias (Chapter 11), based on his ethnoarchaeological investigations at the arid island of Dokos near the eastern coast of the Peloponnesos (Greece), models dynamic land use there from the Early Bronze Age to the Early Modern period. These case studies are accompanied with 20 figures and 4 tables which make the authors' reflections and conclusions more perceptible and illustrative.

The final contribution of the collection (Chapter 12) by Thomas D. Hall concludes with very interesting 'conclusions, questions, speculations' which stimulate further inquiries not only in the field of pastoralists' ecology but also in respect with their history. Briefly analyzing the previous contributions and discussing some their main points, he comes to the conclusion that pastoralists, precisely because of their mobility in all areas of their dissemination, have often been major vectors of change and "the stimulus for increasing complexity in neighbouring societies and for binding together heretofore isolated groups into larger—even if inchoate—systems" (p.276). His macro-analysis of pastoralist societies (so called world-system analysis) allows him to suggest that "studying pastoral societies is fundamentally important to understanding the structure of past and present civilizations" (p. xvii).

That's why *The Ecology of Pastoralism* is an important milestone in the research of the pastoralism as historical, ecological, cultural, ethnic and archaeological phenomenon which is strongly recommended for specialists as well as for students and the general public interested in a deeper understanding of the inner workings of the interaction of people and nature in historical retrospection.

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