

FIELDWORKS#06

CARLOS CASAS
CC F KYR FW6
KYRGHIZ FIELDWORKS
(FIELDWORKS#06)

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Video and sound notes on transhumance
Documentary Fieldworks
Work in progress

Synopsis

A herd descends from higher pastures to a lower river at mid afternoon. A day routine of a transhumane flock in the summer pastures in Atbashi valley, South Kyrgyzstan.

Director's notes

"This video and sound notes express my fascination for the movement of the herd at high altitudes, these images and sound were captured in the summer pastures along the Tian Shan central range in South Kyrgyzstan close to the border with China. In this onirical non narrative video I was interested in a visual hypnosis I experienced while gazing at the herd move around those mountains, it is part of a wider project I will be developing in next coming years related to the transhumance practice and that will lead me to different mountain ranges in the world, from Mongolia to New Zealand up to Siberia and the Alps in Switzerland. I am interested in its ancestral meaning its metaphysical connotation, it's visual strength. Probably one of the oldest professions of the world, transhumance has been practiced in every corner of the world, by shepherds dedicated yearly to pastoral nomadism moving their herd from winter pastures to summer ones in higher mountain ranges. A lifestyle that keeps a yearly natural rhythm. "

Video and Audio source 1:

(Screen and front speakers)
Ambient Video,
Documentary Fieldwork,
Screening format: DVD
Shooting format: DVCAM Color
Aspect ratio: 4:3
Duration: 25 min.
Camera Edit, with ambient sound.

Sound source 2: (Back speakers)

Radio Frequencies Scan.
Captured in location.
Shortwave radio signals.
KHz Range: 6098 -6638 AM SW

Sound source 3: (Headphones)

Various Ambient Sound recorded inside different yurts in the camp. Captured in location.
Preparing Koumiss; Zeynoddin Imanaliev playing Luth Komus and singing; preparing Beshbarmak; young Manaschi reciting to the family; killing a sheep.

Location:

Images and sound captured in Location in the summer pastures camps of the Atbashi Valley.

Kyrgyzstan, Tian Shan central range. Naryn Oblasty, Atbashi, Lat 41.1697222 Long 75.8102778 Elevation 2,047 meters, Pop. 299 Summer pastures 3,720 m Pop. 16

Date:

August 2004

Where

Domus Circular
at San Siro Stadium
Tower 11 Room 189
Milano

When

Thursday April 14th 2005
from 18:00-6:00 AM

What

A Video installation
by Carlos Casas

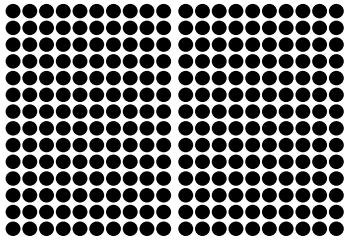


Transhumance:

Form of pastoralism or nomadism organized around the migration of livestock between mountain pastures in warm seasons and lower altitudes the rest of the year. The seasonal migration may also occur between lower and upper latitudes. Most peoples who practice transhumance also engage in some form of crop cultivation, and there is usually some kind of permanent settlement. Transhumance is practiced in those parts of the world where there are mountains, highlands, or other areas that are too cold to be inhabited and utilized for grazing except in summer.

Pastoralism:

The earliest human occupants of the Eurasian Steppe seem not to have differed very much from neighbours living in wooded landscapes. As elsewhere in Eurasia, hunters and gatherers using Paleolithic tools and weapons were succeeded on the steppes by Neolithic farmers who raised grain, keep domesticated animals, and decorated their pottery with painted designs. The critical development that eventually distinguished life on the steppes was the domestication of horses, but it is impossible to say when that development took place. Early Mesopotamian figurines showing equine animals pulling a cart probably record the domestication of donkeys and onagers, not horses. Only a few horse bones have been identified at early sites, and they may attest to successful hunting rather than domestication. However, sometime around 4000 BC steppe dwellers learned to keep herds of horses in addition to raising cattle, sheep, and goats, which were the principal domestic animals in more southerly lands.



Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is a small, mountainous, landlocked country in the heart of Central Asia lying between 390 and 430 N and 690 and 800 E, covering 198 000 kms², with a mixed ethnic population of under 4 500 000. The country is bounded to the north by Kazakhstan, to the south by China and Tajikistan and to the west by Uzbekistan, and is almost entirely mountainous with only 7% of the land area suitable for arable agriculture. Together with Tajikistan, it is among the poorest of the former Soviet Union republics. The main group, the Kyrgyz, make up about 55% of the population. They are a nominally Moslem people with a long tradition as nomad herders and horsemen, speaking a Turkic tongue. Their traditional life-style and ancestral origin in the Altai and the basin of the Yenisei was not dissimilar to that of the Mongols as dwellers in round tents of grey-brown felt draped and bound over a flexible wooden framework (yurta in Russian and boz ooyi i.e. 'grey house' in Kyrgyz). The boz ooyi together with the high crowned white felt hat ak kalpak, the heroic saga of the Manas cycle and fermented mare's milk koumiss are the proud symbols of their nation. This is a life-style for which the country is ideally suited, but for the majority it is now greatly changed. The influence of seventy years as part of the USSR was profound. The legacy of these times remains and ten years of independence have brought more uncertainty than economic benefit to the rural population. Together with water, the natural pastures and grazing-lands of the Tien Shan mountains comprise the Republic's most valuable natural resources. Bishkek (former Frunze), is the capital with a population about 900 000, is situated between 700 and 850 metres at the immediate foot of the northern Tien Shan ranges [Tien Shan - The Celestial Mountains-Chinese: Ala Tau - the Speckled Mountains-Kyrgyz] and commanding the fertile Chu river valley at the southern most edge of the great Kazakh steppe. Administratively the country is divided into seven provinces or oblast (Chui; Talas; Issyk-kul; Naryn; Osh; Jalalabad and Badken) which in turn are divided into forty five districts or rayon.

Yurt: A circular domed tent of skins or felt stretched over a collapsible lattice framework and used by pastoral peoples of inner Asia; Etymology: Russian dialect yurta, of Turkic origin; akin to Turkish yurt home. Date: 1876 also spelled yurta, Mongol ger tentlike Central Asian nomad's dwelling, erected on wooden poles and covered with skin, felt, or handwoven textiles in bright colours. The interior is simply furnished with brightly coloured rugs (red often predominating) decorated with geometric or stylized animal patterns. The knotted pile rug, first known from a nomad burial at the foot of the Altai Mountains (5th-3rd century BC), probably developed as a fur substitute to provide warmth and sleeping comfort in the yurt. Other items found inside a typical yurt include saddlebags, drinking gourds, and tools for spinning and weaving. The yurt is pitched wherever the nomad finds good pasture for the herds and is carried from place to place on horseback or on a small wagon

Koumiss: A beverage of fermented mare's milk made originally by the nomadic peoples of central Asia Etymology: Russian kумыs, of Turkic origin; akin to Turkish kimiz, koumiss Date: 1607

Manas: The hero of the first part of the Kyrgyz epic poem "Manas", a three-part tale preserved over many centuries by wandering bards called "manaschi". The legendary warrior Manas, son of Jakyp, led Kyrgyz troops in battles against foreign invaders and is credited with helping to preserve the independence of the Turkic Kyrgyz people in the past. Manas was the husband of Sanrabiya, who was renamed Kanikey because her name was hard to pronounce. Manas had a son named Semetei and a grandson named Seytek, and their eventful lives are portrayed in parts two and three of the trilogy. Elements of the orally-transmitted Manas legend began to assume written form by the 16th century.

Historical Perspective

When Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991 it opted to be a democratic republic. Attitudes are, however, still influenced by the Soviet experience, as well as by the clan structure of Kyrgyz society which lead to instability corruption and finally to the Tulip revolution last march 2005.

The area comprising modern Kyrgyzstan was brought under Russian control in the 1860s and in 1865 incorporated into the Czarist provinces of Ferghana and Semireche. This opened up the region to European settlement in an area previously inhabited mainly by nomadic tribes. The whole region was much contested after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, but Russian control was regained in the 1920s. Kirgizia (as it was called) was declared a Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936. This gave the present Republic a political identity which it had not possessed historically. To provide Kirgizia with a minimum of productive crop land, a fringe of territory was added to the republic in the 1930s, in the rich Ferghana valley, incorporating the historic towns of Osh and Jalalabad and a mainly Uzbek population with ancient traditions of settled irrigated agriculture.

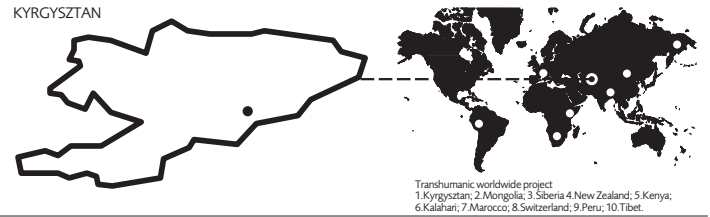
Enforced settlement and collectivisation in the 1930s dealt a blow to the independent tribal, nomadic life-style of the Kyrgyz, from which it has not recovered. However, after the Second World War, their pastoral skills and traditions as herdsmen were successfully harnessed by the USSR to raise sheep and cattle. Traditional stock-rearing was based on transhumance [the seasonal use by domestic livestock and their herders, using different areas of the mountain pastures roughly along zones of altitude], using hardy local breeds. At that time the herds and flocks were more or less in equilibrium with their environment and the pastoral system stable. Under the Soviet Union the emphasis was placed on specialising in fine-wool sheep, less hardy than the local land races. Stock numbers were deliberately increased, supported by imported feed and a complex of other services. Excessive stocking led to the serious deterioration of the pastures and range lands, coupled with some loss of hardiness in favoured breeds. After independence, with the privatisation and division of the sheep flocks, coinciding with the collapse of the wool market and with imported feed no longer available or affordable, sheep numbers have declined precipitously. This has also coincided with a serious decline in the custom and practice of transhumance herding, with the result that, though the remoter pastures are presently under-stocked, the more accessible pastures now tend to be over stocked and seriously degraded.

The ethnic mixture of the Republic's population was further complicated during and after the Second World War by the settlement of many minority groups as well as Russian administrators and technicians from elsewhere in the USSR, giving the Republic the multi-ethnic character that is still its dominant social characteristic. Many of these settlers came from a rural background and were established in sovkhos and kolkhos (state and collective farms hereafter referred to, for brevity, as collectives) on much of the best agricultural land. The Kyrgyz were employed mainly as herdsmen, but living much more controlled lives as part of a centralised production programme.

Manas excerpt:

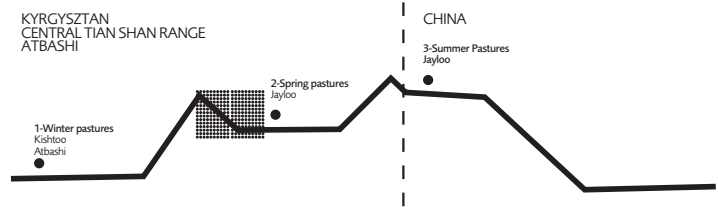
"There are pretenders, there are cheats,
There are folk-no sheep in the leas,
There are those who live like a beast,
There are neighbours on pastures near, will they leave me anything here?
Not even knowing-a son, or no-
Off to brave Jakib did they go!
Not having taken a look around,
Off they went where goods are found!
God it is who decrees my lot,
If from Jakib no gift I got,
What do you think will happen to me?"

KYRGYZSTAN



Transhumanic worldwide project
1. Kyrgyzstan; 2. Mongolia; 3. Siberia 4. New Zealand; 5. Kenya; 6. Kalahari; 7. Marocco; 8. Switzerland; 9. Peru; 10. Tibet.

KYRGYZSTAN CENTRAL TIAN SHAN RANGE ATBASHI



Seasonal Pastures

1. Winter pastures: The definition of a winter pasture kishtoo need not correspond to altitude, landscape features or vegetation type but they are usually close to permanent settlements, in areas of light or negligible snow fall where stock can be easily housed, at least at night. Snow cover is no longer the defining factor if it was, if stock can be housed at night and stall fed, as is now customary. Many ancient, traditional wintering grounds of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, particularly in the lower Chu and Talas valleys and in the Issyk-kul basin were colonised in the late XIXth and early XXth centuries by European and other agricultural settlers. Expansion of irrigation had the same effect in Ferghana. There are still a few old Kyrgyz men and women who can recall, or at least recall their parents telling them of how they returned from their jayloo in the autumn to their traditional wintering grounds only to find them occupied by Russian, Ukrainian and German (from the Volga region) pioneer farmers, claiming exclusive use of the land. Settlement intensified in the 1930s and 40s when irrigation systems were developed to support the new sovkhos and kolkhos. Throughout, winter grazing consists of a mixture of natural grazing, aftermaths and stubble and weeds on the abandoned crop land.

2. Spring-Autumn pastures: These are generally on the foot hills below 2 500 m, typically with a sparse open cover of fescues and Artemisia. The latter dominates on the drier slopes and under heavy grazing. Herbaceous legumes are common than higher up and make an important contribution to the quality of the grazing: Medicago, Trifolium, Astragalus, Onobrychis, Anthyllis and Hedysarum spp. there are also sub-shrubs such as Thymus and Origanum. Grazing conditions are often very similar to those in semi-arid mountain tracts of Afghanistan; Iran Turkey and the Middle East. There is clear evidence that many transition pastures have had a long history of heavy grazing. Ground cover seldom exceeds 40% in the conditions prevailing in the Tien Shan; equivalent areas in Ferghana and on some of the northern foothills overlooking the Chu valley are better than elsewhere, to the point of being mown for hay, with meadows rich in legumes as described above. Heavy stocking has led to local dominance of unpalatable plants such as Ranunculus alberti, Inula spp. and others on damper hillsides and meadows of the northern foothills, and species such as Verbascum spp. generally on drier slopes. The spiny shrub Caragana, generally present in gullies, tends to 'explode' onto degraded slopes where it forms impenetrable thickets. The collectivised system continued to use the seasonal pastures, following older Kyrgyz traditions of transhumance, but under state control, management and support, through the structures of the collectives not by community or tribal decision and management. The end of state and collective management has left the majority of the now mainly settled private stock owners and herdsmen with little idea of how to organise themselves to manage their pastures on a group basis.

3. Summer Pastures: The summer pastures jayloo in the Tien Shan include all grazing above 2 500 metres and are classified as state lands traditionally leased out to herders by their village governments and subject to grazing regulations. The area grazed between June and September are mainly grassland on gentle rolling mountain slopes, typically with 60-100% cover of 5-15 cm grasses such as Festuca valesiaca, with sedges, Carex and Cyperus spp. (about 30%) and broad-leaved perennial herbs with some legumes. At higher altitudes herbaceous legumes are rarer than lower down and often absent. Other species, including eidelweis (Leontopodium ochroleucum Bauverd), (which has similar romantic connotations as in alpine Europe). (10%). Transhumance to and from the jayloo takes from one to six days by foot or on horseback with the grazing flocks and may cover 200 km.

Sheeps

Any of various hollow-horned typically gregarious ruminant mammals (genus Ovis) related to the goats but stockier and lacking a beard in the male; specifically: one (O. aries) long domesticated especially for its flesh and wool. 2 a : a timid defenseless creature b : a timid docile person; especially : one easily influenced or led. (genus Ovis) were among the first animals to be domesticated, perhaps as early as 10 000 BC. They are almost as abundant as cattle worldwide; some 200 breeds are recognized. Closely related to goats, sheep are raised primarily for the fleece or wool of their coats, for meat (mutton and lamb) and, to a lesser degree, for milk. Like cattle, sheep graze for their food, eating both short, fine grasses and coarse, brushy weeds.

Kirghiz Sheep breeds:

(1) **The Tonkourunaya** Kyrgyz Fine Fleece based on the native coarse wool / fat tail improved by crossing with fine fleeced rams including the Caucasian merino, the Siberian Rambouillet, the Wuerttemberger and the Precos and later further up graded with imports of Australian merino and others. Approved as a breed in 1956. This is the most favoured wool breed. Said to have dual purpose wool / meat potential, but mutton in fact less favoured than the indigenous fat tail/rump types. Kyrgyz Fine-wool once made up 90% of the Kyrgyz sheep flock, but are now optmistically stated as 45%/46% of the national flock, or about 1 759 000 head. (2) **The Tien Shanskaya** semi fine wool. Breeding based on the Russian Precoc up graded by crossing with Lincoln rams now estimated at about 180 000 head. (3) **The Alais-kaya-** semi coarse wool based on the native Alai breed improved by crossing with Russian Precoc and Saraja. Grubosherstnaya, a generally black/ dark woolled, fat tail, originally used as the native base for the creation of the fine and semi fine wool breeds. Established approved as a distinct breed in 1973. (4) **The Australian Merino**, from importations in 1971 and 1989 and more recently in 1998 with 290 rams and 400 ewes imported under the World Bank funded Sheep Development Project (SDP) for breed improvement. (5) **Kyrgyz Coarse Wool Fat-Tail**, was the main hardy indigenous breed of the Tien Shan at the beginning of the XX th C, and one of the base breeds used for the breed 'improvements' described above. Brown grey coarse woolled breed to which the national sheep flock is generally reverting in type, as much by default as by intention. (6) **The Hissar** (Gissar), a black dark woolled fat rumped breed, and one of the largest (breeding rams averaging 120 to 140 kg liveweight and adult ewes 75 to 80 kg) originating from Tajikistan / Uzbekistan (viz the ancient district of Hissar - rus Gissar), currently much in favour for breeding back for indigenous characteristics, hardiness, rapid growth and meat quality which much favoured locally. Officially numbered at about 800 000 head. (7) **The Edilbayev**. The indigenous fat-tail sheep of the Kazakh steppe. Greyish / brown coarse wool second only in size and meat quality to the Hissar. (Rams 115 to 120 kg and ewes 80 kg lwt.) Currently popular as an 'improver' in Chui, Talas and Naryn.

Shepherd:

A person who tends sheep
Etymology: Middle English sheepher, from Old English scaphyrde, from scap sheep + hierde herdsman; akin to Old English heord herd Date: before 12th century 1 : Synonyms guide, conductor, direct, escort, lead, pilot, route, see, show, steer.

Special Thanks:

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