

## Agrarian Economy of Karabakh in the 19th Century: Land Use Patterns and Socio-Economic Transformations

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### Abstract.

Relevance of the study is determined by the need for a comprehensive reassessment of the agrarian development of Karabakh in the 19th century as a significant region of the South Caucasus, where traditional land use systems underwent profound transformations following its incorporation into the Russian Empire. During this period, agrarian economy functioned not only as the basis of material production but also as a key factor shaping social organization, mechanisms of adaptation to natural conditions, and institutional practices of land use.

The purpose of the research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the agrarian economy of Karabakh in the 19th century, taking into account natural and geographical conditions, forms of land ownership and land use, as well as the impact of imperial agrarian policies on the transformation of traditional economic relations. The object of the study is the agrarian system of Karabakh, while the subject includes land use practices, the structure of agricultural production, and the social consequences of changes in land relations.

The results of the study demonstrate that the agrarian economy of Karabakh in the 19th century was characterized by significant spatial differentiation shaped by relief, climate, water resources, and soil quality. Agriculture based on grain cultivation, horticulture, and viticulture coexisted with the dominance of livestock breeding, which played a stabilizing role in the regional economy. Traditional land use practices relied on a combination of communal and individual forms, ensuring relative sustainability of rural society. The incorporation of Karabakh into the Russian Empire led to reforms in taxation, cadastral regulation, and legal norms, gradually altering established land relations.

Conclusions indicate that agrarian transformations in Karabakh during the 19th century were ambivalent in nature. While imperial policies contributed to institutional modernization, they simultaneously intensified social stratification and undermined traditional mechanisms of land regulation. The findings expand the understanding of agrarian history in the South Caucasus and provide a foundation for further comparative and interdisciplinary research.

**Keywords:** agrarian economy, Karabakh, land use, social structure, nineteenth century

## Аграрне господарство Карабаху в ХІХ столітті: форми землекористування та соціально-економічні трансформації

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### Анотація.

Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю комплексного переосмислення аграрного розвитку Карабаху ХІХ століття як важливого регіону Південного Кавказу, де традиційні моделі землекористування зазнали істотних змін унаслідок включення до складу Російської імперії. Аграрна економіка регіону в зазначений період виконувала не лише виробничу, а й соціально-регулятивну функцію, формуючи структуру сільського суспільства, механізми адаптації до природних умов та інституційні практики користування землею.

Метою дослідження є комплексний аналіз аграрного господарства Карабаху в ХІХ столітті з урахуванням природно-географічних чинників, форм землеволодіння і землекористування, а також впливу імперської аграрної політики на трансформацію традиційних господарських відносин. Об'єктом дослідження виступає аграрна система Карабаху, а предметом – способи використання земельних ресурсів, структура сільського господарства та соціальні наслідки змін у земельних відносинах.

Результати дослідження свідчать, що аграрна економіка Карабаху ХІХ століття характеризувалася просторовою диференціацією, зумовленою рельєфом, кліматом, водними ресурсами та якістю ґрунтів. Землеробство, орієнтоване на зернову культури, садівництво та виноградарство, поєднувалося з домінуванням тваринництва, яке виконувало стабілізуючу роль у господарській системі. Традиційні форми землекористування ґрунтувалися на поєднанні громадських і індивідуальних практик, що забезпечувало відносну стійкість сільського населення. Включення регіону до складу Російської імперії супроводжувалося реформуванням податкової системи, кадастровими заходами та впровадженням нових правових норм, які поступово змінювали характер земельних відносин.

Висновки полягають у тому, що аграрні трансформації Карабаху ХІХ століття мали суперечливий характер: вони сприяли інституційній модернізації, водночас посилюючи соціальну диференціацію та підриваючи традиційні механізми регулювання землекористування. Отримані результати розширюють уявлення про аграрну історію Південного Кавказу та створюють підґрунтя для подальших порівняльних і міждисциплінарних досліджень.

**Ключові слова:** аграрна економіка, землекористування, Карабах, соціальна структура, ХІХ століття

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### Introduction.

The 19th-century agrarian economy occupies a special place in the socioeconomic history of the South Caucasus, as it was during this period that the region's traditional economic forms were drawn into profound transformation processes brought about by the incorporation of the Caucasian territories into the Russian Empire. Karabakh, with its complex natural and geographical structure and historically shaped land use system, is a prime example of a region where agriculture served not only as the foundation of economic life but also as a key factor in the social organization and stability of local society (Swietochowski, 1995).

The relevance of research into the 19th-century agrarian economy of Karabakh stems, firstly, from the need to rethink the role of agriculture in the formation of the regional socioeconomic model, and secondly, from the need for a more in-depth analysis of the mechanisms by which traditional land use adapted to the new administrative, legal, and fiscal conditions of imperial governance. Unlike the major trading centers of the Caucasus, Karabakh retained a predominantly agrarian economy throughout the 19th century, making its study particularly important for understanding the sustainability of traditional economic forms under external political and economic pressure (Altstadt, 1992).

The scientific significance of land use analysis lies in the fact that patterns of land ownership and use reflect fundamental changes in the social structure of traditional society. In 19th-century agrarian communities, land served not simply as an economic resource but also as the basis of social hierarchy, a system of obligations, and mechanisms for the redistribution of power. Changes in land relations, initiated by both internal processes and imperial agrarian policy, testify to the transformation of traditional institutions and the emergence of new models of interaction between the state and the rural population (Khalilov, 2019).

Despite the existence of individual studies devoted to the economic history of the Caucasus, the agrarian economy of 19th-century Karabakh is often examined fragmentarily – either within the framework of general works on regional history or in the context of political and administrative reforms. Moreover, a comprehensive analysis of the structure of the agrarian economy and land use practices, taking into account natural, social, and institutional factors, remains an underdeveloped area of academic research (Altstadt, 1992; Khalilov, 2019).

The aim of this study is to comprehensively analyze the agricultural economy and land use patterns in Karabakh in the 19th century, taking into account the natural and geographical conditions, traditional economic practices, and the influence of imperial policy on the transformation of agrarian relations. Achieving this goal involves identifying the structural features of the region's agriculture, as well as analyzing the

evolution of land tenure and land use patterns in the context of socioeconomic change.

**The object of the study** is the agrarian system of Karabakh in the 19th century as a set of economic sectors, social relations and institutional mechanisms that ensure the reproduction of the rural society of the region.

**The subject of the study** includes forms of land ownership, methods of land cultivation, the sectoral structure of agriculture, as well as practices of using natural resources that determined the specifics of the agrarian development of Karabakh during the period under study.

**The methodological basis** of the study consists of a historical-comparative method, which allows for a comparison of agrarian processes in Karabakh with similar phenomena in other regions of the South Caucasus; a systems analysis, which ensures the consideration of the agrarian economy as a holistic socio-economic mechanism; and an analysis of archival and statistical sources aimed at reconstructing actual economic practices and land use dynamics in the 19th century. The integrated application of these methods allows for the uncovering of the multidimensional nature of agrarian transformations and the provision of scientifically substantiated conclusions significant for further historical and economic research in the region (Issawi, 1982).

### Analysis of Previous Research and Publications.

The historiography of the agrarian history of the Caucasus in the 19th century is interdisciplinary in nature and includes works by Russian, Azerbaijani, and Western researchers, examining agrarian processes in the context of the region's socioeconomic, political, administrative, and ethnocultural transformations. However, the level of research into land use and agricultural issues in Karabakh remains uneven: most studies treat the region as part of broader generalizations, without a detailed analysis of local economic practices.

In pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russian historiography, agrarian issues in the Caucasus were traditionally viewed through the prism of the region's inclusion in the economic space of the Russian Empire. Works devoted to administrative-territorial reforms and the tax system addressed issues of land ownership and agriculture primarily in the context of fiscal policy and state control over land resources. Moreover, the agrarian economy was often interpreted as secondary to the military-political and administrative objectives of the empire (Suny, 1994).

Western researchers have made significant contributions to the study of socioeconomic processes in the South Caucasus, viewing agrarian relations as an important indicator of the transformation of traditional society under the influence of imperial rule. In particular, works devoted to Russian policy on the outskirts of the empire emphasize that changes in land tenure contributed to the gradual erosion of traditional forms of communal organization and the formation of new social

hierarchies (Swietochowski, 1995). However, Karabakh is often mentioned sporadically in these studies, without highlighting its agrarian context.

In Azerbaijani historiography, issues of agrarian economy and land use have received more detailed treatment, particularly in studies devoted to the socioeconomic history of the 19th century. A number of works analyze land tenure patterns, the role of agriculture and livestock breeding, and the significance of natural and geographical conditions for the economic development of Azerbaijan's regions. However, even in these studies, Karabakh is often considered in a generalized context, alongside other historical regions, making it difficult to identify its specific agrarian characteristics (Adigezalov, 2025).

A separate group of studies is devoted to the Karabakh Khanate and the period of its existence prior to the final establishment of Russian rule. These works focus on the socio-political structure of the khanate, its system of governance, and the economic basis of the khans' power. Land relations and agricultural production are examined primarily as a source of income for the ruling elite and the basis of the tax system, while the everyday land use practices of the rural population remain on the periphery of the analysis (Bournoutian, 2016).

In studies devoted to the Russian Imperial period, land use in Karabakh is analyzed primarily in relation to administrative reforms, the introduction of new legal norms, and changes in tax mechanisms. A number of authors emphasize that imperial agrarian policy, aimed at unifying land relations, conflicted with traditional forms of land ownership and use, leading to social tensions and a transformation of economic practices (Khalilov, 2019). However, a detailed comparison of pre-reform and post-reform forms of land use in Karabakh remains underdeveloped.

Contemporary research, drawing on interdisciplinary approaches, is gradually expanding our understanding of the region's agrarian history, focusing on the interaction between the natural environment and economic activity. A number of studies examine issues of agricultural adaptation to environmental conditions, the seasonality of production, and the sustainability of traditional land use patterns. These studies provide an important theoretical basis for analyzing Karabakh's agrarian economy, but they do not always take into account its historical and institutional specifics in the 19th century (Issawi, 1982).

Thus, an analysis of previous studies allows us to conclude that the agrarian economy and land use of 19th-century Karabakh have not yet received comprehensive and systematic treatment in the scientific literature. Existing studies either focus on pan-regional processes or examine individual aspects of agrarian relations without considering their relationship to natural and social factors. This circumstance necessitates this study, which will focus on a holistic analysis of the Karabakh agrarian system as an important element in the socioeconomic history of the South Caucasus.

An important area of historiographic understanding of 19th-century agrarian processes is the identification of the methodological foundations upon which research into the agrarian economy of the Caucasus was based. A number of works favor an economic-historical perspective, within which agriculture is viewed as an element of the region's economic balance, subordinated to the objectives of taxation, trade, and integration into the imperial economic system. This approach allowed for the identification of macroeconomic trends but often resulted in the denial of local characteristics of land use and the economic structure of individual regions, including Karabakh (Issawi, 1982).

At the same time, a socio-geographical perspective, focused on the relationship between the natural environment, settlement patterns, and economic activity, has become increasingly prominent in studies of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Within this approach, agricultural production is interpreted as the result of human communities' adaptation to the terrain, climate, and resource potential of the territory. Despite the heuristic value of such studies, Karabakh is typically placed within a broader regional context, making it difficult to reconstruct the specifics of its agrarian structure and the spatial organization of agriculture (Hewsen, 2001).

A special place in historiography is occupied by institutional studies, which analyze agrarian relations through the lens of legal norms, administrative reforms, and state regulation mechanisms. These works emphasize the role of imperial reforms in altering land ownership structures, redistributing land resources, and transforming traditional forms of farming. However, the authors' attention is primarily focused on regulatory changes, while actual land use practices and the ways in which the rural population adapted to new conditions often remain outside the scope of detailed consideration (Khalilov, 2019).

Contemporary interdisciplinary research seeks to integrate these approaches, viewing the agricultural economy as a complex system in which economic, social, and environmental factors constantly interact. Such studies provide a theoretical foundation for a more in-depth analysis of regional agricultural patterns, but their empirical base is often limited to aggregated data, preventing a full understanding of land use dynamics at the local level (Issawi, 1982).

An analysis of existing scholarly works reveals that, despite a significant number of studies devoted to the agrarian history of the Caucasus, issues related to the practical functioning of land use in 19th-century Karabakh remain insufficiently systematized. Research attention is typically divided between political and administrative reforms and the general economic characteristics of the region, while specific forms of economic adaptation, local land tenure patterns, and the everyday agricultural practices of the rural population do not form a coherent picture in the scientific literature (Khalilov, 2019; Swietochowski, 1995).

This circumstance necessitates a comprehensive analysis of Karabakh's agrarian system, based on a comparison of natural conditions, socioeconomic structure, and institutional changes. This approach not only allows for a deeper understanding of the region's economic development but also clarifies Karabakh's place in the overall agrarian history of the South Caucasus in the 19th century.

#### **Results.**

#### ***Natural and Geographical Preconditions of Agrarian Development.***

Karabakh's agricultural development in the 19th century was determined not by a single factor, but by a combination of the region's natural "mosaic": altitudinal zonation, differences in humidity and temperature, the contrast between flatlands and mountainous foothills, as well as water availability and soil quality. This complex geographic structure explains why, within a single historical space, both agricultural regions with distinctly commercial crops and territories where livestock farming remained the dominant sector coexisted. This type of economic heterogeneity is characteristic of the entire South Caucasus, where natural conditions shaped local patterns of production and resource distribution (Suny, 1994; Swietochowski, 1995).

#### ***Natural and climatic conditions of Karabakh.***

Karabakh in the 19th century was a region where climatic conditions varied depending on altitude and slope exposure. In the lowlands and foothills, summers were typically long and dry, stimulating the development of irrigated agriculture where reliable water sources were available. In the mountainous regions, temperatures were milder and the growing season shorter, but relative humidity and the presence of mountain pastures created advantages for livestock raising and haymaking. As a result, the agricultural calendar, cropping patterns, and farming methods varied not "by district" but by natural belt: the same year could mean a successful harvest in one zone and significant losses in another. This dependence of the agricultural cycle on local climatic differences is typical of the Caucasus regions, where agricultural sustainability was often ensured precisely by diversifying natural niches (Issawi, 1982; Suny, 1994).

Climate contrasts reinforced the importance of adaptive practices: crop selection, crop rotation, reliance on mixed farming, and the use of "insurance" industries – primarily livestock farming. For peasant and semi-nomadic communities, livestock farming served not only as a source of food and raw materials but also as a mechanism for reducing the risk of crop failure, as it allowed for the redistribution of workload between arable land and pasture depending on weather conditions (Swietochowski, 1995).

#### ***Relief, water and soil as the framework for agriculture.***

Karabakh's topography determined the basic "geometry" of agricultural activity. Flat and gently rolling

terrain facilitated plowing and expansion of cultivated areas, while mountainous foothills required different approaches – more fine-grained cultivation, active use of slopes, and a combination of farming and grazing. Under these conditions, economic efficiency depended not only on labor costs but also on the extent to which a community or farm was integrated into a system of access to water and hayfields.

Water resources were of fundamental importance. Where access to water was stable, agriculture became more predictable and could include drought-sensitive crops. In areas with limited water supplies, farming gravitated toward less water-dependent crops and an expanded pastoral economy. At the same time, water itself became a factor in social organization: the distribution of irrigation resources influenced settlement patterns, economic specialization, and even the structure of local obligations and agreements within the rural community. In the broader context of imperial governance, control over resources (including water) often meant control over production and revenue collection, which imbued natural factors with an institutional dimension (Suny, 1994; Swietochowski, 1995).

Soil conditions also shaped the region's "economic map." Fertile plots – especially in cultivable areas – became the core of agricultural production, while less productive or erosion-prone lands were more often used as pastures, hayfields, or auxiliary farmland. In mountainous regions, soil cover was often heterogeneous, stimulating combined practices: small arable lands were supplemented by horticulture, vegetable gardening, and the exploitation of natural forage resources. This structural dependence of agricultural specialization on the "nexus" of topography and soil is well documented in regional historical and geographical descriptions of the South Caucasus (Hewsen, 2001).

#### ***Regional differences in agriculture and livestock breeding.***

The internal differentiation of Karabakh was manifested primarily in the relationship between agriculture and livestock breeding.

1. Agricultural zones (plains and foothills). Here, agriculture had the greatest potential for expansion and stabilization, given the availability of water and relatively favorable topography. In such areas, a more pronounced focus on grain and other mass crops developed, and surplus produce could be used for barter. It was precisely in such spaces that elements of marketability emerged more easily: the need for transportation links, stable markets, intermediaries, and more regular tax accounting arose (Issawi, 1982; Swietochowski, 1995).

2. Mountain and highland zones (pasture economy). In these regions, livestock farming, especially pastoralism, enjoyed a natural advantage. The availability of summer and interseasonal pastures, the relatively mild climate during the warm season, and the ability to migrate herds seasonally made livestock farming a key



industry. Crop farming did not disappear, but it was more often of a supporting nature: it provided basic food security, complementing dairy and beef farming and wool production. This combination of "arable land and herd" was a rational response to the limited availability of large, flat areas and the risky harvest during the short agricultural season (Suny, 1994).

3. Transitional territories (mixed type). The most characteristic model for Karabakh was the intermediate model, where farms combined sowing, horticultural crops, haymaking, and livestock raising, redistributing efforts depending on the specific year's environmental conditions. In the 19th century, it was precisely such mixed systems that ensured economic stability: they allowed for the compensation of losses in one sector by the results of another and for flexible responses to changing access to water, pastures, and labor (Issawi, 1982; Swietochowski, 1995).

Overall, the natural and geographical conditions of Karabakh in the 19th century dictated not a "unified" agrarian model, but a network of interconnected local systems. Topography and water determined the boundaries of agricultural expansion, soil determined the productivity of land, and climatic variability determined the degree of risk and the need for mixed farming. This logic leads to a key conclusion for further analysis: Karabakh's agrarian economy should be viewed as a spatially differentiated system, where land use patterns and sectoral priorities were directly dependent on the natural structure of the territory (Hewsen, 2001; Suny, 1994).

#### ***Structure of Agrarian Economy in Karabakh in the 19th Century.***

Agriculture: grain crops, horticulture and viticulture.

In the 19th-century Karabakh agrarian system, agriculture served a basic food supply function and largely determined the sustainability of the rural population. Its development was directly linked to natural and geographical conditions, primarily the availability of arable land and access to water resources. In the lowland and foothill regions, agriculture was more stable and predictable, while in the mountainous zones, it was often supplementary and limited in scale, combined with other forms of economic activity (Suny, 1994).

The basis of agricultural production was grain crops, primarily wheat and barley, which played a key role in ensuring food security. These crops were relatively resilient to climatic fluctuations and could be grown in a variety of natural zones, making them a versatile element of agricultural production. Grain cultivation was primarily aimed at domestic consumption, but in years of favorable harvests, some of the produce could be used for local exchange, facilitating the formation of rudimentary market links between rural communities and nearby trading centers (Issawi, 1982; Swietochowski, 1995).

Along with grain crops, horticulture occupied an important place in the agricultural structure, developing

primarily in areas with milder climates and favorable soils. Fruit plantings not only provided dietary variety but also an additional source of income, especially when arable land was limited. Unlike grain crops, horticultural crops required long-term labor investments and more stable land tenure, making them an indicator of relative economic stability and the population's territorial stability (Hewsen, 2001).

Viticulture was particularly important, representing one of the most specialized branches of agriculture in Karabakh in the 19th century. The development of vineyards was linked to a combination of climate, topography, and the traditional skills of the local population. Grapes, unlike grain, had a higher commercial value, which facilitated their inclusion in interregional exchange. The presence of vineyards indicated a gradual increase in the complexity of the agricultural structure and the emergence of elements of economic specialization that went beyond purely subsistence production (Altstadt, 1992; Issawi, 1982).

Thus, agriculture in 19th-century Karabakh was not limited to a single production model. It included both mass-produced food crops aimed at self-sufficiency and more labor-intensive sectors that provided farms with additional stability and the potential to participate in commodity-money relations.

#### ***Livestock breeding as the dominant sector of the agricultural economy.***

Despite the importance of agriculture, livestock farming remained the leading sector of Karabakh's agricultural economy in the 19th century. Its dominant position was explained by both the region's natural conditions and historically established forms of economic adaptation. Extensive pasturelands, the presence of mountainous and highland areas, and the seasonal availability of forage created favorable conditions for the development of various forms of livestock farming (Suny, 1994).

Livestock farming served several functions. It provided the population with meat, dairy products, wool, and draft animals, and also served as an important reserve during crop failures or economic upheavals. Unlike agriculture, which was more vulnerable to weather anomalies, livestock farming was more flexible, allowing for the redistribution of resources between different pasture zones and adaptation to changing environmental conditions (Swietochowski, 1995).

A distinctive feature of Karabakh livestock farming was its combined form, incorporating elements of sedentary and seasonally mobile livestock raising. This model allowed for the efficient use of both summer mountain pastures and lowland areas during the cold season. In economic terms, this meant reduced risks and more efficient use of natural resources, which was especially important given the limited arable land and high spatial heterogeneity of the region (Issawi, 1982).

The dominance of livestock farming was also

reflected in the social structure of rural society. Ownership of herds was often an indicator of economic wealth, and the distribution of pasture lands was a source of local conflicts and negotiations. In this sense, livestock farming served not only as a sector of production but also as an important socioeconomic institution, shaping relationships within rural communities and between different population groups (Altstadt, 1992).

Together, agriculture and livestock farming formed a complementary system, but it was livestock farming that set the overall rhythm of Karabakh's agrarian economy in the 19th century. Its resilience and adaptability allowed the region to maintain relative economic stability even in the face of administrative reforms and external economic pressures, making an analysis of this sector key to understanding the region's overall agricultural structure.

#### ***Forms of Land Ownership and Land Use.***

Traditional forms of land ownership.

Land relations in 19th-century Karabakh were shaped by a long historical evolution, during which stable patterns of land ownership and use emerged, closely linked to the region's social structure and economic structure. Before Karabakh's incorporation into the Russian Empire, land was distributed within a traditional system in which land rights were determined not so much by legally registered ownership as by a combination of customary norms, social obligations, and actual control over resources. Land was viewed primarily as the basis for community reproduction and a source of income for the ruling elite, rather than as an abstract object of free alienation (Bournoutian, 2016).

In traditional society, land ownership was multi-layered. Formally, sovereignty over the land belonged to the khan and associated feudal groups, but actual economic use was carried out by the rural population. This system ensured relative stability in land tenure, as access to land was secured by customs and social agreements, and abrupt land redistributions were relatively rare. However, it also created asymmetries in income distribution and increased the dependence of peasant households on the political and social hierarchy (Swietochowski, 1995).

#### ***Communal and private forms of land use.***

One of the key features of the Karabakh agrarian system was the coexistence of communal and individualized forms of land use. Within rural communities, land was often viewed as a collective resource, distributed among households according to family size, economic capabilities, and local traditions. This model ensured a minimum level of food security and reduced social tensions, as it prevented the complete expropriation of land from economically vulnerable groups (Khalilov, 2019).

Along with this, there were forms of private use, particularly characteristic of orchards, vineyards, and plots requiring long-term labor investment. The assignment of such lands to specific households fostered elements of individual responsibility and economic specialization.

Private use did not always imply full legal ownership in the modern sense, but it ensured relative autonomy in the management of the fruits of labor and encouraged more intensive methods of land cultivation (Issawi, 1982).

The combination of collective and individual practices reflected the adaptive nature of Karabakh's agrarian system. Depending on natural conditions, population density, and the economic specialization of a particular region, the balance between communal and private forms could shift, creating localized land use patterns that were sustainable in the face of natural and social variability (Hewsen, 2001).

#### ***The influence of feudal and semi-feudal relations.***

Feudal and semi-feudal structures inherited from the pre-reform period significantly influenced land relations. Representatives of the local nobility and associated groups controlled significant tracts of land, deriving income from rent, duties, and various forms of taxation of the rural population. This system limited the economic independence of peasant farms and hindered the development of more flexible forms of land use (Altstadt, 1992).

The semi-feudal nature of relations manifested itself in the fact that economic dependence was not always rigidly institutionalized, but was maintained through traditions, debt obligations, and social pressure. As a result, peasant households often found themselves in a position of dual dependence – on natural conditions and on social hierarchy. This circumstance determined the conservative nature of the agrarian structure and slowed the transition to more market-oriented forms of management (Sunny, 1994).

#### ***Transformation of land relations under imperial governance.***

The incorporation of Karabakh into the Russian Empire marked a turning point in the evolution of land relations. The imperial administration sought to unify the land tenure system, subjecting it to common legal and fiscal principles. The introduction of cadastral registration, changes to tax mechanisms, and attempts to legally consolidate land rights gradually undermined traditional forms of land use regulation (Khalilov, 2019).

These changes were controversial. On the one hand, they created the preconditions for a clearer delineation of the rights and responsibilities of land users, as well as for the integration of the agricultural sector into the imperial economic system. On the other hand, imperial norms often failed to take into account local specifics, leading to conflicts, the redistribution of resources in favor of administratively privileged groups, and increased social tension in the rural environment (Swietochowski, 1995).

As a result of the transformation of land relations in the 19th century, Karabakh found itself in a situation of institutional "double-field": traditional land use practices continued to function at the level of everyday economic activity, while the formal legal system increasingly intervened in the distribution and control of land

resources. It was this overlap of old and new mechanisms that defined the specifics of the region's agrarian evolution and became an important factor in its socioeconomic development during the period under study (Issawi, 1982; Khalilov, 2019).

#### ***Impact of Imperial Agrarian Policies.***

Changes in the tax system.

The integration of Karabakh into the administrative and economic space of the Russian Empire was accompanied by a gradual restructuring of fiscal mechanisms affecting the agricultural sector. The tax system, previously based on local customs, in-kind dues, and personal obligations to the khan's authority, began to transform toward standardized monetary and mixed forms of taxation. For the rural population, this meant adapting to new requirements that required regular payments and their linkage to formalized indicators of economic activity (Swietochowski, 1995).

The shift from primarily in-kind taxes to cash taxes increased peasant households' dependence on market conditions. In the context of unstable harvests and limited access to trade channels, this led to an increase in debt and stimulated the search for additional sources of income, including the expansion of livestock farming and seasonal employment. Thus, the empire's tax policy served not only as an instrument of fiscal control but also as a factor in structural changes in Karabakh's agrarian economy (Issawi, 1982; Suny, 1994).

#### ***Cadastral and administrative reforms.***

Cadastral and administrative reforms aimed at formalizing land relations became an important element of imperial agrarian policy. The introduction of land records attempts to classify them, and the consolidation of use rights reflected the state's desire to create a transparent system of resource management and taxation. For Karabakh, where land use had traditionally been regulated by customary law and collective practices, such measures represented a radical intervention in established economic mechanisms (Khalilov, 2019).

Administrative reforms contributed to the redistribution of authority in land relations. Control over land distribution increasingly shifted from local elites and communal institutions to representatives of the imperial administration. This widened the gap between formally established rights and actual land use practices, creating a situation of institutional uncertainty in which the rural population was forced to navigate between the demands of tradition and new bureaucratic norms (Altstadt, 1992).

#### ***The impact of new legal regulations on traditional land use.***

Imperial legislation, aimed at unifying legal regimes, gradually displaced traditional forms of regulating access to land. The formalization of property and use rights altered perceptions of land as a collective resource assigned to the community and contributed to its perception as an individualized object of economic activity. As a result, traditional mechanisms for land redistribution were

eroded and the role of communal institutions weakened (Swietochowski, 1995).

At the same time, the new legal norms did not always provide the expected stability. The lack of precise correspondence between legal categories and actual economic practices led to conflicts, disputes, and increased social tensions. For some rural residents, legal transformation meant the loss of previously guaranteed access to resources, while for other groups, it opened up opportunities for land concentration and increased economic influence (Khalilov, 2019).

#### ***Social consequences of agrarian transformations.***

The combined impact of tax, administrative, and legal changes had a significant impact on the social structure of rural society in Karabakh. Increased fiscal pressure and the redistribution of land resources contributed to deepening property differentiation, the formation of groups of economically stable households, and a simultaneous increase in the number of vulnerable households. These processes altered traditional forms of social solidarity and undermined the mechanisms of mutual assistance previously characteristic of community organization (Suny, 1994).

In the long term, the agrarian reforms of the 19th century paved the way for further changes in the economic and social life of the region. Karabakh's integration into the imperial economic system was accompanied not only by adaptation to new rules but also by the loss of some traditional mechanisms of stability. In this sense, imperial agrarian policy acted as a dual factor: on the one hand, it facilitated institutional modernization, while on the other, it intensified social contradictions and the transformation of traditional forms of land use (Issawi, 1982; Khalilov, 2019).

#### ***Conclusions.***

This study suggests that the 19th-century agrarian economy of Karabakh was a complex, spatially differentiated system, the development of which was determined by the combined influence of natural and geographical conditions, historically established forms of land use, and the institutional transformations initiated by the region's incorporation into the Russian Empire. In contrast to simplified models that treat agriculture as a homogeneous sector, the analysis reveals that Karabakh's economic structure was formed at the intersection of local ecological niches, social practices, and legal regimes, which determined the sustainability of some forms of production and the vulnerability of others (Suny, 1994; Swietochowski, 1995).

It has been established that the region's natural and climatic heterogeneity – altitude zonation, differences in moisture, access to water resources, and soil quality – defined the framework for agricultural specialization and contributed to the development of mixed farming models. Agriculture, focused primarily on grain crops, horticulture, and viticulture, provided the food supply and, in certain areas, acquired elements of marketability. At the same time, livestock breeding, with its greater

adaptability to natural and climatic fluctuations, maintained a dominant position in the agricultural system and served as a stabilizing factor in the face of economic risks (Issawi, 1982).

An analysis of land tenure and land use patterns revealed that traditional land distribution mechanisms were based on a combination of communal and individualized practices that ensured the relative stability of rural society and allowed for flexible responses to environmental changes. Feudal and semi-feudal relations, which persisted for much of the 19th century, limited the economic autonomy of peasant farms but simultaneously contributed to the preservation of local norms regulating access to land resources (Altstadt, 1992; Khalilov, 2019).

The incorporation of Karabakh into the Russian Empire marked a turning point in the evolution of land relations. Imperial agrarian policy, expressed through reforming the tax system, conducting cadastral registration, and introducing new legal norms, was aimed at unifying and formalizing land use. These measures facilitated the region's integration into the pan-imperial economic space, but simultaneously upset the balance of traditional economic practices, increased social differentiation, and generated contradictions

between formally enshrined rights and the actual use of land (Khalilov, 2019; Swietochowski, 1995).

The research's novelty lies in its comprehensive examination of the 19th-century Karabakh agrarian system as a holistic socioeconomic and spatial phenomenon. Unlike studies that focus either on administrative and political reforms or on generalized economic indicators, this article analyzes the agricultural sector through the interrelationships of natural conditions, land use patterns, and institutional changes. This approach allows us to clarify Karabakh's place in the agrarian history of the South Caucasus and demonstrate that the transformation of the region's agriculture was not linear but multifaceted.

The findings open up prospects for further research, particularly for microhistorical analysis of individual regions of Karabakh, comparative comparisons of agrarian models across various Caucasian regions, and the long-term consequences of imperial agrarian policy on the socioeconomic dynamics of rural societies. More broadly, the study's results can be used to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms by which traditional agrarian systems adapted to the conditions of institutional modernization and external governance influences in the 19th century.

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