

Molokans

Molokans are Russian Christians who do not recognise any intermediary communication with God. Molokan history began in 18th Century with the rejection of icons, churches, hierarchies within the Church and the numerous religious ceremonies. The Russian Orthodox Church considers this religious movement to be sectarian.

Once, Molokans lived throughout the country, but the pressure from the government and the desire to establish their own Molokan community forced them to migrate. Today, Molokan communities are scattered across Western and Eastern Russia, the Caucasus, in former Soviet republics, Turkey, the USA, Mexico, Australia and China. The customs and lifestyles of Molokans vary greatly from region to region. In Azerbaijan Molokans live peacefully side by side with Muslims. This series was photographed in the Azeri villages of Chukhryurd, Khimilli, Ivanovka and Alty-Agach. Each village has its own unique identity, as each was founded by different communities from different corners of Russia. There is, however, something that unites them: a certain duality expressed, on the one hand, in the desire to preserve their unique cultural traditions and, on the other hand, the rapprochement towards the bearers of other traditions.

This is a story of how the older generation attempts to preserve the memory of their cultural origins and about the diffusion of cultures: Russians, Ukrainians and Azeris live side by side, having forgotten the differences that once had set them apart. Meanwhile, the youth heads towards bigger towns and cities, so as to get education and escape the pressure of their conservative families.

Captions

1. Forty days after the death of a relative, family members stand on their knees praying their community for forgiveness for themselves and for the deceased. Also they traditionally say that “they do not hold any evil” and ask the villagers to say the same. At the table there are the elder, the chorister and their assistants.
2. An elderly Molokan woman from Khimilli treats her grandsons to compote. They eat Qutab – a kind of pastry stuffed with potatoes or tripe.
3. The commemoration feast is traditionally prepared together. The main dish is the traditional noodle served with meat bouillon. It is cooked in a 50 litre iron pot.
4. Molokans gather pears to bake them in a Russian stove. Sun-dried pears are also popular.
5. Molokan women start the samovar to drink tea during a festive gathering. During festivities, it is customary to wear something white, such as a head scarf.
6. Before, by the age of 16, each Molokan girl had to have a dowry ready: embroidered pillows, sheets and pillowcases, handkerchiefs and the “dabbing” towels. If a girl did not have time to cope with the work herself, her friends would help her at the evening hen-parties. In many houses there are still pillows with the embroidered initials of the craftswoman, including Anna Ivanovna Lebedeva.
7. A day before the funeral, a memorial service takes place. Elderly Molokans do not use modern technology, but amongst the participants of the prayer happened to be a young Baptist man. To join in with singing the psalms, he used his smartphone to find the necessary text on the Internet.
8. A family is visiting an ancient Molokan cemetery in Khimilli. The woman standing by the gravestone is the only member of her family who still lives in her native village. Relatives from Russia visit her during holidays and vacations.
9. An elderly couple from Ivanovka. The wife helps her husband tie his shoelaces, which he is unable to do due to problems with his health.
10. At the end of the working day at the collective farm in Ivanovka – Russian, Azeri and Lezgin

man drink tea. The farm chairman has come to talk to them.

11. Ekaterina Ivanovna Kastyulina – the wife of the elder of the village Chukhuryurd is resting at home. On the day when the photo was taken, commemorations were taking place in the village, which added to the usual worries and anxieties of domestic life.
12. The samovar is taken into the house for gatherings. A young woman observes the table being set. She came to Khimilli, where her parents grew up, from Russia.