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**MOTHERHOOD AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE HEALTH OF WOMEN IN GREEK VILLAGES OF THE NORTH AZOV SEA REGION (THE SECOND HALF OF THE XIX – EARLY XX CENTURY)**

*In the article on a wide range of record documents and materials of press and sources of personal origin was considered a motherhood and its influence on the health of women in Greek villages of Northern Azov. It is shown that pregnancy and childbirth was always accompanied by various prejudices and number of injunctions, not following, woman could harm to the unborn baby. It was found that women hadn't given a birth in hospitals, but at home, using the services of midwives. On average, on one hundred cases of births Greek girl turned for help of midwives from two to eight times. It is determined that on the ninth day after birth (and in the case of illness woman – later) a doula organized and conducted washing mothers that differently affected the well-being of women, sometimes contributed to the rapid recuperation, sometimes vice versa.*

*It is determined the conditions of Greek girls' life, as a result of which they suffered from postnatal illness. It is indicated that women rarely applied with their sexual diseases to the doctor because of shyness and because many diseases due to slow and painless flow, didn't force the patients to seek of medical care. It is given the list of the most common gynecological operations which are conducted for women doctors in zemstvo. It is considered a problem of abortion in the daily life of women, analyzed the reasons that pushed the people of fair sex on this step, pointed out the prices of clandestine abortions.*

**Key words:** *maternity, women, Greek women, childbirth, the North Azov region, sexual diseases, abortion.*

Every year in the Ukrainian historical science is growing an interest for social history in general and the history of a daily life in particular. The study of the daily life of the population will enable anew to consider the social and cultural processes happened in society. It is known that men and women are characterized by a different way of life, the structure of interests, activities and so on, which change with age. Therefore to reckon the gender and age characteristics is a necessary requirement for modern historical research of the daily life.

The relevance of understanding the live of women in Greek villages of Northern Azov is associated with a regional approach to the study of the history of the daily life. One of the major events in the woman's life was bearing and giving a birth to a child, so the study of motherhood will allow to draw a more complete and accurate picture of the life of Greek women.

Founding on the ethnographic research the process of childbirth described V. Mukhina [6], studying of traditional birthing rituals of Northern Azov Greeks engaged V. Dmitrieva [2]. In general, in the historiography a question of motherhood displayed fragmented and has never been isolated in a separate problem of the scientific research.

The sources which reflect different aspects of the chosen problem for study, are presented by clerical documentation, namely, by annual reports of Mariupol county rural council and reports about the state of zemstvo medicine in Mariupol county, and also by

periodic press materials. The sources of personal origin are presented by materials that have been written as by contemporaries, for example, address “To fellow Greeks of village Novo-Karakuba of Mariupol district” M. Kharadzhy [18] and as by memoirs written after a considerable period of time (memories of G. Badasen [1], I. Strionov [3], F. Popova [15]).

Reckoning the lack of study of the problem, the purpose of this article is to research of motherhood and its influence on the health of women in Greek villages of Northern Azov.

The main purpose of a woman, as Greeks saw it, was to continue the family line. The intercourse between a woman and a man, according to Orthodox religious canons, could be justified only like a method for a child conceiving. A child's birth was viewed as a God's blessing, while absence of children was a curse [5, p. 413]. The Greeks used to say: “A house with children is a happiness, a house without children is a tomb”. The entire fault for absence of any children or birth of solely baby-girls was put on a woman. The society treated sterile women negatively, and people considered a reproductively-challenged woman as evil, stingy, sinful. The people used to say: “Let the God drive you off a childless and a sick”. Such a woman could not be present in populous places especially such as wedding or christening. Priests did not hesitate to say that a childless woman means sinful, explaining that such a condition is a punishment.

However children were not valued as individuals but rather as “successors” for their father's family. This explains the preference given to boys, because they stayed in the family, while girls had to leave it sooner or later. Sons were an important source for the woman-mother power, who had no other powers in a strict patriarchal system – because a son would bring a daughter-in-law who would be obedient to the mother. When a daughter-in-law became a mother, she also gained some power in relation to the younger members of the family. She was responsible for the “putiry” of her daughter, executed everyday control of the household. The older a woman became the higher her status in the society grew. A son in such a way became an important source because he would bring a wife to take care of the household and in this case an elderly woman could expect to get necessary honor and care from her children and the society.

Some mothers-in-law would even blame their daughters-in-law for weakening the household when the last ones gave birth to baby-girls only. One of the reasons of this was the rule in the Russian empire, legitimate at that time, which stated that only male newborns were granted an allotment.

In case of infertility Greek women usually addressed to “znakharka” (a wise woman, a sorceress), who used quacks and different herbal extracts to cure her. Sometimes women performed a pilgrimage to saint places, springs, churches and icons in order to be cured from infertility; this sometimes was also done to ensure easy labor and delivery.

Pregnancy and carrying of a baby was always surrounded by numerous superstitions and limitations, which if not obeyed could harm a woman or her baby. A pregnant woman could not swear, feel jealous, say or wish somebody bad things, attend funerals, weddings, christening – meaning must have avoided crowded gatherings. Special attention was paid that during the Ocurus Domini (14-16 of February) a woman did not work around the house and did not cut anything.

For the period of 9 months, while a woman was pregnant, she was given special attention and respect: she was taken care of, helped and assisted (she was considered to already have two souls). A Greek woman would hide her state as long as possible from neighbors and even relatives, because she was afraid to be put an evil eye.

At the end of XIX – beginning of the XX century the women chose not give birth in hospitals but mostly at home, using the services of midwives. Expectant mothers seldom addressed a hospital, and went there at a last resort. This is not surprising at all if to consider

the fact that in 1900 none of the Mariupol county hospitals had a separate room for women in labor, and Ignatyivska hospital did not had a separate operating room. Statistics says that total of 12 midwives worked in Mariupol district in 1900: one midwife for each medical division. They usually lived in the same settlement where a doctor lived. The average number of those women who sought a doctor's help was two to eight cases out of 100. It was much more common when midwives helped women at home: if the labor was going well, they managed themselves, and called for the doctor in case of pathologies only [7, p. 28]. Doctors could perform such obstetrical operations like embryotomy, internal podalic versions, expulsion of fetus by hand, removal of afterbirths, transforation, extraction of arms in case of a stillbirths etc. It was an often case when a Greek woman did not want to ask for a professional help, however had to address the doctors anyway when her condition became critical due to ignorance of a midwife. We can find an example when a woman had her afterbirths (overlooked by a midwife) removed on the seventh day after the delivery. Sometimes a Greek woman went to the doctor to ask for removal of accreted placenta or because of prolapse of the uterus, and these cases were usually treated manually [9, p. 200].

Traditional position for labor among Greek women was sitting. This is an old and physiologically correct position for easy labor. The woman in labor was seated on a tripod, usually used as a stand for vessels with a round bottom [6, p. 153].

A midwife must have had an exceptional knowledge of Greek traditions, because it was she who controlled and performed the chain of ceremonies that served as an acceptance of the baby in the family and in the society.

If a child was born still or with deformation, everyone assumed this as an influence of "evil forces" a pregnant woman tried to avoid. A midwife was called for in secret, and the number of people who were present during labor and helped her was very limited [2, p. 39]. To ease the labor a midwife would use herbal medicine based on infusions and teas from medicinal herbs, such as thyme, mint and nettle, and dry applications with barley and oat grains. There were also mechanical influences such as massage of the belly, turning of the fetus by shaking a woman etc.

The first three days after the labor a woman was kept away from strangers. The Greek proverb says that even the Sun should not see a woman at that time [1, p. 160]. That's why even other Greek women were seldom invited to the house, and if they came a new mother would pretend to be exhausted. This was believed to give her a protection from malicious eyes. The same protection was meant when every evening the woman had roods painted on her forehead and arms [5, p. 415].

On the ninth day after the labor (and sometimes even later, if a woman felt bad) the same midwife arranged and performed a ritual ablution of a new mother. A woman was seated in a big bowl with water, where hot stoned and herbs were also placed, and covered with blankets. After such "banya" (Russian bath with steam) a midwife massaged the woman's belly, rubbed her bones: ankles, hips, shoulders, and then tied a towel around the woman's waist. Such a bath could have different influence on the woman's health: sometimes it facilitated an easier recovery, but sometimes had negative effect. Despite the fact that this ritual was a "cleaning" one, a woman was considered unholy for thirty more days (total of forty days after the labor). At this time she was both susceptible to the influence of evil forces and was a source of negative energy herself. So the woman who just gave birth to a child was limited in her everyday actions and duties: she was not allowed to bake bread, cook, visit social gatherings, church and cemetery. She even slept separately from her husband [2, p. 41]. The Greeks used to say: "Even the grass does not grow where a birthing mother walked". However all these limitation were very rational, as they provided a new mother with the opportunity to have rest and renew her health and strength, while limitation of a sexual life

coincided with the puerperium period necessary for normal recovery of organs changed during pregnancy and delivery. On the 41<sup>st</sup> day a woman visited church and received a holy absolution.

Greek women usually breastfed their children. They sometimes overextended a nursing period in order to prevent next pregnancy. Sometimes they could feed their children until they were “ashamed” of nursing at 3-4 years. This method provided some protection against a new pregnancy. Because women tried to nurse for as long time as possible, there were cases when a grandmother would feed her newborn granddaughter or grandson [15, p. 42]. The Greek women also nursed the children whose mothers died as a result of a labor or foundlings brought by alien women [1, p. 70].

Women usually got pregnant and delivered until physical sterility. A Greek I. Strionov wrote in his memoirs, that at the beginning of the XX century most of women gave births to up to 20 children who were born in different places like fields, barns, sheds etc. He gave an example of his mother, who delivered 18 souls, out of which 7 sons and 1 daughter survived. The author emphasized that most of the children did not live long and died when still small – because of absence of medical help. However child mortality was a usual thing and parents seldom grieved over the gone children, saying “Father (God) gave, Father took”. At that time the children lived according to the natural selection: strong survived, and weak ones died [3, p. 56].

The deaths of women during labor were also often occasions [18, p. 12]. County doctors paid special attention to the fact that obstetrical service was in a poor condition in Mariupol district, and morbidity and mortality rates were extremely high due to the unprofessional and bad help provided from so called “babki” (sorceresses) who often came to their patients untidy and used very brutal methods of treatment [8, p. 131].

Some Greek women suffered from postnatal illnesses which often appeared as a result of absence of proper hygiene, unsuitable conditions for intimate care and completely unhealthy diet, as well as early rise from the bed and “bath” at the wrong time after the delivery [10, p. 181]. But women seldom visited doctors in relation to venereal diseases – because of shyness and also because most of the illnesses were not painful and run slowly and unnoticeable [7, p. 29]. In most cases the diseases run chronically and required systematic, persistent treatment which could take months and even years. The frequency of a woman’s visits to a doctor in relation to venereal diseases depended greatly on the woman’s attitude towards the doctor and trust between a patient and a medical specialist. Most spread gynecological operations performed by the doctors were insecting of vagina, endometrectomy, operations on abscesses in the pelvic cavity [14, p. 174].

Further one may find the notes of a district doctor Z.L. Gorelov concerning his observations of women illnesses: “There are many sick females with venereal diseases, and the number can be explained with the fact that many women during the pregnancy and labor do not want, due to their illiteracy, to call for professional help from midwives, but more often seek help from arrogant quacks who think that they know everything because they themselves gave birth to many children. These quacks cause many problems to peasants, often infect them because know nothing about disinfection, which leads to many postnatal problems that either carry women off or leave them suffer all their life. However the quacks consider themselves to be good specialists not only in labor process and after-birth things, but also experienced gynecologists. So for every country woman that addresses to them in relation to pain at the bottom of her belly they (quacks) for sure find different problems like uterus malposition; and so they start doing different manipulations like uterus uplift etc, which at the end leads to aggravation of different inflammations of the uterus and its

appendages. These quacks and sorcery as a whole is a big bad thing for peasant women” [13, p. 54].

Research of the conditions which a woman in the XVIII-beginning of the XX century faced in daily life leaves no doubt that she used to hide her diseases, especially those in relation to sexual sphere, and visited a doctor or a paramedic at a last resort. Women’s diseases were quite spread, but only little percentage of ill women actually treated them, which was the result of many factors: inconvenience of outpatient care, impossibility to leave domestic work and the most important – arrogance of peasants [12, p. 118]. Seldom visits of a woman to a doctor’s office were also the result of the situation when a woman in addition to household work watched children, and if mother got to the hospital they remained unattended. However the analysis of the ethnical percentage of women who visited hospitals in general shows that Greek women were more often visitors there than the Russian or Ukrainians. Doctors usually assumed that Greek women had less work to do around the house and had more time to treat their illnesses [11, p. 69].

It was dangerous for some women’s health to give birth, and in such cases pregnant women would go to the doctor asking to perform an abortion. If the doctor considered such an operation to be appropriate, he would perform it. The only reason when abortion was officially allowed was the health condition of a woman.

Church was against any abortions. According to the church statutory the killing of a fetus with the help of herbal tea or with support of a midwife was a punishable case, with five to fifteen years of penance. In Russia before revolution of 1917 abortions were against the law. According to the Directive on punishments dated 1845 an abortion was equal to child killing, and the one who performed it could get four to ten years of hard labor. It is very difficult to discuss the number of abortions in Russia at that time, as no statistics was recorded. Illegal abortions were usually done in the most primitive way – by needling the uterus. The women were pushed to perform abortion due to financial hardships, large family with many children or sometimes pregnancy out of marriage. The last reason was a very strong one, as women were afraid of gossips and scandals. The saying “They’ll make fun of me, and paint the gates of my house with tar” brightly illustrates the case [19, p. 4].

Fear of social blame from her fellow villagers was so strong that often pushed a woman to perform a criminal, secret abortion; such cases are known even from the time of Soviet Power, when abortions were legalized. Sometimes services of clandestine midwives led to their patients’ deaths. However the victims of such criminal abortions never turned in the midwives, even on the bed of death. They kept keeping their killers’ names to themselves [17, p. 3]. But sometimes even abortions performed in the hospitals had mortal ending. There is a letter to the editor’s office of the newspaper “Nasha Pravda” (“Our Truth”) dated 24 of April 1929, in which the author from Stariy Kermenchik gave an example of the following episode: “There was once a doctor Divish in our village, who performed plenty of abortions, many of which were not fine, until he get to the prisoner’s box after one of his clients died. The trial showed that he performed operations in such a gross atmosphere that everyone couldn’t help doubting whether he is a doctor or rather an unprofessional midwife. So commission which members are mostly doctors was really doubting that the doctor had necessary training and practice”. In most cases a married woman performed abortions without notifying her husband. Ina Greel village Nova Karakuba a secret abortion cost was 5-7 rubles [16, p. 3]. For the sake of comparison we can say that the price for a pood of grains in April 1925 was 153 gold kopecks, a pood of wheat – 248 kopecks, a pood of barley – 150 [4, p. 37]. But women continued to do abortion despite the high price.

Thus, the main purpose of women was procreation. During the 9 months of pregnancy Greek woman adhered of sets of prohibitions, not to harm the unborn baby. Mostly women

gave birth at home, applying to the hospital was extremely rare cases. Childbirth were taken by doulas of the Greek villages, who were subsequently clearing bath mothers. Because of the obstetric care was at the low level of development, were frequent deaths of women in childbirth. A lack of proper cleanliness and unhygienic conditions were among the causes of postnatal diseases. The frequency of Greek women with similar diseases in medical institutions depended on the gravity of the disease and on the level of confidence to the attending staff.

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**МАТЕРИНСТВО ТА ЙОГО ВПЛИВ НА ЗДОРОВ'Я ЖІНОК В ГРЕЦЬКИХ  
СЕЛАХ ПІВНІЧНОГО ПРИАЗОВ'Я  
(ДРУГА ПОЛОВИНА ХІХ – ПОЧАТОК ХХ СТ.)**

*В статті на широкому колі діловодних документів, матеріалів періодичної преси та джерел особового походження розглянуто материнство та його вплив на здоров'я жінок в грецьких селах Північного Приазов'я. Показано, що настання вагітності і виношування дитини завжди супроводжувалося різними забобонами й низкою заборон, не дотримуючись яких, жінка, на думку греків, могла нашкодити майбутній дитині. З'ясовано, що жінки народжували не в лікарнях, а в домашніх умовах, користуючись послугами повитух. В середньому на сто випадків народжень грекині зверталися за допомогою до акушерок всього від двох до восьми разів. Визначено, що на дев'ятий день після пологів (а в разі поганого самопочуття жінки – пізніше) повитуха організувала і проводила очисне омовіння породіллі, яке по різному впливало на самопочуття жінки: іноді сприяло швидкому відновленню сил, інколи навпаки.*

*Визначено умови життя грекинь, внаслідок яких вони хворіли на післяродові захворювання. Зазначено, що жінки рідко зверталися зі своїми статевими хворобами до лікаря через сором'язливість та через те, що багато хвороб, завдяки повільній і безболісній течії, не примушували хворих шукати лікарської допомоги. Наведено перелік найбільш поширених гінекологічних операцій, які проводили жінкам земські лікарі. Розглянута проблема абортів у повсякденному житті жінок, проаналізовано причини, що штовхали осіб слабкої статі на цей крок, зазначені ціни підпільних абортів.*

**Ключові слова:** материнство, жінки, грекині, Північне Приазов'я, пологи, статеві хвороби, аборти.

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