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EYEWITNESS MEMORIES OF THE FAMINE OF THE 1930S IN KAZAKHSTAN: QUESTIONS OF SOURCE STUDIES AND REFLECTION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The article examines memoir sources that reflect family histories of survival among Kazakhs during the years of forced collectivization, famine, and compelled migrations to neighboring territories. An important place among these materials is occupied by personal documents from the collections of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, belonging to writers, Komsomol workers, and participants in the construction of socialism, whose childhood and youth coincided with this tragic period. The memoirs contain unique information about everyday hardships, the loss of livestock the main means of subsistence and the destruction of the traditional way of life.

Purpose and objectives of the study. The purpose of the work is to demonstrate the significance of memoir sources for studying the famine and migrations of the Kazakh population in the early 1930s, as well as to determine their source-study specificity. The objectives of the research include identifying the corpus of memoir materials, analyzing their content, determining the features of the authors' subjective perspectives, and comparing archival testimonies with published document collections, studies on the famine, and media materials. *Results.* The analysis showed that memoirs, as documents of personal origin, contain valuable retrospective information that allows the tragedy of the famine to be seen “from within,” through the perception of direct eyewitnesses. The archival collections of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan and published sources include recollections of severe everyday life, the loss of households, mass migrations, and the struggle for survival. The source-study approach revealed the need for critical evaluation of these materials due to their subjectivity, yet confirmed their importance for reconstructing the social reality of the period.

Conclusions. Memoir sources represent a vital layer of historical information about the famine and migrations of Kazakhs, revealing the personal, emotional, and everyday dimensions of these tragic events. Their use makes it possible to supplement official documents and scholarly research, reconstruct real human destinies, and gain a deeper understanding of the scale and consequences of the catastrophe of the early 1930s.

Key words: memories, mass death, hunger, force collectivization, settling of Kazakhs, nomads, tragedy

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ 1930 ЖЫЛДАРДАҒЫ АШАРШЫЛЫҚ ТУРАЛЫ КУӘГЕРЛЕРДІҢ ЕСТЕЛІКТЕРІ: ДЕРЕКТАНУ МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ ЖӘНЕ КҮНДЕЛІКТІ ӨМІРДІҢ КӨРІНІСІ

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Аңдатпа. *Kіріспе.* Мақалада күштеп ұжымдастыру, ашаршылық және қазақтардың көршілес аумақтарға еріксіз қоныс аударуы кезеңіндегі отбасылық тіршілік үшін күрес тарихын бейнелейтін мемуарлық дереккөздер қарастырылады. Олардың ішінде ҚР Орталық мемлекеттік архивінің қорларында сақталған, бұл трагедиялық кезеңді балалық шағы мен жастық шағында бастан өткерген жазушылардың, комсомол қызметкерлерінің және социализм құрылысшыларының жеке тектік құжаттары маңызды орын алады. Мемуарларда күнделікті тұрмыстағы қиыншылықтар, негізгі күнкөріс көзі болып табылған малдан айырылу және дәстүрлі өмір салтының күйреуі жөніндегі бірегей мәліметтер қамтылған.

Зерттеудің мақсаты мен міндеттері. Жұмыстың мақсаты 1930-жылдардың басындағы ашаршылық пен қазақ халқының миграциясын зерттеуде мемуарлық деректердің маңызын көрсету, сондай-ақ олардың деректанулық ерекшеліктерін айқындау. Зерттеу міндеттері мемуарлық материалдар кешенін анықтау, олардың мазмұнын талдау, авторлық субъективті көзқарастың ерекшеліктерін белгілеу және архивтік деректерді жарияланған құжаттар жинақтарымен, ашаршылық туралы зерттеулермен және БАҚ материалдарымен салыстырудан тұрады. *Нәтижелер.* Талдау нәтижелері көрсеткендей, мемуарлар жеке тектік құжаттар ретінде тікелей куәгерлердің қабылдауы арқылы ашаршылық қасіретін «ішкі» қырынан көруге мүмкіндік беретін құнды ретроспективтік мәліметтерді қамтиды. ҚР ОММ қорлары мен жарияланған дереккөздер ауыр күнделікті өмірді, шаруашылықтан айырылуды, жаппай қоныс аударуларды және аман қалу жолындағы күресті сипаттайтын естеліктерді қамтиды. Деректанулық тәсіл бұл материалдарды субъективтілігіне байланысты сын көзбен қарауды қажет ететінін анықтаса да, олардың кезеңнің әлеуметтік шындығын қалпына келтірудегі маңыздылығын дәлелдеді. *Қорытынды.* Мемуарлық дереккөздер ашаршылық пен қазақтардың қоныс аударуы туралы тарихи ақпараттың маңызды қабатын құрай отырып, трагедиялық оқиғалардың тұлғалық, эмоционалдық және тұрмыстық қырларын ашады. Оларды ғылыми айналымға енгізу ресми құжаттар мен зерттеулерді толықтырып, адамдардың нақты тағдырларын қалпына келтіруге және 1930-жылдар басындағы апаттың ауқымы мен салдарын тереңірек түсінуге мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: естеліктер, жаппай өлім, аштық, күшпен ұжымдастыру, қазақтардың отырықшылығы, көшпенділер, зұлмат

Дәйексөз үшін: Абдулина А. 1930-жылдардағы Қазақстандағы ашаршылық туралы куәгерлердің естеліктері: деректанулық мәселелер және күнделікті өмірдің көрінісі // Scientific Journal "Central Asian courier". 2026. Т. 2. № 1. 4-14 бб. (Ағылш.). DOI: 10.64970/3105-241X_2026_2_1_4-14

ВОСПОМИНАНИЯ ОЧЕВИДЦЕВ О ГОЛОДЕ 1930-Х ГГ. В КАЗАХСТАНЕ: ВОПРОСЫ ИСТОЧНИКОВЕДЕНИЯ И ОТРАЖЕНИЕ ПОВСЕДНЕВНОСТИ

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В статье рассматриваются мемуарные источники, отражающие семейные истории выживания казахов в годы насильственной коллективизации, голода и вынужденных перекочёвок на сопредельные территории. Важное место среди них занимают документы личного происхождения из фондов Центрального государственного архива РК, принадлежащие писателям, комсомольским работникам и участникам строительства социализма, чьё детство и юность пришлось на этот трагический период. В мемуарах содержится уникальная информация о повседневных лишениях, утрате скота главного средства существования и разрушении традиционного уклада жизни. *Цель и задачи исследования.* Цель работы - показать значение мемуарных источников для изучения голода и миграций казахского населения начала 1930-х гг., а также определить их источниковедческую специфику. Задачи исследования заключаются в выявлении комплекса мемуарных материалов, анализе их содержания, определении особенностей субъективного авторского взгляда и сопоставлении архивных свидетельств с опубликованными сборниками документов, исследованиями о голоде и материалами СМИ. *Результаты.* Анализ показал, что мемуары как документы личного происхождения содержат ценные ретроспективные сведения, позволяющие увидеть трагедию голода «изнутри» через восприятие непосредственных очевидцев. Архивные фонды ЦГА РК и опубликованные источники включают воспоминания о тяжелой повседневности, утрате хозяйства, массовых перекочёвках и борьбе за выживание. Источниковедческий подход выявил необходимость критической оценки этих материалов ввиду их субъективности, однако подтвердил их важность для реконструкции социальной реальности периода. *Выводы.* Мемуарные источники представляют собой важнейший пласт исторической информации о голоде и миграциях казахов, раскрывая личностные, эмоциональные и бытовые аспекты трагических событий. Их использование позволяет дополнить официальные документы и научные исследования, воссоздать реальные судьбы людей и лучше понять масштабы и последствия катастрофы начала 1930-х гг.

Ключевые слова: воспоминания, массовая гибель, голод, силовая коллективизация, оседание казахов, откочевники, трагедия.

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Introduction. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan, historical scholarship faces new challenges related to rethinking the historical past in light of the current level of methodology and methods of foreign and domestic historical science, new conceptual approaches, and new sources identified in archives of both near and far abroad during the implementation of state programs. In addition, there is the growing factor of the politicization of all spheres of public life, including the humanities, which are often postulated in a manner beneficial to the ruling elite or certain controversial politicians, with the aim of ideologically justifying proposed political slogans and messages.

The conflict in Ukraine, in which Russia has been an indirect participant since 2014 following the occupation of Crimea, has brought to the forefront the issue of the recurrence of famines of the 1920s and 1930s on the territory of the Soviet "breadbasket." This issue has become an instrument of

conflict-driven mobilization of the population and the construction of public opinion against the Russian Federation as the legal successor of the Soviet Union, which, according to some Ukrainian politicians and historians, carried out the Holodomor against Ukrainians.

Only an appeal to historical sources will allow professional historians – rather than “armchair experts” who present pseudo-history as truth – to draw correct conclusions regarding the methodological and factual aspects of this complex and still not fully explored problem. In order to fill this gap, in 2020, under the scientific supervision of Doctor of Historical Sciences A.I. Kудaybergenova, the Institute of History and Ethnology named after Ch. Ch. Valikhanov launched the project “Kazakh Nomadic Migrants in the Republics of Central Asia and Russia during the Mass Famine of the Early 1930s: Residence and Adaptation.” The project aims to reconstruct an objective picture of the consequences of the mass famine of the early 1930s by examining the socio-economic and legal status, as well as the specific features of adaptation, of Kazakh nomadic migrants in the republics of Central Asia and adjacent territories of Russia.

Materials and methods. The materials used for writing the article consisted primarily of archival documents of personal origin from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In particular, the collections of well-known writers and Komsomol workers of Kazakhstan were examined, whose childhood and youth coincided with this tragic period in our history. The most informative proved to be Collection No. 1744 (Inventory 2) of the People’s Poetess of the Kazakh SSR, Mariam Khakimzhanova (1906–1995), which contains materials on famine and a cholera epidemic, of which she became an eyewitness at the age of fifteen in her native aul in Kostanay Region in 1921, as well as on the famine of 1931–1932, whose victims she witnessed while studying at the Kazakh Pedagogical Institute in Alma-Ata (now Almaty).

These memoirs were published by her in republican journals between 1990 and 1994, that is, during the period of glasnost in the USSR and the initial stage of independence. Despite the considerable time that had passed since the events described, the memoirs are striking for the abundance of details about individual victims of famine, Kazakhs who arrived in Alma-Ata in search of food and salvation, and the people who surrounded her during that period. Evidently, these horrific facts were so deeply etched in her memory that even 60–70 years later she was able to describe everything in detail with literary mastery, vividly visualizing the tragedy of the Kazakh people for readers. The poetess’s memoirs are permeated with acute pain for the fate of her people, who endured such disasters and lost the best representatives of the nation. In each recollection, she addresses the contemporary younger generation, urging them to remember the Holodomor and not to remain indifferent to national history.

An insight into the harsh everyday life of the early 1930s is also provided by the memoirs of Honored Artist of the Kazakh SSR and pensioner of republican significance A. Asimzhanov (born 1913), entitled “Qasiretti zhyldar haqayasy” (“The Tale of the Tragic Years”), preserved in his personal collection No. 2366 (Inventory 1). Between 1930 and 1932, he studied at a construction vocational school in Semipalatinsk, where starving people were gathering, and also traveled to Zhanasemey, where mass mortality caused by Stalin’s collectivization was taking place. Valuable information about the famine is also contained in the manuscript memoirs of the People’s Writer of the Kazakh SSR, Azil Khan Nurshaikhov (1922–2011), preserved in his personal collection (Collection 2209. In. 2), in which he described a journey to his native aul of Akbuzak in East Kazakhstan Region during the famine years.

A significant body of informative material is found in Collection No. 269, “Documents of Participants in the Construction of Socialism in Kazakhstan. Collection for 1931–1981,” which includes File No. 4 containing the memoirs of surgeon Tatyana Nevadovskaya. At the age of nineteen, in 1932–1933, she worked as a laboratory assistant in the phytopathological laboratory of the zonal station “Soyuz-Sakhar,” headed by her father, Professor G. S. Nevadovsky, who had been exiled to Kazakhstan. In the same collection, some information was drawn from the memoirs of Makai Dzhunusovich Dzhunusov, a Komsomol member of the 1920s–1930s, a party worker, and a participant in the construction of the Turkestan–Siberian Railway, who worked in the apparatus of

the Kazkraikom from 1929 and in 1932 became a witness to the flooding of Akmolinsk by starving people (Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 3: 54–55).

In addition to archival memoir sources, the article also relied on published collections of documents containing recollections, scholarly studies on famine that include testimonies of eyewitnesses and their relatives, as well as articles published in mass media, including Internet-based publications.

To achieve the research objectives, the author relied on the principles of historicism and objectivity in analyzing eyewitness memoirs, which, due to their nature as personal-origin sources, are inherently subjective. General scientific methods of logical analysis and synthesis, as well as systemic-functional, analogy, and abstraction methods, were employed. In addition, problem-chronological, comparative-historical, historical-typological, and other methods played an important role in the study of the stated problem.

Results. In contemporary historical scholarship, in connection with the growing trend toward the study of everyday life, the significance of memoir sources is increasing, as they are capable of revealing family histories of survival during famine and the migrations of Kazakhs to neighboring territories. The term "memoir" derives from the Latin word *memoria*, meaning memory, borrowed through the French language (Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 1974: 64). Memoirs are understood as recollections of life events recorded by eyewitnesses many years after their occurrence, often reconstructed using other sources such as diary entries, documents, accounts of other participants, photographs, newsreels, and similar materials.

As a type of source, memoirs belong to documents of personal origin and contain unique retrospective information refracted through the prism of individual perception. They bear the imprint of the author's personality and the uniqueness of their inner world. This constitutes the main feature of memoirs as historical sources—the subjectivity of the data contained in these documentary materials—a characteristic noted by such prominent Soviet historians as M. N. Chernomorsky (*Memoirs as a Historical Source: A Textbook on Source Studies of the USSR*, 1959) and E. V. Tarle ("The Significance of Archival Documents for History," *Vestnik arkhivovedeniya*, 1961, No. 3). These documents are also of great value for research in the social sciences and humanities, as they reproduce people's customs, everyday life, and mentality.

It is necessary to agree with the opinion of the Russian historian N. G. Georgieva that "memoirs are a valuable historical source with a dualistic nature: on the one hand, they possess a documentary character as remnants (embodiments of part) of the past, and on the other, they are a narrative source reflecting certain aspects of the culture of bygone eras" (Georgieva, 2012: 136).

The most widespread type of memoirs consists of autobiographical memoirs, usually intended for descendants; memoir-histories are also distinguished, in which the memoirist recounts historical events experienced personally (*Source Studies...*, 1998: 466). These types of memoirs share a common feature: they reflect not the author's attitude toward events at the time they occurred, but rather the attitude at the moment of writing the memoirs. Thus, a reassessment of facts and events takes place, which may have occurred under the influence of prevailing ideological conditions. Academician E. V. Tarle wrote: "The fundamental feature of all memoir literature lies in the author's fully conscious intention to show readers people and their actions only in a certain light: to reveal one aspect, conceal another, and distort a third" (Tarle, 1961: 102).

For this reason, recognizing the value of memoirs as historical sources does not preclude, but rather requires, thorough source-critical analysis. This involves adherence to the following principles:

- studying the personality of the memoirist: social origin; social status at the time of the described events and at the time of writing; property status; ideological beliefs and positions; occupation; nationality and, in the case of Kazakhs, clan and tribal affiliation; attitude toward religion; family status and presence of children; character traits and personal qualities (where possible);
- analyzing the social environment in which the memoirs were created; determining whether there was a social demand for their creation; whether they were intended for wide publication and commercialization; whether they underwent literary or editorial processing that could distort the

author’s original text; whether they have a propagandistic character; and whether they were published during the author’s lifetime or posthumously by descendants;

- establishing whether the author was a direct participant in the events described or relied on the recollections of direct participants and other sources of information;
- drawing conclusions about the memoirist’s self-awareness;
- carefully comparing the information contained in memoirs with other types of sources, since memoirists often confuse dates, names of actors, attribute the actions of some individuals to others, and misrepresent the sequence and chronology of events.

With regard to the problem of the famine of the 1930s in the Kazakh ASSR, due to the specific nature of this topic, only a limited number of memoir testimonies of eyewitnesses to the Great Famine are available, primarily because discussion of this subject was prohibited in the Soviet Union. During the period of independence, the scarcity of such sources has also been influenced by demographic factors, including the declining number of eyewitnesses as a result of natural mortality, the temporal distance of the events, their short duration, the lack of literary skills or conditions for creative work among many surviving participants, the limited number of field expeditions conducted by historians to collect oral testimonies, and other factors.

Nevertheless, recollections of the famine are embedded in many memoirs of prominent historical figures of Kazakhstan, in particular in the works of D. A. Kunaev, “About My Time” (1992) and “From Stalin to Gorbachev” (1994). He wrote: “My studies in Moscow coincided with the most difficult period in the life of the republic and the country—the period of forced collectivization. Information about the extremely dire situation of the population reached us, Moscow students. I received letters from my parents describing the immense suffering of the inhabitants of auls and villages who were starving and dying of hunger. I was able to judge the scale of the unfolding disaster myself when I visited my parents during the holidays in the village of Turgen, Enbekshi-Kazakh District of Alma-Ata Region. Here, in 1932–1933, many people died of hunger in the villages of Baltabai and Malovodnoye, as well as in the auls of the district” (Kunaev, 1992: 17).

On March 12, 2021, the Institute of History and Ethnology named after Ch. Ch. Valikhanov hosted a presentation of the collection of memoirs “Asharshylyk in the Aulie-Ata Region” (Äulie-Ata өңіріндегі ашаршылық), prepared by scholars of the Institute under the leadership of the well-known publicist T. Baikulov. This publication represents a continuation of an earlier volume released in 2017 (Baikulov, 2017). The book brings together memoirs of descendants of eyewitnesses and witnesses of the famine of the early 1930s, recorded during field expeditions across districts of Zhambyl Region, photographs of respondents, and newly identified archival materials.

Individual recollections of victims and eyewitnesses of the famine are also included in a number of historical studies. Among them is the research by Professor S. Cameron of the University of Maryland, “The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan” (2020). Referring to Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, she notes: “Everyone was now concerned with only one thing: how to find food for tomorrow—or for today, or immediately, to stave off the pangs of hunger. Even the kindest people and closest friends and relatives could no longer help one another” (Cameron, 2020: 148). She also cites excerpts from the memoirs of Koken Belgibayev, the renowned Kazakh writer Zeitin Akishev, Khalim Akhmedov, and Vera Richter, which confirm instances of cannibalism among starving Kazakhs, as well as shocking lines from Agnes Mironova, the wife of the deputy plenipotentiary representative of the OGPU in the Kazakh ASSR, describing the luxurious conditions of their journey through the Hungry Steppe in Pullman railway cars with abundant food (Cameron, 2020: 151).

The recollections of Kazakh writers Gafu Kairbekov concerning his conversations with Gabit Musrepov about the famine, as well as those of Galym Akhmedov and Alzhappar Abishev, are woven into the documentary narrative of the well-known Karaganda poet, writer, and publicist Valery Fedorovich Mikhailov, “Chronicle of the Great Zhut” (1990). Describing his work on the book, he noted: “At that time, I began collecting ‘living documents’—testimonies of those who survived the ordeal. Then I immersed myself in the Pushkin Library, working through newspaper archives of the 1920s and 1930s. In short, I read everything possible about that period, from 1925 to 1933, when

Goloshchekin served as First Secretary of the Kazkraikom of the Party." Mikhailov's book went through four editions in Russian and was also translated into Kazakh by T. Aitbayuly and published in 1992.

Based on memoir materials, the prominent Kazakh writer and playwright Smagul Yelubay completed by 1990 a novel-trilogy in the Kazakh language entitled "Aqboz Uy" ("The Lonely Yurt"), in which he reconstructed his family's journey from Western Kazakhstan to Karakalpakstan and onward to Turkmenistan in search of food during the famine.

Eyewitness accounts have also appeared in mass media in the form of interviews and personal stories. Thus, in 2017, the Russian-language portal InoSMI.ru, which publishes materials by Western journalists, featured an article by American journalist Joanna Lillis, who resides in Almaty, entitled "Kazakhstan: An Eyewitness Account of the Great Famine of the 1930s." In the article, the author presents an interview-based memoir of Nurziya Kazhibayeva, who at the age of six was forced to flee to China with her family, and also discusses the causes of the famine in conversations with historians, including Academician T. Omarbekov, writer S. Yelubay, and others.

In 2018, the portal Zakon.kz published a feature article entitled "Let Us Slaughter Our Son and Eat Him": The History of the Famine in Kazakhstan, which presented, through the words of Sh. Orazbekuly, a labor veteran from the Tolebi District of Turkestan Region, the story of a Kazakh elder. This story, heard by Orazbekuly in the 1960s in the Jizzakh Region of the Uzbek SSR, recounts the flight of a man with his wife and children from the vicinity of Arkalyk to grain-rich Uzbekistan:

"I come from distant Arkalyk. In the 1930s, famine also tightened its grip on our family. We heard from people that if one worked in Tashkent, one would not die of hunger. One day I took my wife and our only three-year-old son and set off on the road. We spent the nights wherever we could. We walked on foot for forty days. We took turns carrying the child on our backs. The food we had taken with us ran out, and out of desperation we dug up grass roots and ate them. Our bodies swelled from malnutrition. I nearly lost my mind from hunger and exhaustion. 'Rather than all of us perishing at once, let us slaughter our son and eat him,' I began persuading my wife. 'If we survive, we are still young—God willing, we will have more children,' I said. Suddenly my wife became frightened, jumped to her feet, grabbed the child, pressed him tightly to her chest, and, in tears, ran away from me in an unknown direction. I did not take my eyes off her and dragged myself after her. On the third day, horsemen raising clouds of dust appeared in the distance... Dragging my legs with the last of my strength, I reached them... When we had somewhat recovered, we were given bread soaked in water... After staying in that aul for some time, we went on to Tashkent, found work with a well-to-do man, and lived there..."

The search for additional memoir testimonies of the famine may be continued.

Let us now turn to memoir accounts preserved in the personal collections of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan. From the memoir album "Years, People, Fates" by the aforementioned Tatyana Nevadovskaya, it follows that at the age of nineteen, in 1932, she lived together with her father, a professor, in the aul of Shymdaulet near Alma-Ata, where she directly encountered starving Kazakh nomads. She described this tragedy as follows:

"Early spring of 1933. I was walking with one of the specialists, and I had a camera with me. On the road sat a Kazakh man, exhausted and emaciated. He was barely dragging himself back from field work, utterly weakened, groaning, begging for food and water. I handed the camera to my companion and hurried to bring some water. The Kazakh drank greedily. I did not notice when my companion took a photograph of me. I rushed home again to bring the starving man a piece of bread and some sugar. When I returned with the bread, he was already dead."

The famine in Semipalatinsk and its surroundings is also described in deeply emotional terms by the Honored Artist of the Kazakh SSR, Abdrakhman Asimzhanov. As noted above, at the age of seventeen he was a student at the Semipalatinsk Construction College. From his mentor, Shkirtov, he heard about the requisitioning of food and livestock from Kazakhs, who in search of survival rushed to Russian cities such as Rubtsovsk, Barnaul, and Biysk, as well as to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and beyond the borders of the Soviet Union—to China and Iran. Shkirtov witnessed crowds of starving

people and corpses on the streets of the city of Zhanasemey on the Irtysh River (known until 1927 as the city of Alash).

These grim reports deeply disturbed the young man, whose parents lived in that town. He set out for his native places with supplies of bread obtained at the college:

"With six loaves of bread and thirty rubles in assistance, I set out from the city toward Semeytau, about thirty kilometers away. I walked briskly, hoping to reach the station of old Imanbai by nightfall. I sweated while crossing Karasu. I hoped I would not fall ill when the sweat froze. The land was white, the sky was white. There was not a single living soul in sight. Only a few snow-covered hills lay scattered in the deserted steppe, standing as if they had sworn never to reveal what they had seen. Even the cloud-covered peak of Semeytau seemed lost in heavy thought. When I noticed an elderly man and a young boy, their bodies half-buried in the snow by the roadside, my body shuddered and my heart sank. I wiped the clear beads streaming down my cheeks with my sleeve, recited the prayer I had been carrying in my thoughts, and passed my hand over my face. The fur hats on their heads indicated that they belonged to the Karakesek clan."

Already on the outskirts of the city, he encountered a starving Kazakh woman whom he, together with a kind Russian woman named Nina Ivanovna, protected from the beating of a drunken Russian man who suspected her of cannibalism. She told her bitter story of losing two sons and her husband at the foot of Mount Semeytau. The young man's native aul had become deserted; the familiar barking of dogs was no longer heard, and traces of mass death were visible everywhere. On his way back home, among the fresh bodies of people who had died of hunger, Abdrakhman noticed a living infant whose faint whimper he heard. He picked up the child, chewed bread in his mouth, and placed it into the baby's mouth, but the child soon fell silent forever. These are far from all the bitter details of everyday life in Soviet Kazakhstan during the 1930s.

While reading the memoirs of the People's Poetess of the Kazakh SSR, Mariam Khakimzhanova, one becomes fully immersed in the narrative fabric of the famine of the 1930s, which proved to be a profound emotional shock for a student of the workers' faculty of the Kazakh Pedagogical Institute. According to her recollections, in the spring of 1932 the streets of Alma-Ata were permeated with a nauseating stench of decomposing bodies, as during the winter no one had collected or buried them. The entire area around the city's only public bathhouse was covered with the bodies of Kazakhs who had died of starvation.

Together with other students, Mariam, under the leadership of the secretary of the party committee, Akkoshkarov, was assigned by decision of the Alma-Ata party committee to a special brigade, each consisting of ten people, tasked with collecting the bodies. On Talgarskaya Street, near a nursery, they gathered nine small corpses of Kazakh children and transported them on carts harnessed either to donkeys or oxen to the Red Cross, where trucks already filled to the brim with bodies were standing. Even more harrowing lines follow, which for ethical reasons are left untranslated here (Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 85: 8). Khakimzhanova also cites accounts conveyed by the writers B. Mailin and G. Musrepov, who traveled during the height of the famine to her native Kostanay Region, where, according to their words, no more than 25 percent of the population remained alive (CSARK, 85: 11).

According to Khakimzhanova's memoirs, many bodies of those who had perished were concealed beneath a crust of ice, which the young people broke with iron shovels and then excavated with wooden ones. On one occasion, they uncovered the body of a man about sixty years old who was embracing his deceased seven- or eight-year-old son with one arm, while tightly clutching a dombra in the other. Akkoshkarov, whose first name the poetess no longer recalled, understood the spiritual significance of the dombra for Kazakhs and therefore ordered that the man be buried together with the instrument. Many mothers, unable to endure the hunger deaths of their children, hanged themselves from trees out of grief. One group returning from the direction of Kaskelen reported that they had found three bodies among the trees: a Kazakh woman lying together with her son and daughter in a dense grove; both children had died, swollen and emaciated. Having covered her daughter's face with a headscarf and her son's face with a sleeveless jacket, the mother had then hanged herself from the same tree. Upon hearing this, Akkoshkarov took a handkerchief from his

pocket, wiped away his tears, and rose to his feet. Everyone present at the meeting stood up as well, expressing sorrow and respect (CSARK, 85: 8).

At that time, students ate at the student canteen, around which the plaintive cries of starving people—"Bread! Bread!"—were constantly heard. In such conditions, many young women found it impossible to swallow even a piece of bread; they themselves went hungry and shared their food with the starving, although the students' own meals were extremely modest—for example, soup was sometimes made from animal skulls. It should be noted that a comparative analysis of the three memoir sketches contained in this archival file, each supplementing the others with specific details without deviating from the core narrative, demonstrates the objectivity of the facts presented and their correspondence to the grim reality of those years.

Recollections of the years of national calamity were also left by the well-known writer A. Nurshaikhov, who wrote: "Famine came to the aul. After midsummer, refugees began to arrive in the village. Women and men, starving and emaciated people passed through our aul on their way from the railway junction toward Zhangyztobe station. At first, the villagers welcomed them with open arms, sharing their last grains of food. They took the starving into their homes. Later, they themselves became hungry." As can be seen, as a ten-year-old boy he recorded his perception of events, marveling at the influx of starving migrant families into their aul, with whom they shared shelter.

He further noted that a sign of the times was the disappearance of dogs, which had previously greeted travelers with loud barking; they became food for the destitute: "In our household there used to be a large black-and-white dog named Mailyayak... This time, Mailyayak did not come out to greet me. Even when a cart drawn by two horses rattled into the yard, there was no sound from Mailyayak or any other dogs. Dogs are the village's bell, and that bell no longer rang. Later I learned that our Mailyayak, along with the other dogs, had been killed and eaten by the starving people streaming through the village. After that, I noticed that livestock in the aul had diminished, people had grown fewer and more emaciated. Formerly tall figures seemed to have shrunk, and wide-open eyes appeared sunken. Even the familiar silhouettes of some of my elders were no longer to be seen" (CSARK, 3: 11).

Conclusion. Thus, within the framework of the ongoing project "Kazakh Nomadic Migrants in the Republics of Central Asia and Russia during the Mass Famine of the Early 1930s: Residence and Adaptation," as well as other projects on related topics, substantial work remains to be done. This includes the extraction of retrospective memoir-based information about the famine from personal archival collections and published books, the search for relatives of famine victims, and conducting interviews with them in order to expand the documentary corpus on the great tragedy experienced by the Kazakh and other peoples during the Soviet period. Such efforts are essential for reconstructing the everyday life of famine eyewitnesses who, by the will of fate, found themselves in relatively more favorable conditions than their compatriots—unwilling victims of famine and hostages of the Stalinist regime.

At the same time, it is evident that memoir sources do not present the chain of cause-and-effect relationships that led to the tragedy of famine in a logical or systematic sequence. However, they immerse the researcher in everyday life and help to understand the ways of thinking and patterns of behavior of people of that era, revealing the depth of human suffering, the empathy shown by some, or, conversely, exposing the callousness and indifference of others to the suffering of the starving.

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