

ABSTRACT

For the dissertation of Sakabay Tolkinay for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the educational programme 8D02202-«History» on the topic «The history of famine in Central Kazakhstan in 1931-1933:causes, course of events, measures to eliminate the consequences»

General characteristics of the research topic. The paper examines the history of the famine in Central Kazakhstan in 1931-1933 on the basis of a detailed analysis of archival documents, materials of the periodical press, published memoirs of eyewitnesses of the famine and the memories of their descendants, as well as scientific research.

Relevance of the research topic. In the first half of the 20th century, Kazakhstan underwent complex political and socio-economic transformations. The consequences of these changes led to one of the biggest historical catastrophes in the history of the Kazakh people — the famine of 1931-1933. The history of this famine, which left indelible consequences in the social, demographic and spiritual spheres of Kazakh society, requires a systematic and comprehensive study. In this regard, President Tokayev noted in his program article "Independence is more expensive than anything else": "These pages of our history are still white spots and have not been fully studied. Even among scientists, there is no consensus on the actual number of victims of famine. Different interpretations of the sources and causes of mass starvation mislead society. The relevant historical documents and available data should be studied and analyzed in detail." Therefore, we believe that the tragic period of this story still needs academic research, taking into account the regional context.

This urgent problem in the history of Kazakhstan received a conceptual understanding and became the subject of systematic scientific study only in the late 1980s. Over the past period, the accumulated archival materials and historiographic sources require detailed analysis, critical understanding, systematization and classification, as well as reconstruction of the course of events taking into account the regional context.

Although the problem of famine in Kazakhstan in 1931-1933 has been studied quite extensively in domestic and foreign historiography, its regional features still require a full-fledged and systematic study. In particular, the causes, dynamics and consequences of famine in Central Kazakhstan are generally considered generically in large-scale national studies, while the socio-economic, demographic and ethno-cultural characteristics of the region are not sufficiently disclosed.

Studying the history of famine in Central Kazakhstan, where the economy was based on nomadic animal husbandry, and natural and climatic conditions, as well as the administrative and territorial structure, especially reinforced the consequences of the policy of collectivization and forced transition to sedentarism, on the basis of regional materials, allows us to identify specific results of Soviet social policy. The relevance of this research is related not only to the knowledge of the past and orientation to the future, but also to the need to learn historical lessons. Taking into account the mistakes of the past in implementing economic reforms, developing agriculture, and shaping social policies helps prevent similar catastrophes in the

future. In this context, the study of famine is an important scientific problem that serves not only the interests of historical science, but also the strategic interests of society as a whole.

Research objective: The purpose of the dissertation is to study the causes, scale, nature and consequences of the famine of 1931-1933 on the territory of Central Kazakhstan.

Research objectives:

- Determine the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of the concept of "hunger", their classification, as well as the main approaches to the study of the history of hunger;

- to consider the main trends in historiography on the research problem;

- analyze the source base on the research topic, including documents from national and regional archives;

- to study the problems of harvesting agricultural products in the second half of the 1920s-early 1930s as prerequisites and causes of famine in 1931-1933 on the territory of Central Kazakhstan;

- to investigate the mechanisms of the property confiscation campaign (dekulakization campaign/kempeskeleu) in the Kazakh villages of Central Kazakhstan;

- analyze the peculiarities of the processes of collectivization and transfer to a sedentary lifestyle in the territory of Central Kazakhstan;

- assess the scale and nature of the famine of 1930-1933 in Central Kazakhstan and determine strategies for the survival of the population;

- analyze the socio-economic and demographic consequences of the famine of 1931-1933 in Central Kazakhstan;

- review the measures organized by the authorities to combat hunger and eliminate its consequences in the Central Kazakhstan region in the 1930s.

Object of research: Famine of 1931-1933 on the territory of Central Kazakhstan.

Subject of research: Background, causes, scale, nature and consequences of the famine of 1931-1933 on the territory of Central Kazakhstan.

Theoretical and methodological basis of the research. The theoretical and methodological basis of the research is the theory of modernization, the theory of totalitarianism, and the concepts of A. Sen «Food entitlement decline», "hierarchy of consumption", proposed by Ye. Osokina, "the empire of positive discrimination" by T. Martin, social and structural inequality in distribution of resources by N. Piansciola.

When studying the history of famine in Central Kazakhstan in the 1930s, general scientific and special historical methods were used. Methods of analysis and generalization (analysis and synthesis) allow us to classify the studied phenomenon into social, economic, demographic, and administrative-political components, and then consider them as a complete system in interrelation.

Mathematical-statistical, comparative-historical, historical-typological, problem-chronological and historical-system methods were used in the research work. The mathematical-statistical method was used in the study of quantitative indicators. Population changes, migration processes, reduction of livestock numbers, mortality

rates, and an increase in the number of homeless children are systematized on the basis of archival and published statistical materials. Average values, percentages and relative indicators are calculated, and time and territorial dynamics are determined. Grouping quantitative data by characteristics and compiling tables made it possible to clarify the scale of hunger and determine its demographic and economic consequences.

The comparative-historical method to identify general patterns and regional features of famine by comparing the situation in Central Kazakhstan with the situation in other regions. Such a comparison makes it possible to take into account the peculiarities of nomadic and semi-nomadic economy, as well as to differentiate the ratio of natural, economic and managerial factors.

The historical and typological method was used to systematize models of behavior of the population in crisis situations. It analyzed approaches to adaptation, survival strategies, forms of mutual assistance, changes in family and social relations. This method identified repeated signs of social reactions and paved the way for demonstrating the transformation of traditional norms.

The problem-chronological method served as the basis for a step-by-step review of the research material. The prerequisites, the period of exacerbation and the consequences of the famine were analyzed in historical sequence, and the dynamics of state decisions and public reactions were determined.

The historical-systemic method allowed us to consider the famine as an integral complex of interrelated social, economic, demographic and administrative factors, creating conditions for a comprehensive interpretation of the internal logic of the crisis, the mechanisms of its formation and the totality of factors that led to large-scale humanitarian consequences. In addition, the origin, content, reliability and representativeness of documents were critically evaluated. A comparison of various sources-statistical data, official reports, correspondence, memoirs-made it possible to clarify the data and identify contradictions.

In the study of individual personalities and social groups, prosopographical and biographical methods were widely employed. The prosopographical method is aimed at the collective analysis of shared social characteristics, life experiences, and behavioral patterns of individuals belonging to a particular social or ethnic group. It enables the systematization and comparison of such parameters as social origin, living conditions, economic activities, and participation in historical events.

The biographical method is based on the analysis of an individual's life trajectory and the specific ways historical events were perceived and experienced. Through the examination of respondents' personal experiences, this method makes it possible to identify the impact of historical processes on human destinies. The combination of these methods ensures a comprehensive analysis of the research material and allows historical processes to be examined at both the individual and collective levels.

Thus, the combination of methods used made it possible to analyze the famine in Central Kazakhstan in 1931-1933 in a historically comprehensive and holistic way. This position allowed us to explain in depth not only the scale of the crisis, but also its structural causes, social consequences, and impact on long-term changes in regional society.

The scientific novelty of the dissertation consists in considering the history of the famine of 1931-1933 in the regional aspect. Unfortunately, in Russian historiography, the history of the famine of the 1930s in Central Kazakhstan was not previously studied as an independent object of research.

In the course of the work, the background, causes, course and consequences of the famine are comprehensively studied on the basis of previously completely unpublished archival materials, including documents stored in regional archives.

The scientific novelty of the study is reflected in the following results:

- in the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, the theories and concepts of domestic and foreign researchers on the study of hunger are systematized, on the basis of which the factors of occurrence, scale, nature, features and strategies of population survival in the conditions of hunger in the territory of Central Kazakhstan were analyzed;

- in the course of the research, historiographical works on the topic were divided in the author's interpretation into three large groups, within which the corresponding stages were identified;

- the source base of the study, along with materials from central and regional archives, includes documents from district archives that were not fully put into scientific circulation before;

- mechanisms of implementation of campaigns for harvesting grain, livestock and meat by the Soviet government in the conditions of Central Kazakhstan are considered on the basis of local archival materials;

- the policy of confiscation of property, collectivization and transfer to a sedentary lifestyle is considered as a combined historical phenomenon that served as a prerequisite and cause of famine in Central Kazakhstan, taking into account regional characteristics;

- the scale and nature of famine in the Central Kazakhstan region are investigated, and survival strategies are identified based on the historical memory of the population;

- based on scientific research and archival documents, the economic and socio-demographic consequences of famine in Central Kazakhstan are analyzed;

- at the regional level, migration processes and demographic changes during the famine period are assessed, as well as their impact on the social structure of the population is determined;

- the peculiarities of implementing administrative and coercive methods through local government bodies are identified and the factors that contributed to the deepening of hunger are identified;

- assessment of the actions of the authorities to eliminate the consequences of hunger and analyze the effectiveness of their measures to combat hunger.

Thus, the dissertation research makes a systematic and regional addition to the study of the history of the famine of 1931-1933 in Central Kazakhstan and represents its own scientific contribution to the understanding of this complex period of national history.

The main provisions submitted for defense:

1. The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study of the famine was based on the scholarly conclusions presented in the works of domestic and foreign researchers. The methodological concepts developed by these scholars made it possible to examine the history of the famine within its social, economic, and cultural contexts. This created the conditions for understanding the famine of the 1930s in Central Kazakhstan not merely as a natural or economic crisis, but as a complex historical phenomenon shaped by the interaction of social structures and mechanisms of governance.

2. The history of famine studies at each stage depended on the socio-political context, ideological frameworks, and the degree of accessibility of archival sources. The foreign, Soviet, and domestic research traditions on the famine issue have been characterized by a number of methodological limitations. In Soviet historiography, the problem was largely silenced for ideological reasons, as a result of which its demographic and social consequences were not systematically addressed. In the post-Soviet space, the polarization of research—contradictions between interpreting the famine as an all-Union catastrophe and viewing it as a “genocidal” phenomenon—has hindered the formation of a unified theoretical model. In foreign scholarship, despite the widespread use of interdisciplinary approaches, insufficient attention has been paid to the internal structural features of nomadic pastoralism.

In domestic historiography, the issue of famine has been extensively studied; however, several research directions still require further development. In particular, the theoretical and methodological foundations of these studies have not yet been fully consolidated, and regional approaches capable of accounting for local specificities of crisis processes remain limited. Therefore, taking into account the specific nature of nomadic pastoralism, it is necessary to compare researchers’ conclusions regarding the scale of the famine and to formulate an independent position within domestic historiography.

3. The source base of the study, systematized into seven main groups, provides an opportunity for a comprehensive examination of the history of the 1930s famine in Central Kazakhstan. At the same time, a number of difficulties arise in the course of analyzing the source complex.

First, data on demographic losses are predominantly fragmentary, and official statistics do not fully cover all regions and social groups, which complicates the determination of the exact number of deaths. Second, archival materials, especially administrative reports and protocols, contain contradictory information resulting either from the ideological specificity of the documents or from the attempts of local authorities to present the situation in a more favorable light. Third, memoirs of famine survivors and their descendants, despite their importance for reconstructing historical events, require critical evaluation in terms of reliability, subjectivity of perception, and the interpretation of information preserved in collective memory over time.

A significant portion of district archival documents has not yet been fully introduced into academic circulation. In addition, the documents related to the issue under study have not been completely preserved in district archives. Thus, materials on this topic are available in the archives of the Karkaraly, Shet, Osakarov, and Nura

districts, whereas relevant documents have not been preserved in the archives of the Aktogay and Zhanaarka districts.

4. The implementation of political and economic campaigns in Central Kazakhstan in 1928–1933 did not correspond to the region’s economic structure. In areas dominated by animal husbandry – Karaganda (Karkaraly), Shet, Kuv, Zhanaarka, Abyraly, and others – the population was compelled to fulfill excessively high quotas for grain, meat, and livestock procurement. These measures were accompanied by administrative pressure and repressive practices, while the weak development of transport and storage infrastructure further exacerbated economic losses. In 1929–1933, in the livestock-raising regions of Central Kazakhstan (particularly Karkaraly, Shet, Zhanaarka, Abyraly, and others), the livestock population decreased by an average of approximately 90–97%, and a significant part of the population was forced to leave their places of permanent residence. This situation defines the regional specificity of the unfolding famine in Central Kazakhstan.

5. Prior to the implementation of the confiscation campaign, extensive preparatory work was carried out and its regulatory and legal framework was established. In accordance with the confiscation plan, the majority of regions in Central Kazakhstan were classified as belonging to a semi-nomadic type of economy. Wealthy households in the Karkaraly district were subject to deportation to the Kostanay district.

The officials responsible for implementing the confiscation, in an effort to meet the established quota for the number of so-called “bais,” merged individual households and, in many cases, classified even middle-income households as wealthy. The lists of bais were subject to continuous revision: district commissions, in cases where the number of livestock did not meet the criteria established by decree, reclassified households from one category to another. Among the wealthier population, there were attempts to avoid confiscation by distributing livestock among relatives. Despite the complaints and petitions concerning violations of legality during the confiscation process, the authorized bodies, as a rule, did not review them. The confiscation led to the destruction of the traditional economic structure, which became

6. During collectivization and the transition of the population to a sedentary way of life, local Soviet authorities and party organizations failed to ensure sufficient consideration and planning of the implemented measures, while the responsible officials often lacked an adequate understanding of the nature and specific features of the tasks assigned to them. The organizational forms of collective farms and partnerships were not clearly defined, and their establishment largely disregarded the natural and economic conditions of the respective areas. The population was incorporated into collective farms in a largely spontaneous manner, through coercion and intimidation, while authorized representatives frequently abused their powers.

The transition to a sedentary lifestyle in the Shet and Konyrat districts, located near Karaganda, was carried out with the aim of creating a food supply base for the industrial centers of the region, as well as providing land resources for the camp

system. Compared to purely nomadic areas, collectivization in semi-nomadic regions proceeded at a faster pace.

A widely circulated popular saying—“Collectivization drowned the bai in the swamp, pushed the middle peasant into a ditch, and grabbed the poor by the throat”—figuratively reflects the essence of the implemented policy.

7. In Central Kazakhstan, the famine did not begin in 1931, but as early as 1930, developing in a phased manner. Phase I (early 1930 – early 1931) was characterized by the localized spread of famine and its gradual intensification. During this period, intra-district and intra-regional population migrations prevailed, while mass mortality had not yet reached a widespread scale. Phase II (1931 – mid-1932) marked the peak of the famine crisis: the famine engulfed the entire region, mass deaths were recorded, and epidemics as well as interregional migration flows became widespread. Phase III (late 1932 – 1933) was characterized by a gradual decline of the famine, the beginning of the recovery of the economic structure, and a reduction in mortality rates, although demographic and social consequences persisted. In the spring of 1930, the famine situation sharply worsened in the northern, central, and western regions of the republic. In Central Kazakhstan, famine initially appeared in localized forms in 1930, and by 1932 it had become widespread. According to archival documents, the scale of the famine in the region was significantly more severe in rural areas than in urban centers, particularly in the Nura, Zhanaarka, Abyraly, Kuv, Shet, Karkaraly, and other districts. The famine in Central Kazakhstan affected not only Kazakh auls but also multiethnic settlements. Survival strategies during the famine were implemented at individual, family, and community levels, ranging from relatively moderate forms of adaptation to extreme antisocial practices.

8. The economic consequences of the famine in Central Kazakhstan were manifested in a reduction in the areas used for pasture and haymaking, the deterioration of the fodder base, and, as a result, a sharp decline in livestock numbers and the number of хозяйств (households).

The social consequences included an increase in the number of orphaned and neglected children, the loss of parents and kinship ties, and the breakdown of families due to the death of their primary members. Traditional mechanisms of mutual assistance and intra-community support effectively ceased to function. Even the surviving population lost familiar forms of social life, established social relations, and emotional support structures. In a number of districts—Nura, Shet, Karkaraly, Abyraly, and others—population losses reached 70–77%.

Demographic consequences were characterized by higher mortality rates among men, declining marriage and birth rates, and significant changes in the population’s demographic structure. The proportion of children and elderly people decreased, while in conditions of crisis greater attention was given to the survival of boys. The lack of comprehensive demographic registration and the incompleteness of statistical data for the region significantly complicate comprehensive analysis.

The destruction of the traditional economic structure led to the marginalization of the Kazakh population. The famine caused irreparable moral damage to the cultural development of the Kazakh people, and its psychological, cultural, and social

9. In order to mitigate the consequences of the famine, food and seed assistance in the form of wheat, millet, and rye was provided to the affected population, along with industrial goods and loans. Livestock was also allocated to restore the animal husbandry sector. In addition, certain relief measures were introduced, including a reduction in grain procurement quotas, a decrease in the unified agricultural tax, or full exemption from its payment.

At the same time, a significant portion of the assistance provided was partially misappropriated and embezzled by local administrations. There were cases in which collective farm leaders included individuals who had already died of starvation in beneficiary lists and appropriated the allocated funds and supplies. Aid distribution began with considerable delay, only after the famine had already significantly expanded and the population's situation had sharply deteriorated.

The volume of assistance provided was insufficient and did not fully meet the needs of the population. Some forms of aid were never fully implemented, remaining only at the level of official directives and reporting. As a result, state support proved inadequate and, at the initial stage, was unable to significantly alleviate the consequences of the famine. An improvement in the population's living conditions became noticeable only by the mid-1930s.

Scientific and applied significance of the study. In the course of the work, the archival materials used and conclusions drawn on their basis can serve as both a source and theoretical basis for studying the processes of collectivization, dekulakization and transfer of the nomadic population to a settled position in Kazakhstan. In addition, the results of the dissertation research can become a methodological guide for subsequent scientific research in the fields of regional history, historical demography, and social history.

The practical significance of the work lies in the possibility of applying the results obtained in teaching courses on the history of Kazakhstan, local lore and history of the XX century in higher educational institutions, including lectures and seminars. The research materials can serve as a basis for developing educational and methodological complexes for specialized courses and elective disciplines.

In addition, some scientific conclusions of the dissertation can be used to perpetuate the memory of victims of famine, update historical memory, prepare museum expositions and implement scientific projects.

Approbation of the study. The main results of the work are reflected in publications of various levels – in the materials of scientific journals and conferences. A total of 12 scientific articles were published on the topic of the dissertation research. Of these, 5 articles were published in publications recommended by the Committee for Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (two of them are in English), and 7 articles were published in the proceedings of international conferences. At the same time, 4 articles were presented in the form of reports at international scientific conferences.

Structure of the paper The paper consists of content, definitions and abbreviations, an introduction, three sections, including nine subsections, conclusions, a list of sources used, and appendices.