

The Famine of 1921-1922 and Modern Kazakh Society

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ABSTRACT: The article is devoted to a historical and geographical overview of the famine in Kazakhstan during 1921-1922 and its reflection in the modern appearance of Kazakhstanis. In Kazakhstan, this famine is known as the first famine of the Kazakhs under Soviet rule. The main purpose of this work is to familiarize foreign researchers and readers with the topic of the famine of 1921-1922 and its consequences. As a research task, the author attempted to present to the reader the main causes of famine in Kazakhstan, the scale of damage and the impact of famine on the life of the indigenous population of the republic in modern times through a review of historical and demographic analysis. The peculiarity of the research methodology is the generalization and systematization of works on the subject and conclusions regarding the traces of injuries in the minds of the population. The author concludes that not all aspects of the famine of 1921-1922 have been sufficiently studied, among the necessary to study, in addition to historical-demographic and landscape-climatic aspects, the author also includes historical-geographical and migration aspects. The article uses new archival materials and the latest research of Kazakhstani scientists and historians on the topic in recent years, which allows us to delve even deeper into the thick of those events.

KEYWORDS: famine, food spread, Kazakh famine, demographic crisis, migration, mental trauma, historical memory

Introduction

A particularly relevant topic in the modern history of Kazakhstan is the famine of the Kazakhs in the first half of the twentieth century. During this period of time, three major famines occurred in the steppe. These are the famine of 1917-1919 in Turkestan, covering 1/3 of Kazakhstan (loss of about 1 million people), the famine of 1921-1922 with half of the territory of the Republic (loss of population over 1 million) and the mass famine in 1930-1933, which covered the entire region of Kazakhstan and with a terrifying loss of 1.5 to 3 million people. For a long time, the famine of the 20s of the twentieth century was not sufficiently studied and required a comprehensive study taking into account the economic, social and political factors of this period. To date, the topic is also relevant because new data of archival documents were introduced into scientific circulation after Kazakhstan gained independence, and the process of declassification of archival documents gradually began, which made it possible to study the causes and consequences of this famine even more deeply. For most foreign researchers, the topic of famine in 1921-1922 in Kazakhstan is of some interest due to the enormous losses of human resources, especially among the Kazakh population. So, what caused such a tragic consequence like starvation? Which regions were affected by famine? How did the Kazakhs survive in the famine years and who is responsible for this famine? Was the famine of 1921-1922 artificial? How have the consequences of hunger and mental trauma changed the consciousness of an entire nation over the years? Finding answers to these questions will be our subject of research.

History, analysis and result

For most Soviet historians, respectively, during the Soviet period, as well as most domestic researchers, the famine in Kazakhstan in the 20s of the twentieth century was considered for some time an integral part of the general famine in Russia, the Volga region and the Urals, and thus,

often, fell out of the field of view of a separate study. A characteristic feature of the famine was its locality, since in Kazakhstan, the entire territory was not affected by the famine, but its individual parts. For example, the famine of 1921-1922 covered mainly the north-western regions of the Kazakh Soviet Republic.

A peculiar feature of the Kazakh nomad lifestyle has always been accompanied by great difficulties and risks like hunger and disease in the steppe. As a kind of natural law, famine in the steppe was repeated every 10-12 years. The terrible famine of 1897 and 1899 in the Turkestan region greatly undermined the cattle breeding economy of the Kazakhs. The famine of 1910-1911 in the greater territory of Kazakhstan also had the consequences of the death of livestock from lack of fodder.

After the end of the Civil War, the Soviet people, including the Kazakhs, were waiting for another terrible ordeal. The year 1921 was in winter without snow, and in summer without rain, many areas of the country, especially the Volga region, were affected by drought, the consequence of which was famine. In the autumn of 1921, the number of hungry people reached 20 million throughout the country (the Soviet State) (Khaidarov 2021, 159). Kazakhs as a nomadic people with millions of herds of horses and sheep, this famine left an indelible mark on demography and economy. So, historians note the following main causes of famine: World War I; the uprising of the Kazakhs against tsarism in 1916; exorbitant taxes on the population; Civil war; the policy of «war communism», which brought agriculture into decline.

The famine mainly affected the western provinces of the Kazakh Republic, such as Orenburg, Ural, Aktobe, Kustanai, Bukeevskaya and Adayevsky counties. A total of 20 districts and 21 counties were affected by famine (Musaev 2006, 62-63). Of the seven provinces of KazASSR, five were declared starving (in these years, the southern and southeastern regions were part of the Turkestan Republic). The total area covered by the famine was 1,048,100 square kilometers with a population of 2,633,300 people. As of November 1921, the number of starving people for both sexes was 1,558,927 people or 60% of the population [CSARK, 25:9]. And already in April 1922, their number reached 93%, and this is already 2,448,969 starving (Masanov 2000, 368).

At that very time, the cattle farming was in a very difficult situation. According to archival documents, in 1917 there were 29.7 million cattle in the Republic, in 1920 – 9.7 million, in 1921 there were only 6.2 million, the reduction was 83% (APRK, 211:38). But on March 18, 1921, the Bolsheviks considered the issue of taking cattle from the Kazakhs to help the starving of other provinces of Russia. Despite the objections of local economists about these disastrous consequences, the food tax was approved. Along with the withdrawal of livestock, there were other taxes, for example, in 1921, such types of taxes were withdrawn from the population: 1. Egg tax. 2. Oils. 3. Wool. 4. Meat. 5. The Seine. 6. Bread. 7. Vegetables. 8. Tobacco. 9. Skins (APRK 107:83).

All segments of the population, all authorities and public associations took an active part in the fight against hunger. The leadership of Kazakhstan wrote letters to draw Stalin's attention to the catastrophic situation in the Kazakh steppe. They wrote that in some villages people die by the hundreds, and they eat not only cats, dogs, surrogates, but it comes to cannibalism (Kindler 2017, 76). The head of the Government of Kazakhstan, S. Mendeshiev, was the chairman of the Central Commission for Famine Relief. In his report of July 8, 1922, *The Question of hunger*, he summarizes the work of the commission, where he emphasized the role of international institutions in the fight against hunger. He mentioned the work of such organizations as the International Workers' Committee, the Red Cross Society, the American Famine Relief Administration (ARA) and the Quaker movement (Mendeshev 2021, 12). In June-July 1922, 339,508 children and 860,041 adults received meals in canteens and from warehouses of the Orenburg branch of the ARA. But in the following years, the amount of rations from the ARA began to decrease as hunger in the region comparatively eased.

The activities of foreign international organizations such as the American Relief Administration, the Nansen Mission and others cannot be overlooked. They have made a huge financial and humanitarian contribution to the fight against hunger not only in these provinces, but also throughout the country. At the All-Russian meeting of the Famine Relief Commission, which was held on December 2, 1921, the commission recognized the activities and assistance of the ARA organization and the mission of Dr. Nansen as the main rescuers in helping the hungry (SAWKR 23: 151-154). Of course, the Kazakh people are very grateful to the American people for their help in saving the population, especially children from terrible hunger. Nowadays, contemporaries in Kazakh society are the second and third generations of those who were able to survive during the years of famine.

According to the official report of the center, 2,286,591 people experienced hunger, and 68% of them died, and this is 1,554,882 people (Darkenov 2013, 75). The well-known Kazakh historian-demographer M. Tatimov carried out scrupulous work on the registration and movement of the population of Kazakhstan using census data and statistical materials of accounting bodies. According to his calculations, as a result of the national liberation uprising of 1916, the revolutions of 1917 and the civil war, the aftermath of the famine of 1921, 950 thousand Kazakhs died, 200 thousand migrated outside the country. In the first quarter of the twentieth century alone, the decline of Kazakhs amounted to over 1 million people (Tatimov 1992. 134). According to his calculations, if these tragedies had not occurred (meaning artificial, by human hands) on Kazakh land, with a stable population growth of 4 million by the beginning of the twentieth century, there would be at least 40-45 million Kazakhs today.

An American historian and writer, a specialist in the history of the USSR, the author of the book *Harvest of Sorrow*, Robert Conquest wrote, making parallels between the two famines in Kazakhstan in 20-30 years, that the famine in Kazakhstan in the 30s was caused artificially, in the same way as in 1921, that is, it arose as a result of reckless conduct a policy dictated by purely ideological considerations (Conquest 1988, 293). This point of view is also confirmed by the German historian R. Kindler. In his book «Stalin's Nomads: Power and Famine in Kazakhstan», he begins with the narration of an event from 1921. He writes that the Communists, who had the opportunity due to their position, observed the deplorable pictures that took place (Kindler 2017, 76-77). Based on various data on the number of deaths from hunger (including from diseases, in most cases from malnutrition and unsanitary conditions), it is assumed that the total number of victims of the famine of 1921-1923 is from 1 to 1.5 million, the decline of the Kazakh population is from half a million and above. The data is still being clarified, scientific projects are underway to study hunger and its victims, scientific studies of hunger and its victims are being conducted within the framework of numerous projects.

Modern Kazakh society understands very well the price of hunger and its consequences. Until now, the older generation reminds the young to be economical, not to be wasteful and take care of bread. We still remember how our grandparents always collected bread crumbs from the table and did not throw them away, but carefully put them in their palms and ate them to the last, while they always remembered their parents and their difficult childhood years. And such examples can be found everywhere in the country, since the famine affected almost every family. The historical memory of the famine, even after a hundred years, has not lost its significance in the consciousness of the people in terms of cultural and social identity and continuity. As the historian Sarah Cameron correctly noted, how to preserve hunger in the memory of modern Kazakhstanis, how Kazakhs interpret memories of the catastrophe to their descendants, how they are woven into their consciousness and intellect, there is still a lot to study (Cameron 2018, 187). But the fact remains that these two famines of the 20-30s changed the Kazakhs beyond recognition, a new national image of the Soviet Kazakh, meek, obedient and very cautious, has developed. Its cultural and mental core was changing, as the process of Russification and the planting of an alien element of culture and education went on

intensively for decades. But the current situation in modern Kazakh society is changing from the side of the national origin, obsolete and unnecessary features of the past are giving way to more cultural elements of modernity. And therefore, a person of independent Kazakhstan has more clearly visible traits of wisdom and creativity, hope for a bright future without violence and non-repetition of the mistakes of history.

Conclusion

Summing up, it can be said that the famine of 1921-1922 occupies a special place in the history of Kazakhstan. It was not without the participation of the human factor that most of it was artificial. Since knowing the difficult situation in Kazakhstan, the authorities neglected to help the hungry, they did the opposite, and the cattle left in the steppe were taken to other starving regions of Russia. It can be said that there was some discrimination not in favor of nomadic Kazakhs. Some may object to this opinion. Of course, there were also natural and climatic conditions, but they were before this event and the nomads coped with such phenomena. It means that with grain reserves and a certain number of domestic animals still in possession of the Kazakhs, the potential existed to save them from severe hunger, were it not for directives and decrees from above regarding the withdrawal of food and remaining livestock from the population. The Kazakh people survived this tragedy at the cost of great losses and tangible cataclysms in society. With huge help from outside, in the person of foreign international organizations, as the American Relief Administration (ARA), a large number of people, especially children, were rescued.

Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis have survived all these tragedies and have been preserved as an integral ethnos. In the modern world, Kazakhs, as a people and Kazakhstan, as a country, are known to all, but not everyone knows how they overcame all these difficulties. They do not forget their roots and history lessons! They are descendants of those Kazakhs, but the realities of the event have transformed them. There is still a lot of catching up to do in terms of culture, economy, and self-realization. However, the modern nation has already shown outstanding achievements in culture, sports, and education in recent years, indicating that they are moving in the right direction.

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