

<https://doi.org/10.28925/2524-0757.2024.111>
УДК 341.485

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The Holodomor of 1932–1933 in the Greek Villages of the North Azov Region: Oral Testimonies of Victims

This article examines the testimonies of residents from Greek villages in the North Azov region who witnessed the Holodomor of 1932–1933. It highlights the scope of issues addressed by respondents in their recollections and identifies the specificity of these recollections compared to other historical sources on the given problem. Despite their fragmentary nature, the testimonies of residents from Greek villages in North Azov contain multifaceted and highly significant information for reconstructing prevailing attitudes, offering insight into the average person's experience during this horrific catastrophe with its pain, despair, fear, and thirst for life. The source-critical analysis of the testimonies enables the clarification or elaboration of the famine's causes, its scale, data on the population's diet, survival strategies, and instances of self-sacrifice, as well as peasants' perceptions of the dekulakization executors, disruption of burial rituals, and the composition and number of deceased or repressed individuals.

Key words: Holodomor, genocide, oral testimonies, Greeks of North Azov, survival strategies.

Голодомор 1932–1933 рр. у грецьких селах Надазов'я: усні свідчення жертв

У статті проаналізовано свідчення мешканців грецьких сіл Північного Надазов'я — очевидців Голодомору 1932–1933 років. Висвітлено коло питань, до яких зверталися респонденти у своїх спогадах, визначено специфіку спогадів у порівнянні з іншими історичними джерелами з цієї проблеми.

Більшість свідчень жертв Голодомору серед греків Північного Надазов'я представлена в «Національній книзі пам'яті жертв голодомору 1932–1933 років в Україні. Донецька область».

Суттєвою рисою утворення такого джерела, як свідчення жертв, є те, що носіями свідчень виступали переважно літні люди, які пережили Голодомор у дуже молодому віці. Попри певну фрагментарність, свідчення мешканців грецьких сіл Північного Надазов'я містять різнопланову і надзвичайно важливу інформацію для реконструювання домінуючих настроїв, дають змогу побачити пересічну людину під час цієї страшної катастрофи з її болем, відчаєм, страхом і жагою до життя.

Спогади про Голодомор в грецьких селах в першу чергу містять свідчення про процес хлібозаготовель, вилучення під час колективізації усього наявного у колгоспників і одноосібників. Переважна більшість респондентів звертає увагу на те, що представники влади вдавалися до насильницьких методів, не рахуючись з бажаннями й прагненнями грецьких селян.

Джерелознавчий аналіз свідчень дає можливість з'ясувати або уточнити причини голоду, його масштаби, отримати інформацію про раціон населення, стратегії виживання, випадки самопожертв, сприйняття селянами виконавців розкуркулювання, деградацію поховального обряду, склад та чисельність померлих чи репресованих тощо. Кожний такий факт, збережений у пам'яті людей, дає історичну унікальну інформацію, дослідження якої є вельми значущим у контексті мікроісторії та історії повсякдення.

Ключові слова: Голодомор, геноцид, усні свідчення, греки Північного Надазов'я, стратегії виживання.

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In the first half of the twentieth century, the Soviet regime committed a number of crimes against humanity, during which Ukraine suffered enormous human losses. The Holodomor of 1932–1933 occupies a special place among these crimes as one of the most devastating in terms of scale, with its demographic reverberations still felt some 90 years later. These losses during the Holodomor affected both the total population and its “ethnic makeup”. The Greeks of the North Azov region were no exception. (These Greeks were effectively deported from the territory of the Crimean Khanate in 1778 and settled in the North Azov region in 1779–1780.) In the 1930s, the Mariupol Greek community was made up of ethnic Greeks, who lived in the Yuzivka (Stalino) and Mariupol districts. It is impossible to provide accurate information on the size of the community in the postwar period, as no rural population counts were conducted during those years. According to data from the Stalino District Executive Committee from 1923, 29,901 ethnic Greeks lived in the district. In Mariupol district there were about 63 thousand Greeks. At the time of the regional reorganization of 1923, according to government data the Greek population of the republic amounted to 92,560 people⁵⁶⁶ [636; p. 148].

Eyewitness accounts significantly complement and expand the source base we have for studying the Holodomor. The value of testimonies as historical sources is determined by the peculiarities of their origin: they belong to individuals and reflect their direct perception of the world around them, and historical events and phenomena.

By recreating the life experience of each individual who witnessed the tragedy, it is possible not only to show the extent of human grief during that time, but also to confirm or expand official documentary source material. The subjective aspect of oral testimonies should, of course, be underlined: in testimony accounts, people may exaggerate some aspects of their experiences, or the actions of their relatives or neighbours.

Robert Conquest characterized testimonies of the Holodomor as “first-hand reports by survivors both of the deportations and of the famine. [...] The most remarkable feature of such testimony, especially from peasants themselves, is the plain and matter-of-fact tone in which terrible events are usually narrated. It is especially gratifying to be able to

confirm and give full credit to this first-hand evidence. For a long time testimony which was both honest and true was doubted or denounced — by Soviet spokesmen, of course, but also by many in the West who for various reasons were not ready to face the appalling facts. It is a great satisfaction to be able to say that these sturdy witnesses to the truth, so long calumniated or ignored, are now wholly vindicated”⁵⁶⁷.

James E. Mace, a researcher of the Holodomor of 1932–1933, and one of the first to apply the oral history method to the study of this topic, noted that “oral history” is a valuable source, a type of verbal memoir by people who usually do not leave memoirs behind: “My goal in the oral history project was to treat each witness as a unique historical source with enough background information so that future scholars could evaluate each account for themselves just as they might evaluate the memoirs of some well-known historical figure”⁵⁶⁸.

The Ukrainian researcher Valentyna Borysenko has argued that oral testimonies about genocide may reveal hitherto unknown stories and versions⁵⁶⁹.

In the works of the Holodomor researchers Vasylyl Marochko and Heorhii Papakin, the Greek peasant emerges as a hostage and victim of a system that ignores legal norms and condemns him and his family to starvation⁵⁷⁰.

The aim of this article is to analyse the testimonies of residents of Greek villages who witnessed the Holodomor of 1932–1933, to highlight the range of issues that respondents addressed in their testimonies, and to determine the specifics of the testimonies in comparison to other historical sources on this issue.

There is relatively little material about how the famine affected the Greeks of the North Azov region. This is mainly due to the veil of secrecy surrounding the tragic events of 1932–33 in Ukraine. The total silence about this disaster has had a negative impact on the preservation of primary sources. The eyewitness testimonies, and the stories of the younger generation who reference eyewitnesses from whom they heard about the Holodomor, are most fully represented in the “National Book of Memory of Victims of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine. Donetsk region”⁵⁷¹.

In addition, it should be noted that there is large amount of thematic collections of documents, relating to both central and republic levels, regarding

⁵⁶⁶ Tsentralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchykh orhaniv vlady ta upravlinnia F. 413. Op. 1. Spr. 909. Ark. 148.

⁵⁶⁷ Conquest R. *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* London, 1986. P. 8.

⁵⁶⁸ Mace J. E. ‘Facts and Values: A Personal Intellectual Exploration,’ in *Pioneers of Genocide Studies*, ed. by Samuel Totten and Steven Leonard Jacobs, p. 68

⁵⁶⁹ Borysenko V. Usni svidchennia pro henotsyd. *Pam’iat stolit*. 2003. №3. S. 63.

⁵⁷⁰ Marochko V. Y. Holodomor 1932–1933 rr. na Donbasi. Kyiv, 2015. 96 s.; Papakin H. V. “Chorna doshka”: antyselianski represii (1932–1933). Kyiv, 2013. 412 s.

⁵⁷¹ Natsionalna knyha pamiati zhertv holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini. Donetska oblast / Hol. red. O. L. Tretiak. Ch. 1. Donetsk, 2008. 784 s.; Natsionalna knyha pamiati zhertv holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini. Donetska oblast / Hol. red. O. L. Tretiak. Ch. 2. Donetsk, 2009. 784 s.

collectivization, the Holodomor of 1932–1933, and the repressions of the late 1930s, which help us to study the relevant processes in relation to the Greek community⁵⁷².

An essential feature of these sources as eyewitness accounts is the time of their recording: the oral testimonies to follow were recorded 60–65 years after the events of the Holodomor. Thus, the carriers of these memories were elderly people who survived the Holodomor at a very young age (the human psyche records events in memory from the age of 3–4 years old), all of whom were born in the 1920s and were over 60 years old at the time of giving their testimonies. Another typical feature of such testimonies is their fragmentation. Since most participants experienced the events as schoolchildren, they often only remember the events in their local area and immediate surroundings. In the vast majority of cases, testimonies relate to the eyewitnesses' own village, possibly district, and, occasionally, region. City dwellers could accumulate a broader range of memories, but it should be noted that cities suffered relatively little from the famine: the main burden of the tragedy was borne by the countryside⁵⁷³.

The informational content of testimonies depends on many factors: the role played by the author in the events he or she describes; the sharpness of perception of reality of the eyewitness; the ability to remember the course of events; the age of the respondent at the time of the event. One of the most highlighted problems in eyewitness accounts is the beginning of the Holodomor and the analysis of its causes. The overwhelming majority of respondents named widespread collectivization as one of the main causes of the famine and drew attention to the use of violent methods by the authorities who disregarded the desires and aspirations of Greek peasants.

Let us now look at the content of the testimonies.

Lyubov Iordaniivna Khonakhbeieva, born in 1923, Starobesheve:⁵⁷⁴ “The brigade leaders took everything. And as we were scared, we gave them all we had... The authorities did not starve, everything was in their hands”⁵⁷⁵.

Leontii Klymovych Angelin, born in 1916, a former head of the Voroshylov collective farm in Starobesheve, noted in his testimony: “In our area,

the famine began much earlier, in 1931, when mass dekulakization began during collectivization. We had a lot of land, the land was rich, there were many people dekulakized. In the early 1930s, they took away all our grain...”⁵⁷⁶.

Yelyzaveta Hryhorivna Tymoshchenko, born in 1919, Komar: “The famine began in 1932. At the time we lived with my mother, we were 3 children. I was the oldest, I was 12–13 years old. My father worked at the Roi station near Kurakhove. It all started with the taking away of people's grain. The communists would drive up to a house, break into it, and carry out their search. They would take everything: flour, oil, beans, anything they could find. They would enter the house, look around the whole place, rip up the floorboards, climb into the attic. They would even remove paper and ink from children, and, as a result, the children could not go to school. It was a very scary time”⁵⁷⁷.

Oleksandra Hnativna Banikatova, born in 1918, Yalta, Velykonovosilkivskiyi (formerly Velykyanyasolskiyi) district, Donetsk region: “The things we grew were taken by the new arrivals, I do not know their names, they could come at any time of day. They would carry out searches, took away anything they could find, and did not respond to our requests to leave something at all behind. There was barely any point in hiding food, and if someone managed to do so, they would have to eat the food at night and a little at a time, as there was no other way to consume it. Many people died. There were families where mothers would take their children and go out asking for alms”⁵⁷⁸.

Lyubov Antonivna Dmytrieva, born in 1921, Komar: “A lot of people died of starvation, mostly children. Entire houses were devastated. There were many homeless children left behind. Many parents died of starvation, and some were dekulakized. I remember how Georgii Dmitriev and his sister lived and slept on a patch of still warm ashes near the canteen of the Perebudova state farm. They ate food from the rubbish heaps. They would find pieces of bread and potato peels. The management of the farms and village councils, and those who managed to hide away a small sack of grain, did not starve. People were afraid to talk with each other. It was unclear what was

⁵⁷² Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraini: dokumenty i materialy / Uporiad. R.Ya. Pyrih. K., 2007. 1128 s.; Kolektyvizatsiia i holod na Ukraini: 1929–1933. Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv / Red. kol.: S.V. Kulchitskiy ta in. K.: Naukova dumka, 1992. 734 s.; Natsionalni protsesy v Ukraini: istoriia i suchasnist. Dokumenty i materialy. Dovidnyk / Uporiad.: I. O. Kresina (kerivnyk), O. V. Kresin, V. P. Liakhotskiy, V. F. Panibudlaska; za red. V. F. Panibudlasky. Ch. 1. K.: Vyshcha shkola, 1997. 583 s.; Natsionalni protsesy v Ukraini: istoriia i suchasnist. Dokumenty i materialy. Dovidnyk. / Uporiad.: I. O. Kresina (kerivnyk), V. F. Panibudlaska; za red. V. F. Panibudlasky. Ch. 2. K.: Vyshcha shkola, 1997. 704 s.

⁵⁷³ Slisarenko O. Osobysti spohady zhertv holodomoru — spetsyfika dzherela. *Naukovi zapysky*. 2009. T. 19 (2). S. 287–290.

⁵⁷⁴ Note: when introducing testimonies, we give the name of the eyewitness, followed by the year they were born, followed by the place name where they were living during the events described.

⁵⁷⁵ Natsionalna knyha pam'iaty zhertv holodomoru... Vol. 1. P. 330.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. P. 363.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 333–334.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 329.

going on. [...] The authorities, the Bolshevik Party, were to blame⁵⁷⁹.

Lidiia Mykolaivna Zaitseva, born in 1926, lived in Kostyantynopil in 1932–1933: “I remember the famine of 1933 well. It was caused by the confiscation of the harvest by the authorities. At that time, my father was sentenced to 2 years in prison for non-payment of taxes. My mother and her 5 children remained. The komsomol members Hryhorii Fedorovych Topalov and Varvara Kharlampivna Fotina, on behalf of the village council, came to our yard. There was no grain, and the potato harvest had been put to one side for winter. Everything was loaded and taken away. They only took the food, there was no livestock. People didn’t resist, my mother was crying. There was nowhere to hide, and people were afraid. People didn’t have a chance to hide their livestock. Almost all residents starved. They gathered ears of corn in the field and handed them over to the collective farm. They ate mainly grass, and in summer they ate fruit. Some people ate gophers and hedgehogs. [...] Residents would feed the youngest children whenever possible⁵⁸⁰.

The topic of the parent-child relationships is central to Holodomor eyewitness accounts. In the foreground are images of a mother and father trying to save their children from starvation. The search for food also became the main occupation of children. Family relationships revolved around food. From testimonies we learn that not only did parents give the last scraps of food to their children, but also that children who managed to obtain food shared it with their dying parents.

Dmytro Vasylovych Serafymov, born in 1915, Komar: “I remember 32–33 well. They took away our very last remains of grain. [...] Seeing this situation, in 1933 I went to Krasnohorivka and went to study at the factory training school. There, students were fed once a day. They would give us 200 grams of bread, plus 800 grams on ration cards. But I did not forget that my mother and brothers were starving at home. Once, I told the director of the school about my situation. He listened to me attentively and signed off on some some goats for me to take home. I came home, and my little brother had made a hole in the haystack and was living in it. My mother was at work. It was a great help. That’s how I saved my family from starvation⁵⁸¹.

Yelyzaveta Hryhorivna Tymoshchenko, born in 1919, Komar: “For as long as we could, my little sister and I would walk to Roi, to my father’s work. Dad would give us each a piece of bread and we would

take it home to my mother and younger brother⁵⁸².

Dmytro Vasylovych Serafimov, born in 1915, Komar: “People would catch gophers, eat dead horses, all kinds of orache, among other things⁵⁸³.

Memories of the Holodomor are a complex, emotional, somewhat subjective, but at the same time unique source for studying the everyday life of the Greek peasantry. They make it possible to reconstruct the dominant moods, feelings, and despair of eyewitnesses.

Yelyzaveta Hryhorivna Tymoshchenko, born in 1919, Komar, recalled: “The famine was horrifying. There was nothing people didn’t eat. Mostly it was grass: capsella, bitter spurge. They would boil the grass, sprinkle it with salt, and eat it. There was one incident that comes to mind: my sister went out to the garden, and saw a man lying in the grass all the while eating it. He couldn’t even get up. My sister began to cry and told him that it was our grass, but my mother told her not to touch him. [...] To prevent the communists from finding the grain, people would bury it in the ground. At that time, the head sent communists to drive up to every house where there were dead bodies and take them to the cemetery. [...] The famine lasted for a year, from spring to spring, until people started planting fields again. At the time my mother worked in a canteen. She would peel potatoes and bring home the potato peels, which we planted⁵⁸⁴.

Leontii Klymovych Angelin, born in 1916, a former head of the Voroshylov collective farm in Starobesheve, noted in his testimony: “There were also cases when us youngsters tried to bring grain home in our pockets from the collective farm. We would then grind it down into flour with hand mills. One day, my friends and I filled our bags with grain, but before we left, the collective farm foreman noticed us. He took away what we had and told us not to tell anyone about what had happened; he promised us to return our bags with the contents when we got home...”⁵⁸⁵.

Mykola Vasiliovich Khonakhbeiev, born in 1927, Starobesheve: “...And our uncle, Ilyusha Polakh, who was already showing signs of swelling, cooked a gopher, drank up the cooking water, gave us the meat, and said: ‘I’m pretty much dead now anyway, but you’re young, go out and live, but don’t eat too much at once, otherwise you’ll upset your stomachs... In late spring, we gathered sorrel, and millet was taken from the mouseholes — it tasted bitter like quinine. I remember a law on the “Five Ears of Grain” when

⁵⁷⁹ Natsionalna knyha pam’iati zherty holodomoru... Vol. 1. P. 330–331.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. P. 331–332.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. P. 232–333.

⁵⁸² Ibid. P. 333–334.

⁵⁸³ Ibid. P. 232–333.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. P. 333–334.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. P. 363.

people were given 7 years for harvesting ears of grain in a mowed field. [...] Who was to blame? The policy aims to destroy the elderly and break the young with hunger”⁵⁸⁶.

Lyubov Iordanivna Khonakhbeeva, born in 1923, Starobesheve: “...We would walk through fields, through rubbish dumps, pick up whatever we could find and eat it. We ate orache, amaranth, nettles. Instead of meat, we ate gophers...”⁵⁸⁷.

Lyubov Antonivna Dmytrieva, born in 1921, Komar: “Some people caught gophers, collected shells. They cooked with all kinds of plants: orache, malva, poison hemlock and others”⁵⁸⁸.

Valentyna Konstantynivna Bondar, born in 1921, Starobesheve: “...When they came, they took everything they could find... People died of hunger over the course of several months... A lot of people died, everyone was swollen from hunger... We ate potato peels, cooked amaranth, rotten cabbage. We ate acacia flowers, dandelions, grass, wild sorrel, spurge, gophers, and horse meat when a horse happened to die...”⁵⁸⁹.

These testimonies show that the world of the peasant was impoverished and focused on almost exclusively on one thing: food. The usual diet of an average Greek in the North Azov region, according to the memories of Greek villagers in 1932–1933, included the following plants: amaranth, bitter spurge, shchyriya, acacia flowers and bark, dandelions, wild sorrel, and orache. The plants were boiled, sprinkled with salt, and then consumed. Crows, hedgehogs, gophers, mice, dogs, and cats were also eaten; bread was made from corn flour. Residents of coastal villages were lucky enough to have the opportunity to catch and eat fish, mainly sprat, goby, mussels, and shrimp. In their testimonies, almost every second respondent mentions relatives or neighbors who died from hunger.

Emergencies tend to reveal new behaviours in an individual. Analysing these remembrances, we see that the level of fear experienced during the Holodomor and repressions led to a desire to remove suspicion from one’s family, to save one’s children, to become loyal to the authorities and, as a result, to denounce and slander neighbors and, sometimes, relatives.

Mykola Vasylovych Khonakhbeiev, born in 1927, Starobesheve: “I was only 6 years old in 1932, but everything etched itself in my memory. We were very hungry. There was nothing to eat at all. It was

so scary, we were constantly afraid of something. [...] The famine began in 1932, in autumn, when everything was taken away. Whoever managed to hide some food survived. And nobody shared with anyone — people were afraid that they would be betrayed and whatever last bits of food they had would be taken away”⁵⁹⁰.

Lyubov Antonivna Dmytrieva, born in 1921, Komar: “I remember the years 32–33 very well. All the grain was taken away. [...] Those who carried this out didn’t show any documents. We had grain hidden under the sofa. They found it and took it all away. Maybe there were denunciations, but this was kept secret. There were often arrests and deportations, for example Semen Yuriev and Kirill Semenovich Dmitriev. Several people would come with the cart. Although they were unarmed, we were afraid to say a word. They usually took the grain, but didn’t touch clothes or other things. [...] The collective farms were guarded by people on patrol, and often authorized people with weapons from the district would appear. People were forced to join collective farms at gunpoint. They didn’t touch livestock, but would take away horses without asking”⁵⁹¹.

Mykola Vasylovych Khonakhbeiev, born in 1927, Starobesheve: “We had land near Hirnyk. We had a good harvest. People didn’t want to give up their things – they hid their cattle and grain. They came to our home looking for grain, and poked around with their iron rods in the garden and barn, but found nothing – my father handed over everything as he was told to do...”⁵⁹².

Testimonies contain information about cases of looting by government representatives, when they took not only grain, but also food, clothes, shoes, and jewelry.

Polina Zakharivna Shevtsova, born in 1920, Starobesheve: “I remember those times well because I was already 12 years old. I remember how government representatives took grain to the district center and took it all away. It was impossible to hide it because they dug the ground up like moles. They turned everything over. First they asked if there was any extra grain. And then they started their searches...”⁵⁹³.

Petro Panteliiiovych Yuriev, born in 1928, Starobesheve, “...I remember the Holodomor of 1932–33. Our family consisted of 10 people. The winter of 32–33 was especially hard, and in spring, when small livestock and poultry were slaughtered in autumn... Everything that could be eaten was used for food,

⁵⁸⁶ Natsionalna knyha pam’iati zhertv holodomoru... Vol. 1. P. 360–361.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. P. 360.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. P. 330–331.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. P. 360.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. P. 360–361.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid. P. 330–331.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid. P. 362.

there was no waste. People were dying of hunger. I had the Il'ins as neighbours, a family of 10 people, and out of those 10 people, 5 survived. The children ended up in orphanages and shelters, three sons survived"⁵⁹⁴.

Mariia Diakonenko, born in 1928, Rozdol'ne: "My father was a musician, and he was forced to play in the orchestra every day; they would take musicians to various places to where grain convoys were formed. Due to starvation, he didn't have the strength to blow into his trumpet. In 1937, the entire orchestra was repressed"⁵⁹⁵.

The local historian Volodymyr Dushka recounts the reminiscences of Vlas Kostyantynovich Papayani: "When I recall those years, the voices of the people crowding around the bread counter, full of hope and despair, begin to immediately sound in my ears: «Vir ma! Vir ma! Vir ma!» ("Give me!" in Greek). There was not enough bread for everyone... It was impossible to establish the number of human losses from starvation in the district for one simple reason: no one kept such statistics"⁵⁹⁶.

Marfa Khrystoforivna Dmytrieva, born in 1920, Starobesheve:

"Question: What is The Law of Five Ears of Grain? Have you heard of it? Answer: I have heard about the law, my mother was imprisoned for 3 years for collecting only five ears of grain. My grandmother took care of the three children.

Question: Were people allowed to collect ears of grain, leftovers from the field? Answer: No, they weren't allowed. [...] Question: Were people forced to join collective farms and how?

Answer: People were forced to go to collective farms and work for free. [...] Question: When did people start dying of hunger?

Answer: People died, were taken on carts and dumped into a pit. Whoever could bury their dead did so themselves"⁵⁹⁷.

Eyewitness testimonies make it possible to reconstruct in detail how burial rites were affected in the period. This source clearly indicates that in the context of mass murder by starvation, the traditional burial rite lost all meaning. Indifference and disrespect towards people who died of starvation, and derision towards the dead body became commonplace. The village community, which was previously intimately involved in the burial ritual, lost this important function.

Lidiia Mykolaivna Zaitseva, born in 1926, lived in Kostyantynopil in 1932–1933: "People were

collapsing in the streets and dying from hunger. In our family, four children died of starvation. Three of my brothers were buried in the cemetery in a common pit where all the dead were buried. And I buried one brother in our garden in a hole I dug myself. The graves did not survive"⁵⁹⁸.

Dmytro Vasyliovych Serafimov, born in 1915, Komar: "My father died of starvation. We buried my father with my mother. We dug a knee-deep grave in the cemetery and buried them as best we could. [...] A lot of people died. Whole families departed for the other world. We buried them as best we could. I don't remember what happened to the orphaned children in Komar, but in Dniproenerhiya the collective farm took over the guardianship of orphaned children"⁵⁹⁹.

According to eyewitnesses, the village council provided carts for the burial of dead villagers who had no one to bury them.

The journalist Taras Bespechnyi recalls the testimony of Fedir Heorhiiovych Takhtomysh and his wife Hanna Ivanivna. They were born in 1910. The couple recalled that Hanna Ivanovna's father was the first to die on 1 May 1933. Before his death, he asked his son-in-law to bury him in a humane way: "I don't want to be dragged to the cemetery like a dead horse to a livestock cemetery. Tear up the floor in the room and make a coffin." Fedir Heorhiiovych fulfilled his father-in-law's request and made a coffin out of floorboards. For five days, the deceased lay in the house as the collective farm could not provide a cart to take him to the cemetery. When a cart finally arrived and the coffin was placed on it, a neighbour came running out and begged them to take her dead mother to the cemetery too. They put the dead woman on top of the coffin and took her to the cemetery. When they approached the grave dug by the collective farm, Hanna fainted — the pit was filled to the top with dead bodies"⁶⁰⁰.

Liubov Antonivna Dmytrieva, born in 1921, Komar: "On the whole, the dead were buried in the cemetery. There were cases when they were covered with snow and left until spring, or put on top of fresh graves"⁶⁰¹.

Varvara Khrystoforivna Dimidzhyieva, born in 1925, Starobesheve: "I remember that time. [...] All the grain was taken, there was nothing to eat. My mother would cook some thin broth, but my family was made up of my father, mother, grandmother and us, three daughters... I would go with my mother

⁵⁹⁴ Natsionalna knyha pam'iati zhertv holodomoru... Vol. 1. P. 362.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. P. 378.

⁵⁹⁶ Dushka V. Holod 1933-ho. *Put Oktiabria*. 16 yulia 1991 roku.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid. P. 380.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid. P. 331–332.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. P. 232–333.

⁶⁰⁰ Bespechnii Taras. *Smert po ymeny Holod. Vechernyi Donetsk*, 2007, 10 noiabria.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid. P. 330–331.

to collect ears of grain. For this, my mother was arrested and put in prison. There were three of us left, aged 12 years old, 8 years old, and 3 years old. I don't remember when people started dying of starvation, but on the way to school I would see how people were being buried in the cemetery, wrapped in sheets and left some place, or just thrown into a pit; the cemetery was next to our school"⁶⁰².

Nina Andriivna Anastasova, born in 1923, Starobesheve: "People were dying of starvation, and piled up in pits; sometimes they were thrown into the water..."⁶⁰³.

Cemetery customs, and visits and care towards the graves of loved ones were neglected. An examination of testimonies about the genocide allows us to conclude that they are important sources for an in-depth study of death under those conditions; the destruction of the religious and local culture of dying; and the decline of funeral and memorial rites, their symbols and attributes.

The analysis of testimonies shows that there were several ways that Greek peasants used to save themselves and, first and foremost, their children. Often in testimonies about life during the Holodomor, one can find cases of individuals exchanging women's clothes and jewelry for food. Sometimes people managed to save the most valuable things they had: women's jewelry, good-quality clothes, rugs, and sometimes houses. These were the key to a family's survival. In conditions of total famine, all valuables lost their meaning. Similarly, peasants obtained food by exchanging household items where possible.

Ivan Alekseenko, born in 1918, Kostyantynopol: "My father had a violin which was left to me: it is the only memory I had of my parents. Among Greeks, all the joyful events in life were accompanied with a violin, a drum, and a flute. I used to lend my violin to various people — there was no other violin like it in the whole village, and perhaps even anywhere else in the wider vicinity. When they made an inventory of the property, there was no violin in the house, and I was very happy about that. I traded the violin in a neighboring village for a bucket of potatoes"⁶⁰⁴.

Oleksandra Myronivna Stavrynova, born in 1912, Starobesheve: "In 1933, my future husband's mother exchanged her house for a sack of flour and moved to the city..."⁶⁰⁵.

Mykola Vasyliovych Khonakhbeiev, born in 1927, Starobesheve: "In the spring, people started to show signs of swelling and die. A lot of people died, a lot... my

father died in winter, and my mother went to the city to exchange her bracelets and earrings for bread and groats which she brought back home to us. One day in winter there was a blizzard and she never returned home... And we (the children) were crying, we were very hungry. Then my brothers climbed into the attic, took a calf hide, cleaned it and cooked it"⁶⁰⁶.

Yelyzaveta Hryhorivna Tymoshchenko, born in 1919, Komar: "In 1933, my father died. He became very sick, went to the hospital in Novoselivka for treatment. He died there. My sisters brought him back to Komar and buried him. It became very difficult for us without dad. After my father's death, my mother gave birth to a child, but due to a lack of milk, the child died. My mother buried the child in our garden. We had nothing to eat at all. We would lie in bed and would get up with great difficulty. My mother packed our things and in the afternoon we went by train to visit her sister in Selidovo. At that time I had already shown signs of swelling caused by hunger. My mother came home at night and knocked on the window so that I could open the door for her. I told her I couldn't get up, but I crawled to the door with difficulty and opened the door for her. My mother brought oil (she had exchanged it for some things) and fed us spoons of oil through the night"⁶⁰⁷.

Lidiia Mykolaivna Zaitseva, born in 1926, Kostyantynopil: "We went to the neighboring village of Andriivka to exchange some of our things. We exchanged a large rug for half a sack of fodder beets. A neighbour gave me a glass of flour, all of which I ate before we got back home"⁶⁰⁸.

Leontii Klymovych Angelin, born in 1916, Starobesheve: "I remember how my father gathered all the valuable things we owned, including various types of homemade rugs, and went to the industrial towns, where people were wealthier, to exchange these things for food. The next day, in the village of Karachurino, he was found dead: he had been shot and robbed"⁶⁰⁹.

People who survived those terrible times testify time and again to the fact that their lives were saved thanks to the food received in exchange for their mothers' shawls, skirts, embroidered towels, and other clothes. These items were exchanged for priceless — for the time — bread, flour, groats, and vegetables.

The most interesting thing is that in none of the testimonies is there any grief for those things that had to be given away in a difficult situation in an overly unequal exchange. It should be noted that

⁶⁰² Ibid. P. 361.

⁶⁰³ Ibid. P. 363.

⁶⁰⁴ 33-i: holod: Narodna Knyha-Memorial / Uporiad.: L. B. Kovalenko, V. A. Maniak K., 1991. P. 215–216.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid. P. 363.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid. P. 360–361.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid. P. 333–334.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. P. 331–332.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. P. 363.

almost every testimony of this type is supplemented by a comment stating that it was precisely thanks to the food obtained in this way that someone managed to survive; eyewitnesses emphasise that the real price of these exchanges of these 'valuable' items was human life.

Another difficult page of the Holodomor was the blacklisting of Greek villages. To give two examples, the Nove Selo collective farm of the Novokaran village council of the Volnovakha district and the Skhid collective farm of the Greko-Oleksandrivka village council of the Starobesheve district were blacklisted. The purge of the Skhid collective farm was carried out according to the well-known plan. Out of 154 peasant households, 50 farms were subject to purges: 22 of these were kulak households, 10 were wealthy peasant households, and 2 were poor peasant households; three people were expelled from the party. Abramovich, the authorized representative of the CPC, opened criminal cases against the entire board of the collective farm, headed by I. Makhnosov. Those working on the collective farm had the bread issued for the days they had worked taken away. They also made a demand for the return of grain grown in their gardens. The collective farmer Hanna Pomeschenkova said that after the confiscation of the grain, many did not live to see the following harvest⁶¹⁰.

G. Papakin, in his monograph "«Black Board»: Anti-Peasant Repression (1932–1933)," cites a reference of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR, dated 26 November 1932, about the wishes of the regional executive committee to place the Greek village of Gurzuf in the Mariupol district (the Mariupol City Council) and the Vladyka collective farm in the Staromyolskyi district of the Donetsk region on the all-Ukrainian blacklist⁶¹¹.

After being put on the blacklist, repressions were brought to bear on entire districts, collective farms, and governing boards. For example, in the Starokaransk district of Donetsk region alone, 5 collective farm boards were brought to trial. In total, about 600 people were punished here, 20 of whom were sentenced to death, with the rest imprisoned for a term of 3 to 10 years. However, despite the intensification of repressions, and the confiscation of seed, fodder and food funds from collective farms, the grain procurement plan in Donbas had still not been fulfilled by the end of January 1933⁶¹².

According to V. Marochko, "Soviet laws, party resolutions, and personal instructions of the leader, J. Stalin, were on the side of the nomenklatura satraps. He called for the destruction of kulaks, saboteurs, those who evaded grain procurement, and speculators,

and so the ideology, criminal in spirit and word, generated arbitrariness in the everyday life of rural communists and Soviet activists. Their immoral behavior during the years of grain procurement and the famine manifested itself in the ugliest of forms. P. A. Shchadko, a resident of Kostyantynivka, Maryinka district, Donetsk region, recalled: "I was told by one of the MTS employees that in 1933 his wife went to the commissioner's office at night and returned home in the morning with some flour. He told me this story and cried in the presence of his wife, a Greek woman of extraordinary beauty"⁶¹³.

The testimony of Ivan Alekseenko, a resident of the village of Kostyantynopil in the Velykonovosilkivsk district, who was 15 years old in 1933, reveals the drama of a distinctive ethnic community: "Our village of Kostyantynopil lay between two rivers. The neighboring villages were Ulakly and Bahatyr. Each village has its own language: in some Greek was spoken, in other Greek-Tatar. The houses were mostly adobe, the gardens were large and tidy..."

But over time something incomprehensible began to happen: the collective farmers were dekulakized and deported beyond the Urals! They were deported in whatever clothes they were wearing, many died on the way from grief, hunger, and cold. The minds of my fellow villagers, wise and hardworking Greeks, could not understand the reasons behind all of this injustice. They were perhaps the first in this region to start farming in a new way, to socialize the land, and they were being punished for no reason, as if they were sworn enemies of socialism. *We could only think one thing: we were being punished for being Greek.*

I had no father or mother, I lived with my grandparents, and my father's brother's family lived with us. My uncle was a member of the board of the collective farm. But our large family was poor, like everyone else. We received very little for the days we worked — we received goods in grams, not kilograms. And with the barley and oats we were given, the bread tasted as if it were underbaked. In the autumn of 1932, people were not given any grain at all. After the harvest, us boys would go into the fields to collect ears of grain. Adults were sentenced to 5 years in prison for this, and we, children, thought that nothing would happen to us unless we came across a fierce person on patrol on a horse with a whip in hand.

The village was given a dekulakization quota, and our family was included in this quota. Someone warned my uncle, and he secretly left the village for Alchevsk, to work in a mine. We stayed at home. They came early, carried out an inventory, took everything away, and

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. P. 487–488.

⁶¹¹ Папакін Г. В. «Чорна дошка»: антиселянські репресії (1932–1933). К.: Інститут історії України НАНУ, 2013. С. 160

⁶¹² 33-і: holod: Narodna Knyha-Memorial... С. 219.

⁶¹³ Marochko V. Y. Holodomor 1932–1933 rr. na Donbasi. K., 2015. S.7.

left us in the clothes we were in. How did we live? We replanted the previous year's chaff and gathered some grains. A boy from the neighbourhood and I would walk for a kilometer and a half to a Russian village, which was barely affected by collectivization, to beg for alms. We were often chased away and reproached for the fact that our entire village had joined the collective farm. But we would get given some things: a potato, a cracker, a beet...

I had a strange character: I could eat anything that I happened to lay my eye on. Chalk, grass, some hide or other — whatever it was, I would cook it and eat it. My aunt and grandmother could not stand up anymore, they were dying before my eyes. I was holding on, even though I was showing signs of swelling. I was saved by moving around — I did not sit still for a minute, and I was always trying to find something that I could eat.

When the whole family began to show signs of swelling, I took my aunt and her two children to Alchevsk, to my uncle. On the way, I saw people crawling on the road leading to the granary, picking grains out of the dust that only they could see. Some of them died right there on the spot. They were dragged to the side of the road and no one paid attention to them anymore... Is it any wonder that at the age of 14 years old my hair started to turn grey?

In our village, everyone had large homesteads, and if we had been allowed us to grow produce near our homes, there would have been no such famine. But this was strictly forbidden — people were told to work only for the collective farm.

Later on, the whole family moved to Alchevsk, then to Luhansk. Rural life was over, the knowledge of our great-grandfathers forgotten⁶¹⁴.

The memories of Ivan Strionov, published in his "History of Everyday Life in its Ethnic Dimension: Memoirs of a Greek Communist," are representative and informative. These memoirs of a native from the Greek-Tatar village of Komar illustrate the socio-political and cultural life of the Greek community in Mariupol, the peculiarities of the mentality of this specific ethno-cultural group, and provide a view on the milestones of the political history of the USSR through the lens of the common man. Ivan Strionov dared and managed to write down his own observations and impressions of the era of which he was a contemporary. Strionov's memoirs give us the perspective of the ordinary builders of socialism, a look at the country in which they lived and worked, at the tragic pages of its history, at its government, and at themselves. His work is a people's view of history that until recently did not receive the attention of the academic community, and is only now beginning to be analysed.

⁶¹⁴ 33-i: holod: Narodna Knyha-Memorial... S. 215–216.

⁶¹⁵ Istoriiia povsiakdennosti v yii etnichnomu vymiri: spohady hreka-komunista. Kyiv : Institute of History of Ukraine NANU. 2009. S. 178–179.

This is how the communist Ivan Strionov, for whom the state and everything it did was not to be questioned (at least, not in public), recalls the Holodomor: "Not only were the collective farmers not the masters of their collective farms, as Lenin taught, but they were also turned into real slaves. They were deprived of any human rights and doomed to death. Additionally, they were tried and imprisoned for not going to work, for gathering ears of grain in the fields after a harvest, for anti-collective-farm utterances; even those sick with fever were forced to work. The year 1933 arrived and the collective farms of Ukraine produced a good crop, but again the state took all the grain, gave nothing to the collective farmers who had been toiling for days, and left no grain for the collective farms for fodder or even seeds. From early autumn 1933, famine began in Ukraine. The collective farmers, having finished the last of their food and livestock (including dogs and cats), went to cities and industrial centres to escape the famine. Many of them died on the road before reaching the cities, and a small number of those who reached their destinations died on the streets...

In the cities, there was also a shortage of food (a ration card system was in place), but, nonetheless, the urban population tried to feed the hungry peasants, and had the saying, "Our breadwinners are miserable!" Peasants, who had not seen bread for a long time, would eat dry pieces of bread given to them by the urban population, and would almost immediately collapse and die on the spot. These poor peasants were loaded onto cars, taken out of town and buried in quarries or ravines⁶¹⁵.

Eyewitness accounts, even from those who were children at the time, are an important source for studying the terrible consequences of the famine in the Greek villages of the North Azov region. Their analysis allows us to see an ordinary person during this terrible catastrophe with his or her pain, despair, fear, and thirst for life. The study of testimonies makes it possible to clarify or specify important characteristics of the period of 1932–1933 such as the causes of the famine and its scale, obtain data on the diet of the population, and better understand the composition and number of those who died or were repressed. Life experience and a relatively high level of education left an imprint on the awareness of the events of 1932–1933, so the given testimonies contain analytical reflections on both the causes of the famine and the population's reaction to the events. The greatest value of these testimonies lies in the detailed factual material they provide about events in Greek villages. The facts are mostly personal in nature, as adults did not share hardly any of their impressions with children, both for reasons of caution and due to the children's age.

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Дата надходження до редакції: 30.03.2024 р.

Дата схвалення до публікації: 20.04.2024 р.



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