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Repression of the Yezidis in the Armenian and Georgian SSRs in 1930–1940

Abstract:

This article examines the repression of the Soviet Yezidis during the Stalin period and analyses the state policy toward this minority. Like all Soviet people, the Yezidis were subjected to repression and deportation during this period. However, unlike in central Russia, the persecution against them was less severe and did not occur on a mass scale. Although the repressions of the 1920s and 1930s decapitated the Yezidis and weakened the influence of the tribal nobility, they did not result in the destruction of their social structure, which persists to this day. As a result of the repressions, the Yezidis' isolation was broken, accelerating their integration into Soviet society.

Keywords:

Yezidis, Kurds, the USSR, Armenia, Georgia, Repressions, Yezidi Clergy, Deportation

Introduction

The 20th (XX) Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Central Committee was a turning point in the history of the Soviet state. It is most remembered for Khrushchev's speech, which debunked Stalin's personality cult and acknowledged the illegal arrests and persecution of citizens for political reasons. However, despite this, the above-mentioned topic remained taboo for researchers for several decades. Only with the onset of "perestroika" the veil of secrecy was slightly lifted and the first publications on the subject appeared. Initially, these publications typically had little in common with academic research and were politically charged, aimed at denigrating the Soviet period of Russian history.

It's worth noting that political repression, as a tool to combat dissent, was used by the Soviet authorities from the very first days of the USSR. It reached its peak in 1937–

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1938, when the February–March plenum of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) outlined a policy of tightening repressive measures.[1]

According to most historians, the central focus of the NKVD's mass actions was operations against "kulaks"[2] and "according to national features", targeting "foreign" ethnic groups. In total, from August 1937 to November 1938, the NKVD of the USSR carried out 11 punitive "national" actions, namely: "Polish", "German", "Harbin", "Finnish", "Estonian", "Latvian", "Greek", "Iranian", "Afghani", "Romanian" and "mixed".[3] Within the "mixed" repressive action, researchers identify up to 20 punitive "lines".[4] The victims of these persecutions included individuals accused of spying for Hungary, England, France, the USA, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Turkey, and others. Currently, researchers have studied in detail four punitive "national" actions – "German",[5] "Polish",[6] "Harbin"[7] and "Greek".[8]

It's worth noting that the Kurds in the Caucasus were among the first to suffer Stalin's repressions, deported in 1937 from regions bordering Turkey. This topic has been examined by various researchers, both within the context of general processes and specifically in relation to the Kurds. N. F. Bugai made a significant contribution to the study of this issue. His works, devoted to the problems of deportation and rehabilitation of the Kurdish and other peoples, shed light on the political events of that period.[9] However, these works, as a rule, always focus on the Muslim Kurds living in the Transcaucasian republics and repressed in 1937 and 1944.

Until now, no researchers have attempted to distinguish the Yezidis (ethnoreligious group) from the number of repressed Kurds. During the Soviet period, they were traditionally considered a subethnic group of Kurds – the so-called Kurds-Yezidis. Only a few works devoted to the detailed history of the Kurds (Yezidis) have mentioned this topic in passing or provided general data.[10] Meanwhile, the topic of deportations and repressions of the Yezidis is also important because, while previously considered Kurds, today in Russia, Georgia, and Armenia, they are classified as a separate nationality in

[1] Cf. Аблажей 2019: 152.

[2] The term kulak which translates to "fist" in Russian, originally referred to wealthy peasant farmers in rural communities who accumulated wealth through land ownership and labour. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, kulaks became synonymous with the most affluent members of the peasant class, often opposing the collectivization efforts initiated by the Soviet leadership under Joseph Stalin in the 1920s.

[3] Cf. Аблажей 2019: 157.

[4] Cf. Аблажей 2019: 158.

[5] Cf. Дённигхаус 2011, Охотин 1999.

[6] Cf. Петров 1997.

[7] Cf. Аблажей 2008.

[8] Cf. Джуха 2006.

[9] Cf. Бугай 2012; Бугай, et al 1993.

[10] Cf. Чатоев 1965, Мурадян 2013, Guest 1987.

censuses, and most of them classify themselves as a distinct people.[11] However, this article does not address the question of whether the Yezidis are Kurds or a distinct people. The purpose of this publication is merely to summarize new materials revealing the nature of the repressions and deportations against adherents of the Yezidi religion without regard for their ethnic self-identification.

The article is based on documents from the National Archives of Armenia (NAA), the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs archive (GMIAA), the archive of the Spiritual Council of the Yezidis in Georgia (ASCYG), the Central State Archive of Literature and Art of St. Petersburg (TsGALI), and the National Archives of Georgia – the Central Archive of Contemporary Georgian History (NAGCACGH). The personal files of those repressed from 1929–1939, as well as investigative files, witness statements, certificates and decrees of the NKVD, and court verdicts, were examined in these archives. Valuable information on the rehabilitation of Yezidis deported from Batumi and copies of statements from relatives of those repressed to USSR law enforcement agencies from 1944–1990, stored in the archive of the Spiritual Council of the Yezidis in Georgia, also served as an important source for the article. Personal sources were also drawn upon, including letters and memoirs of participants in these events, stored in the aforementioned archives. These documents contain important information about the social origins of the Yezidis, their education, mentality, relationships within the community, attitudes toward the government, and assessments of changes in the country. They constitute a crucial source describing not only the nature of the repressions but also the conditions under which the Yezidi community developed. An analysis of case files held by the National Archives of Armenia revealed that 205 Yezidis were subjected to repression in the Armenian SSR between 1930 and 1953. In the same time 54 Yezidis were subjected to repression in the neighbouring Georgian SSR, of whom 17 were sentenced to death. All files are held in the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. It is worth noting that, according to the 1926 census, the Yezidi population numbered 14,523.[12] Taking into account natural population growth (at that time, Yezidi families had more than three children), it can be estimated that the Yezidi population between 1930 and 1953 could have ranged from 20,000 to 26,000. Thus, more than 1% of the Yezidi population of the USSR was subjected to repression.

Determining precise data on the number of repressed Yezidis in the USSR is very difficult. Firstly, during the period under study, Yezidis were often classified as Kurds. Secondly, nationality was not always indicated in archival files. Furthermore, a fire in 1992 in the administrative buildings of the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs

[11] Мосаки 2018: 104, *idem* 2014: 97.

[12] Амоев, Мосаки 2014: 16.

of the Georgian SSR destroyed most of the archival collections, including the archive of criminal cases, which may have also contained files on Yezidis.[13] Nevertheless, the available information allows us to conclude that, unlike the Muslim Kurds, the persecution of Yezidis was not widespread. As of January 1, 1953, among the 1,810,140 adult special settlers (aged 17 and older), there were 174 Yezidis.[14] Overall, representatives of this community were subjected to repression in three stages.

First Stage of the Repression

The first stage of persecution began with the establishment of Soviet power in Transcaucasia in the early 1920s. This period is characterized by the relative bloodlessness of measures taken against the majority of the Yezidis. Repression at this stage was aimed at weakening the influence of the tribal nobility and clergy. Their authority was at an unprecedented level, so the authorities demanded that work among the Yezidis be conducted with caution. Thus, in a report on the work of the subdepartment of national minorities of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Georgia, in terms of anti-religious propaganda, it is noted that: "The most backward and religiously fanatical among the national minorities are the Georgian Jews and the Kurdish Yezidis, who primarily live in cities. The influence of the clergy on them is very strong, and work among them requires great caution".[15] According to Chatoyev, in 1924, in villages populated by Yezidis, a significant portion of the members of village councils were represented by wealthy peasants and "kulaks".[16] The state sought to discredit them and oust them from governing the Yezidis. Consequently, the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Armenia demanded that local district party committees strengthen their activities among the Yezidis and involve more poor and middle-class peasants in Soviet work. As early as 1929, only poor peasants, farm laborers, and middle-class peasants were elected as Council deputies.[17] Over time, the measures taken by the authorities led to the exclusion of the most influential segment of the Yezidi community from the socio-political life of their people.

[13] Official response of the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (AMIAG) No. 2487090 dated September 19, 2019.

[14] Земсков 2005: 283.

[15] The translation from Russian to English was made by the author; NAGCAGMH, F.284, Op.1, D.1083, L.51.

[16] Чатоев 1965: 54.

[17] *Ibid.*

Parallel to this process, the training of Yezidi cadres loyal to the Soviet regime was underway. They were charged with the special mission of combating the remnants of the previous social structure of Yezidi society. In 1925, Marogulov, a member of the Council of National Minorities of the Armenian SSR, reported on the noticeably increasing party work among the Yezidis and noted the participation of a young clergyman, Suleiman Khalitov, whom he called for encouragement.[18] Marogulov further noted that "the harmful influence of the sheikhs and pirs (Yezidi spiritual castes) on the ignorant masses is noticeably weakening. The people have apparently seen the light somewhat and, albeit slowly, are steadily moving toward a new direction in life".[19]

Famous fighters against the old social structure were Teymurov Shamir and Arab Shamilov,[20] the first Kurdish Bolsheviks (as they positioned themselves) and participants in the Civil War. According to the Kurdish writer Amarike Sardar, Shamilov, as an instructor for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia on national minorities, "led an irreconcilable struggle against the Yezidi clergy, the agas, and the begs".[21] The apogee of this struggle was the publication in 1935 in Yerevan of Shamilov's famous Kurdish-language novel, Şivanê kurmanca ("Kurdish Shepherd"), which differed from the Russian version published earlier in 1931. For example, the Kurdish edition of the story included a chapter, "Once Again Among the Kurmanjs", in which Shamilov lists by name the most authoritative Yezidi leaders and clerics of the time, calling them "enemies of the workers" for their exploitation of the Yezidi poor.[22] Many of them were subsequently repressed under political articles, and some, such as Jangir-aga and Pir Kurdo Avdalov met their deaths in the camps. It is worth noting that the chapter "Once More Among the Kurmanjs" was never published in later Kurdish and Russian editions of the novel. However, according to Sardar, Shamilov himself was arrested in the late 1920s as a representative of the Yezidi clerical caste of sheikhs.[23] This thesis is essentially refuted by Vasilkov and Sorokina, citing data from the Archives of the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences. They assert that "in 1929, Shamilov was briefly arrested as a result of a conflict with the local clergy".[24] Shamilov himself confirms these statements, writing that he was under

[18] Cf. NAA, F. 122, Op. 1, D. 234, L. 15.

[19] Cf. *Ibid*.

[20] Arab Shamilov was one of the most prominent representatives of the Kurdish intelligentsia of the former USSR, the author of the first Kurdish novel, and in the late 1920s, together with Marogulov, he created a Kurdish alphabet based on the Latin alphabet.

[21] Сардар 2018: 97.

[22] Шамилов 1935: 155.

[23] *Ibid*.

[24] Васильков, Сорокина URL: http://memory.pvost.org/pages/shamilov.html

investigation due to complaints from the clergy and the principality, but was acquitted, and the complainants were exiled.[25]

Around this time, the most authoritative and influential Yezidi leaders of the period, Usub-beg Teymurov[26] and Jangir-aga Khatifov, were arrested.[27] Both belonged to the beg class and were active members of the Dashnak movement.[28] However, they received a relatively lenient sentence for the time – several years of exile in Soviet Armenia. This leniency was explained by the patronage of Aghasi Khanjyan, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia.[29] Subsequently, after serving his sentence, Usub-beg Teymurov returned to his village of Shamiram, where he died on January 12, 1934.[30] Jangir-aga, returning home to the village of Choban-kyara, faced new charges from government authorities.

The early 1930s were among the most difficult and controversial in the history of the USSR. The country's measures to persecute wealthy peasants and forced collectivization led to discontent in the villages. According to Kuznechevsky, armed clashes became more frequent against this backdrop.[31] According to the OGPU, the reasons for this were "excesses, bungling, and distortions of the party line committed by local authorities in the area of collective farm development".[32]

As Zemskov's comparative statistics of those convicted for political reasons between 1921 and 1952 demonstrate,[33] the number of repressions and death sentences across the country increased sharply in the first half of the 1930s, driven by the policy of forced collectivization. Among the Yezidis, discontent with the Soviet regime grew, primarily among the community's elite. Tribal leaders, clergy, and wealthy peasants, unwilling to accept their isolation, agitated against the Soviet regime and collective farms among the Yezidi population. However, their attempts to create grounds for anti-Soviet rebellion by the Yezidis were ineffective. The Yezidi peasantry, having

[25] Cf. TsGALI, F.328, Op. 2, D.1837, L.2.

[26] Мурадян 2013: 198. Usub-beg Teymurov was the leader of the Yezidi confederation of the Hasni tribes. He was the last leader of the Yezidis in Transcaucasia recognized as such by the tsarist authorities. From 1918 to 1920, he was a member of the parliament of the first independent Republic of Armenia. He was closely associated with members of the Armenian intelligentsia, military leaders, and government officials.

[27] NAA, F.1191, Op. 14, D.878, L.503 Jangir-aga Khatifov was the leader of the Yezidi confederation of the Zukri tribes. In 1915, he and his unit defected to Russia. After the collapse of the Caucasian Front in 1918, he fought in the Armenian Corps. During the Battle of Bash – Aparan in 1918, in which the Turks suffered a crushing defeat, the Yezidi units of Jangir-aga made up most of the Armenian cavalry. He was closely associated with Armenian leaders.

[28] The Armenian Revolutionary Federation also known as Dashnaktsutyun is an Armenian nationalist and socialist political party founded in 1890 in Tiflis, Russian Empire.

[29] Cf. Мурадян 2013: 198.

[30] Cf. *Ibid*: 199.

[31] Кузнечевский 2015: 66.

[32] *Советская деревня глазами ОГПУ-НКВД: документы и материала* 2003: 325.

[33] Cf. Земсков 2012: 81.

suffered greatly from the events of the first half of the 20th century, sought to free itself from the oppression of the beg class, and they saw the Soviet regime as an ally in achieving this goal. For this reason, convicted Yezidis received relatively lenient sentences during this period compared to what was happening in the central regions of the country, with acquittals also common. The archives analysed do not contain any documents attesting to the courts imposing capital punishment on citizens of Yezidi origin in the first half of the 1930s.

One of the most significant cases of politically motivated criminal prosecutions of Yezidis during that period was case No. 223/158. Residents of the villages of the Armenian SSR, Ivan Kostirov (Atoev Rzgo), Mamoyan Shabab, Davrish Shamo oglu, Nadirov Bagir, Khatifov Said, Khudoyan Hamid, Taloyan Ordi, Khalatyan Samand, Mirzo Omar (Rashoyan), Kalashyan Bro, Asoyan Bro and Kaloyan Isko.[34] According to the investigation, those arrested, "being counterrevolutionary-minded elements, agitated for the acquisition of weapons for an uprising against Soviet power in the event of war, fought for the disintegration of existing collective farms and the non-organization of new ones".[35] It should be emphasized that among the accused was Bagir Nadirov, a member of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and former chairman of the village council of Akko, and Ivan Kostirov (Atoev Rzgo), a former communist and participant in the Civil War in Transcaucasia. Regarding the latter, the Chekists believed that after he was accused of murder in 1930 and expelled from the party, he became an "anti-Soviet element". After his release in 1932, Atoyev bought a Mauser revolver and, using his authority among the Yezidis, engaged in anti-Soviet and anti-kolkhoz activities.[36] In 1933, having received three documents with counter-revolutionary content from an unidentified person, he did not report them to the relevant authorities, but kept them with the Mauser revolver. Atoyev, for his part, denied all accusations against him except that he had failed to promptly report the documents with counter-revolutionary content to the NKVD.[37] Nevertheless, the investigation insisted on its version. The court verdict states: "The accused Kostirov, with the aim of spreading anti-Soviet provocation, visited a number of villages in Talinsky and Aparansky districts during 1934–1935. A characteristic fact of his "anti-collective activity" is the circumstance that before the arrival of the accused Kostirov at the dacha for the summer season of 1935 in the village of Turk Duzkyand in Aparansky district, 11 working farms submitted an application to

[34] NAA, F.1191, Op.18, D.414, L.84.

[35] NAA, F. 1191, Op. 18, D. 414, L. 2.

[36] NAA, F.1191, Op.18, D.414, L.84.

[37] NAA, F. 1191, Op. 18, D. 414, L. 85.

organize a collective farm, but with his arrival in this village and, due to his anti-collective farm agitation, these farms refused to join and the collective farm fell apart".[38]

Davrish Shamo Oglu and Mirzo Omar were members of the Yezidi clergy from the sheikh caste. The investigation alleged that they organized frequent visits to villages and urged Yezidis not to join collective farms, claiming that doing so would destroy the Yezidi religion and religious rituals and lead to the disappearance of the Yezidis "as a nation".[39] The former chairman of the Akko village council, Bagir Nadirov, was accused of spreading "anti-collective farm rumors" and of being close to the defendant Kostirov. In 1934, he refused to join the collective farm, sold his property, and left for Tiflis, for which he was later dismissed.[40]

Following the consideration of this criminal case in 1936, at a closed session, the court delivered guilty verdicts against the defendants and chose a preventive measure for each in the form of arrest for 7 years for Ivan Kostirov, 5 years for Shabab Mamoyan, and Davrish Shamo oglu and Hatifov Said, 4 years for Mirzo Omar and 3 years for Khalatyan Samand and Kalashyan Bro. The court found the claims brought against Taloyan Ordi, Asoyan Bro and Kaloyan Isko unproven and released them from custody.[41] Most of the defendants were former kulaks, which effectively sealed their fate, as the NKVD was largely indifferent to their innocence. At this time, numerous criminal cases were fabricated across the country, accusing citizens of counterrevolutionary activity, which was also acknowledged by some government officials. For example, People's Commissar of Justice of the USSR Rychkov and Chairman of the Supreme Court of the USSR Golyakov believed that the judiciary was blatantly ignoring the rights of the accused, turning the entire judicial investigation into an empty formality and the court's verdict into a rubber-stamp indictment.[42] In his letter of February 4, 1936, addressed to the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Molotov, the USSR Prosecutor Vyshinsky emphasized the danger of making mistakes, which was further exacerbated by the fact that "these cases are conducted without any witnesses and are based on intelligence data, and in a number of cases there is only one witness, whose testimony often contradicts that of the accused, who categorically deny their guilt".[43] For example, Said Khatifov, brother of the aforementioned famous Yezidi leader, Jangir-aga, ended up in the dock for privately expressing his opinion about the imminent

[38] *Ibid*.

[39] *Ibid*.

[40] NAA, F.1191, Op.18, D. 414, L.85.

[41] NAA, F.1191, Op.18, D. 414, L.89.

[42] Cf. Верт, *et al*. 2004: 328.

[43] Cf. *Ibid*.: 215.

collapse of Soviet power and spreading a rumor that England wanted to "arrange a free life" for his brother and demanded that the USSR extradite him.[44] The entire prosecution case revolved around the testimony of a former kulak from the village of Kmlakut, where Khatifov had been staying.[45] Despite the fact that the case lacked any evidence of verification of the witness testimony, and the defendant himself categorically denied his guilt,[46] he was nevertheless convicted and sentenced to five years in prison.[47]

Second Stage of the Repression

However, starting in 1937, with the appointment of Yezhov as People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, the authorities' response to such sentiments among Yezidi leaders, as well as throughout the country, was very harsh. The so-called "Great Terror" (a period of the most widespread political repression) began in the USSR. Thus, the second wave of repression against the Yezidis began. It's chronological framework can be roughly defined as ending on March 17, 1939, when the trial of Case No. 7623 concluded. This case, one of the most resonant in Yezidi-Soviet history, accused the most influential Yezidi figures of that period of anti-state activities. It was during this period that the largest number of Yezidis were repressed.

A distinctive feature of the second stage of repression was the scale and bloodshed of the measures taken by the authorities. The accused were not only exiled to regions remote from Armenia and Georgia, but also subjected to the death penalty – execution. While previous repressions had targeted the agas, begs, clergy, and wealthy peasants, this time they were joined by Yezidi communists, scholars, journalists, and ordinary peasants, who had previously actively fought against the tribal structure of their community. The politicization of the repressions among the Yezidis at this time, in general, fit into the overall context of events unfolding in the USSR. Analysing archival documents from those years, court records, and interrogations, one senses the atmosphere of fear that pervaded all participants in the process, which was characteristic of that time. Many witness testimonies, which proved decisive in the guilty verdicts, were based on rumours and speculation. It is therefore not surprising that after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, most of those repressed were acquitted and rehabilitated.

[44] NAA, F.1191, Op.18, D.414, L.85.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] NAA, F.1191, Op.18, D.414, L.87.
[47] NAA, F.1191, Op.18, D.414, L.88.

In February 1938, one of the prominent members of the Yezidi community of Georgia, Sharif Izmailov, was arrested in Tbilisi by the NKVD.[48] He was a former beg, secretary of the Komsomol cell, and accused of anti-Soviet activities. By order of the NKVD troika[49], Izmailov was summarily executed on March 14, 1938.[50] His family was not notified of this. Abesova Gyazo, Izmailov's wife, tried to find out about his fate for many years.[51] The archives of the Spiritual Council of the Yezidis in Georgia contain a statement she sent to the USSR Ministry of State Security in 1956. In it, she describes her husband as a noble, calm, and honest man and requests a review of his case.[52] Abesova's statement reads: "I ask you to inform me of the fate of my husband, Sharif, where he is currently located, whether he is alive, whether he will ever be released, or whether I, as a cleaning personnel, will have to bear the heavy family burden alone and whether I will be forever punished in life without him".[53] After repeated appeals to various authorities by Izmailov's widow, his case was reviewed by the Supreme Court of the Georgian SSR in 1957, which overturned the NKVD troika's decision and rehabilitated Sharif.[54]

In parallel with this case, in 1938, one of the most high-profile trials in the history of Soviet Yezidis began in Armenia. The most authoritative and influential representatives of the Yezidi community in the USSR found themselves in the dock, namely: Shamir Teymurov, Akhmed Mirazov, Gyanjuntsyan Armenak (Jardoe Ganjo), Javari Gadzhie Jindi, Khatifov Jangir (Jangir-aga), Tamoyan Jake, Aloyan-Muradyan Mraz and Usoyan-Rzgoyan Akhmed.[55] The interest in this case was added by the fact that all the accused, with the exception of Khatifov, Muradyan and Tamoyan, were former or current members of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), while Jardoe Ganjo (armenian) and Gadzhie Jindi represented the new Soviet-Yezidi intelligentsia.[56] This trial was preceded by the arrest in Leningrad in 1937 of another well-known representative of the Soviet Kurdish intelligentsia, the aforementioned writer Arab Shamilov.

[48] ASCYG, folder 4, L.1.

[49] A three-member NKVD commission empowered to issue summary sentences, including executions, without the guarantees of a formal trial.

[50] ASCYG, folder 4, L.2.

[51] ASCYG, folder 4, L.3.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.41.

[56] Jardoe Ganjo was a writer and a member of the Kurdish Soviet intelligentsia. From 1934 to 1938, he was the editor-in-chief of the Kurdish newspaper "Rya Taza". Gadzhie Jindi is a Kurdish writer, scholar, and educator. He is the author of numerous works on Kurdish folklore, literature, and language. In 1946, he developed a Kurdish alphabet based on the Cyrillic alphabet. From 1959 to 1967, he worked at the Armenian Academy of Sciences.

He was accused of organizing anti-Soviet rebel activities among the Kurds of Armenia with the goal of establishing a free Kurdistan under the protectorate of England.[57] The investigation believed that Shamilov, acting on instructions from the Khoybun organization, recruited the defendants Teymurov, Khatifov, Gyanjuntsyan, Mirazov and Javari to carry out the work.[58] The NKVD believed that all of them, as influential figures, formed a rebel center among the Yezidis of Armenia and directed the anti-Soviet activities.

However, the inconsistencies in the investigation of this case were obvious from the very first days. Firstly, it was claimed that Shamilov was the organizer and leader of the rebel center, although, as is known from his biography, he lived in Leningrad from 1931 and was engaged in scientific work there until his arrest in early 1937.[59] Accordingly, being far from Armenia, he could not have led the rebel group. Secondly, the investigation believed that all the detainees were carrying out the will of the "Kurdish-Dashnak committee "Khoybun" represented by Bedirkhan" located in Aleppo,[60] but this contradicts other materials of the case, in particular, the report prepared by the NKVD on Khatifov (Jangir-aga), which states that in his activities he was guided by the instructions of the head of all the sheikhs in Iraq, Mir Ismail, who is called a "political agent of the British".[61] Finally, the defendants belonged to ideologically opposed camps, while Jangir Khatifov hailed from the beg class and was once a respected leader of the Yezidi people, the others represented the new Yezidi-Kurdish elite, which emerged specifically in the fight against the begs and agas. In this regard, Shamir Teymurov's statement at the trial is quite revealing: "I waged a struggle against the sheikhs, begs, and other counterrevolutionary elements, in particular against the defendant Khatifov".[62]

There was no unity among the members of the new Yezidi elite. Each of them fought against one another. As is evident from Grachiy's testimony. Kochar and Jasme Jalil, Jardoe Ganjo (Armenak Gyanzhuntsyan) and Gadzhie Jindi complained about Arab Shamilov's counterrevolutionary work and called him an anti-Soviet element.[63] In this regard, Grachiya Kochar emphasized: "They were both against Shamilov and tried in

[57] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.15.

[58] *Ibid*.

[59] Васильков, Сорокина URL: http://memory.pvost.org/pages/shamilov.html

[60] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.15. The Khoybun Committee was a Kurdish organization that emerged in 1927 in Syria and fought for the political and cultural rights of Kurds. Its members included prominent Kurdish figures of the period: Kadri Jamil Pasha Ekrem, Muhammad Jamil Pasha, Hamza Moksi, Jeladet Ali Bedirhan, Kamuran Ali Bedirhan, Arakol Azizan and many others.

[61] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.17.

[62] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.878, L.503.

[63] NAA, F. 1191, Op. 14, D. 878, L.494 and L.495.

every way to avoid not only working with him, but even meeting him".[64] Gadzhie Jindi himself confirmed in court that he, along with Kurdish and Armenian writers such as Grachia Kochar, Ganjuntsyan Armenak, Jasme Jalil and others exposed the convicted Shamilov.[65] However, this accusation clearly demonstrates Shamilov's leading role in the Yezidi community. Moreover, it should be noted that, in the competitive struggle, members of the new Kurdish elite spread information about him, knowing that it could cause him serious harm. Moreover, the denunciations were not always motivated by self-preservation.

The testimony of Jardoe Ganjo (Armenak Ganjuntsyan), who headed the newspaper "Rya Taza", sheds light on the true causes of the contradictions within the Kurdish-Yezidi intelligentsia of that period. According to him, representatives of the younger generation of intellectuals were dissatisfied with the role assigned to them. They didn't like the fact that Arab Shamilov was taking credit for all the work among the Kurds. They also didn't like the fact that, with Shamilov's support, the leading positions among the Kurdish intelligentsia were mostly occupied by Armenians.[66] Against this backdrop, young Kurdish-Yezidi intellectuals began a struggle against Shamilov and achieved his departure from Armenia.[67] As Shamilov himself notes in his memoirs, in 1931 he submitted a petition to the party to be sent to study in Leningrad.[68] There, he entered the propaganda department of the Stalin Communist University.[69] One way or another, even after his release in the 1950s, Shamilov apparently had no idea that his comrades, many of whom he personally helped and advised on career advancement, were writing denunciations against him. To be fair, it should be noted that Gadzhie Jindi was one of the few who regretted his actions. After Shamilov's release Jindi supported him in every possible way and subsequently made an invaluable contribution to the popularization of his work. The National Archives of Armenia preserves his letter to the Council of Ministers of the Armenian SSR, dated June 11, 1979, in which he petitioned to name a Kurdish school after Arab Shamilov to perpetuate his memory.[70]

In general, this criminal case was virtually indistinguishable from the vast majority of cases throughout the country that were given a political character in the second half of the 1930s. It was conducted, as if following a template, using the same meth-

[64] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.878, L.494.
[65] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.878, L.493.
[66] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.876, L.92.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] TcGALY, F.328, Op.2, D.1837, L.1.
[70] NAA, F. 883, Op.1, D. 144, L.16.

ods and techniques, with standard charges, violating all legal procedures, completely disenfranchising the accused, and making decisions that were unappealable. During the preliminary investigation, physical violence was used against the defendants, with the help of which they were forced to sign "confessions". This was confirmed in court by Jangir-aga, Akhmed Mirazov, Jake Tamoyan and others stated that for this reason they had given false testimony against themselves and the other defendants.[71] Moreover, the Chekists did not spare even those who had once helped them in "exposing counterrevolutionary elements". Thus, in his testimony, Jake Tamoyan notes: "When I was the authorized representative of the village council, employees of the NKVD department came to me for all kinds of assistance in the matter of detaining bandits and I helped them in this matter... During the preliminary investigation, I also slandered the defendants Gyanzhuntsyan Armenak and others, claiming they were members of a counterrevolutionary Kurdish rebel organization, when I had heard and noticed nothing bad about them, and I was forced to testify. The day before the military prosecutor was scheduled to attend my interrogation, investigator Khoylunts summoned me in advance and warned me to confirm all my previous testimony, threatening me with further physical violence, which I did".[72] In turn, witnesses, fearing the prospect of being brought to trial, and some out of personal animosity, sometimes made absurd statements, further exacerbating the defendants' already unenviable position. For example, Rashid Mirzoyan, a member of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and secretary of the Alagez Komsomol, asserted: "After the treacherous suicide of Khanjyan Agasi, the defendant Gyanjuntsyan arrived in the village of Türk-Pamb and stayed with the anti-Soviet element Iboev Hasan. After his arrival, he spoke among individual peasants and collective farmers about how Khanjyan had been killed by Georgians. I personally was not present at this conversation and did not hear it, but collective farmers told me, but I cannot now indicate who exactly... The defendant Gyanjuntsyan, as I heard from others, was associated with enemies of the people Shamilov Arab, Kostirev Ivan, and others, and praised them. He gave Shamilov a false and inaccurate certificate of his social origin and published articles with counterrevolutionary content in the newspaper "Rya Taza", but I personally do not know these facts".[73] Gyanjuntsyan (Jardoe Ganjo) himself countered the witness's accusations: "I was not in Aparan district during the days of Khanjyan's suicide, but in Tallinn, which is quite a distance from the vil-

[71] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.878, L.503, L.484, L.488.

[72] *Ibid*

[73] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.878, L.496.

lage, now in the Alagez district, and therefore could not have gotten there so easily. The witness did not testify to a single counterrevolutionary statement he heard from me".[74]

Even those who sympathized with the defendants were afraid to support them openly. The criminal case file contains an anonymous letter addressed to the USSR People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, Beria. In it, the unknown author demands Armenak's release from custody. Ganjuntsyan and Gadzhiye Jindi citing the fact that they were arrested indiscriminately and on the basis of a denunciation by the Dashnaks.[75]

In 1939, a court hearing was held, following which a verdict was passed on the defendants.[76] According to it, Mirazov Akhmed, Teymurov Shamir, Aloyan-Muradyan Mraz, Gadzhie Jindi and Armenak Ganjuntsyan (Jardoe Ganjo) were acquitted and released.[77] This was taking into account the fact that the last two defendants were considered by the investigation to be "leaders and ideological inspirers of an anti-Soviet Kurdish rebel organization in Armenia".[78] This court decision was dictated more by political expediency than by a desire for justice to prevail. The fact is that in November 1938, Yezhov was replaced as People's Commissar of Internal Affairs by Beria. That same month, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) approved the resolution "On Arrests, Prosecutor's Supervision, and the Conduct of Investigations".[79] It, in particular, noted the shortcomings of the NKVD and the prosecutor's office. An irresponsible attitude toward investigative proceedings and a gross violation of procedural rules established by law were often skilfully exploited by enemies of the people who had infiltrated the NKVD and the prosecutor's office, both centrally and locally. They deliberately distorted Soviet laws, committed forgeries, falsified investigative documents, prosecuted and arrested people on trivial grounds, and even created provocative "cases" against innocent people without any grounds at all, the document stated.[80] In connection with this, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) ordered the NKVD to make arrests only by court order or with the prosecutor's sanction, and also abolished judicial *troikas*.[81] All these

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.71.

[76] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.73.

[77] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.74.

[78] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.53.

[79] Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) No. P 4387 of November 17, 1938 "On Arrests, Prosecutor's Supervision, and the Conduct of Investigations".

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Ibid.*

measures, of course, did not lead to an end to the repressions, but they did reduce their scale and served as a signal to the judiciary, which began issuing acquittals more often.

As for Tamoyan Jake and Usoyan-Rzgoyan Akhmed the court found him guilty and sentenced them to three and six years in a forced labour camp (FLC), respectively, without loss of political rights.[82] Admittedly, this was a light sentence for the time. This "leniency" likely stemmed from the fact that the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs was replaced at that time, which temporarily softened their sentences. However, they could not be fully exonerated, lest they undermine the government's authority. As a former collective farm chairman, Tamoyan had a negative reputation.[83] As part of the NKVD's informant network, he was responsible for the arrest of fellow villagers, which earned him many enemies.[84] Therefore, it is not surprising that when he himself ended up in the dock, many were willing to testify against him. Usoyan-Rzgoyan, meanwhile, was accused of attempting to assassinate another communist.[85]

However, the most tragic fate awaited Jangir-aga, a former beg and commander of the Yezidi volunteer militias under the Dashnaks. At that time, he remained the last authoritative leader among the Yezidis. The state saw him as a threat to its influence and could not allow him to be acquitted, so Jangir-aga was given the harshest sentence. "Due to his advanced age, he is to be imprisoned for 10 years in a labor camp, with deprivation of his political rights for 5 years and confiscation of all personal property",[86] the court's verdict against Jangir-aga stated. For a man his age – Jangir-aga was 65 at the time[87] – this sentence meant certain death. He was sent to serve his sentence in the Novo-Kamensky labor camp, also known as Kamenlag, located in Saratov region.[88] It was one of the most brutal camps of that period, created by order of the NKVD in April 1942.[89]

Journalist and poet Morozov, who served his sentence there from 1943 to 1944, wrote in detail about life and everyday life in Kamenlag in his book, *Nine Steps to Oblivion*.[90] According to his testimony, the prisoners "had to eat grass and drink water from streams just to quench their thirst".[91] Because of this, they often fell ill. Jangir-aga was

[82] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.74.

[83] *Ibid*.

[84] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.878, L.481.

[85] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.74.

[86] *Ibid*.

[87] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.878, L.479.

[88] Response to the request from the Saratov Region Government Administration No. 0302-42/18 dated January 22, 2019.

[89] Register of German settlements in Russia.

[90] Морозов 1991.

[91] *Ibid*: 86.

no exception. According to Yagubyan, an eyewitness to those events, his condition worsened with each passing day; he did not eat anything for seven days.[92] "He died at night. They did not immediately learn of his death, and the prisoners received his rations for three days. Then his body lay in the basement for 10 days, until two cartloads of corpses had accumulated. They were then taken away in carts and buried in mass graves. I know the location of his burial. There was a Gothic-style church, with warehouses nearby, and mass graves were dug nearby".[93] The archival records of the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia for the Saratov Region state that Jangir-aga died on July 5, 1943, from pellagra, a disease caused by prolonged malnutrition.[94] As Zemskov notes, the highest death rate in the camps occurred in 1942–1943. During this time, 661,000 prisoners died, a consequence of significant reductions in food rations due to the extreme military situation.[95]

The verdict in this criminal case was the latest in a series of politically motivated repressions against Yezidis at this stage. Although politically motivated arrests continued throughout the country, even after the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War in 1941, their number had significantly decreased compared to previous years.

Third Stage of the Repression

Beginning with the Great Patriotic War, the primary form of mass repression became the deportation of "unreliable" peoples to remote areas of the country. In total, 61 nationalities were deported during the war.[96]

In 1944, while fierce fighting with Nazi Germany continued, Muslim Kurds from the Transcaucasian republics, along with Turks and Hemshin people, were deported en masse to Central Asia and Kazakhstan. According to Doctor of Historical Sciences Bugai, the deportation of these national minorities was due to a combination of internal factors and international factors.[97] He notes that Turkey could have allied with Germany, threateningly amassing 28–30 divisions near the Soviet border. Stalin was concerned about the sentiments of the Muslim border population, which, according to NKVD archival documents, could allegedly side with Turkey in the current situation.[98] A certain role was also played by the fact that in 1942, during the Nazi advance toward

[92] NAA, F.1191, Op.14, D.879, L.75.

[93] *Ibid.*

[94] Response to the request from the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia for the Saratov Region No. 18/7-11 dated 01/09/2019, L.3.

[95] Земсков 2012: 83.

[96] State Archives of the Russian Federation, F.A-321, Op.2, D.721, L.85.

[97] Cf. Бугай 2002: 160.

[98] Cf. *Ibid.*

the Caucasus, the Germans included Kurds in the North Caucasian Legion, which was part of the 162nd Infantry Division under the command of Oskar Niedermayer, who had extensive experience working among the Kurds.[99] All of this ultimately laid the foundation for the third stage of repression. As part of these deportations, the Yezidis of Batumi were also targeted and classified as Kurds. Precise data on the number of Yezidis deported during this period is lacking. The only source that allows us to estimate the number of Yezidis in Batumi is the 1926 USSR census, which counted Yezidis and Kurds separately. According to it, 54 Yezidis lived in the Adjaristan ASSR.[100] All of them were urban residents. Taking into account natural growth, it can be assumed that by 1944 their number in Batumi could easily have exceeded 100 people.

Traditionally, Kurds constituted one of the largest ethnic minorities in this region of the Georgian SSR. According to the same 1926 USSR census, in Adjaristan, after Georgians, Armenians, Russians, and Greeks, the Kurds numbered 3,295.[101] Therefore, it is not surprising that the Yezidis here were classified as Kurds and subjected to deportation, and the authorities showed little interest in addressing the religious differences between them. In this regard, the following fact should be noted: in the case files of previously repressed Yezidis from Georgia or Armenia, the nationality column always listed "Yezidi" or "Kurd-Yezidi", but in the case of the Yezidis of Adjaristan, only "Kurd" was indicated. For example, in the case of Amirov Bondo, a member of the Yezidi clergy from Batumi convicted of counterrevolutionary activities in 1938, listed his nationality as "Kurd".[102] A similar situation existed with other Batumi Yezidis. Information about some of them is stored in the archives of the Spiritual Council of the Yezidis in Georgia. This archive also contains information about the 1944 repressions against Batumi Yezidis, from which one can infer the age and gender composition of those deported. A distinctive feature of this period was that entire Yezidi families were deported. The archives contain dozens of documents attesting to the expulsion of women and children who could not pose any danger to the state. Thus, in the certificate of rehabilitation of Daloyan Khazan, issued by the Prosecutor General's Office of Kyrgyzstan in 1999, it is stated that "from 1944 to March 13, 1947, she was registered in a special settlement in the Budenovsky district of the Talas region of the Kyrgyz SSR, as a person of Yezidi nationality".[103]

[99] Cf. Жигалина 2010: 338.

[100] All-Union Population Census of 1926. National composition of the population by region of the republics of the USSR.

[101] *Ibid*.

[102] Сталинские списки из Грузии – Открытый список: https://ru.openlist.wiki Амиров_Бондо_Авдоевич_(1900)

[103] ASCYG, folder 4, L.5.

It is worth noting that news of the deportation of the Yezidis from Batumi quickly spread among their relatives living in Tbilisi. Eyewitness accounts of those events indicate that the Yezidis in Tbilisi were frightened; most of them packed their belongings and waited for the authorities to come for them. Rumors circulated that the authorities would deport them to Karayazi, a district on the Georgian-Azerbaijani border.[104] However, these rumors were later unfounded, and the deportation bypassed the Yezidis in Tbilisi.

Conclusion

A common feature of that era, which was also characteristic of Western countries, was the "trend towards cruelty". Camps, repressions, and deportations became tools in the hands of ruling elites to eliminate their competitors. Many Western countries had their own camps where many people died. The United States, which is often considered the epitome of democracy, actively used repressions against its own national minorities. The deportation of Japanese Americans is a notable example. In turn, the German Nazi camps, which became camps of targeted extermination, were nothing more than an extension of the English camps for the Boers in South Africa and the Austrian camps of World War I for the Slavs. In comparison, the Soviet camps fit into the traditional penitentiary system of the Modern era. Thus, like most peoples of the USSR, the Yezidis found themselves under attack by the state's repressive machinery during the Stalin period. The persecution of them, in general, fit within the context of the general repressions taking place in the country during that period. However, the repressions against the Yezidis, compared to those in central Russia, were less severe and targeted primarily members of the beg class and the clergy, who sought to maintain their influence over the Yezidi community. The authorities sought to break the Yezidis' isolation and integrate them into Soviet society, a move resisted by the begs and clergy, who saw it as a threat to the existence of the Yezidi community. Although the repressions of the 1920s and 1930s decapitated the Yezidis and weakened the influence of the tribal nobility, they did not lead to the destruction of their social structure, which remains in place to this day. As a result of the repressions, the Yezidis' isolation was broken, accelerating their integration into Soviet society. This is how national policy was built in the USSR, where state laws and Soviet values gradually supplanted ethnic traditions.

[104] ASCYG, folder 5, video 2.

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რუსტამ რზგოიანი

ეზიდური მოსახლეობის რეპრესიები საქართველოსა და სომხეთის საბჭოთა სოციალოსტურ რესპუბლიკებში 1930–1940 წლებში

აბსტრაქტი:

ეს სტატია იკვლევს საბჭოთა ეზიდების რეპრესიებს სტალინის პერიოდში და აანალიზებს სახელმწიფო პოლიტიკას ამ უმცირესობის მიმართ. ყველა საბჭოთა მოქალაქის მსგავსად, ამ პერიოდში, ეზიდებსაც შეეხოთ რეპრესიები და დეპორტაცია. თუმცა, ცენტრალურ რუსეთთან შედარებით, მათ მიმართ დევნა ნაკლებად მკაცრი იყო და მასობრივ ხასიათს არ ატარებდა. მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ 1920-იანი და 1930-იანი წლების რეპრესიებმა ეზიდების რელიგიური და საერო ლიდერების გავლენა შეასუსტა, ამას მათი სოციალური სტრუქტურის განადგურება არ გამოუწვევია – ის დღემდე შემორჩა. რეპრესიების შედეგად ეზიდების იზოლაცია დაირღვა, რამაც დააჩქარა მათი საბჭოთა საზოგადოებაში ინტეგრაცია.

საკვანძო სიტყვები:

იეზიდები, ეზიდები, ქურთები, სსრკ; სომხეთი, საქართველო, რეპრესიები, ეზიდი სასულიერო პირები, დეპორტაცია.

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Rustam Rzgoyan

Binpêkirina (Repression) Êzîdiyan li SSR-yên Ermenistan û Gurcistanê di salên 1930–1940 de

Kurte:

Ev gotar represyona êzdiyên sovyêtî lêkolîn dike di dema Stalînda û polîtîka dewletê ya li himber vê kêmanîyê analîz dike. Wekî hemû miletên Sovyêtê, êzdî jî di vê demêda tûşî rêprêsyon û koçberbûnê bûn. Lê, ne wek li herêmên naverast yên Rûsyayêda, li dijî êzdiyan tundî kêm bû û ne bi teherekî berfreh bû. Her çende prosêsa rêprêsyonan salên 1920 û 1930 ser êzdiyan bû sebebê serîbirîn civakê û bandora rêberên eşîretan sist kir, lê strûktûra civakî ya wan bi tevahî nehate hilweşandin; strûktûreke ku heta îro jî maye. Di encamê wê prosesêda, bi rêprêsyona îzolasyona êzdiyan hate şikênandin û pêvajoya yekgirtin û întegrasyona wan di civaka Sovyetîda bileztir bû.

Peyvên sereke:

Êzdî; kurd; Yekîtiya Sovyetê (USSR); Ermenistan; Gurcistan; binpêkirin (repressions); ruhaniya êzdiyan; koçberkirin.