

Allanijazov, Turganbek; Taukenov, Amangel'dy: *Poslednij rubež zaščitnikov nomadizma. Istorija vooružennych vystuplenij i povstančeskich dviženij v Kazachstane (1929-1931gg.)*. Almaty: OST-XXI-vek 2009. ISBN: 9965-659-77-X; 457 pp.

Rezensiert von: Niccolò Pianciola, Università di Trento

During the Stalinist „revolution from above“, Kazakhstan was one of the regions where violence in the countryside against state and Party representatives was most widespread. By 1929 a number of sometimes well-organized but poorly-armed insurgencies, mostly local in scale, had formed. These then expanded during the first period of collectivization in the late winter and spring of 1930; they resumed during the grain-collection campaigns in autumn 1930, and the harsh livestock requisitions of 1931. If we include some minor episodes in 1932, the armed insurrections in Kazakhstan from 1929 to 1932 numbered 25 (only two, involving more than 4,000 insurgents, were officially labeled „counter-revolutionary uprisings“), while – according to OGPU files – there were 411 non-armed actions (p. 172).

The immediate cause of the revolts varied and overlapped, from the arrests of people in authority, to anti-religious policy, collectivization, and the grain- and livestock-requisitioning campaigns. Although the study focuses on the Kazakhs, the book also deals with episodes of insurgency involving Slavic peasants (especially in Northeastern Kazakhstan). The authors frame events within the dubious dichotomy of modernity vs. tradition (the insurgent movement was „peasant resistance to the politics of forced modernization of the traditional Kazakh society“, p. 9), and refuse to approach their topic from the point of view of the post-Soviet national narrative, rejecting explicitly the characterization of this wave of insurgencies as a unitary political movement of „national liberation“ (p. 180).

Turganbek Allanijazov is among the most distinguished historians of collectivization and rural resistance in the 1920s and 1930s in Kazakhstan. More than anyone else he has

made use of the documentation produced at the lowest level of the Soviet administrative pyramid. He has published a number of studies devoted to single episodes of revolt and repression in the steppe during the „Great Turn“, some of them carried out with the help of the young scholar Amangel'dy Taukenov. This work is, in some respects, the outcome of these geographically and chronologically more limited studies.¹

Authors assessing this crucial period of Soviet history have had to rely mostly on documentation produced by the Party and OGPU: insurgents' shared discourses and interpretative frameworks, as well as their hopes and aims, come to us distorted by the mindset and frames of the administrative and military institutions which fought them, and – in the process – seized, collected, selected and translated documents produced by the rebels. They also interrogated imprisoned peasants and herders, recording biased testimonies of the repressed. While the Soviet police archives, produced during the final battles against the peasantry, are qualitatively different from the pre-formulated NKVD interrogatories of 1937-38, it is nonetheless a very problematic source. Interpretative problems of this kind are, of course, a *locus classicus* of historical studies of transformative policies involving rural populations that were implemented by states or other institutions.

A critique of police and administrative documentation is wanting in the book, and the authors very often seem to uncritically accept concepts and categories found in their sources, as when they describe the „social characteristics“ of the groups of insurgents. They assert that insurgency waves in Kazakhstan started as a struggle of the higher social strata in Kazakh communities („baj [rich

¹The most important, all published with Almaty's „Fond XXI vek“, unfortunately with print runs ranging from 100 to 500 copies, are Turganbek Allanijazov, *Kontrevoljucija v Kazachstane. Čimbajskij variant*, Almaty 1999; Turganbek Allanijazov / Amangel'dy Taukenov, *Iz istorii antisovetskich vooruženich vystuplenij v Central'nom Kazachstane v 1930-1931 gg.*, Almaty 2000; Turganbek Allanijazov, *Kollektivizacija po-karsakpajskij. 1928-1933 gg.*, Almaty 2001; Turganbek Allanijazov, *Krasnye Karakumy. Očerki istorii bor'by s antisovetskim povstančeskim dviženiem v Turkmenistane. mart-oktjabr' 1931 goda*, Almaty 2006.

herders] and religious clergy“ (p. 10), whose aim was to „preserve their socio-political and economic positions“ (p. 10) and only afterwards did they expand to „middle and poor peasants“ because of the violence of Soviet policies.

The strength of the research lies elsewhere: in the vastness of the material used (this work is one of the few on the topic to be based on documentation originating from all Soviet administrative levels, from Moscow Party archives to district files), and the detailed accounts both of episodes of insurgency and of the multi-faceted nature of repressive measures. Mastering military, Party and police sources allow the authors to give an interesting assessment of the character of the early Stalinist state in Kazakhstan, when the only institution which controlled the flow of information was the OGPU. At crucial moments the Kazakhstan Party leadership received information about events on the ground only from the political police, while the lower Party apparatus often dissolved and backed the rebels (p. 226). However, far from having tight control over the territory, Kazakhstan's OGPU was severely undermanned, and often requested Red Army intervention, at the same time arming „trustworthy elements“ in the region's tiny (and predominantly Slavic) urban population (pp. 272-273). The use of the Kazakh cavalry division, frantically dispatched from one corner to another of immense Kazakhstan, had an explicit political aim: Party documents underscored the fact that the military presence of people „of Slavic nationality“ had a bad influence on the Kazakhs' „political mood“ (p. 351). But, then, as Kazakhstan was not a region where large garrisons of Red Army troops were present, soldiers were sent from Tashkent, or from the Volga region. The overall picture is one of state infrastructural weakness, a state that nonetheless was able to concentrate its resources in lethal expeditions aimed at requisitioning its subjects' wealth, and repressing groups that resisted.

On the base of prisoner interrogations and of OGPU operative correspondence, the authors have managed to give an appraisal of the insurgents' degree of organization and, to a certain extent, of their aims. The authors

point out that often the OGPU's repressive detachments did not distinguish between armed insurgents and groups of Kazakhs moving with their livestock in order to escape requisitioning and subsequent starvation (these movements were called „otkočevki“, or, roughly, „nomadic transfers“). The political police coined the term „armed nomadic transfers“ („vooruzhennye otkočevki“), thus creating a hybrid category and grouping people fleeing starvation with rebels, whereas only a small minority of these groups of hundreds or thousands of Kazakhs were actually carrying obsolete firearms.

We can discern in these revolts the patterns other historians described with reference to anti-Soviet armed resistance. Kazakhstan was a region where, using OGPU-NKVD categories, „customary banditism“ was rooted, and the OGPU looked for connections with anti-Soviet political groups abroad and foreign governments, in order to make the case for „political banditism“.² Insurgents' violence against representatives of the state was often extreme and „demonstrative“ and involved mutilation and torture. The leadership of the different revolts was diverse: we have little information about some of the leaders, but know that others had occupied low-level administrative positions under the Tsarist regime. In the Slavic-inhabited regions, the background of the leaders of the revolts was similar to the experience of those active in the Russian countryside: peasants transformed by the mobilization during the Great War, who entered politics in the soldiers' committees of 1917, then became Bolsheviks or Social-Revolutionaries, and subsequently fought in the Red Army during the Civil War – as in the case of the leader of the Ust'-Kamenogorsk district uprising in February 1930 (pp. 321-322). It was perhaps not by chance that this revolt was one of the few to express explicit political demands (the formation of an „independent Russian state of Siberia“, p. 192). The idea of forming independent polities („Kazakh khanates“) was also expressed in four of the major Kazakh revolts. These watchwords may have been aimed at attaching a legitimizing political la-

² Nicolas Werth, *La terreur et le désarroi. Staline et son système*, Paris 2007, pp. 140-142.

bel to the counter-power of the insurgents in circumscribed areas, rather than expressing a true political project defined in geographical terms and capable of coalescing into a broad-based anti-Soviet movement.

It is impossible to list here all the intriguing information that the authors have been able to extract from the documentation. Their book is an extremely detailed military history of the peasant war in Kazakhstan during collectivization and a useful contribution to the history of early Stalinism in Central Asia. On the basis of Allanijazov's and Taukenov's findings, future approaches would do well to focus on the medium term (for instance, linking biographically the uprisings of 1929-31 to the 1916 revolt in specific areas, and assessing the role of the great famine of 1931-33 in the continuum of violence which started in 1929) and could cross-reference police and administrative archives with the new social history of the steppe based on Islamic sources.

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