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## "The church is taken away by force": letters of complaint the authorities from the believers in Kazakhstan (1920-1940s)

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to one of the forms of interaction between believers of Kazakhstan and the authorities, namely, letters from citizens to the state authorities. These letters of complaint against the actions of local officials led to the emergence of a set of documents that were deposited in archival fund. They became the main documentary base of the research. The concept of cultural adaptation of ethnic groups was used as a methodology to characterise the mechanisms of adaptation of believers to the requirements of the anti-religious policy of the Soviet state. The systemic analysis of the documents showed the informational potential of believers' letters as a narrative base that allows reconstruction the history of relations between the Soviet state and religious organisations. The letters of believers' form ideas about religious discourse and the spiritual state of society. They reflect the religious feelings of Soviet people and characterise the level of religiosity of society. They express the reaction of ordinary citizens to the confessional policy of the state and the methods of its implementation. The informative content of letters, as sources for research into the methods of religious legislation, is often more comprehensive than the content of official documents and reports.

**Key words:** archival sources; Orthodoxy; Soviet power; letters; religious communities; power structures; arbitrary rule; fight against religion.

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## **Introduction**

The years of 1920s and 1940s are known as the years of Soviet political and economic modernization, a time of radical changes in the socio-cultural and spiritual life of society in the modern history of Kazakhstan. A widespread practice of interaction between the population and the authorities during these years were letters of complaint and letters of appeal from ordinary citizens to higher authorities. The content of the letters and correspondence materials were deposited in archival funds and formed a complex of documents that reflect the forms of interaction between the power structures of the Soviet state and the population. The value of such documents is that they are informal, written by ordinary citizens, and therefore reflect the worldview and views of broad sections of the population on what is happening in society. They record the feedback and reaction of ordinary people to the domestic policy pursued by the state.

A separate group in the cycle of documents of this kind consists of letters from believers to state and party bodies that were responsible for religious policy. The content of the letters reflects the history of the development of state-confessional relations and the forms of interaction between government structures and religious organizations of different faiths. Religious people often wrote letters to party and government structures, since this was practically the only form of communication permitted by the authorities, demonstrating the formal loyalty of the Soviet regime towards religion. In their letters, ordinary citizens expressed protest against the actions of local officials and mistrust of the bureaucratic structures of power. They expressed the response of ordinary citizens to the religious policy of the state and the methods of its implementation.

A textual analysis of the letters of believers and the materials of their correspondence with Soviet authorities allows us to solve objectively the following several research problems: how did believers of different faiths react to the tightening of religious legislation and the changes taking place in society; how religious communities perceived the strengthening of administrative control and pressure from the Soviet authorities; how they adapted to new political realities and how they survived under administrative pressure; what were the limits of criticism of the actions of its local representatives permitted by the authorities and why no punitive measures were applied to officials who “exceeded the mark”; how did the highest authorities respond to citizens’ appeals and why local Soviet government agents ignored “instructions from above” and continued to violate religious legislation.

The relevance of the proposed article is due to the poor study of the problem in its regional aspect, based on materials from Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, in the 20-40s of the 20th century, representatives of different faiths (Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics, and etc.) lived on the territory of the republic. From the second half of the 1920s, anti-religious propaganda was intensified in the republic, as in the country as a whole, developing into a brutal fight against religious organizations, during which religious sites were closed and expropriated: mosques, churches, temples, and prayer houses. The state's anti-religious policy provoked resistance from religious people, and their discontent was expressed in numerous letters of complaint and letters of appeal to party and Soviet state bodies.

## **Methodology, methods and materials**

The letters of believers from Kazakhstan, deposited in the funds of the Central State Archives (CSA) and in the regional archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan, were used as basic sources. The Central State Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Fund 789 contains materials on the activities of the Central Permanent Commission for the Consideration of Religious Issues. The members of the commission dealt with issues of interaction with religious organizations and consideration of complaints. In addition to various instructions and protocol decisions, the foundation's documents contain a large portion of letters of complaint, letters of petition from believers received from different regions of the republic, as well as texts of the commission's official responses to incoming correspondence.

The texts of the letters and correspondence materials were also deposited in the regional archives of Kazakhstan, in particular, in the funds of city, district and provincial executive bodies, since the hierarchical authority's structures were a mandatory stage in the appeal process of complainants. Before writing complaints to republican and union authorities, the believers tried to resolve contentious issues at the local and regional levels.

In methodological terms, the study is based on the concept of cultural adaptation outlined in the works of J. Stewart, E.S. Markaryan, and S.V. Lurye (Markaryan, 1983; Lur'e, 1997; Stewart, 1955). This conceptual paradigm helps to identify and explain the adaptive capabilities of ethnic groups in the context of transforming socio-economic and political systems of society. In relation to our research, the theory of cultural adaptation helps to study and understand the problems of survival and functioning of religious communities under conditions of severe administrative pressure from the state and restrictions on religious worldview in the 20-40s of the 20th century. The appeal of the believers with letters to the authorities can be estimated as their desire and attempts to adapt to the demands of the anti-religious regime of the Soviet state.

From the methodological points of view, the scientific developments of researchers working with ego-documents have proven to be very useful for us, among which "letters to the authorities" can be considered as informative sources, the cognitive and denotative potential of which for studying state-religious relations is quite large. Depending on whether the letter is the result of a collective appeal by a group of people or it is written only by one author, letters to government agencies accumulate social practices not only of the specific person but also of a large number of people united by a spiritual community and opposing the state policy of mass atheization of the population. Our study used both collective and individual appeals from the religious people.

## **Discussion**

In a historiographic review of the topic, mainly, it is necessary to note the works of N.N. Kozlova on social anthropology (Kozlova, 2001). For historians, the scientist's works are important in terms of defining methodological approaches to studying ego-documents. In the author's interpretation, the study of the life experience and worldview of Soviet people, the appeal to "human testimony" as a source no less valuable than, for example, official statistics, allows us to reach a new level of understanding of scientific responsibility and objectivity (Arutiunyan, 2019: 176).

In the works of Yu. Zaretsky the problems of methodology and historiography of the study of ego-documents are considered based on the analysis of the experience of the foreign scientists. The author expresses his opinions on the prospects of studying Soviet subjectivity using ego-documents as the main sources. The methodology for studying such documents analyzed by the author requires “not only thorough theoretical reflection, but also dipping into the social context surrounding each of the texts” (Zaretskii, 2021: 197-198).

It is worth noting the unique work of the famous Kazakhstani scientist Zhanbosinova A.S. that was published in the format of a monograph in the documents (Zhanbosinova, 2020). The second section of the monograph is called “Ego-documents of the history of political terror in Kazakhstan” and is devoted to the problem of studying ego-documents as historical sources. The author underlines that the scientific value of the work not only in its novelty and formulation of problematic topics of historical science of Kazakhstan, but also in completely new methodological approaches “History from below” applied in the work. Highly appreciating the monographic study, Professor S. Kovalskaya writes in her review: “These sources (referring to ego-documents) have a number of features; they must be worked with extremely carefully and meticulously. Like any other document of personal origin, they contain a large number of subjective elements that must be taken into account; the document must be compared with others, etc” (Kovalskaya, 2024: 158).

The following authors Zhanbosinova, Zhandybaeva S.S., Kazbekova A.T. reveal the cognitive potential of letters as ego-documents for studying the history of political repressions in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstani scientists interpret the texts of the letters as a reconstruction of the socio-cultural memory of the past, as a micro-history of the “Great Era” in the perception and understanding of the “little man” (Zhanbosinova, 2021: 797).

In the study of the authors Alpyspaeva G.A. and Zhuman G. letters of believers to the power structures of the Soviet state are characterized as the most informative sources on the history of denominations. They reflect the historical memory of the spiritual life of the people under conditions of restriction of freedom of conscience (Alpyspaeva, Zhuman, 2022: 7-24). The problem of preserving historical memory in the system of state-confessional relations was reflected in the work of R. Garipova (Garipova, 2020: 36-48).

Researcher A.I. Savin analyzes the role of letters to the authorities in the context of political changes during the Stalinist regime in the 1930s. The author concludes, “the letters to the authorities played a significant role in the process of political co-adaptation of the authorities and the people, but the degree of this co-adaptation varied significantly depending on the extent to which the interests of the people coincided with the aspirations of the authorities...” (Savin, 2016: 133).

In the works of A.N. Beliakova, letters from the believers to the authorities are considered through the prism of social history, as an integral part of social protest, as a channel of communication between the population and the authorities in the absence of other legal forms of expression of protest and dissatisfaction with the religious policy of the state (Beliakova, 2019: 207).

In general, it can be noted that scientists are showing growing interest in this little-studied topic. Continuing the topic about the forms of interaction between the believers and the

authorities, the authors of the article examine the problem from the regional perspective, using materials from Kazakhstani archives.

## **Results**

The letters of complaint began to arrive a masse to the Republican Party and State bodies in the late 1920s in connection with the beginning of a campaign to confiscate religious objects from religious communities. In September 1931, the Central Standing Commission for the Consideration of Religious Issues was established under the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh ASSR (Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, (hereinafter – CSA RK). 789. Op. 1. D.11. L. 4). The commission immediately began its work, since the Kazakh Central Executive Committee received numerous complaints from the believers about local officials violating religious legislation. However, the functions of the commission were not limited to this. The members of the commission were engaged in sending out guidelines and instructions to local executive bodies on the issues of the "correct" implementation of the current legislation "On Religious Associations". They also dealt with issues of creating regional commissions on religious issues under the district executive committees. Local authorities were required to coordinate with the commission all religious events related to the cult and activities of religious communities.

The content of the letters gives grounds to state the numerous "excesses" committed by Soviet officials at the local level in the course of implementing anti-religious policies. As an example, we will cite the content of letters of complaint from the believers in the city of Akmola and the responses to them from employees of the Central Standing Commission. In 1929, the Akmola City Council, on its own initiative, decided to confiscate and transfer two religious' sites to cultural and educational institutions: the city mosque and the Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Cathedral. Two years later, the city council makes another decision – to confiscate the second mosque and the Constantine and Yelenin Orthodox Church. The city authorities cited the non-payment of taxes by the communities as the reason for closing the religious sites. In the protocol No. 8 of the meeting of the Presidium of the Akmola District Executive Committee on March 3, 1931, there was a record: "It was listened to: a petition for a church from a group of the believers in the city of Akmola. It was decided: in the view of the fact that the group of the believers has a debt on payments since last year in the amount of about 3,000 rubles, to this day no measures have been taken to eliminate the debt thereby violating the rules for collecting taxes and fees, and therefore the decision of the City Council to close the church is to be approved, in the event of non-payment by the group of the believers, the issue of using the church for cultural purposes is raised" (CSA RK. F. 789. Op. 1. D. 204. L.4).

The decision caused discontent and desperate resistance among believers, and the Central Commission began to receive complaints from Muslim and Orthodox communities in the city. On February 17, 1931, the Council of Muslim Believers of Akmola addressed the Presidium of the Kazakh Central Executive Committee with a letter containing the following content: "The Akmola administrative department sealed the second mosque in accordance with the resolution of the city council, citing late payment of fees and untimely re-registration. All fees

were paid annually and on time upon receipt of notification. Taxation of 1930/1931 3500 rubles were paid before the deadline. There were no arrears; supporting documents are available, all necessary ones. The re-registration materials were submitted to the administrative department in a timely manner on December 24, 1930. Believers did not participate in the resolution to close the mosque, the regional executive committee refused to issue an extract of the resolution.... 10 thousand believers of the Muslim community considered the action of the local authorities to be illegal. We ask you to be kind enough to register the opening of the mosque by urgent order based on these materials. Council members Khusainov, Burnashev. Akmolinsk, Kazakhskaya Street, 24" (CSA RK. F. 789. Op. 1. D. 204. L. 1-2).

At the beginning of March 1931, the community of Orthodox believers in the city of Akmola addressed the Presidium of the Kazakh Central Executive Committee and the prosecutor of the republic with a letter: "The city council closed the last church in Akmola, citing alleged non-payment of taxes as the reason.... We paid our taxes on time, on February 23, we were presented with various taxes for immediate payment for four thousand, and on the 28th, and the temple was sealed. We ask for orders to open the church, to give believers not only of the city, but also of the entire almost former district the opportunity to fulfill freely their religious needs. Church Council of the Akmola Cossack Church" (CSA RK. F. 789. Op. 1. D. 204. L. 16-16 reverse side).

In response to letters of complaint from the believers, a telegram from the Secretariat of the KCEC was sent to the Akmola District Executive Committee on March 11, 1931, demanding that the decision of the city council be overturned: "Immediately open the Cossack church in Akmola, without our sanction performance is strictly prohibited, telegraph. Secretariat of the KCEC, Baiganin. Alma-Ata. Government House" (CSA RK. F. 789. Op. 1. D. 204. L. 15). However, local authorities ignored the instructions, prompting believers to complain repeatedly. On March 22, 1931, the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh ASSR received a telegram from the Church Council of the Cossack Church: "In view of the upcoming great Christian holidays, for the third time we ask for orders to open the Akmola church, the only one not only in the region, but also in almost the entire district. We ask for an answer. Church Council of the Cossack Church" (CSA RK. F. 789. Op. 1. D. 204. L. 13). On March 25, 1931 the following order was sent to the Akmola District Executive Committee by the head of the Secretariat of the Presidium of the KCEC, Baiganin: "In forwarding the statement of the religious association of the Constantine and Yelenin Church, the Secretariat of the Presidium of the Kazakh Central Executive Committee requests: 1. Immediately say the word about the opening of the said church as illegally sealed and do not create obstacles to the satisfaction of the religious rites of the believing population. 2. Urgently review the issue of taxing the church with the taxes and fees established by law and give instructions on this matter to the Akmola City Council in accordance with the directives of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, clause 20/V1. 1930. Head of the Secretariat of the Presidium of the Kazakh Central Executive Committee Baiganin" (CSA RK. F. 789. Op. 1. D. 204. L. 17).

The religious people often filed complaints with the highest religious structures, in particular the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Churches of the USSR, relying on its authority and hoping to influence the authorities through the Synod. A letter of complaint of this kind was received from the Akmola Diocesan Administration on April 7, 1928, signed by the chairperson of the

Archbishop of the Center. It reported on the illegal actions of local authorities against the religious believers: "In the Akmola diocese, events have recently taken place that shake the foundations of church and parish life. Local village authorities have sealed a number of churches and services have been interrupted there. In some places, the village council has categorically forbidden priests to give sermons and speeches without any reason. In other places (the village Zhuravlevka in the Akmola district), the churchwarden was ordered to remove church utensils and icons from the church by the village authorities. For disobedience, the churchwarden was arrested and, as punishment, forced to stand on the open church porch, where he stood all day and all night in the severe Siberian frost, with a strong wind on February 20-21. In some places, it was announced to believers that if they were members of religious communities, a special tax would be imposed on them for this. In the village Poltavka in the Atbasar district, during the archbishop's passage, the latter, who had permission from the administrative department in his hands, was forbidden by the chairperson of the village council to serve the liturgy under threat of arrest. Flaunting his authority, chairperson of Poltavka did not even take into account the document presented from the Administrative Department. "Often, local authorities opened and detained correspondence from Church Councils for months, and sometimes returned packages with their own inscriptions" (State Archive of the North-Kazakhstan region (hereinafter-SANKR). F. 55. Op.1. D. 622. L. 269).

In the struggle for temples and mosques, believers showed persistence and tenacity. Not finding real support from officials of republican bodies, believers turned to union bodies. Thus, the Orthodox believers of Akmola, fighting to preserve the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral for the community, addressed a letter of complaint to the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. We will cite the text of the official response from the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee to the letter from the Orthodox Christians of Akmola: "To the Commission for the Review of Religious Issues under the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh ASSR. To the Prosecutor of the Republic, the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh ASSR and the Chairman. Extract from the minutes No. 6 of the meeting of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets on April 30, 1931. It was listened to: On the cancellation of the resolution of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh ASSR of March 20, 1930 on the liquidation of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and the mosque of the first parish in the city of Akmola. It was resolved: to cancel the resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh ASSR. To leave the cathedral and mosque for the use of believers" (CSA RK. F. 789. Op. 1. D. 204. L. 35).

The letters testify eloquently to the high level of mistrust of ordinary citizens towards local bureaucratic structures. It is precisely this circumstance, in our opinion, that prompted believers to turn directly to the country's top leadership, to appeal and seek support in international organizations. Thus, the community of 150 Orthodox believers from the village Peschanoe in the Pavlodar district sent a telegram to I. Stalin, in which they asked for protection: "The Church is being forcibly taken away" (State Archive of Pavlodar Region (hereinafter - SAPR). F. 380. Op. 1. D. 5. L. 107). The Orthodox believers from Akmola, having failed to achieve a positive solution to their problem after appealing to the republican and union authorities, wrote a letter to the Second International (State Archive of Astana (hereinafter - SAA). F. 32. Op. 1. D. 62. L.

287). Thanks to their persistence, believers sometimes managed to retain religious objects and protect them from destruction.

Letters written by believers to the authorities, as a type of source, in some cases can be more valuable in terms of the content and nature of the information they convey than the official records of central and local government agencies, whose responsibilities included the tasks of religious policy. For example, the data on the number of believers reported in letters is more objective than the statistics in official reports of officials. Local Soviet agents often deliberately understated the actual number of believers in order to obtain permission from higher authorities to close religious sites. The informative content of letters as documentary sources for the purposes of historical research into the methods of implementing Soviet religious legislation, often richer than the content of official documents and reports, emanating from the authorities, since believers in letters reported specific facts about the actions of officials, details from their spiritual practice and expressed their attitude to what was happening.

In their letters, believers describe in detail the arbitrary actions of the authorities towards believers and clergy. From the content of the letters, one can conclude what methods of psychological pressure, deception and intimidation of believers local officials used in order to achieve the administrative closure of religious sites. The authorities not only understated the actual number of participants in meetings where decisions on religious objects were made, but also threatened citizens with economic and political repression, arrests of leaders of religious cults and individuals, actively protesting against the transfer of churches to local authorities. The believers in the village of Milovidovo in the Leninskaya volost of the Petropavlovsk district complained that at a general meeting of citizens, the chairperson of the village council declared: "Whoever votes against the transfer of the prayer house to a cultural institution will be subjected to a high self-tax rate". As a result, out of 140 people, only 36 voted for the confiscation of the prayer house, the rest refrained. In this same village, the local council used threats and even arrest against individuals who attempted to file a petition with the relevant authorities regarding the village council's improper seizure of a prayer house (SANKR. F.55. Op.1. D. 622. L. 268). The believers write: "As a result of such "moral" influences on the believers, the prayer house is currently under the jurisdiction of the village council, the above mentioned facts in the conditions of our province are far from an isolated case of an exceptional nature; they are observed not only in the village of Milovidovskoye, but also in a number of others" (SANKR. F.55. Op.1. D. 622. L. 269).

The fight against religion declared by the Soviet government was understood by local officials in a simplified, distorted way and often took the form of offensive attacks against clergy and believers, mockery of their religious feelings. Thus, the parish council of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Pavlodar appealed to the chairperson of the Pavlodar executive committee with a complaint about the hooligan actions of children and young people against the clergy: "Komsomol organization members and pioneers from children's shelters located near the cathedral greet and see off the clergy on the street with offensive remarks and songs, and knock out windows in churches with bricks" (SAPR. F. 12. Op. 1. D. 155. L. 25). One of the local government representatives entered the church during the service and interrupted the priest's sermon with the words "Lie, lie, father" (SAPR. F. 12. Op. 1. D. 155. L. 14). Laymen of the Pokrovskaya Church



in the Krasnoarmeyskaya volost of the Kokchetav district of the Akmola province complained about the actions of young Komsomol members who "arbitrarily broke down the fence and occupied the church building" used by the religious community (State Archive of Akmola region (hereinafter -SAAR). F. 61. Op. 1. D. 8. L. 62). The believers regarded this as an interference in their spiritual life and a violation of the provisions of the Decree of 1918.

The practice of contacting government agencies with letters of complaint and petitions to leave religious sites for believers has become widespread. The Standing Committee and the Kazakh Central Executive Committee received letters from different regions of the republic. According to official data, 198 applications were received and reviewed in 1933, including: from the religious believers of the West Kazakhstan region – 10, Karaganda – 77, Aktobe – 19, East Kazakhstan – 43, Almaty – 26, South Kazakhstan – 23 (CSA RK. F. 789. Op.1. D.26. L.8).

A discursive analysis of letters from the religious believers to state and party organs allows us to identify several concepts in the relationship between the Soviet state and religious communities. From the content of the letters in which the believers refer to articles of the laws on freedom of conscience, it can be concluded that they knew Soviet religious legislation well and tried not to violate it, avoiding conflicts with the authorities. In their letters, they appeal to the current legislative norms and points of resolutions of party bodies. Here is an excerpt from the letter of the believers in the village of Poltavskoye, Bulaevsky district, to the Kazakh Central Executive Committee dated March 26, 1930: "In our village of Poltavskoye, the church was closed administratively according to the protocol of the council committee on November 5, 1929. We consider the closure of our church without the consent of the population and the group of the believers to be wrong for the following reasons. 1 According to the Decree on the Separation of Church and State and the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) instructions, all churches are subjected to transfer for permanent use to groups of the religious people. There for, a group of believers according to the agreement must transfer our church to us and this Agreement has not been terminated by us, and therefore our church is not subject to closure and confiscation. 2. According to the resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks, published in the newspaper "Smychka" on March 15, 1930, No. 62, paragraph 7, it is forbidden to close churches administratively and our church is closed administratively, which contradicts the existing law. Based on the above mentioned, we ask you to issue an order to return the church that was wrongly seized to us and to allow us to fulfill freely our religious needs". Similar letters of complaint were received by the Kazakh Central Executive Committee from the group of believers in the church in the village of Voznesenskoye, as well as from parishioners of the Fortress Church in the city of Petropavlovsk (SANKR. F. 2376. Op.1. D. 2. L. 30, 32, 41).

The Semipalatinsk District Executive Committee received a complaint from the community of believers in the village of Novo-Odesskoye, Ust-Kamenogorsk District, dated September 5, 1927, regarding the "incorrect seizure of a prayer house for a school" in accordance with the minutes of the general meeting of citizens of the above mentioned village dated May 19, 1929. The complaint considers facts about the "improper conduct of the meeting," distortion of the minutes regarding voting, i.e., a deliberate reduction in the number of those who voted against the seizure of the house of prayer. Despite protests and statements from parishioners, "the district executive committee approved this protocol without checking the actual situation"

(Centre for Documentation of the Modern History of the East Kazakhstan Region. F. 74. Op. 1. D. 208. L. 48).

It is worth noting a characteristic feature of the letters of believers, regardless of their religious affiliation; the content of the letters and their main message were based on accusations of illegal actions against local officials. While complaining about the actions of local representatives of the Soviet authorities, believers did not directly criticize Soviet religious laws and the anti-religious values and norms imposed by the authorities. The protest expressed in the letters was directed specifically against the actions of local officials who implemented these laws, but not against the state and its policies. It is quite possible to agree with the opinion of scientists that there were certain boundaries of permissibility for criticizing government bodies, the crossing of which threatened believers with being classified as “enemies” of Soviet power (Savin, 2016: 140).

Moreover, in their letters, the religious people of all faiths position themselves as citizens loyal to the Soviet regime, striving to comply with Soviet religious legality. In almost all letters, the believers report about the timely registration of religious communities and payment of all taxes. According to the researchers, in this way, the believers “mastered the propaganda concepts of the Soviet state intended for export” (Beliakova, 2019: 209). It is possible that such a strategy on the part of the believers was designed to achieve the effectiveness of the appeal, since believers always had hope for a compromise with the Soviet government as one of the forms of adaptation to the realities of that time.

In response to complaints from the believers, senior officials, as a rule, limited themselves to formal replies and sending numerous instructions to the localities explaining the provisions of the legislation on the religious cults. In bureaucratic replies, the top leadership threatened to take “the most decisive measures to combat such phenomena, not stopping at bringing officials to trial, who allowed methods of administrative confiscation of churches, houses and mosques from religious groups and communities, without regard for any merits or official position of these workers.” However, no documents have been found in the archival funds that testify to the punishment of those who “exceeded the mark.” The highest party and government bodies “turned a blind eye” and essentially did not react to the actions of local “excessive agents”. According to the researchers, through “excesses,” the Soviet regime “purposefully sought to fulfill the objectives of the next campaign, be it grain procurement, the liquidation of churches or the destruction of the “former”. On the other hand, “going too far,” allowed the authorities to test the boundaries of what was possible in anti-religious practice without risking their own legitimacy (Savin, 2016: 135).

The texts of the letters of complaint very objectively and figuratively characterize the era of a brutal struggle against religion as a social institution and ideological system. They express the reaction of the believers to the confessional policy of the state, attempts of the believers to defend their right to freedom of conscience declared by the Soviet government, satisfying their spiritual needs and performing religious cults. Letters from the believers to the authorities can be considered as an integral part of social protest against the actions of the authorities, as signals to the authorities about dissatisfaction with the state’s religious policy. However, the representatives of the Soviet government did not often consider these signals and apriority were ignored.

The materials of the letters are valuable because they contain information about the behavior patterns of large groups of people who were not afraid, in the conditions of an irreconcilable struggle with religion, to recognize themselves as believers and defend their right to freedom

of conscience. Classified as "talking sources," letters of complaint, along with everyday political and social practices, accumulate the socio-cultural experience of Soviet people in the 1920s and 1930s. They can be considered as a kind of dialogue between the believers and the state in which each side pursued its own purposes; the authorities and their representatives in the regions consistently implemented anti-religious laws and imposed an atheistic worldview, and the believers tried to adapt to the rough conditions and realities of the Bolshevik regime.

## **Conclusion**

Letters to the authorities can be considered as a valuable and original source for studying the history of state-confessional relations. They shape our understanding of the religious discourse of the Soviet period of history and testify to the deep contradictions between the atheistic consciousness imposed by the state and the religious spirituality of society. The content of the letters reveals a crisis of trust and loyalty of the believers to the organs of Soviet power. As sources, letters to the authorities reflect objectively not only the models of collective behavior of a certain part of Soviet society but also the spiritual state of society as a whole. The believers' communities, along with bureaucratic authorities, performed as actors in the historical process of development of state and confessional relations, and their letters represent a significant fragment of the value world of ordinary citizens, since there are real people behind the text of each letter; the motives of their behavior and ideological position can be seen.

## **AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION**

**Alpyspaeva G.A.** – ideas; formulation of overarching research goals and aims; development and design of methodology; creation of models; management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution; preparation, creation and presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary including post-publication stages.

**Dzhumagalieva K.V.** – conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, evidence collection; preparation, creation and of the published work, specifically visualization; preparation, creation and presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation)

**Sametova G.S.** – conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, evidence collection; preparation, creation and of the published work.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare no relevant conflict of interests.

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### **«Шіркеу күштеп таңдалады» Қазақстан діндарларының билік құрылымдарына шағым хаттары (1920-1940 жж.)**

**Аңдатпа.** Мақала Қазақстанның сенушілерінің билікпен өзара іс – қимылының бір нысаны-азаматтардың мемлекеттік органдарға жазған хаттарына арналған. Бұл жергілікті шенеуніктердің іс-әрекеттеріне шағым хаттар мұрағат қорларында қалдырылған құжаттар кешенінің пайда болуына әкелді. Олар зерттеудің негізгі құжаттық базасына айналды. Әдіснама ретінде діндарлардың Кеңес мемлекетінің дінге қарсы саясатының талаптарына бейімделу тетіктерін

сипаттауға мүмкіндік беретін этностардың мәдени бейімделу тұжырымдамасы қолданылды. Құжаттарды жүйелі талдау Кеңес мемлекеті мен діни ұйымдар арасындағы қарым-қатынас тарихын қайта құруға мүмкіндік беретін баяндау базасы ретінде сенушілердің хаттарының ақпараттық мүмкіндіктерін көрсетті. Сенушілердің хаттары діни дискурс пен қоғамның рухани жағдайы туралы идеяларды қалыптастырады. Олар кеңес халқының діни сезімдерін бейнелейді және қоғамның діндарлық деңгейін сипаттайды. Олар қарапайым азаматтардың мемлекеттің конфессиялық саясатына, оны жүргізу әдістеріне реакциясын білдіреді. Хаттардың ақпараттық қанықтылығы, биліктің діни заңнаманы жүргізу әдістерін зерттеу көзі ретінде, көбінесе ресми құжаттар мен есептердің мазмұнына бай.

**Түйін сөздер:** мұрағат көздері; Православие; Кеңес өкіметі; хаттар; діни бірлестіктер; билік құрылымдары; ерікті басқару; дінге қарсы күрес.

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### **«Церковь насильно отбирается»: письма-жалобы верующих Казахстана во властные структуры (1920-1940-е гг.)**

**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена одной из форм взаимодействия верующих Казахстана с властью – письмам граждан в государственные органы. Данные письма-жалобы на действия местных чиновников привела к появлению комплекса документов, отложившихся в архивных фондах. Они стали основной документальной базой исследования. В качестве методологии использована концепция культурной адаптации этносов, позволяющая характеризовать механизмы адаптации верующих к требованиям антирелигиозной политики советского государства. Системный анализ документов показал информационные возможности писем верующих как нарративной базы, позволяющей реконструировать историю взаимоотношений советского государства и религиозных организаций. Письма верующих формируют представления о религиозном дискурсе и духовном состоянии общества. Они отражают религиозные чувства советских людей и характеризуют уровень религиозности общества. В них выражена реакция рядовых граждан на конфессиональную политику государства, методы ее проведения. Информативная насыщенность писем как источников для исследования методов проведения властью религиозного законодательства нередко богаче содержания официальных документов и отчетов.

**Ключевые слова:** архивные источники; православие; советская власть; письма; религиозные общины; властные структуры; произвол; борьба с религией.

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