

FAMINE IN TURKESTAN DURING THE EARLY YEARS OF SOVIET RULE AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IT (THE 1920s)**Kuchkarova Feruza**Andijan branch of Turon University Master's Department
History specialty Graduate student of the 1st stage**Abstract**

This article analyzes, on the basis of historical sources and scholarly literature, the main causes of the famine that emerged in Turkestan during the early years of Soviet rule, its social consequences, and the measures undertaken to combat it. The food shortage of the 1920s was not merely the result of natural disasters, but rather a complex historical process closely connected with war, the disintegration of the economy, the policy of forced distribution, and administrative mistakes. The article also examines the relief measures implemented by the state, local structures, and the public within the framework of anti-famine efforts, as well as their capacities and limitations. In addition, it considers the profound impact of the famine on the demographic, economic, and spiritual life of Turkestan society.

Keywords

Turkestan, Soviet rule, famine, the 1920s, food shortage, civil war, relief commissions, agriculture, social consequences, historical memory.

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of Soviet power in Turkestan occurred in conditions of deep political instability, economic disruption, and social hardship. On one hand, the civil war, military clashes, and the breakdown of transport systems disrupted economic ties across the region. On the other hand, the decline in agricultural production, neglect of irrigation systems, and the policy of centrally collecting grain and other food products directly affected the daily lives of the population. As a result, by the early 1920s, severe famine was observed in some regions of Turkestan.

This famine cannot be explained solely by natural disasters. Droughts, reduced crop yields, and occasional diseases exacerbated the situation. However, the root causes were linked to post-war economic decline, harsh measures in food policy, disregard for the specific features of local agriculture, and administrative mismanagement. Therefore, it is more scientifically accurate to consider the famine as a multi-factor crisis in the history of Turkestan.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the historical roots of the famine in Turkestan during the 1920s, reveal its social consequences, and systematically examine the measures implemented to combat it. The study also aims to highlight its place in historical memory and the lessons that can be drawn from it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article uses historical, systematic, comparative, and problem-oriented analysis methods. First, political and economic processes in the early years of Soviet power were examined in relation to the famine. Then, the connections between food shortages, declining agricultural production, transport-logistics issues, and socially vulnerable groups were analyzed. Additionally, the effectiveness of aid commissions, local initiatives, and measures by central authorities was assessed based on historical sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The famine in Turkestan during the 1920s was caused by a combination of multiple factors. Firstly, the civil war and military mobilization reduced agricultural labor resources. Many peasant households lost labor, seed, livestock, and farming tools. Moreover, the



breakdown or neglect of irrigation systems reduced cotton and grain yields [1]. As a result, food shortages in local markets intensified, prices rose, and the purchasing power of poor populations sharply declined.

Centralized grain collection and food requisition policies further aggravated the situation. These policies often ignored the natural-economic characteristics of local agriculture, reducing even the reserves needed by the population in some areas [2]. In regions with broken transport, limited trade, and poor harvests, these policies increased the risk of famine. Therefore, the famine should be viewed not only as a crop failure but also as a result of management practices.

Table 1. Main Causes of Famine in Turkestan during the 1920s

Factor	Description	Effect
Military-Political Instability	Civil war, armed clashes, and mobilization	Decreased labor force and collapse of economic system
Agricultural Decline	Shortage of seeds, livestock, tools, and irrigation problems	Reduced productivity and product shortages
Forced Collection Policy	Centralized seizure or distribution of food products	Reduced local reserves available for population
Natural Factors	Drought, low yields, local disasters	Deepened food scarcity

The social consequences of the famine were severe. The poorest groups, landless or small-scale peasants, nomads and semi-nomadic groups, and families deprived of social support due to war and migration suffered the most [3]. Food shortages led to increased diseases, higher mortality among children and elderly, intensified population migration, and deeper household hardships. Disruption of exchanges between urban and rural areas also spread the economic impact across other sectors.

Efforts to combat famine were carried out on several fronts. Measures included organizing food supplies, establishing emergency aid funds, sending grain and flour to affected areas, and creating orphanages and free canteens [4]. Local soviet authorities and community representatives also attempted to register the population, identify the most needy, mobilize charitable assistance, and distribute seeds and labor tools. However, limited resources, transport problems, and administrative interruptions reduced the effectiveness of these measures [5]

Table 2. Main Measures to Combat Famine and Their Characteristics

Direction	Implemented Measures	Limitations or Results
Emergency Food Aid	Distribution of grain, flour, and essential goods	Provided short-term relief but did not reach all areas equally
Social Protection Measures	Orphanages, free canteens, support for needy families	Helped preserve the most vulnerable groups
Agricultural Recovery	Distribution of seeds, repair of irrigation systems, restoration of tools	Laid the foundation for long-term recovery
Local Initiatives and Charity	Community assistance, registration, targeted aid	Limited by scarce resources but had practical importance



An important aspect of famine relief was that the problem could not be solved solely through product distribution. Long-term measures such as restoring agriculture, repairing irrigation systems, creating seed funds, and revitalizing market exchanges were also necessary [6]. Otherwise, short-term aid would only help survival temporarily, and famine risks would persist in subsequent seasons. Thus, famine relief had to be linked with economic recovery strategies.

The famine of the 1920s left a deep imprint on historical memory in Turkestan. It affected people's perceptions of state and society, labor and property, local solidarity, and mutual aid traditions. This tragedy clearly demonstrated the consequences of the mismatch between central policies and local needs [7].

CONCLUSION

The famine in the early years of Soviet power in Turkestan was a multi-factor historical crisis, rooted in civil war, agricultural decline, forced collection policies, and natural hardships. Its consequences included demographic losses, increased diseases, intensified migration, and deepened poverty among vulnerable groups. This disrupted the economic and domestic life of Turkestan and seriously weakened social stability.

At the same time, emergency relief measures, support for vulnerable groups, and initiatives aimed at restoring agriculture played a role in mitigating the crisis. Historical experience shows that such crises require not only short-term distribution measures but also systematic policies tailored to local economic conditions and needs. Studying the 1920s famine is therefore valuable both for historical research and for deriving lessons for social governance.

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