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THE ROLE OF ORAL HISTORY IN URBAN STUDIES OF THE LATE STALIN PERIOD (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE IZMAIL REGION OF THE UKRAINIAN SSR)

Abstract: The article purposes are firstly to reveal the scientific potential of oral sources in urban studies of the late Stalin period; secondly to analyze the scientific potential of oral sources collected and published before; thirdly to investigate the features of oral sources of the Izmail region on our own collected materials. **The scientific novelty** is presented: firstly by analyzing degree of using oral sources in history studies of the region; secondly the oral archives of the Izmail region, as well as published oral sources were studied; thirdly features of oral sources of the Izmail region on our own material have been characterized. **The conclusions.** Oral sources are widely used by Ukrainian historians to study different aspects of the Izmail region history, such as famine and everyday life. The informative potential of oral sources had been collected before is significant, especially of the archive of the Center for Oral History of the Izmail State University of Humanities. However, the number of published transcripts is still insufficient. Having conducted our research, we can follow some features of oral sources of the Izmail region: 1) the elderly age of the respondents; 2) unwillingness to make contact and fear of the interviewer; 3) important, but not the determining factor in the quality of the interview is the respondent level of education; 4) use of predominantly Russian language; 5) a significant predominance of women in this age group.

Key words: oral history; Izmail region; late Stalinism.

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Introduction. Soviet, Ukrainian, and foreign historians paid considerable scientific attention to the Izmail region history. Such problems as Sovietization, famine during 1946-1947, repressions, and so on were researched. Historians, philologists, and art historians used archival sources, and to a lower level, press and memories in their scientific works. Oral sources were used sparingly. After the

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USSR collapsed, one of the trends of Ukrainian history science became active use of oral historical sources. Oral evidence in the historian's study is important due to several factors. Firstly, they can open some aspects that are not available to researchers from archive documents or newspapers. Secondly, in the conditions of anthropological turn, the importance of "history from below", the study of individuals' fate, the study of their subjective experience of "great" events is increasing. The relevance of the study also increases because the number of source studies on the Izmail region history is insufficient. Thus, oral source search of scientific potential of Izmail region history is modern and up-to-date.

The problem statements. The aim of the article is to define informative potential oral sources in researching local history in late Stalin period on Izmail region example. Investigating potential oral sources about the history of this region have been collected and published, studying peculiarities of oral sources from Izmail region history.

Izmail region (on Ukrainian – область, «oblast») is historical Bessarabia, in 1940-1941, and after 1944 – the part of Ukraine. There were 6 cities in the region (Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, Bolgrad, Vylkove, Izmail, Kiliia, and Reni) and 13 districts (on Ukrainian – район, «raion»). In 1954 Izmail region was joined to the Odessa region.

Research analyzes. The first stage of oral history' formation in Ukraine covers the 1990s when there was a search for new research topics and methods, as well as the interest' formation in the method of oral history. The second period in the oral history' development covers the 2000s. The main thematic priorities were identified: the tragedy of the Holocaust, "forgotten victims" and "unknown" history of the Second World War; collectivization and famine of the early 1930s; repressions, mass forced migration and resettlement; (re)emigration and the Diaspora history; political, religious and other forms of persecution; women's history; everyday history; history and culture of national minorities and classes; history of cities; history of local military conflicts of the twentieth century. The institutionalization of a new direction in Ukrainian historical science took place in 2006 when the Ukrainian oral history association was established. One of the trends in Ukrainian historical science in the last decade was online archives becoming. Thus, on 31 March, 2021, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory presented the online resource "Oral History Archive". It became the first polythematic online archive of oral memories in Ukraine, which provides free access to video and audio interviews have been collected.

Oral sources are widely used in urban studies. Thus, in Lviv, the Center of Urban History has been studying urban history since 2004, which collects oral

sources in particular¹. A significant contribution to oral history development was made by the Research Institute of Urban History. One of its activity directions is conducting scientific research with the involvement of oral sources of urban history and the formation of interviews archive. Another project is “U Stories: Oral History and Urban Experiences”. These are an interviews and conversations archive collected in the framework of various projects implemented at the Center for Urban History of East-Central Europe (Lviv). The purpose of this collection is to preserve and make available the memories and opinions of Lviv residents, as well as to expand the use of oral sources in urban studies².

Historian V. Mishchanyn widely used oral sources in studying the Sovietization of Transcarpathia. Assessing the potential of oral history, the researcher concluded that the historical memory of the region’s inhabitants preserved key moments in the postwar history of Transcarpathia: the arrival of Soviet troops, their meeting with the local population, key local government measures to Sovietization of the region and repression against the population. V. Mishchanyn was interested in the perception of various events by residents: the liberation of the region, the creation of collective farms, changes in education, and the liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church³.

During the Soviet era, oral sources were not used by researchers in historian studies of Izmail region. Interest in oral history was intensified in the modern period. Articles by Ukrainian researchers, based on oral sources and devoted to Izmail region, can be divided into 3 groups: articles devoted to the Holodomor, everyday life, and public sentiment. Many aspects of the post-war development of Izmail region and famine during 1946-1947 were highlighted at a conference, which took place in May 2017 at the University⁴. Based on oral interviews, M. Bashly revealed the peculiarities of famine during 1946-1947 in the Tatarbunary district. N. Moroshan (Volkanova) with the help of the one family’s memories highlighted the peculiarities of famine during 1946-1947 and its consequences for the village Ostrivne of Artsyz district. The famine problem was revealed by Delusto in the context of studying dialectal features. N. Petrova and I. Saulyak (Barlak) analyzed

¹ Софія Дяк та Ірина Склокіна, “Дослідження, документування та популяризація історії міст в Україні: досвід центру міської історії у Львові,” *Місто: історія, культура, суспільство* 1 (2016): 49-50.

² “Центр міської історії. Міський медіаархів”, uma.lvivcenter.org, дата звернення грудень, 2009, <https://uma.lvivcenter.org/>

³ Василь Міщанин, *Радянська Закарпаття 1944-1950 рр.* (Ужгород: РІК-У, 2018).

⁴ Лілія Циганенко, “Образ ворога в спогадах дітей – свідків подій Другої світової війни (на матеріалах Південної Бессарабії),” в *Усна історія: теорія, метод, джерело: матеріали VI міжнародної науково-практичної конференції*, під ред. Г. Слотюк (Вінниця: ПП Балук І. Б., 2018)

the influence of hunger on the transformation of Gagauz traditional culture, such as weddings and burials. N. Goncharova revealed the methodological aspects of researching oral history, giving examples of interviews about postwar famine. Considerable scientific attention was paid to everyday life studies. The picture of post-war life and post-war reconstruction on the oral sources is covered by A. Dorosheva. The research presents the Southern Bessarabia inhabitants' about the period 1944-1947, their attitude to the famine, and the end of the war. I. Tatarinov covered on the materials of oral sources the children's daily life in the Izmail's periphery in the postwar years. Public sentiment remains insufficient researched. Thus, based on the Bessarabian children's memories, born during or before the war, L. Tsyganenko analyzed the historical, social, cultural, and psychological transformation of the "enemy image" during World War II. Scientific value these publications increase by giving exact quotations from interviews, and also they have value as a separate source.

Oral sources are also used by local historians, such as B. Rainov⁵, N. Basov⁶, I. Cheban⁷, and others, but the most negative factor is the absence of proper scientific design when using oral sources.

Statement of the basic material. Assessing the potential oral sources have been collected, we can note that during the USSR period Izmail region oral sources were not collected. A significant number of oral sources was published in the region newspaper "Prydunaiska Pravda" ("Danube truth") and in the districts' newspapers of the former region. However, these publications cannot be considered as objective sources due to ideological control over the press in that period. Oral sources are also stored in the Museum of History of «Ukrainian Danube Shipping Company». Labor veterans recorded their memories and presented these records to the museum. This work was carried out both in the Soviet and modern periods. A significant number of oral sources are stored in the Izmail City Council archives in Izmail district, Odessa region, in the collections № 312 «Documents and materials on the Holodomor of 1932-1933, 1946-1947» This collection contains 94 files with transcripts of interviews conducted in 2007-2009. The scientific potential of these sources decreases by the fact that the interviews were conducted by pupils who do not enough master the oral history methodology.

⁵ Борис Райнов, *История Килии*, 2 т. (Измаил: СМІЛ, 2011).

⁶ Н. Басов, *Вилково – город 3 церквей, 72 островов и бесконечных каналов: историко-краеведческий очерк*, 2 видання (Одесса: Астропринт, 2011).

⁷ Иван Чебан, *Краткая история Бессарабии и бессарабских болгар: Пустия Сихитика, Онглос, Онгыл, Буджак и с 1813 г.* (Измаил: СМІЛ, 2009).

Purposeful and systematic collection of Izmail oral sources began after the USSR collapse. Oral history research in Southern Bessarabia was carried out by the Center for Oral History of the Izmail State University of Humanities. According to the Perspective Work Plan of the Center from 2018 till 2023⁸, its activities took place in several directions:

- World War II by Bessarabian children eyes;
- Woman and war;
- History of rural everyday life (1944-1953);
- The problem of cultural trauma after the collapse of the USSR;
- Man and epoch: portraits of contemporaries;
- The Izmail State University of Humanities in the memories of veterans of pedagogical work - to the 80th anniversary of the University;
- Famine during 1946-1947 in Bessarabia: memories and history;
- Deportation in Bessarabia (1940-1941, 1944-1953);
- Urban folklore of the Izmail district;
- Cultural life of Bessarabia in the memories of contemporaries (60-80s of XX century);
- Worldview universals of folk art.

As part of the center's activities, interviews of the Bessarabia's residents of the appropriate age are systematically conducted. These interviews were devoted to various aspects and events of the Second World War in the region and famine during 1946-1947. Today, the Center's archive includes more than 500 interviews. Several events, conferences, and seminars were held within the Center activities. Separate important directions of the Center activity are publications of oral sources have been collected. One collection has been published. This publication contains oral sources of Izmail region and presents the memories of Izmail district children, born during or before war. Topics such as the Second World War, famine during 1946-1947, and the postwar reconstruction of the region are covered⁹.

Other published oral sources are devoted to famine during 1946-1947. One of collections edited by V. Kuznetsov contains interviews conducted by students of Faculty of History of Ukraine Odessa Mechnikov National University from residents of Odessa region who lived during the famine of 1932-1933 or 1946-1947 or the period of Nazi occupation. In particular, the collection contains 2 interviews with residents of Belgorod-Dniesterovsk town and several districts of the former Izmail

⁸ “Перспективний план роботи ЦУІ ІДГУ на 2018-2023 рр“, idgu.edu.ua, дата звернення грудень, 2009

⁹ Ярослав Кічук та Лілія Циганенко, редактори. *Сторінки пам'яті. м. Ізмаїл. Ізмаїльський район. Книга спогадів*. 1 т., частина 1 (Ізмаїл: Ірбіс – РВВ ІДГУ, 2021).

region¹⁰. Memories of the former region residents about the famine were published in the “Holodomor of Ukraine” series. 18’ volume is devoted to the publication of research, memories, and documents on the Holodomor of 1921-1923, 1932-1933, and 1946-1947 in the Odessa region¹¹.

We collected oral sources as a part of our work at dissertation, «Urban population of the Izmail region in the conditions of Sovietization (1944-1954)». The main directions chosen were: everyday life, famine during 1946-1947, and repression. The nature of the questionnaire is partly biographical and partly thematic. Oral sources were collected through a standardizing interview with a list of questions common to all respondents, which have been asked in a certain sequence. Depending on the respondents’ age of birth, first, the interview covers the Romanian period, then the war period, everyday life in the postwar period, the famine period, and subsequent events up to 1954. A separate section has been devoted to repression. However, if the respondent wanted to reveal some problem that went beyond the questions, we did not stop him. Thus, these interviews were rather semi-structured, as most respondents deviated from the outline of questions in one way or another, taking into consideration their life experience, emotional state, and so on. During the study, we added and complicated the questionnaire according to new information collected by the author. In addition, the questions in the questionnaire could vary depending on the respondent biography. For example, if the respondent came to the region in 1944, then he knows nothing about the Romanian period in the region, or if the respondent taught in Vylkovo, she can tell a lot about the Old Believers and their lives. Interviews took place in most cases at the respondent’s home. Interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone; we did not transcribe the interviews, we made only passports and annotations.

In common, we interviewed 10 people during the period 2019-2021. The main criteria for selecting respondents were: 1) geographical area, a person had to live in Izmail region for some time. For example, if a person was born, out of the region, but he studied in Izmail, he might be a respondent; 2) person’s age, the person had to be born before or in 1940-1941 (see Table 1).

¹⁰ В. Кузнецов, ред. та інші. *Відгомін лихоліття: спогади очевидців Голодоморів 1921-1933 і 1946-1947 рр., а також періоду нацистської окупації, записані студентами історичного факультету ОНУ ім. І. І. Мечникова* (Одеса: Освіта України, 2014).

¹¹ І. Ніточко, ред. *Голодомори в Україні: Одеська область 1921–1923, 1932–1933, 1946-1947. Дослідження, спогади, документи. XVIII т.* (Одеса: Астропринт, 2007). <http://resource.history.org.ua/item/0007962>

Table 1

The structure of the respondents we interviewed

	Gender	birth year	education	Social origin	Place of residence in 1944-1954.
person 1	f	1935	higher	family of wealthy peasants	Izmail
person 2	f	1934	higher	family of the nomenclature worker	Izmail, 1944-1953
person 3	f	1929	3 classes	family of businessman	Izmail
person 4	f	1929	higher	middle-class peasant family	Kiliia
person 5	f	1940	higher	family of the nomenclature employee (of the judge)	Izmail, before 1947 p.
person 6	m	1934	higher	working family	Izmail, from 1940
person 7	f	1941	higher	family of dentist	Kiliia
person 8	f	1936	higher	family of workers on the railway	Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, 1951-1955
person 9	f	1938	7 classes	family of poor peasants	Izmail
person 10	f	1928	higher	family of a builder	Izmail 1945-1948 Vylkove, 1949-1954

During the interview, it is necessary to take into account the Soviet experience of respondents. According to T. Shcheglova, the generation of 1930-1950 has some fear of their frank. It shows unwillingness to sign an agreement of the interview data processing. However, in the future, many older people, especially single women, find a long-awaited attentive listener in the interviewer. They are grateful storytellers and try to keep the interviewer close to them with their stories. Therefore, as T. Shcheglova advises not to interrupt their story¹². T. Moldavska studied the problem of perception of Soviet and modern life by elderly people. She notes that most respondents have a clear tendency to extend their Soviet experience in modern life. They continue to think in Soviet terms¹³.

¹² Татьяна Щеглова, *Устная история: учебное пособие*. (Барнаул: АлтГПА, 2011), 25.

¹³ Тетяна Молдавська, "Радянська ідентичність та її вплив на формування сучасних суспільних стереотипів людей похилого віку (за матеріалами усно історичних джерел Півдня України)," *Наукові записки Національного університету "Острозька академія"*. Сер.: *Культурологія* 12, no. 2 (2013).

We can highlight the following features of our interviews. 1) Particularities of oral sources have been collected from history Izmail region are adults, what leads to special attitude to their interviewing. 2) In our experience, many respondents do not want to have contact, to invite to their own house, to get in touch with a researcher or just meet with him. Some respondents are afraid to let a historian get into their own home, thinking that he is a swindler or criminal. 3) The level of education of the respondent is important for the quality of the interview. Respondents with higher education remember the events of their youth much better, more widely explaining them, and their answers are more informative in the study of the history Izmail region. 4) The absolute predominance in the use of Russian, including those who define their national identity as Ukrainian. Respondents explained that it was easier for them. 5) There is a significant predominance of women in this age group, so women's aspects of gender history will be revealed better, and to a lower level such «male» aspects as military service at the time.

Recommendations. Some respondents cannot remember very well the period of their youth, for example, due to illness. However, such respondents can be asked about everyday life: what was their usual diet, how did their own house looked like, how the house heating was organized, what games they played in, and so on. Take into consideration if you want to have several meetings, it is very important to ask the most important questions at the first meeting. Because the respondent might then refuse the further interviews, for example, due to health problems. The researcher needs to be careful when talking about «painful» periods of life, such as hunger, repression, and dispossession of kulaks. Topics such as Stalin's death, repression or famine, might be painful for them. Everyone has their own political points of view, respondents can sometimes say: «write the truth», taking into consideration a certain political position, they consider so negative as positive achievements of the Soviet government.

Conclusions. Ukrainian historians widely use oral sources in the study of various aspects in Izmail region history. The main topics are hunger and everyday's life, and to a lesser extent – the views and moods of the population. The information potential of oral sources has been collected is quite significant and allows extensive researching in various aspects of the region's history. Oral archive collected by students of the Center for Oral History of the Izmail State University for Humanities have the greatest information potential. This collection is superior in quality and volume to any other archives of oral sources on the region's history. The number of published oral sources is still insufficient. Having conducted our research, we can identify some features of oral sources of the Izmail region history: 1) the elderly age of the respondents; 2) unwillingness to make contact and fear of the interviewer; 3)

important, but not the determining factor in the quality of the interview is the level of education of the respondent; 4) use of predominantly Russian language; 5) a significant predominance of women in this age group.

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