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Mobilized Laborers from Central Asia in the Urals in the Days of the Great Patriotic War of
1941–45: Characterizing Archival Sources and Rethinking the Points of View

Abstract

The article describes archival documents on the issue of lifestyle of the mobilized laborers' from the Central Asian military district in the Urals in the days of the Great Patriotic War, which were deposited in the fonds of central and regional archives. The author examines cognitive potential and possible limitations of using these materials to study mass waves of Central Asian migration in the Soviet era from new angles of ethnicity, social organization of mobilized laborers, etc. He addresses such subjects as relations between mobilized laborers, peculiarities of their social organization, their behavior patterns under critical conditions, difficulties of medical support due to cultural and language barriers, etc. The source base is materials from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), in particular, from the fond of the State Defense Committee (fond 644). A considerable layer of useful data is contained in the Chelyabinsk State Archive of the Chelyabinsk Region (OGACHO), in the fonds of the Magnitogorsk City Committee (fond P-234), the Chelyabinsk Regional Committee (fond P-288), the Party Committee of the Chelyabinsk Tractor Plant (fond P-124), and the Health Committee (fond R-1595). There is not enough space to describe all archival fonds containing valuable information, attention is focused only on major documents collections. Although most studied documents describe the considered phenomenon in quantitative terms, opportunities have been found for shifting research optics to anthropological subjects. Thoughtful work with new historiography on the topic of socialist construction in Central Asia in the 1920s–30s and practices of managing ethno-cultural diversity in the Soviet Union in the 1920s–40s allows the author to interpret known sources from a new angle, incorporating them into broader contexts. It is necessary to expand the source base, to attract new archival documents, materials from periodicals, and memoirs. On this basis, various waves of migration can be incorporated into a wider pattern of movements that connected the Urals and the Asian regions in the 20th–21st centuries. Such formulation of research questions seems productive and relevant in the context of growing need for historical reconstruction of labor migration from Central Asia.

Keywords

Historical sources, labor migration, Central Asian migration, mobilized laborers, Uzbeks, Urals, archival documents.

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