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Repressed Scientists' Memoirs on the Development of the European North-East of the USSR in
Late 1920s – Early 1950s

Abstract

The article focuses on the study of historical experience of the development of the Northern territories of Russia. The processes of industrial development of the Far North areas that began in late 1920s was closely connected to the events of repressive policy of the Soviet power. One of the accelerated industrial development regions was the European North-East of the USSR, which became a territory with a high concentration of camps and special settlements in the 1930s–50s. The article presents an analytical review of the memoirs of scientists, who were Gulag camps prisoners, stored in the archives of the Komi Republic (Vorkuta Museum and Exhibition Center, K. G. Voinovsky-Kruger Geological Museum, Scientific Archive of FRC Komi SC UB RAS, National Archive of the Komi Republic, Komi Republican Fund of Geological Information). The study has determined that this information complex was accumulated by large-scale initiative work of the scientific community of the Komi Republic, collecting memoirs of scientists who had been in camps in the region. The specificity of these sources is in their special approach to the description of the events. They show not only horrors of the penal system, but also creative role of those people who, with their titanic work, developed remote regions of the North of the country. It has been determined that the authors were mostly geoscientists, which may be explained by the main task of the camps located in the European North-East of the USSR, i.e. industrial development of mineral deposits. Some were professional scientists, former employees of the Geological Committee (K. G. Voinovsky-Kruger, N. N. Tikhonovich, N. M. Lednev, and others), others became geologists in prison (K. V. Flug, V. V. Grechukhin, G. M. Yaroslavtsev, and others). The author presents an analysis of the memoirs content taking into consideration the time of their creation. She examines some common aspects of the sources: difficult conditions of prison transfer to the North, challenges of research work, various way of engaging in research in the camp. It is concluded that this document complex is a valuable retrospective sources group on the development of the Northern territories of the USSR in the late 1920s – early 1950s, primarily implemented by the Gulag prisoners. Introducing this evidence into scientific use expands the historical picture of the study of the North, demonstrating complexity and multifacetedness of the process.

Keywords

Personal provenance sources, North of Soviet Russia, GULAG, geologist, Soviet convicts, scientific research, Komi Republic, history of science.

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