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“The Summary of Life, or the Long Paradox”: From Memoirs of the Repressed Scientist V. V. Grechukhin

Abstract

Memoirs of Doctor of Geological and Mineralogical Sciences, professor Vladimir Vasilyevich Grechukhin (1913–98) preserved in the fonds of the Vorkuta Museum and Exhibition Center are being published. The memoirs highlight tragic events in the author’s life: serving the sentence in the forced labour camps of the GULAG in 1936–41. During this period, the young man experienced all the hardships of repression: hunger, humiliation, struggling under harsh natural conditions of the Arctic, heavy work at the industrial facilities of Vorkuta. The memoirs of V. V.

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Grechukhin are a unique written monument of past; events are described through the lens of personal assessment and interpretation, they spring from memory, feelings, and impressions, shifting the emphasis from fact to personal perception. Despite all hardships, it was the time of V. V. Grechukhin's formation as a scientist. It was in the labour camps that he began the first geophysical research in Vorkuta and made a significant contribution to the development of the Pechora coal basin in the 1930s–40s. After his time was served, Grechukhin remained in Vorkuta until 1960s to continue his research. In his memoirs, the scientist details conditions in which he had to conduct his research, describes the atmosphere of creativity, the daily life, the social and psychological climate. His memoirs are a valuable source on scientific development of the Northern territories of Russia in the 1930s–40s implemented by the Soviet government by efforts of the GULAG prisoners. Study of the history of Soviet prison institutions has revealed many aspects of repression and functioning of camps. However, from the point of view of social history, studying the GULAG in its human dimension seems equally important. The introduction of the memoirs into scientific use is to expand the study of the GULAG phenomenon.



Keywords

GULAG, Pechora coal basin, Vorkuta, forced labor camp, repressions, prisoner, individual perception, historical sources, personal provenance source.

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