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THE HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF CIVIL AVIATION IN KAZAKHSTAN (1920-1940)

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Abstract. *Introduction.* This article examines how passenger, postal, sanitary, agricultural, and administrative flying services emerged in Soviet Kazakhstan between 1920 and 1940. Instead of presenting early flights, government acts, public campaigns, and route construction as separate episodes, the study treats them as parts of one historical process: the gradual creation of a governed, technically supported, and socially embedded system of communication. Particular attention is given to the legal measures of 1923, the managerial reforms of the 1930s, the expansion of specialized services, and Almaty's growing role as a strategic transit point in the late interwar period. *Goals and objectives.* The aim is to reconstruct the trajectory through which flying services became a stable institutional field in the Kazakh ASSR and later the Kazakh SSR. The article analyzes central and republican regulations implementation practices in the republic, ground facilities, route geography, and the preparation of professional staff. It further identifies historiographical gaps and explains why the republic's experience should be studied as a regional case rather than being absorbed into a general narrative of the Soviet air system. *Results.* The analysis distinguishes four phases: the initial organizational stage of 1923–1929; centralization and territorial structuring from 1930 to 1934; functional diversification in 1934–1939, when flight-based services increasingly served agriculture, postal exchange, emergency assistance, and interregional movement; and the transit-geopolitical phase of 1937–1940, when Kazakhstan's aerodromes, especially Almaty acquired broader strategic significance. *Conclusion.* The article argues that consolidation depended on the simultaneous interaction of three factors: administrative regulation, ground infrastructure, and trained staff.

Keywords: civil aviation, aerial transport history, Kazakhstan, Kazakh ASSR, Dobrolet, Aeroflot, aircraft, routes

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА АЗАМАТТЫҚ АВИАЦИЯНЫҢ ҚАЛЫПТАСУ ТАРИХЫ (1920 - 1940 ЖЖ.)

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Аңдатпа. Мақала азаматтық авиацияның 1920–1940 жылдар аралығында қалыптасуын, бастапқы ұйымдастырушылық шешімдер, аймақтық іске асыру практикалары, тұрмыстық түрлі салалардағы мақсатты функцияларының кеңеюі секілді жалпы институционалдық деңгейге көтерілу кезеңдерін хронологиялық ретпен талдайды. Сонымен қатар осы жылдар аралығындағы ұйымдастырушылық қадамдар мен тәжірибелердің тарихи проблемаларын негізге ала отырып, әлеуметтік-саяси мәнін ашуды көздейді. Зерттеуіміздің негізгі нысаны мен пәні – Қазақстан аумағындағы азаматтық авиацияның пайда болуы мен даму процесі. Осы процесті қамтамасыз еткен басқару құрылымдары, инфрақұрылымдық дамуы және кадр даярлау мәселелерін талдау көзделеді. Аталмыш тақырып төңірегінде мақсатты түрде жария көрген ғылыми зерттеу жұмысы жоқ дей аламыз. Бұл фактор мақаланың жаңашылдығы мен өзектілігін айқындайды. *Мақсат-міндеттер.* Зерттеу басқару реформалары, жоспарлы экономика динамикасы, аймақаралық авиациялық желілер конфигурациясы, орталықтандырылуы мен институт ретінде өсу процесі секілді азаматтық авиацияның «қалыптасу мен даму» көрсеткіштерін салааралық контекстте қарастыруды мақсат етеді. Бұл мақсатта тақырып аясындағы тарихи фактілерге негізделген әртекті нарративтер мен интерпретациялық тұжырымдарды талдай келе, тақырып туралы жалпы картинаны құрау, зерттеу олқылықтарын анықтай отырып синтездік анализ, архивтік-деректанулық талдау жүргізу секілді бірқатар міндеттемелерді арқалайды. *Нәтижелер.* Ғылыми зерттеу азаматтық авиацияның қалыптасу кезеңдерін бірнеше этаптарға бөлуді ұсына отырып, ғылыми тұрғыдан негіздеді. Бұлар: 1923–1929 жылдар аралығын қамтитын *алғашқы кезең* – алғашқы ұйымдар, құрылым іргетасы; 1930–1934 жылдар аралығында *орталықтандыру* және аумақтық құрылымға көшу сатысы; 1934–1939 жылдары *салалық тарамдалу*, сала аралық функциялардың дамуы мен әуе маршруттарының кеңеюі; 1937–1940 жылдары *транзиттік* – геосаяси мүмкіндіктердің күшеюі кезеңдері секілді тақырыптық негіздерге сүйене талданды. Азаматтық авиацияның қалыптасуы жекелеген оқиғалар тізбегі емес, әлеуметтік-экономикалық, әрі саяси факторлардың тоғысындағы институционалдық мақсатта қалыптасқан үдеріс болғанын зерттеу барысында көрсетілді. Қалыптасудың өзі үш түрлі қабаттың немесе факторлардың өзара синхронды жүруіне тәуелді болғаны анықталды.

Түйін сөздер: Азаматтық авиация, авиация тарихы, Қазақстан, Қазақ АКСР, Добролет, Аэрофлот, ұшақ

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ИСТОРИЯ СТАНОВЛЕНИЯ ГРАЖДАНСКОЙ АВИАЦИИ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ (1920–1940 ГГ.)

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В статье анализируется история формирования гражданской авиации в 1920–1940 годы, включая этапы её становления на общеинституциональном уровне, первоначальные организационные решения, региональная практика реализации и расширение целевых функций в различных сферах жизни. Выявляется социально-политическое значение организационных шагов и практик в проблеме гражданской авиации. Предметом исследования является процесс становления гражданской авиации на территории Казахстана, анализ структур управления и кадровые вопросы обеспечивающие этот процесс. Очень мало научных работ посвященных проблеме становления гражданской авиации. Это определяет новизну и актуальность поднятой проблемы. *Цели и задачи.* Целью исследования является изучение в междисциплинарном контексте показателей «формирования и развития» гражданской авиации, таких как реформы управления, динамика плановой экономики, конфигурация межрегиональных авиационных сетей, ее централизация и процесс роста как института. Для этого предпринимается ряд задач, таких как анализ различных нарративов и интерпретационных утверждений на основе исторических фактов по теме, создание общей картины темы, проведение синтетического анализа, выявление пробелов в исследованиях, а также проведение архивного и документального анализа. *Результаты.* Научное исследование научно обосновало этапы формирования гражданской авиации, предложив разделить его на несколько этапов. К ним относятся: *начальный этап* – первые организации, закладка структуры, охватывающий период с 1923–1929 год, *этап централизации* и перехода к территориальной структуре с 1930–1934 год, *период отраслевой диверсификации* – развития межотраслевых функций и расширения воздушных маршрутов с 1934–1939 год, *период укрепления* транзитно-геополитических возможностей с 1937–1940 год, проанализированный поэтапно. Исследование показало, что формирование гражданской авиации представляло собой не серию отдельных событий, а процесс формирования и накопления в социально-экономических и политических институциональных целях. *Заключение.* Было установлено, что само формирование зависело от синхронного движения трех различных слоев или факторов.

Ключевые слова: Гражданская авиация, история авиации, Казахстан, Казахская АССР, Добролет, Аэрофлот, самолеты

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Introduction

In the first half of the twentieth century, aviation became one of the most visible instruments of Soviet modernization. It was associated not only with machines, but also with state governance, spatial integration, accelerated communication, and the political imagination of a society oriented toward the future (Bol'nykh, 2010). For Kazakhstan, these functions had special weight. The republic covered an enormous geographical space, its climate and relief were diverse, and in the 1920s railway construction remained incomplete. Administrative centers, industrial zones, steppe settlements, and border territories were often separated by hundreds or even thousands of kilometers. Under such conditions, flight-based mobility offered a means of connecting places that could not be fully integrated by rail, road, or river transport alone.

The relevance of this problem is connected with the administrative dynamics of early Soviet Kazakhstan. The relocation of the capital from Orenburg to Kyzylorda and then to Almaty changed the geography of official exchange and increased the need for faster links between central institutions and distant territories. Mail delivery, urgent correspondence, sanitary flights, border monitoring, geodetic work, agricultural protection, and the carriage of passengers and cargo were not secondary services. They formed part of a wider attempt to make the republic governable, connected, and economically manageable.

At the same time, the terms "emergence" and "formation" require careful distinction. Demonstration flights, military landings, and scattered flight episodes over the Kazakh steppe belong to the prehistory of aviation in the region. Yet a small number of flights does not amount to an integrated system. The formation of civilian flight services presupposed stable routes, administrative bodies, aerodromes, technical maintenance, trained pilots and mechanics, and regular functions within the economy and state administration. This distinction is methodologically significant because it prevents the history of flight from being reduced to a list of first events.

In this study, civilian flight services are understood in a broad historical sense. The term refers to structures and services engaged in passenger, cargo, postal, agricultural, sanitary, communication, and other non-combat tasks. Modern legal definitions describe this field as a branch of flight activity that satisfies the needs of citizens and the economy through transportation, commercial activity, and public service (Morozov, 2017). For the period under analysis, however, the boundaries between civilian, departmental, and military-technical structures were not always fixed. The article therefore treats the object of study as a developing institutional field rather than as a fully differentiated modern industry.

The legal foundation of the Soviet civil fleet is usually associated with the decree of February 9, 1923, when the Council for Civil Aviation was created under the Main Directorate of the Air Fleet (SNK USSR, 1923; Stepanov, 2009; Bol'nykh, 2010). Soon afterward, the decision of March 17, 1923, defined the status of the Voluntary Air Fleet Society, known as Dobrolet (STO USSR, 1923). These central measures quickly found a republican continuation. On April 4, 1923, the government of the Kazakh ASSR, under the leadership of Saken Seifullin, decided to form a special commission and involve the public in supporting the fleet (Protocol No. 16/8, Orenburg; Absemetov, 2024). The decision of May 28, 1923, to open a Kyrgyz/Kazakh branch of Dobrolet demonstrated that the air fleet was becoming not merely a propaganda theme but a practical institutional project (Kazakh ASSR Government Protocols, 1923).

The history of Kazakhstan's flight system should be interpreted at two levels. The microhistorical level includes individual pilots, first landings, aircraft types, public campaigns, and particular aerodromes. The macrohistorical level includes management reforms, route geography, planned-economy logistics, spatial integration, and the relationship between central decisions and capacities in the republic. This article combines both dimensions but gives analytical priority to the macrohistorical problem: how dispersed early initiatives gradually became a relatively stable transport and service system.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the formation of civilian flight services in Kazakhstan from 1920 to 1940 through the interaction of governance, ground infrastructure, route geography, and trained professional groups. The research objectives are: to clarify the socio-political meaning

of the organizational choices of 1923; to examine how the reforms of 1930–1934 influenced republic-level structures; to describe the expansion of agricultural, sanitary, postal, and transport functions between 1934 and 1939; and to explain why Almaty's role as a transit hub from 1937 onward altered Kazakhstan's position within Soviet aerial space.

Materials and Methods

The source base is organized into several heterogeneous groups: regulatory acts, official protocols, official correspondence, periodical press materials, memoirs, local historical publications, and later research literature. These materials differ in genre, reliability, and analytical depth. Legal documents and protocols make it possible to reconstruct formal decisions and institutional design, whereas newspapers, memoirs, and local histories reveal how the new field entered public discourse and everyday practice in specific regions.

The materials can be divided into two main layers. The first consists of normative and bureaucratic documents, including decrees, protocols, resolutions, and orders issued by central and republican bodies. This group is indispensable for tracing formal institutional change. The second includes periodicals, memoirs, and local historical accounts. These sources are valuable because they show how official decisions were received, promoted, and realized in cities, districts, and professional communities. Since the two layers sometimes emphasize different aspects, the study applies triangulation: a key event is treated as historically reliable only when it can be checked against at least two different types of evidence.

Source selection followed three criteria. First, the material had to relate to the period from 1920 to 1940. Second, it had to concern at least one aspect of this formation process: organization, material base, professional staff, routes, technology, financing, or practical function. Third, the origin and metadata of the source had to be sufficiently clear. Materials lacking dates, institutional attribution, route details, or resolution numbers were not used as direct evidence; they were considered mainly as indicators of public memory or journalistic interpretation.

The research relies primarily on qualitative historical analysis. It combines archival-source criticism, historiographical comparison, and synthetic interpretation. Quantitative information, such as line length, passenger traffic, cargo volume, or mail transportation, is used only where it is supported by identifiable sources. The study also applies a functional approach: the field is examined not as a purely technological phenomenon but as a system linking governance, economy, communication, security, and social mobilization.

Terminological consistency is another methodological issue. Names of administrative bodies changed several times during the interwar period. The Civil Air Fleet Directorate appeared in sources under different abbreviations, including GVF, VOGVF, GUGVF, and Aeroflot. To avoid anachronism, the article preserves historical names in quotation marks where necessary and explains their institutional meaning in context. This is especially significant for the 1930s, when the field was repeatedly reorganized and incorporated into broader mechanisms of Soviet planning.

The general body of evidence was interpreted through cross-reference. Information about the Guryev–Ural–Aktobe line, for instance, was compared with materials on detachments and republican administrative decisions (*Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 1936; Aktobe Regional State Archive, Fund 85, List 1, File 188). The relative weight of source groups changes across the period. In the early 1920s, protocols and decrees dominate. In the 1930s, management reform and press chronicles become more visible. Memoirs and retrospective accounts, although written later, help reconstruct professional norms, practical difficulties, and the social identity of pilots and mechanics.

Discussion

A review of the available literature indicates that the early history of flight in Kazakhstan has not yet been studied as a coherent republican problem. Existing publications are fragmented. Some texts present isolated episodes, such as the first flights, the role of prominent figures, or the opening of particular routes. Others place the republic within the larger story of Soviet modernization, where developments in the republic appear mostly as consequences of decisions made in Moscow. Such

works are useful, but they rarely explain how central policy was translated into ground facilities, financial mobilization, route planning, and cadre preparation in Kazakhstan.

International studies of air transport history often analyze aerial transport as part of large technical systems. This perspective emphasizes the interdependence of the state, industry, science, infrastructure, and professional education (Hansen, 1989; Dalamagkidis et al., 2012; Petrescu, 2017). Applied to Kazakhstan, this framework suggests that the subject should not be interpreted as a narrow history of aircraft or pilots. It was a system-building process in which administration, spatial planning, equipment, and social mobilization developed unevenly but in close connection.

The Kazakhstani case also reveals the limits of two simplified and opposing interpretations. The first reduces the process to a ready-made Soviet project imposed from the center, leaving national republics as passive executors. The second overemphasizes initiative from below and treats actors in the republic as the main drivers. The evidence points to a more complex relationship. The center established legal norms, technical standards, and planning mechanisms; republican and district-level bodies adapted these frameworks to geography, resources, available experts, and public support. Institutional consolidation occurred through constant interaction between central regulation and practice on the ground.

Among recent publications, M. Absemetov's article on Saken Seifullin highlights the political and symbolic importance of air-fleet campaigns in 1923, including the creation of a commission and support for Dobrolet (Absemetov, 2024). O. Shukurov's historical overview on The Steppe portal popularizes the early stages of this history (Shukurov, 2022). N.Zh. Mukhabayev's electronic publication gives a concise outline from the origins to the present, including a brief section on the 1920s–1940s (Mukhabayev, 2023). These texts are valuable for historical memory, but they do not replace systematic academic analysis based on archival and institutional interpretation.

Memoirs and professional accounts add another layer. N.A. Kuznetsov's *Shturval i kurs* offers insights into pilots' identity, technical risks, discipline, and everyday practice (Kuznetsov, 1983). I.M. Chuprov's study of frontier flying helps explain the intersection between civilian and departmental flight structures in frontier regions (Chuprov, 1999). D.A. Sobolev's multi-volume *Chronicle of Soviet Civil Aviation, 1918–1941* contains valuable material on routes through Central Asia and Kazakhstan, including chapters related to Moscow–Central Asia connections and the Almaty–Semipalatinsk line (Sobolev, 2019). However, Sobolev's work is framed primarily by the all-Union context and does not aim to reconstruct Kazakhstan as a distinct regional case.

The periodical press of the 1930s demonstrates how the new form of mobility entered local life. Reports on the earliest documented airplane landing in Guryev, Aviation Day celebrations, openings of new lines, pilots' profiles, exhibitions, clubs, and public fundraising campaigns indicate that flight was not merely a technical matter (Ural Military Vedomosti, 1912; Kazakhstan Pravda, 1936; Komsomolskaya Pravda, 1936; Na Strazhe, 1935; Gromakov, 1984). Newspapers reveal the social environment around the new field: clubs, propaganda meetings, financial campaigns, model aircraft displays, and youth recruitment. These practices helped transform the new field from a distant symbol of modernity into a profession and a shared public cause.

Several gaps remain. First, the relationship between Soviet central policy and its implementation on the ground in Kazakhstan is insufficiently systematized. Second, the intersectoral functions of flight services – agriculture, medical assistance, communication, geodesy, and emergency response – are often mentioned separately but rarely integrated into one analytical framework. Third, the preparation of pilots, mechanics, communicators, and technical staff has not been fully treated as a social institution. These gaps justify the present study's focus on the interaction between governance, material resources, route geography, and professional culture.

Normative, Legal, and Archival Sources

The principal source group consists of normative and legal documents, together with decisions and orders issued by management bodies. Between 1930 and 1934, the central government adopted several measures that changed the administrative position of the civil fleet. These included the creation of the All-Union Association of the Civil Air Fleet in 1930, the establishment of the Main

Directorate of the Civil Air Fleet in 1932, and the 1934 resolution on reorganizing management bodies (SNK USSR, 1930; SNK USSR, 1932; SNK USSR, 1934; Stepanov, 2009; Bol'nykh, 2010).

For Kazakhstan, the 1934 reorganization had particular significance. It led to the creation of the Kazakh Territorial Directorate of the Civil Air Fleet, based in Almaty, and recognized the republic as a separate territorial unit within the all-Union management system (SNK USSR, 1934). This measure opened a new phase in route planning, resource allocation, and administrative responsibility. It also made Almaty a coordination point for flight services in the city and surrounding areas.

The resolution of January 3, 1934, issued by the Council of People's Commissars of the Kazakh ASSR on the organization of agricultural aviation, is equally significant (Kazakh ASSR Council of People's Commissars, 1934). It makes clear that by the mid-1930s the branch was no longer imagined solely as passenger or postal transport. It was increasingly linked to agricultural production, pest control, crop protection, and the technical needs of the planned economy. Regional archives from Aktobe and Atyrau, together with local historical collections, connect state decisions with specific toponyms, routes, aerodromes, and prominent figures.

Results

Early Flights and the Transition from Event to System

The early flights associated with the historical territory of Kazakhstan occurred before the establishment of a permanent civilian network. Some sources indicate that an early flight over the Kazakh steppe took place in Omsk in 1911. Within the borders of present-day Kazakhstan, an airplane engine was heard over Oral on July 8 and July 10, 1912, when A.A. Vasilyev piloted a Blériot biplane above the city for several minutes. In 1919, military pilot A. Shavrov, born in what is now Taldykorgan, conducted an interregional flight along the Samara–Aktobe–Tashkent–Verny route. On March 30, 1919, his British-made Sopwith biplane landed in present-day Almaty (Shukurov, 2022).

These episodes were symbolically significant, but they did not yet create an institutional system. They should be understood as pre-institutional events that revealed the technical possibility of aerial communication. Their later historical value lies in the fact that the idea of connecting vast territories by flight gradually became compatible with the political and economic logic of Soviet modernization and with a new practical logic of territorial control.



Figure 1 – "Ural Military Vedomosti" Newspaper, July 8, 1912

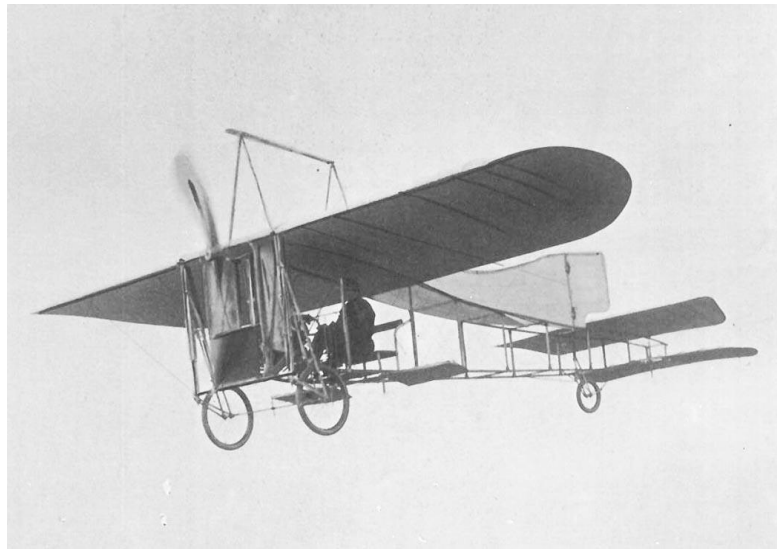


Figure 2 – French Aircraft Designer Louis Blériot's "Blériot" Plane (Biplane)

Institutional Foundations and the 1923 Decisions

The institutional foundations of Kazakhstan's flight system can be linked to the decisions of 1923. The creation of Dobrolet on March 17, 1923, provided an organizational model for civilian flight-service activity in the Soviet Union (Bol'nykh, 2010; SNK USSR, 1923). In the same year, the Kazakh ASSR began its own campaign of support. The protocol of April 4, 1923, provided for a special commission and an Air Fleet Association in the republic. Saken Seifullin's participation in this commission suggests that the air fleet had entered the political agenda as a symbol of technological renewal and national modernization (Kazakh ASSR Government Protocols, 1923; Absemetov, 2024).

Seifullin's role was not limited to administrative participation. His articles and poems presented flight as the "wings of future generations" and called for the connection of Kazakhstani cities by scheduled lines. Such public language mattered because material resources were scarce and social mobilization was necessary. The campaigns of the 1920s relied on fundraising, stock and bond contributions, public meetings, exhibitions, Air Fleet Days, and press support. In practical terms, the 1923 commission concentrated on purchasing aircraft, identifying landing grounds, arranging trial flights, and creating initial administrative conditions for regular communication.

The decision of May 28, 1923, to open a Dobrolet office in the Kyrgyz/Kazakh region was an early step toward organizational consolidation. Although the legal framework was adopted in Moscow, implementation depended on republican and district capacities. This combination of central authorization and republican mobilization became a recurring feature of development throughout the interwar period.

Ground Facilities and Spatial Organization

Ground infrastructure gave the emerging system its material basis. Almaty gradually became the principal hub because of its administrative role and its growing importance after the capital was moved there. Information on a temporary aerodrome in Almaty in 1923 indicates that the city acquired flight-related significance before the construction of a stable airport. The opening of Almaty airport in 1930 strengthened the technical base and linked scheduled services with the concentration of republican institutions.

Western Kazakhstan also entered this developing system during this period. The first airplane landing in Guryev, now Atyrau, in 1925 symbolized the beginning of connectivity in the Caspian direction. These routes reflected the need to link oil-rich and resource-oriented territories with the Volga, Ural, and central administrative zones. The growth of facilities was therefore uneven. They developed around administrative centers, industrial regions, and areas where distance made rapid communication especially valuable.

From 1923 to 1929, flight-based mobility became part of the state's political strategy and public imagination. The new technology was promoted as a sign of progress, but its deeper function was spatial integration. The material base remained limited; nevertheless, the idea of a republican route system had already entered government planning and social discourse (Absemetov, 2024).

Centralization and Territorial Structuring, 1930–1934

The period from 1930 to 1934 changed the managerial logic of the branch. Industrialization, collectivization, and the planned economy increased demand for reliable transport and communication. The creation of the All-Union Civil Air Fleet in 1930 brought the branch closer to economic planning mechanisms (Bol'nykh, 2010; SNK USSR, 1930). In 1932, the creation of the Main Directorate of the Civil Air Fleet centralized management of the branch (SNK USSR, 1932).

For Kazakhstan, these reforms had ambivalent consequences. Dependence on the center increased, especially in relation to equipment, standards, funding, and planning. At the same time, the republic acquired clearer responsibility for arranging lines, preparing staff, and carrying out practical work on the ground. Centralization did not eliminate republican agency; it redefined it within a stricter administrative framework.

The economic restructuring of the 1930s accelerated the functional expansion of flight services. Agricultural work became especially important. Seasonal demand grew because aircraft could be deployed for crop protection, pest control, disease prevention, chemical treatment, and observation over large cultivated areas. The decree of January 3, 1934, on the organization of agricultural aviation in the Kazakh ASSR formalized this shift and established a specialized body in Shymkent (Kazakh ASSR Council of People's Commissars, 1934). This measure placed the branch into production policy rather than leaving it merely as a transport service.

The 1934 Reorganization and Administrative Consolidation

The decree of May 19, 1934, issued by the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, was a turning point. It reorganized the Civil Air Fleet and Aeroflot and established twelve territorial management bodies, including the Kazakh Territorial Directorate headquartered in Almaty (SNK USSR, 1934). This decision recognized Kazakhstan as a distinct unit for civil fleet management and created conditions for the planning of lines, facilities, and staff distribution within the republic.

Central reforms developed in parallel with sector-specific initiatives. The resolution on agricultural aviation adopted in January 1934 established a management body in Shymkent and approved an action plan for the year (Kazakh ASSR Council of People's Commissars, 1934). Functional diversification generated demand for aerodromes, maintenance, fuel supply, and trained staff. Starting in 1930, Almaty airport received flights from Moscow, which confirmed the republic's growing position in the broader Soviet system.

At the practical level, implementation required working units and flight detachments. The Ural squadron was established in December 1933, and new lines through Guryev were opened in 1934, including Guryev-Kalmykov-Ural-Aktobe-Zhetikara-Kostanay (Kazakhstan Pravda, 1936). Semipalatinsk, now Semey, provides another example of uneven but meaningful inclusion (Sobolev, 2019). The geographical reach of the branch expanded through a combination of administrative designation and practical work on the ground.

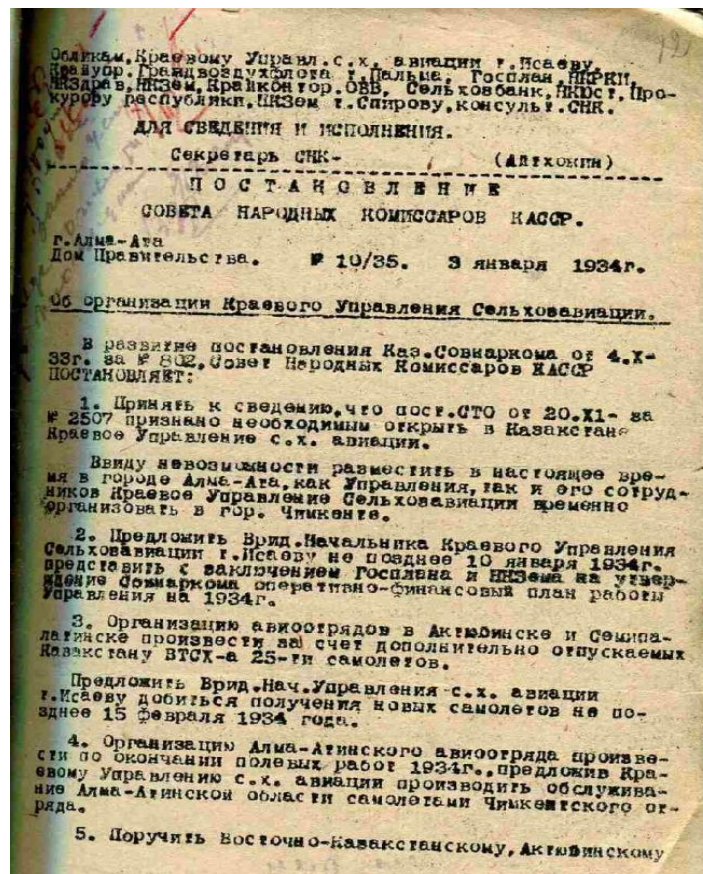


Figure 3 – First and Last Pages of the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the Kazakh SSR, January 3, 1934 (ARSA. F. 85. Inv. 1. C. 188)

Date	Document or decision	Organization or authority	Outcome
09. 02. 1923	Decision to create the Council for Civil Aviation.	USSR Labor and Defense Council; Chief Directorate of the Air Fleet	The Soviet civil fleet received an independent administrative framework and became part of state policy.
17. 03. 1923	Creation of the Voluntary Air Fleet Society, Dobrolet.	AO Dobrolet; Air Fleet Association	Legal and organizational principles for public participation and funding were introduced.
04. 04. 1923	Protocol No. 16/8 of the Kazakh ASSR government: campaign to support the fleet, commission formation, and negotiations with Dobrolet.	Kazakh ASSR government; special commission; A. Rykov	The first official republican step toward the institutionalization of flight services was taken.
28. 05. 1923	Opening of a Dobrolet office in Orenburg; fundraising for aircraft; proposals for lines connecting Kazakhstani cities.	Kazakh ASSR government; Dobrolet	Operational planning began, and early sketches of route

Date	Document or decision	Organization or authority	Outcome
			geography were formulated.
29. 10. 1930	Decree No. 591: creation of VOGVF, dissolution of AO Dobrolet, and transfer of civil fleet assets to state ownership.	USSR People's Commissariat; VOGVF	The field shifted to a state management model with planned funding and centralized control.
10. 11. 1934	Kazakh Krai Party Committee Protocol No. 67: organization of KazAVIAHIMKH/OSOAVIAHIM aero club, allocation of funds, mass propaganda, and youth engagement.	Krai Party Committee; KazAVIAHIMKH; VLKSM; Kazsovprof; Kazakh ASSR government	Social institutions for training were created, including aero clubs and technical circles.

Table 1 – Key decisions and structures in the formation of Kazakhstan's flight system

Expansion of Routes and Routine Services, 1934–1939

After 1934, the system moved from planning toward routine operation. The change was particularly visible in Western Kazakhstan. Guryev, an oil-related center near the Caspian Sea, gained logistical importance and generated demand for rapid communication. The celebration of Air Fleet Day in Guryev on August 18, 1935, and the continuation of such events in 1936 indicate that the new field had entered urban social life (Na Strazhe, 1935; Na Strazhe, 1936).

Ground facilities were visible not only in public celebrations but also in practical organizational measures. On August 26, 1937, a decision was made to establish a flight unit in Guryev. This points to the presence of local staff, equipment, and basic servicing capacity within a relatively short time. The western routes performed several functions at once: passenger movement, mail communication, economic supply, sanitary assistance, and emergency response.

According to data summarized by N. Zh. Mukhabayev, since 1934 the total length of the lines in Kazakhstan reached 20, 015 kilometers; 140, 000 passengers, 7, 320 tons of cargo, and 5, 136 tons of mail were transported (Mukhabayev, 2023: 2). The quality of ground facilities cannot be measured only by the number of airports or aerodromes. It also depended on refueling, maintenance, communication, meteorological services, and technical reliability. Although detailed information about every service point is incomplete, the evidence suggests that regular operation was becoming possible by the late 1930s.

Date	Line	Status
1923	Orenburg–Uralsk–Akmolinsk–Semipalatinsk	First proposed line; associated with S. Seifullin's proposals.
1930	Moscow–Almaty	Main passenger connection.
1936	Guryev–Kalmykov–Uralsk–Aktyubinsk–Zhetiqara–Denisovka–Kostanay	Permanent connection.
1937	Guryev–Kalmykov–Uralsk–Aktyubinsk–Zhetiqara–Ordzhonikidze–Kostanay	Cargo-passenger connection.
1936–1938	Baku–Astrakhan–Guryev–Emba; Guryev–Aktyubinsk; Guryev–Uralsk	Interregional flights.

Table 2 – Major routes in Kazakhstan from 1920 to 1940

Transit-Geopolitical Functions, 1937–1940

From 1937 to 1940, Kazakhstan's airspace acquired a broader transit-geopolitical role. One major factor was the "air bridge" organized within the framework of Soviet military-technical assistance to China. Agreements initiated in 1937 led to the supply of aircraft and equipment to China, while Soviet pilots and specialists worked on Chinese territory (Mil'bach, Nazarenko, 2022). Almaty became one of the logistical starting points of this operation. Aircraft arriving from factories were assembled and repaired in the city and then sent through the Saryozek-Ürümqi-Lanzhou "Z" route toward Hankou (Volkova, 2014).

This transit role strengthened the city's technical environment. The capacity of the aerodrome had to be increased; repair, assembly, navigation, communication, and safety services gained greater importance; and the demand for qualified specialists grew. The international line crossed long distances and mountainous areas, which raised the importance of meteorology, route discipline, and flight security. In this respect, the geopolitical context indirectly accelerated the professional and technical maturation of the republican route system.

A second aspect was the parallel development of border aviation. Since 1932, Almaty hosted units of the border aviation section of the OGPU, which performed border protection and reconnaissance duties (Chuprov, 1999). In 1933, the squadron expanded, and in 1934 the 14th border aviation squadron was established in Almaty. Although these units were departmental rather than civilian in the strict sense, they developed within the same aerodrome environment and contributed to the stability of flight facilities.

By the end of the 1930s, Kazakhstan's flight system was no longer only an internal system of republican lines. It had become part of a larger Soviet and international corridor. Almaty's emergence as a transit hub had long-term consequences, including the concentration of technical services, trained staff, and facilities in the city during the war and postwar periods.

Professional Staff, Public Mobilization, and Professional Culture

Staff shortages were among the most serious constraints in the formation of the system. During the 1930s, training was largely sustained by military-technical organizations such as OSOAVIAKHIM, aero clubs, and special courses. In Kazakhstan, these structures had several interconnected tasks: preparing pilots, mechanics, communicators, and technical workers; presenting this profession as a prestigious career for young people; and creating a reserve of specialists for future expansion.

Newspapers and documentary sources show that Aviation Days, pilots' sketches, model aircraft displays, exhibitions, and youth recruitment campaigns were actively promoted (Na Strazhe, 1935; Komsomolskaya Pravda, 1936). These practices should not be dismissed as mere propaganda. They were social mechanisms for solving a real staffing problem. A technologically complex field could not become stable without people trained to operate, repair, navigate, and administer aircraft.

Memoirs provide additional insight into the everyday professional world of pilots and technicians (Kuznetsov, 1983; Sobolev, 2019). By the late 1930s, the first generation of trained staff had been formed. This group later carried many wartime and postwar tasks. The human foundation created in the 1930s represented not only a technical resource but also a professional culture with its own discipline, risks, and standards.

Aircraft name	Definition	Scope of use and territory
PR-5	Aircraft constructed according to the Rafayelyants design; built in 1934.	Used on the Fort-Shevchenko, Astrakhan, Karabau, and Kossashagyl lines; applied in transportation and service tasks.
K-4	K-series aircraft designed by K. A. Kalinin; first flight in 1928.	Used for mapping, transporting equipment for geologists and surveyors, urgent topographic

Aircraft name	Definition	Scope of use and territory
		work, and engineering-geodetic tasks connected with the Turkestan-Siberian Railway.
K-5	K-series aircraft designed by K. A. Kalinin.	Used on the Fort-Shevchenko, Astrakhan, Karabau, and Kossashagyl lines; applied in transportation and service tasks.
Po-2	Polikarpov light biplane, one of the most widely used Soviet aircraft.	Used in the 244th squadron park in 1940; suitable for short landing strips and diverse local tasks.
Sh-2 / ASH-2	First Soviet serial amphibious aircraft designed by V. B. Shavrov.	Used in the 244th squadron park in 1940; reliable for varied operating conditions.
R-5	Soviet multipurpose single-engine biplane of the 1930s, also known as "Reconnaissance Five".	Used in the 244th squadron park in 1940; suitable for transportation, support, and local service functions.

Table 3 – Types of equipment and aircraft used in Kazakhstan from 1920 to 1940

Conclusion

The history of Kazakhstan's civilian flight services between 1920 and 1940 can be divided into several interconnected phases. The first phase, from 1923 to 1929, was characterized by initial organizational choices, public mobilization, and the symbolic introduction of the air fleet into republican politics. The second phase, from 1930 to 1934, brought centralization and territorial structuring. The third phase, from 1934 to 1939, witnessed functional diversification, including agricultural, postal, sanitary, and interregional transport work. The fourth phase, from 1937 to 1940, strengthened Kazakhstan's transit-geopolitical role, especially through Almaty's participation in broader Soviet corridors.

The emergence of this field was not a simple sequence of first flights, opening ceremonies, and celebratory events. It was an institutional process in which legal acts, ground facilities, professional preparation, public campaigns, and economic demand gradually reinforced one another. The government decisions of 1923 created the first administrative and financial mechanisms. The reforms of the 1930s integrated flying services into the planned economy and gave Kazakhstan a clearer structural position within the Soviet management system. Republican initiatives, especially in Almaty, Guryev, Ural, Aktobe, and Semipalatinsk, translated central policy into practical connectivity.

The evidence also indicates that Kazakhstan's route system was shaped by more than passenger transportation. Agriculture, sanitary assistance, mail, emergency response, geodesy, border functions, and international transit all contributed to consolidation. This multidimensional character explains why flight-based communication became historically necessary in a republic marked by vast distances, uneven infrastructure, and strategic border geography.

The article argues that the formation of civilian flight services in Kazakhstan should be understood as a regional model of Soviet modernization. It was centrally regulated but locally implemented; technically ambitious but socially dependent; symbolic in public discourse but practical in economic and administrative life. By 1940, the foundations had been created for further development during the war and postwar decades: a map of regular connections, a material-technical base, trained staff, and a strategic hub in Almaty.

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CONTENTS

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND SOURCE STUDIES

Alpysbes M.A., Khumarzakh A., Kara A. THE LETTER OF GÜYÜK KHAN AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE	608
---	-----

HISTORY

Batyrbayeva M., Dönninghaus V. THE HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF CIVIL AVIATION IN KAZAKHSTAN (1920–1940)	626
Bekenova A.A., Mukhatova O.Kh. COMBATING CRIME AMONG HOMELESS CHILDREN IN KAZAKHSTAN IN THE 1920S	642
Berlibay E., Zhubanyshov B., Smanova A. THE CONSEQUENCES OF REPRESSION IN KAZAKHSTAN (1920-1950)	659
Zhirenov A.A., Kalan E. EMIR OF KHOREZM HUSSEIN SUFI IN HIS WORK "TAVARIKH-I GUZIDE-I NUSRAT-NAMEH"	677
Kapbarova G.Sh., Amirbek A.A., Gündogdu A. SETTLEMENT AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION OF KANDAS IN SOUTHERN KAZAKHSTAN: REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION POLICY (2000–2023)	689
Kapayeva A.T., Kassymova D.B., Konkabayeva A.N. SOCIAL POLICY AND WOMEN'S HEALTH IN KAZAKHSTAN IN THE 1920S–1930S: A HISTORICAL-SOCIAL ANALYSIS	705
Mamytova S.N., Shayakhmet N.U., Batalov K.K. USE OF SNOW AND SNOW RETENTION PRACTICES IN THE ECONOMY OF THE KAZAKHS IN THE IRTYSH REGION (LATE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURY)	725
Nurymbetova G.R., Abzhanov Kh.M. POLITICAL REPRESSION IN KAZAKHSTAN: THE FATE OF S. SEIFULLIN	738
Ospanova R.R., Murzakhodzhayev K. ACTIVITIES OF SECULAR AND MUSLIM EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE SEMIRECHYE REGION AT THE TURN OF THE XIX–XX CENTURIES (INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS BASED ON ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS)	753
Saktaganova Z.G., Zhagypar A.B., Baigozhina G.M. OME ASPECTS OF "DISSENT" AMONG THE YOUTH OF KARAGANDA IN 1940–1945	772
Satenova M., Shotanova G., Zhetpisbay N. ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOMESTIC ARCHEOGRAPHY BASED ON DOCUMENTARY PUBLICATIONS OF THE 18TH–19TH CENTURIES	789
Toraigyrov E.M., Dzhumashev A.M. THE ZHATAKS OF THE IRTYSH REGION AND THE TEN-VERST BELT IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURIES	806
Tuleshova U.Zh., Galimov E.A. IMPERIAL POWER AND QAZAQ ELITES: MAIN DIRECTIONS OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE INSTITUTION OF SULTAN-RULERS IN THE JUNIOR ZHUZ	821
Tursun Kh.M., Khazretalikyzy R., Kapbarova G.M. THE HISTORICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF FORCED NOMADIC DISPLACEMENT	840
Cherepanov K.V., Omarova G.A., Ualtaeva A.S. THE FORMATION OF ALMATY AS THE POLITICAL CENTER OF KAZAKHSTAN (1920S–30S)	854
Shashayev A.K., Kurmanalina N.N., Belous S.G. POLICE ACTIVITIES DURING THE 1916 UPRISING IN THE SEMIRECHESK REGION	876

ETHNOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY

Razdykov S.Z., Sydygaliyev S.M., Khainazarov B.B. ONOMASTIC ELEMENTS OF SUFI ORIGIN IN THE GENEALOGY OF KAZAKH CLANS IN THE XIV–XV CENTURIES	892
Samashev S.K., Sapashev O.S., Seitkhanuly Sh. TAMGAS AND EAR MARKS (EN) OF THE KAZAKHS OF MONGOLIA	908
Sapatayev S.A., Kartayeva T.E., Orynbasar B.K. SEASONAL SETTLEMENTS OF THE DULAT TRIBE IN THE VALLEYS OF THE SHU-ILE AND TALAS RIVERS	926

МАЗМҰНЫ

ТАРИХНАМА ЖӘНЕ ДЕРЕКТАНУ

Алпысбес М.А., Хумарзах А. Қара Ә.	
КҮЙІК ХАННЫҢ ХАТЫ – ТАРИХИ ДЕРЕК КӨЗІ РЕТІНДЕ	608

ТАРИХ

Батырбаева М., Дёнингхаус В.	
ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА АЗАМАТТЫҚ АВИАЦИЯНЫҢ ҚАЛЫПТАСУ ТАРИХЫ (1920–1940 ЖЖ.)	626
Бекенова А.А., Мухатова О. Х.	
1920-ЖЫЛДАРДАҒЫ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ПАНАСЫЗ –	
БАЛАЛАР ҚЫЛМЫСЫНА ҚАРСЫ КҮРЕС	642
Берлібай Е., Жұбанышов Б., Сманова А.	
ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ҚУҒЫН–СҮРГІНІНІҢ ЗАРДАПТАРЫ (1920-1950 жж.)	659
Жиренов А.А., Калан Э.	
«ТАУАРИХИ ГУЗИДЕ-И НУСРАТ НАМЕ»	
ШЫҒАРМАСЫНДАҒЫ ХОРЕЗМ ӘМІРІ ХУСЕЙН СУФИ	677
Капбарова Г.Ш., Амирбек А.А., Гүндоғду А.	
ОҢТҮСТІК ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ҚАНДАСТАРДЫҢ ҚОНЫСТАНУЫ	
МЕН ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК БЕЙІМДЕЛУІ: АЙМАҚТЫҚ ДИНАМИКАСЫ	
ЖӘНЕ КӨШІ-ҚОН САЯСАТЫНЫҢ ӘСЕРІ (2000–2023 ЖЖ.)	689
Қапаева А.Т., Қасымова Д.Б., Қоңқабаева А.Н.	
ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ 1920–1930-ЖЫЛДАРДАҒЫ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК САЯСАТ	
ЖӘНЕ ӘЙЕЛДЕР ДЕНСАУЛЫҒЫ: ТАРИХИ-ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК ТАЛДАУ	705
Мамытгова С.Н., Шаяхмет Н.У., Баталов Қ.Қ.	
ЕРТІС ӨңІРІ ҚАЗАҚТАРЫНЫҢ ШАРУАШЫЛЫҒЫНДА	
ҚАРДЫ ПАЙДАЛАНУ ЖӘНЕ ҚАР ТОҚТАТУ ТӘЖІРИБЕЛЕРІ (XIX ғ. соңы – XX ғ. басы).....	725
Нұрымбетова Г.Р., Әбжанов Х.М.	
ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ САЯСИ ҚУҒЫН-СҮРГІН: С. СЕЙФУЛЛИН ТАҒДЫРЫ	738
Оспанова Р.Р., Мурзаходжаев Қ.	
XIX–XX ҒАСЫРЛАР ТОҒЫСЫНДА ЖЕТІСУ ӨңІРІНДЕГІ ЗАЙЫРЛЫ	
ЖӘНЕ МҮСЫЛМАНДЫҚ ОҚУ ОРЫНДАРЫНЫҢ ҚЫЗМЕТІ	
(АРХИВТІК ҚҰЖАТТАР НЕГІЗІНДЕ ПӘНАРАЛЫҚ ТАЛДАУ)	753
Сақтағанова З.Ғ., Жағыпар Ә.Б., Байгожина Г.М.	
1940–1945 ЖЫЛДАРДАҒЫ ҚАРАҒАНДЫ ЖАСТАРЫ АРАСЫНДАҒЫ	
«ӨЗГЕШЕ ОЙЛАУДЫҢ» КЕЙБІР АСПЕКТІЛЕРІ	772
Сатенова М., Шотанова Г., Жетпісбай Н.	
XVIII–XIX ҒҒ. ҚҰЖАТТЫҚ ЖАРИЯЛАНЫМДАР НЕГІЗІНДЕГІ ОТАНДЫҚ	
АРХЕОГРАФИЯНЫҢ ДАМУЫ ТУРАЛЫ.....	789
Торайғыров Е.М., Джумашев А.М.	
XIX ҒАСЫРДЫҢ ЕКІНШІ ЖАРТЫСЫ – XX ҒАСЫРДЫҢ БАСЫНДАҒЫ	
ЕРТІС ӨңІРІ МЕН ЕРТІС ОН ШАҚЫРЫМДЫҚ БЕЛДЕУІНДЕГІ ЖАТАҚТАР.....	806
Түлешова Ұ.Ж., Галимов Е.А.	
ИМПЕРИЯЛЫҚ БІЛІК ЖӘНЕ ҚАЗАҚ ЭЛИТАСЫ: КІШІ ЖҮЗДЕГІ БІЛЕУШІ	
СҰЛТАНДАР ИНСТИТУТЫН ТАРИХНАМАЛЫҚ ЗЕРТТЕУДІҢ НЕГІЗГІ БАҒЫТТАРЫ.....	821
Түрсүн Х. М., Хазретәліқызы Р., Капбарова Г. М.	
МӘЖБҮРЛІ АУА КӨШУДІҢ ТАРИХИ ПСИХОЛОГИЯСЫ	840
Черепанов К.В., Омарова Г.А., Уалтаева А.С.	
АЛМАТЫНЫҢ ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ САЯСИ ОРТАЛЫҒЫ РЕТІНДЕ ҚАЛЫПТАСУЫ (1920–30 ЖЖ.)	854
Шашаев Ә.К., Құрманалина Н.Н., Белоус С.Г.	
ЖЕТІСУ ОБЛЫСЫНДАҒЫ 1916 ЖЫЛҒЫ КӨТЕРІЛІС КЕЗІНДЕГІ ПОЛИЦИЯ ҚЫЗМЕТІ	876

ЭТНОЛОГИЯ/АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ

Раздықов С.З., Сыдығалиев С. М., Хайназаров Б.Б.	
XIV–XV ҒАСЫРЛАРДАҒЫ ҚАЗАҚ РУЛАРЫ ШЕЖІРЕСІНДЕГІ	
СОПЫЛЫҚ ТЕКТІ ОНОМАСТИКАЛЫҚ ЭЛЕМЕНТТЕР.....	892
Самашев С.Қ., Сапашев О.С., Сейітханұлы Ш.	
МОҢҒОЛИЯ ҚАЗАҚТАРЫНЫҢ ЕН-ТАҢБАЛАРЫ.....	908
Сапатаев С.Ә., Қартаева Т.Е., Орынбасар Б.Қ.	
ШУ-ІЛЕ ЖӘНЕ ТАЛАС ӨЗЕНДЕРІ АҢҒАРЛАРЫНДАҒЫ ДУЛАТ ТАЙПАСЫНЫҢ	
МЕРЗІМДІК ҚОНЫСТАРЫ	926

СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ И ИСТОЧНИКОВЕДЕНИЕ

Алпысбес М.А., Хумарзах А. Кара А.	
ПИСЬМО ХАНА ГУЮКА КАК ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ ИСТОЧНИК	608

ИСТОРИЯ

Батырбаева М., Дённингхаус В.	
ИСТОРИЯ СТАНОВЛЕНИЯ ГРАЖДАНСКОЙ АВИАЦИИ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ (1920–1940 ГГ.)	626
Бекенова А.А., Мухатова О.Х.	
БОРЬБА С ПРЕСТУПНОСТЬЮ БЕЗПРИЗОРНЫХ ДЕТЕЙ	
В КАЗАХСТАНЕ В 1920-Х ГОДАХ	642
Берлибай Е., Жубанышов Б., Сманова А.	
ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ РЕПРЕССИЙ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ (1920-1950 ГГ.)	659
Жиренов А.А., Калан	
ЭМИР ХОРЕЗМА ХУСЕЙН СУФИ В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИИ «ТАВАРИХИ ГУЗИДЕ-И НУСРАТ НАМЕ»	677
Капбарова Г.Ш., Амирбек А.А., Гюндоду А.	
РАССЕЛЕНИЕ И СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ АДАПТАЦИЯ КАНДАСОВ В ЮЖНОМ КАЗАХСТАНЕ:	
РЕГИОНАЛЬНАЯ ДИНАМИКА И ВЛИЯНИЕ МИГРАЦИОННОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ (2000–2023 ГГ.)	689
Капаева А.Т., Касымова Д.Б., Конкабаева А. Н.	
СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ПОЛИТИКА И ЖЕНСКОЕ ЗДОРОВЬЕ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ В 1920–1930-Е ГГ.:	
ИСТОРИКО-СОЦИАЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ.....	705
Мамытова С.Н., Шаяхмет Н.У., Баталов К.К.	
ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ СНЕГА И ПРАКТИКИ СНЕГОЗАДЕРЖАНИЯ В ХОЗЯЙСТВЕ	
КАЗАХОВ ПРИИРТЫШЬЯ (КОНЕЦ XIX – НАЧАЛО XX ВЕКА)	725
Нурымбетова Г.Р., Абжанов Х.М.	
ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ РЕПРЕССИИ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ: СУДЬБА С. СЕЙФУЛЛИНА.....	738
Оспанова Р.Р., Мурзаходжаев К.	
ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ СВЕТСКИХ И МУСУЛЬМАНСКИХ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫХ УЧРЕЖДЕНИЙ	
В РЕГИОНЕ СЕМИРЕЧЬЕ НА РУБЕЖЕ XIX И XX ВЕКОВ (МЕЖДИСЦИПЛИНАРНЫЙ	
АНАЛИЗ НА ОСНОВЕ АРХИВНЫХ ДОКУМЕНТОВ).....	753
Сактаганова З. Г., Жагыпар А.Б., Байгожина Г.М.	
НЕКОТОРЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ «ИНАКОМЫСЛИЯ»	
СРЕДИ МОЛОДЁЖИ КАРАГАНДЫ В 1940–1945 ГОДАХ	772
Сатенова М., Шотанова Г., Жетписбай Н.	
О РАЗВИТИИ ОТЕЧЕСТВЕННОЙ АРХЕОГРАФИИ НА ОСНОВЕ ДОКУМЕНТАЛЬНЫХ	
ПУБЛИКАЦИЙ XVIII–XIX ВВ.	789
Торайгыров Е.М., Джумашев А.М.	
ЖАТАКИ ПРИИРТЫШЬЯ И ДЕСЯТИВЕРСТНОЙ ПОЛОСЫ	
ВО 2-Й ПОЛОВИНЕ XIX–НАЧАЛЕ XX ВВ.	806
Тулешова У.Ж., Галимов Е.А.	
ИМПЕРСКАЯ ВЛАСТЬ И КАЗАХСКАЯ ЭЛИТА: ОСНОВНЫЕ НАПРАВЛЕНИЯ	
ИСТОРИОГРАФИЧЕСКОГО ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИНСТИТУТА СУЛТАНОВ-ПРАВИТЕЛЕЙ	
МЛАДШЕГО ЖУЗА.....	821
Турсун Х.М., Хазреталикызы Р., Капбарова Г.М.	
ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ПСИХОЛОГИЯ ВЫНУЖДЕННОГО ОТКОЧЕВАНИЯ	840
Черепанов К.В., Омарова Г.А., Уалтаева А.С.	
ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ АЛМА-АТА КАК ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО ЦЕНТРА КАЗАХСТАНА (1920–30-Е ГГ.)	854
Шашаев А.К., Курманалина Н.Н., Белоус С.Г.	
ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ ПОЛИЦИИ В ПЕРИОД ВОССТАНИЯ 1916 ГОДА	
В СЕМИРЕЧЕНСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ	876

ЭТНОЛОГИЯ/АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ

Раздыков С.З., Сыдығалиев С. М., Хайназаров Б.Б.	
ОНОМАСТИЧЕСКИЕ ЭЛЕМЕНТЫ СУФИЙСКОГО ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИЯ	
В ГЕНЕАЛОГИИ КАЗАХСКИХ РОДОВ XIV–XV ВВ.....	892
Самашев С.К., Сапашев О.С., Сейитханулы Ш.	
ТАМГИ И ЕН КАЗАХОВ МОНГОЛИИ	908
Сапатаев С.А., Картаева Т.Е., Орынбасар Б.К.	
СЕЗОННЫЕ ПОСЕЛЕНИЯ ПЛЕМЕНИ ДУЛАТ В ДОЛИНАХ РЕК ШУ-ИЛЕ И ТАЛАСА	926

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