

Mapping the Great Ukrainian Famine

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One of the most insightful and moving accounts of the Holodomor, or the Great Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33, was written by Oleksandra Radchenko, a teacher in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine. In her diary, which was confiscated by Stalin’s secret police and landed the author in the Gulag for ten long years, the 36-year-old teacher recorded not only what she saw around her but also what she thought about the tragedy unfolding before her eyes. “I am so afraid of hunger; I’m afraid for the children,” wrote Radchenko, who had three young daughters, in February 1932. “May God protect us and have mercy on us. It would not be so offensive if it were due to a bad harvest, but they have taken away the grain and created a man-made famine.” That year she wrote about the starvation and suffering of her neighbors and acquaintances but recorded no deaths from hunger. It all changed in January 1933, when she encountered the first corpse of a famine victim on the road leading to her home. By the spring of 1933, she was regularly reporting mass deaths from starvation. “People are dying,” wrote Radchenko in her entry for May 16, 1933, “...they say that whole villages have died in southern Ukraine.”¹

Was Radchenko’s story unique? Did people all over Ukraine indeed suffer from starvation in 1932 and then start dying en masse in 1933? Which areas of Ukraine were most affected? Was there a north-south divide, as the diary suggests, and, if so, did people suffer (and die) more in the south than in the north? Were there more deaths in the villages than in towns and cities? Were small towns affected? Did nationality matter? These are the core questions that the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute’s Digital Map of Ukraine Project attempts to answer by developing the GIS Atlas of Holodomor. By posing these and many other related questions, we hoped to increase our knowledge of one of the greatest tragedies of Ukrainian and East European history. Many of our questions were informed by the vast literature on the Great Famine, with its focus on the causes of mass death from starvation, including ecological factors, weather conditions, levels of collectivization and, last but not least, nationality policy. By measuring the “footprint” of the Great Famine, we also sought to understand the dynamics of the famine, the intentions of the authorities, the fate of the survivors, and the consequences of mass starvation.²

¹ *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraïni: Dokumenty i materialy*, ed. Ruslan Pyrih (Kyiv, 2007), pp. 1012-25.

² For the main approaches to the study of the Great Ukrainian Famine, see S. Maksudov, ‘Losses Suffered by the Population of the USSR, 1918–1958,’ in *The Samizdat Register II*, ed R. Medvedev (London and New York, 1981); Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror–Famine* (New York and Edmonton, 1986); Mark B. Tauger, “The 1932 Harvest and the Famine 1933,” *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991): 70-89; Andrea Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War. Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1918-1934* (Cambridge, Mass, 1996); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY,

The scope of our research was determined by the availability of geo-referenced maps and “mappable” data. We worked with a variety of maps of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic in its interwar borders that were prepared with the assistance of cartographers at Kartohrafiia Publishers in Ukraine, led by Rostyslav Sossa. Those maps served as a basis for the maps prepared specifically for this website by Gennadii Poberezhny. They reflect administrative changes in Ukraine’s external and internal borders, allowing us to compare the results of the 1926 and 1939 population censuses with data from the famine years of 1932–33. These maps helped us answer many important questions, but they also imposed limitations on our research, as they “stop” at the boundaries of Soviet Ukraine and do not include the neighboring areas of Russia and Belarus, thereby restricting our focus to questions that could be answered within the boundaries of interwar Soviet Ukraine.

Another set of limitations that we had to face was the absence of reliable data on population losses in Ukraine at the oblast and raion levels. Such data was produced specifically for the purposes of this project by a group of demographers including Oleh Wolowyna (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Omelian Rudnytsky, Natalia Levchuk, Pavlo Shevchuk, and Alla Savchuk (all four from the Institute for Demography and Social Studies in Kyiv). Joseph Livesey (University of New York) collected and systematized data on government policies. Heorhii Papakin (Institute of History, Kyiv) collected and systematized data on blacklisted communities. Hennadii Iefymenko (Institute of History, Kyiv) collected and systematized data on collectivization in Ukraine. Tetiana Boriak (National Academy of Cadres in Culture and Arts, Kyiv) systematized data based on the testimonies of Famine survivors. The

2001); *Komandyry velykoho holodu: Poizdky V. Molotova i L. Kahanovycha v Ukraïnu ta na Pivnichnyi Kavkaz, 1932–1933 rr.*, ed. Valerii Vasyl'iev and Iurii Shapoval (Kyiv, 2001); J. Vallin, J., F. Meslé, S. Adamets, and S. Pyrozhkov, “A New Estimate of Ukrainian Population Losses during the Crisis of the 1930s and 1940s,” *Population Studies* 56, no. 3 (November 2002); Mark Tauger, *Natural Disasters and Human Actions in the Soviet Famine of 1931–1933*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies (Pittsburgh, 2001); Stanislav Kul'chyts'kyi, *Demohrafichni naslidky Holodomoru 1933 r. v Ukraïni* (Kyiv, 2003); Stephen Wheatcroft, “Towards Explaining the Soviet Famine of 1931–3: Political and Natural Factors in Perspective,” *Food and Foodways* 12, nos. 2–3 (2004): 107–36; R. W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger. Soviet Agriculture, 1931–33* (Basingstoke, 2004); Michael Ellman, “The Role of Leadership Perceptions and of Intent in the Soviet Famine of 1931–1934,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 6 (September 2005); Roman Serbyn, “The Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33 as Genocide in the Light of the UN Convention of 1948,” *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2006): 181–94; *Hunger by Design: The Great Ukrainian Famine and Its Soviet Context*, ed. Halyna Hryn (Cambridge, Mass., 2008); Hiroaki Kuromiya, “The Soviet Famine of 1932–33 Reconsidered,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 4 (2008): 663–75; Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010); Norman Neimark, *Stalin’s Genocides* (Princeton, NJ, 2010). For the historiographic overview of recent discussions on the Great Ukrainian famine, see Liudmyla Grynevych, “The Present State of Ukrainian Historiography on the Holodomor and Prospects for Its Development,” *The Harriman Review* 16, no. 2 (2008): 10–20; Heorhii Kas’ianov, *Danse Macabre. Holod 1932–33 rokiv u politytsi, masovii svidomosti ta uistorohrafii (1980-ti -- pochatok 200 0-kh)* (Kyiv, 2010).

map of the 1928 famine is based on data collected by Liudmyla Hrynevych (Institute of History, Kyiv). Hennadii Boriak (Institute of History, Kyiv) provided intellectual leadership for the research projects conducted in Ukraine in conjunction with the HURI GIS Map project. Research on the project has been supported by the Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University and the Ukrainian Studies Fund.

What we are going to present will be the first attempt to reconstruct the history of the Great Famine with the help of the historical data presented in the GIS Atlas of Holodomor, created by the participants of the Project. Most of the archival documents used to discuss the meaning of the maps come from the most comprehensive collection of the documents of the Great Famine published in 2007 by Ruslan Pyrih.³ Not all the results of our research to date have materialized in the form of GIS maps or layers. Work is still continuing on many of the projects mentioned above. The maps we offer today, presented in the Map Gallery, reflect the first results of our research efforts. All these maps are also available as parts of the interactive map of the Great Famine, which offers everyone using the website an opportunity not only to check the accuracy of our hypotheses but also to formulate his or her own questions and conduct independent research by comparing different layers of the map.

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Serhii Plokhii is the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Professor of Ukrainian History and the director of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University, where he leads a group of researchers working on the GIS Map Atlas of Holodomor. A leading authority on the region, he has published extensively in English, Ukrainian and Russian. Plokhii is the author of several influential monographs, including most recently *Yalta: The Price of Peace* (Viking Press, 2010, Penguin 2011) and *The Cossack Myth: History and Nationhood in the Age of Empires* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). In 2013 Plokhii was named Walter Channing Cabot Fellow at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University for scholarly eminence in the field of history.

³ *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv v Ukraïni: Dokumenty i materialy*. [Henceforth: *Holodomor*].