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**SECURITY AGENCY SURVEILLANCE
OF THE GREEK CATHOLIC UNDERGROUND AMONG
THE SPECIAL RESETTLERS OF SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN
(based on the materials of the agent file 'reefs')**

The article is devoted to the history and social memory of the Greek Catholic underground, which emerged in the Kazakh SSR after the mass deportations from Western Ukraine, carried out in the period 1940–1952, especially the operation 'West' in 1947. The underground, operating initially without priests, then, after their release from prison during Khrushchev's amnesty in 1954–1956, was formed by released clergymen of the Greek Catholic churches banned in the Soviet Union: the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (Lviv Metropolitanate) and the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo. The centre of their activities in Kazakhstan was Karaganda, where, in particular, the secret bishop Alexander Khira lived until the end of his days. The later beatified priest Oleksa Zaritsky, who died in detention on the territory of Karlag, also lived and worked here. The history and culture of the deported peoples have become part of the social history of Kazakhstan, but unlike the fates of other ethnic communities, the fates of Ukrainians and their collective memory have been very poorly studied. In recent years, due to the declassification of the archives of the KGB of the Ukrainian SSR, it has become possible to fill some of the gaps. The previously unexplored history of persecution, surveillance and recruitment of underground Greek Catholic clergy in Kazakhstan is reconstructed mainly on the basis of the materials of the all-union agency file 'Reefs', which totals 32 volumes. If necessary, this information is supplemented by other sources, including information preserved in the families of special resettlers.

Key words: USSR, KGB, history of Kazakhstan, repressions, special resettlers, Greek Catholics, Catholic church.

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**Арнайы қызметтер грек-католик астындағы қызметтерді бақылау
кеңестік Қазақстанның ерекшеліктері арасында
(«Рифтер» агенттік ісінің материалдарының негізінде)**

Мақала 1940–1952 жылдар аралығында Батыс Украинадан болған жаппай депортациядан кейін, әсіресе 1947 жылғы «Батыс» операциясынан кейін Қазақ КСР-да пайда болған грек-католиктік астыртын қызметінің тарихы мен әлеуметтік жадына арналған. Бастапқыда діни қызметкерлерсіз жұмыс істеген митрополитен 1959 жылдың 14-ші жұлдызында түрмеден босатылған Кеңес Одағында тыйым салынған грек-католик шіркеулерінің гигиенасы: украин грек-католик шіркеуі (Львов митрополиті) және Мукачево грек-католиктік епархиясы. Олардың Қазақстандағы қызметінің орталығы Қарағанды болды, мұнда, атап айтқанда, құпия епископ Александр Хира өмірінің соңына дейін өмір сүрді. Бұл жерде Карлаг аумағында түрмеде қайтыс болған, кейіннен ұрып-соғылған діни қызметкер Олекса Зарицкий де тұрып, жұмыс істеген. Жер аударылған халықтардың тарихы мен мәдениеті Қазақстанның әлеуметтік тарихының бір бөлігіне айналды, бірақ басқа этникалық қауымдастықтардың тағдырларынан айырмашылығы, украиндықтардың тағдыры мен олардың ұжымдық жадысы өте нашар зерттелген. Соңғы жылдары Украина КСР МҚК мұрағатының құпиясыздануына байланысты кейбір олқылықтардың орнын толтыруға мүмкіндік туды. Қазақстандағы астыртын грек-католиктік діни қызметкерлерді қудалаудың, қадағалаудың және жұмысқа алудың бұрын зерттелмеген тарихы негізінен 32 томнан тұратын бүкілодақтық «Рифтер» барлау ісінің материалдары негізінде жаңғыртылған. Қажет болған жағдайда бұл ақпарат басқа да көздермен, соның ішінде арнайы қоныстанушылар отбасыларында сақталған мәліметтермен толықтырылады.

Түйін сөздер: КСРО, КГБ, Қазақстан тарихы, қуғын-сүргін, арнайы қоныс аударушылар, грек католиктері, католик шіркеуі.

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e-mail: nes.pilawa@gmail.com**Надзор спецслужб за греко-католическим подпольем
в среде спецпереселенцев советского Казахстана
(по материалам агентурного дела «Рифы»)**

Статья посвящена истории и социальной памяти греко-католического подполья, возникшего в Казахской ССР после массовых депортаций из Западной Украины, осуществлявшихся в период 1940-1952 гг., в особенности операции «Запад» 1947 г. Подполье, действовавшее поначалу без священников, затем, после их выхода из мест заключения в период хрущевской амнистии 1954-1956 гг., было сформировано освободившимися священнослужителями запрещенных в Советском Союзе греко-католических церквей: Украинской Греко-Католической Церкви (Львовская Митрополия) и Мукачевской Греко-Католической Епархии. Центром их деятельности в Казахстане стала Караганда, где до конца своих дней проживал, в частности, тайный епископ Александр Хира. Здесь же жил и работал позднее беатифицированный священник Олекса Зарицкий, скончавшийся в заключении на территории Карлага. История и культура депортированных народов стали частью социальной истории Казахстана, однако в отличие от судеб других этнических сообществ судьбы украинцев и их коллективная память изучены крайне слабо. В последние годы, в связи с рассекречиванием архивов КГБ Украинской ССР, появилась возможность восполнить некоторые пробелы. Ранее не исследованная история преследований, слежки и вербовки подпольного греко-католического клира на территории Казахстана воссоздается, в основном, по материалам общесоюзного агентурного дела «Рифы», которое насчитывает 32 тома. При необходимости эти сведения дополняются другими источниками, включая информацию, сохранившуюся в семьях спецпереселенцев.

Ключевые слова: СССР, КГБ, история Казахстана, репрессии, спецпереселенцы, греко-католики, католическая церковь.

Introduction

Ukrainian Greek Catholicism (also called Uniatism or Unia) was one of the priority internal enemies of the authorities and remained under prohibition until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities began preparations for the liquidation of the UGCC (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church) as early as 1939-1940, after the military defeat of Poland and the annexation of the territory of Western Ukraine to the USSR. In 1941, due to the German occupation, the work started was interrupted, and with it the development of the NKVD agency file “Walkers” (Rus. “Ходячие”) was interrupted. In 1945 it was resumed. The accumulated materials of the “Walkers” case were later added to another agent development named “Reefs” (Rus. “Рифы”) (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 338–337). In 1946, the UGCC accused of co-operation with the Nazis was liquidated at a ‘church council’ staged by the authorities [3; 4], and those priests who did not agree to become part of the Russian Orthodox Church (РПЦ) were sent to prisons and camps. In 1949, the Uniate church in Transcarpathia (Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo, GCEM) was also liquidated.

At the same time, and especially on a large scale in 1947, the authorities carried out deportations of

the civilian population of Western Ukraine (the so-called relatives of ‘OUN-UPA bandits’) to the northern regions of Russia and Kazakhstan. During Operation ‘West’ in 1947 alone, at least 76,000 people, mostly women, children, and the elderly, were removed. In total, in 1944-1952, according to the documents of the Soviet authorities, more than 210,000 people were deported from the western regions of Ukraine [1, p. 275]. Thus there appeared communities of Greek-Catholic special resettlers. Special resettlers were restricted in their freedom of movement, were regularly registered in the special commandant’s offices (Rus. *спецкомендатуры*) and, as a rule, worked in heavy industries. The regime of special settlements survived the Gulag (ГУЛАГ) system and existed until the mid-1960s. In Kazakhstan, special Ukrainian settlements were located mainly in the Karaganda region. It was also the site of the infamous Karlag (Карлаг) concentration camp, whose victims included many Greek Catholic religious workers, a number of whom were beatified by Pope John Paul II: priest Oleksa Zaritsky (Ukr. *Олекса Зарицький*; ЦПСИП, 11ц/12/5-3-6) and bishop Nikita Budka (Ukr. *Никита Будка*; ЦПСИП, 11/7/4/М/186). At first Greek Catholics lived without priests, but Khrushchev’s 1954 amnesty, when some priests were released from the ITL, changed the situation and underground church

structures were formed. The KGB closely monitored their activities, recruited agents, exerted pressure, preventing not only the socio-political, but also cultural and ethno-religious life of Greek Catholics. At the same time, the most active figures of the underground were held in the 'Reefs' agency file.

The analysis of the above-mentioned agency file, declassified in Ukraine, became the main method of the present study. Religious freedom came to Ukrainian Greek Catholics on the territory of the republic only with the independence of Kazakhstan, and the restoration of the history of persecution and the fate of the victims of totalitarianism meets the objectives of the democratic policy of memory carried out in the country. Archival work and historical analyses allow us to draw conclusions both about the general nature of repressive activities of the Soviet security services and about the specific methods of work, as a result of which people's fates were broken and entire ethno-confessional communities were deprived of the freedom of cultural and religious life. It is equally important to reconstruct the ways of cultural resistance of the victims of repressive policies that allowed them to preserve their identity.

Materials and Methods

In addition to the above-mentioned materials of the 'Reefs' case files, currently stored in the Branch State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (ГДА СБУ; Ukr. *Галузевий державний архів Служби безпеки України*), and materials recorded by the Institute of Church History of the Ukrainian Catholic University (АІІЦ УКУ; Ukr. *Архів Інституту історії Церкви Українського Католицького Університету*), materials obtained during expeditions to the Karaganda region of the Republic of Kazakhstan were involved in the research: documents from the archive of the Apostolic Administration for Catholics of the Byzantine Rite of Kazakhstan and Central Asia (ААКВОКЦА; Rus. *Апостольская Администратура для католиков византийского обряда в Казахстане и Центральной Азии*), documents from the Centre for Legal Statistics and Information at the Prosecutor's Office of Karaganda Oblast (ЦПСИП; Rus. *Центр правовой статистики и информации при Прокуратуре*), documents and photographs from private and home archives, as well as memories of victims of Stalinist repressions and descendants of special settlers, collected through semi-structured and narrative interviews and participant observa-

tion. Thus, the methodology of the research is interdisciplinary and combines classical historical and archival analyses with ethnographic research techniques and methods of studying historical memory.

Literature review

Some publications published in Ukrainian scientific periodicals are devoted to the surveillance of Greek Catholics by the special services of the USSR, such as a review of agent work before 1941 [7] and an article devoted to the personality of Nikolai Murani (Hungarian *Miklós Murányi*; Ukr. *Миколай Мурані*), whose activities were connected not only with Transcarpathia, but also with Kazakhstan [8]. It is also necessary to list a number of collections that include selected documents on the surveillance of Metropolitan Joseph Slipyj (Ukr. *Йосиф Сліпий*), their entourage, as well as documents accompanying the process of liquidation of the UGCC [3; 4; 5]. Among the biographical studies we should highlight the dissertation of the Hungarian historian Marianna Riskó, devoted to the activities of bishop Alexander Khira (Ukr. *Олександр Хіра*; Rus. *Александр Хира*) [10]. However, there are no publications specifically devoted to the issue in the context of the Central Asian region. And although the scope of this article in no way allows us to fill this gap, it may provide a starting point for such work.

Results and discussion

The 'Reefs' agency file was opened in early February 1958, when the USSR authorities realised that the Greek Catholics were able to organise underground structures throughout the country and to some extent re-established a vertical church apparatus headed by Metropolitan Joseph Slipyj, who was in exile in the Krasnoyarsk region of the RSFSR. The ruling on the opening of the case states that the clerics of the UGCC and the GCEM 'after their release established contact among themselves and developed active illegal work for the revival of the former Uniate Church', and 'the religious and political activity of the Uniats, as in former times, in the ideological and organisational sense, as in former times, is closely intertwined with the activity of Ukrainian nationalists' (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 5). To prevent the spread of ideas aimed at building an independent Ukrainian state was one of the important goals of the KGB.

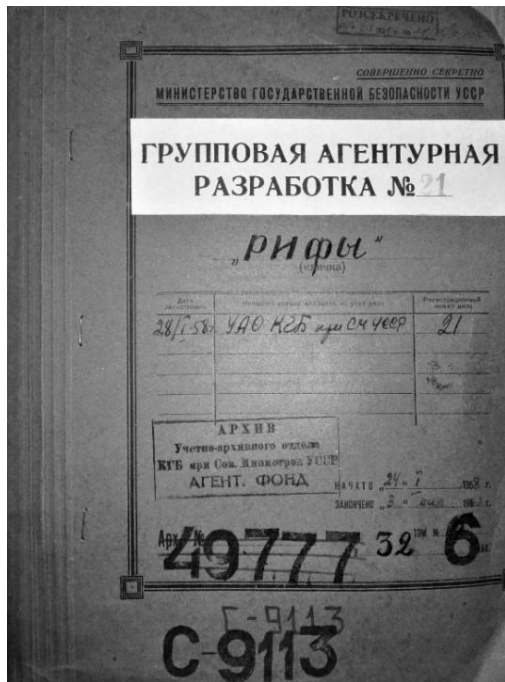


Figure 1 – Volume 6 of the group agency case ‘Reefs’.
Source: ГДА СБУ.

Both in the decision to register the ‘Reefs’ file and in the decision to close it, among the nine ‘leaders of the Uniate opposition’ is a Transcarpathian prelate, secret bishop Alexander Khira, exiled to Karaganda (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 335-337). In the ‘Reefs’ file the most active Greek Catholic priests of the USSR are mentioned, including those who acted on the territory of Kazakhstan: Mykhailo Suliatiitsky (Ukr. *Михайло Сулятицький*), Istvan Bendas (Hungarian *István Bendász*; Ukr. *Іштван Бендас*), Kindrat Vergun (Ukr. *Кіндрат Вергун*), Mykolai Vonsul (Ukr. *Миколай Вонсуль*), Mykolai Shaban (Ukr. *Миколай Шабан*) and others. The Roman Catholic priests Vladyslav Bukovynsky (Pol. *Władysław Bukowiński*) and Alexander Staub, who were closely connected with the Uniate underground, were held together with them. The authorities had a special interest in Oleksa Zaritsky, as he was in direct contact with Metropolitan Slipyj.

The documents of the ‘Reefs’ file show that priests Kindrat Vergun and Mykolai Vonsul, who worked in Karaganda, were recruited by the KGB. Most likely, this happened before their release from the camps. The report on agent-operative work ‘in the line of Greek-Catholic clergy and monastic element’ dated 11.08.1958 reveals the identity of the agent ‘Karyy’ (‘Карый’) is the underground priest Vergun, who worked as a bath attendant at the mine

in Shakhtinsk (Шахтинск), characterised as ‘an active uniate, enjoying authority among reactionaries and nationalists’ (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 9, л. 55–79). In turn, the operative note of the 4th department of the UKGB under the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR from 05.10.1957 reports that the agent ‘Sincere’ (‘Искренний’). is none other than Mykolai Vonsul, who works as a bricklayer’s foreman, and clandestinely performs the duties of a priest (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 120–121).

However, if Vonsul and Vergun were ordinary agents, the vicar of the Mukachevo Eparchy, Nikolai Murani, was a particularly valuable one. This priest was recruited under the pseudonym ‘Berezovsky’ (‘Березовский’) back in Transcarpathia in February 1949, when the security service pressed him with the testimony of his colleagues and accused him of involvement in the suicide of a diocesan employee whom Murani had previously dismissed because he suspected of collaborating with the state security services. Following his recruitment, Murani wrote a public statement terminating the diocesan office as well as resigning as vicar, which contributed to the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church in the region. Subsequently, Murani spread the legend among Greek Catholics that his letter had been forged by the secret services, thus remaining a vicar, but in the service of the KGB [8]. Co-operation with the organs did not save Murani from imprisonment. He was re-recruited before his release from Karlag in 1955 under the pseudonym ‘Owl’ (‘Сова’). Having been released, Murani stayed briefly in Kazakhstan and then left for Uzhgorod (Ужгород). However, he was destined to return briefly to Karaganda in 1957, together with Bishop Alexander Khira, who had been exiled there.

The agents often checked and double-checked each other on behalf of the KGB, usually not knowing that their counterparts were being led by the same manipulators. The characteristics given to Vergun and Vonsul by Murani, the agent ‘Owl’ who was monitoring them, have been preserved. Vergun, he said, was “not liked by anyone” and “his behaviour is not good”. He allegedly scared off the Ukrainian special resettlers in Karaganda with drinking and scandals, so that they “now go to the Orthodox church in Tikhonovka more than to him.” According to the agent, the special settlers do not trust Vonsul either, perhaps because he is “a Ukrainian, but from Polish ancestry”. In July 1957, Vonsul left Karaganda “first home, and from there he wants to go to work in the Crimea, where his acquaintance /also a bricklayer/ is a foreman and calls him to join his

brigade” (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 5, ч. 2, л. 185–204). While ‘Owl’ was checking ‘Sincere’, the latter, together with other agents of the Karaganda and Jambyl KGB Department ‘Kovalevsky’, ‘Arrow’, ‘Kirst’ and ‘Soloviev’ were checking the agent ‘Owl’ they did not notice any anti-Soviet manifestations on his part (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 180–185).

‘Owl’ tried to smooth out the appearance of what was happening, creating an image of predominantly loyal, apolitical or disillusioned Uniates. Meanwhile, Mykolai Vonsul came from a family closely associated with the nationalist underground. In Karaganda, Vonsul worked in a construction brigade, and, according to Ivanna Stanko, who was close to the Vonsul family, created an underground chapel in Astana, then called Akmolinsk (АІІЦ УКУ, с. П-1-1-510, к. № 1449). It is also known that in 1956, on the feast of the Intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary (also the day of the founding of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army; УПА), Vonsul married well-known OUN (ОУН; Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) activists Petro Lavriv (Ukr. *Петро Лаврів*) and Maria Skrentovich (Ukr. *Марія Скрентович*), who were in exile in Kazakhstan and later became involved in dissident and anti-Soviet activities.

It is also necessary to mention another defendant in the ‘Reefs’ case, the priest Mykhailo Suliatsky, whom the authorities tried for a long time to recruit or convert to Orthodoxy, but did not succeed. Suliatsky was born in 1894 in the village of Seredny Berezhov (*Середній Березів*), Yablunovsky district, Stanislav region, in a gentry family [2, p. 213]. Apparently, Suliatsky was a participant of the First World War as a member of the Austro-Hungarian army and as a prisoner of war was held for some time in Siberia. After his return to Ukraine, he studied at the Stanislav Theological Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1923. In 1946 he was one of those who openly opposed the so-called ‘reunification’ with the Orthodox Church, which led to his arrest. Suliatsky was accused of collaborating with the Nazis during the war, and on 27 June 1946 was sentenced under Articles 54-1 ‘a’, 54-11 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic to imprisonment in a correctional labour camp for 10 years with a 5-year loss of rights. Suliatsky was sent to Karlag, where he stayed un-

til 1951, and then was transferred to Peschanlag (Песчанлар), from where he was released to live in exile-settlement in Karaganda in April 1955. While still in the camps, as it appears from the KGB documents, Suliatsky established a secret correspondence with Greek Catholic bishops Ivan Lyatyshevsky (Ukr. *Іван Лятишевський*) and Nikolai Charnetsky (Ukr. *Миколай Чарнецький*), as well as with Metropolitan Joseph Slipyj. After his release he lived for some time in the Tikhonovka House of Invalids, then at the 20th mine of Karaganda (АІІЦ УКУ, с. П-1-1-1536, к. № 2609). There, according to the documents of the security services, M. Suliatsky and K. Vergun “*hatched a plan to create an illegal Uniate monastery in Karaganda, for which purpose they tried through their connections to conduct recruitment work among the population in order to send Greek Catholics from the western regions to the Karaganda region under the pretext of going there to work*” (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 80–85).

Together with Oleksa Zaritsky, Mykhailo Suliatsky began to conduct worship services. Since there were many deported from the Ivano-Frankivsk (formerly called Stanislav) region, he met his old acquaintances and former parishioners here. Such is the Dranchuk (*Дранчук*) family, familiar to Suliatsky from their life in Bily Oslavy (Білі Ослави), who have preserved the good memory and photos of their confessor. “*We went to him to study, learnt the basics of religion, learnt carols,*” recalls Natalia Dranchuk (AFM Natalia Dranchuk 2022). Her sister Halina, in her turn, tells how the priest used to conduct divine service in their hut: “*Before that, they used to decorate the atmosphere, make a kind of elevation on the table from books, cover it with an embroidered tablecloth, put a crucifix on it, and hang icons on the walls, decorated with embroidered towels and flowers*” (AFM Halina Dranchuk 2024). Suliatsky also visited Aktau (Ақтай), a settlement near the town of Temirtau (Теміртау), which had grown thanks to the development of the Karaganda coal basin. His charges were not only Ukrainians, but also Roman Catholic Germans. Volodymyra Senyk recalled how in Aktau Suliatsky gave the first communion to German children, and they were traditionally dressed in suits, dresses and headdresses of white colour (АІІЦ УКУ, с. П-1-1-380, к. № 587, 588).



Figure 2 – Mykhailo Suliatitsky, Karaganda, 1955. Photo provided by Galina Dranchuk.
On the back there is a gift inscription addressed to her parents: ‘To dear friends Orysa and Bogdan in memory’
(Ukr.: ‘Дорогим приятелям Орісі та Богданові на спомин’).

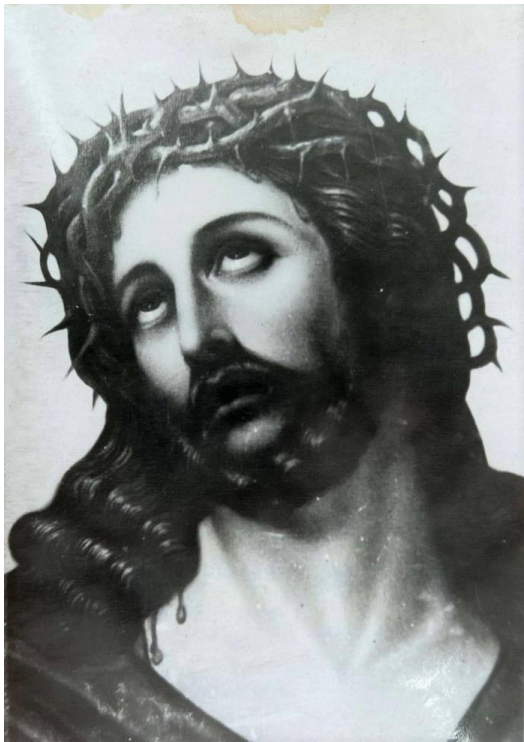


Figure 3 – An image of Jesus Christ used in the Dranchuk family’s clandestine services conducted by Fr. Mykhailo Suliatitsky. Provided by Halina Dranchuk.

The special services kept an eye on Suliatitsky, who showed himself to be politically active in the 1940s. In a special memorandum about him we find that ‘the ultimate goal of his religious activity’ Suliatitsky saw ‘the restoration of the Unia in the western regions of Ukraine’ and relied on missionary activity in detention centres and special resettlements. Another irreconcilable priest, whose fate was linked to Kazakhstan, Fr. Volodymyr Prokopiv (Ukr. *Володимир Прокопів*), who was in communion with Suliatitsky, was closely supervised. Born in 1912, studied in Peremyshl and Rome (where he defended his doctoral thesis), and ordained in 1938, Fr. Volodymyr was probably one of the first Greek Catholic pastors to become active in Asia during the Stalin years. He was arrested for the first time in November-December 1945, in the prison in Peremyshl, during the forced eviction of Ukrainians from Poland to the Ukrainian SSR. In October 1947 he was sentenced under articles 10 and 54-11 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR for 5 years of deportation to Kokchetav region for aiding Ukrainian insurgents. In the village of Novo-Sukhotino (Ново-Сухотино), Krasnoarmeisky district, Kokchetav region, Kazakhstan, he established a Catholic community. According to the data of the Capu-

chin priest Serafin Kaszuba, Volodymyr Prokopiv conducted services in the Byzantine rite, to which he gathered Roman Catholics. He recounts Prokopiv's appearance among the evicted Poles and Germans, long deprived of a priest, in Tayynsha (Тайынша; before 1997 Красноармейск, before 1962 Тайнча), in North Kazakhstan oblast, as follows: 'And it is here, around 1948, that the first priest appears. Skinny and darkened, constantly in prayer and mortification of the flesh, he rules the Eastern rite. This confuses and scares people away, they fear deception. He also socialises more with Germans, although he is sheltered by a Polish family. The local authorities are also confused' [9, с. 102-103]. Prokopiv's energetic activity attracted the attention of 'competent authorities', who found that he had managed to form an 'anti-Soviet formation' and, together with the special prisoner Ida Imel, liaised with 'counter-revolutionary circles' in Western Ukraine, receiving banned literature from there. In January 1949 Prokopiv was sentenced to 25 years in the camps [6, p. 327-328]. After serving his sentence in the camps in the Urals and Khakassia, in 1956 the priest was released early and returned to Lviv region, but lived there for only two years, when he was forced to leave for Lithuania. From there he travelled periodically to Astana (then Akmolinsk), where he established a catacomb chapel and conducted services, first in the Eastern and later in the Latin rite. His ministry also

included believers from the villages of Korgalzhin (Қорғалжын) and Shortandy (Шортанды) in Akmola Oblast.

In May 1956, the KGB intercepted a letter from Fr. Volodymyr Prokopiv, sent from the Drohobych region to Maklakovo, to exile Metropolitan Slipyj. Apparently, his correspondence with Slipyj made him suspected of being active in Western Ukraine and contributed to his early eviction from there. The intercepted letter, in particular, reported that Suliatsky, being in Karaganda, received a passport and an opportunity to return to Galicia, "*but he does not return, because there was no advice to leave the faithful who were stretching out their hands to him*" (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 4, л. 94-98). In August 1956, Suliatsky returned to the Stanislav region, where he communicated with underground priests and where he was to meet Oleksa Zaritsky, who had travelled there, and who was allegedly carrying Metropolitan Slipyj's instructions 'to create in each village a group of 5-10 active Greek-Catholics, who would, if necessary, be the initiators of the restoration of the Unia'. On 25 October 1956, the agent 'Mironyak' recounted Suliatsky's views as follows: "*The Catholic Church is of great importance for us Greek-Catholics in Kazakhstan, as we can think about restoring the Unia in the western regions of Ukraine by leaning on it*" (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 80-85).



Figure 4 – Volodymyr Prokopiv surrounded by parishioners, Akmola region, Kazakhstan, late 1950s – early 1960s. Source: ААКБОКІЦА.

In September 1957, the agent 'Owl' was tasked to meet M. Suliatsky on the territory of Ukraine, to find out about Slipyj orders transmitted through Zaritsky, to find out about the affairs of Bishops Lyatyshevsky and Charnetsky (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 186–188). On 20 December 1957 'Owl' sent his report, which stated that he had learned from Suliatsky about the dissatisfaction on the part of Oleksa Zaritsky that he, Suliatsky, had left Karaganda. It was also reported that Metropolitan Slipyj had forbidden Zaritsky to serve liturgies in the Latin rite for Germans and Poles, because he believed that biritualism leads to Latinisation and cultural erosion of Ukrainian special settlements, whereas the Eastern rite should be strengthened. Suliatsky was frightened in 1957 by detention on the way to the Serednyanska Mountain (Середнянська Гора), where allegedly miracles took place and preached another figure of the "Reefs" Ignatij Soltys (Ukr. *Ігнатій Солтис*), who received a secret ordination to the priesthood in Kazakhstan from Bishop Ivan Lyatyshevsky (lived in the special settlement in Merke, then in Chulak-Tau, Jambyl region) (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 5, ч. 2, л. 238–245).

In January 1958, another KGB agent nicknamed 'Quiet' ("Тихий"), who was embedded in the catacomb church, reported from the words of Bishop

Mykolai Charnetsky that Zaritsky had trouble with the authorities and was unable to deliver the instructions from Metropolitan Slipyj for transmission to the clergy. Then this mission was fulfilled by the priest Iurii Potereiko (Ukr. *Юрій Помереїко*), who travelled from Galicia to Maklakovo. The meeting between the unsuspecting Charnetsky and the 'Quiet' agent was interrupted by the appearance of Petro Herilyuk-Kupchinsky (Ukr. *Петро Герілюк-Купчинський*), who then arrived on a visit from Karaganda and noted that there were many believers in need of the Latin rite (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 5, ч. 2, л. 300–304).

In June 1958, 'Owl' informed the curators that he had received two letters from M. Sulyatsky, where he recounted news from Kazakhstan: underground Catholic priest Alexander Staub was dissatisfied with the fact that Greek Catholic priest Istvan Bendas did not know German, so that the German Catholics were in dire need of a pastor (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 6., л. 167–169). The authorities continued to collect compromising material on Suliatsky, which they hoped to use for his recruitment with the subsequent purpose of undermining the catacomb bishops of the UGCC. For the rest of his life in Ukraine he was subjected to surveillance, pressure and provocations.

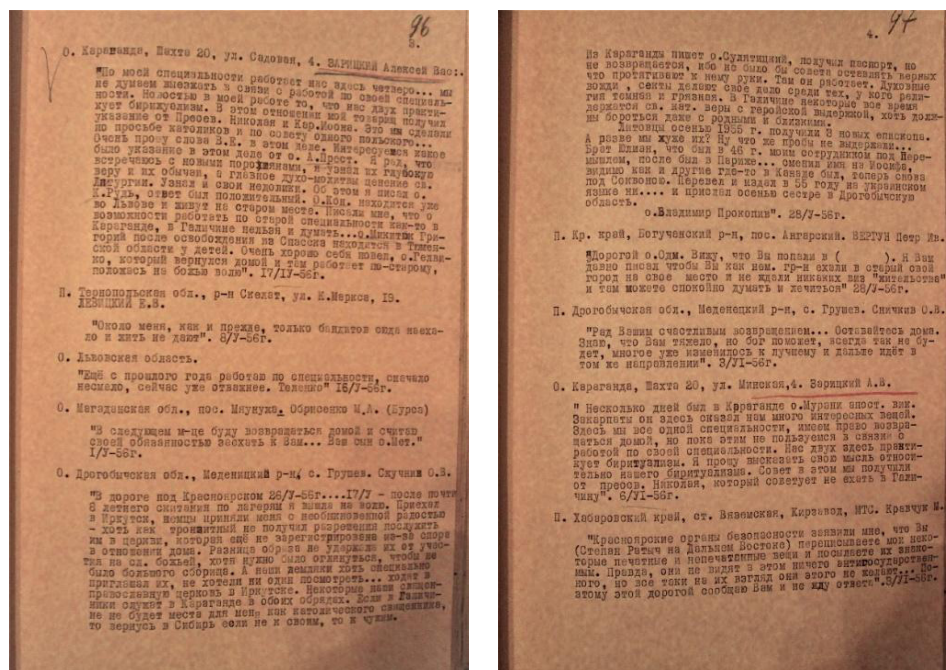


Figure 5 – Pages of the note on the incoming and outgoing correspondence of Metropolitan Joseph Slipyj (the 'Reefs' file), containing extracts from the intercepted correspondence of figures of the Greek Catholic underground, including the Karaganda addressees. Source: ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 4, л. 94–98.

M. Suliatitsky and V. Prokopiv left and subsequently had nothing to do with the Catholic underground in Kazakhstan. On the contrary, bishop Khira remained in Karaganda after his eviction from Uzhgorod forever, died here in 1983, and now rests in the Karaganda Basilica of St Joseph. When in November 1956, in the presence of Murani, bishop Hira, then secretly serving in Transcarpathia, ordained four former seminarians to the priesthood, it angered the KGB. It was decided to deport Khira from Ukraine, but leaving Murani in Uzhgorod meant sowing suspicion among the clergy about the latter. So the authorities sent both of them into exile, but with the aim of later returning ‘Owl’ to Transcarpathia. Murani and Khira were ordered to leave the territory of the Ukrainian SSR. At first they left for Lithuania, but since they were not registered there, they travelled to Maikuduk (Майкудук, Майкұдық), then a suburb of Karaganda. There they were joined by another Transcarpathian priest Istvan Bendas, who left his native land because of financial problems and fear of arrest [8, pp. 101–103].

‘Owl’ tried to assure the KGB that Khira, who had arrived in Karaganda, was broken, intended to ‘get involved in nothing’ and no longer wished for the revival of the Uniate church. *“The Greek Catholic Church has lived up to its age and ended its existence with shame. The Roman Catholics are standing strong and the future of the Church depends on them and only on them. There is nothing to count on us, and Rome knows it, and that is why it keeps silent. Otherwise, I can’t imagine why no one will speak of us. So, we need to get off the stage,”* these words were allegedly uttered by the desperate papal prelate on arrival in Kazakhstan (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 5, ч. 2, л. 185–204). This information from ‘Owl’ did not arouse much confidence in the KGB. In the plan of operational use and verification of the agent ‘Owl’ of 14 September 1957 it was noted that *“reports on the behaviour and political moods of Hira require verification”* and that Murani, remaining committed to the Greek Catholic Church, *“does not show proper activity in the execution of the above tasks of the state security agencies”*, and *“has so far presented materials on uniate authorities superficially”* (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 180–185). A few days later, ‘Owl’ had to compile a new report listing the underground priests working in Kazakhstan and describing their sentiments. About Khira, the report said that he served masses for the German population, and for Ukrainians Greek Catholics stopped (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 5, ч. 2, л. 205–212). By this time, Murani, who had previously sent a petition for cancel-

lation of his expulsion by agreement with the KGB, had already received permission to return and was in Transcarpathia. Khira followed up with a similar petition, but, of course, was refused.

In Karaganda, A. Khira initially lived in the dwelling of the Ukrainian Fabulyak (Фабуляк) family, with whom he knew from the camp, and then corresponded with. Volodymyr Okun says that the prelate held his first or one of his first underground liturgies in the dugout of his grandparents, who were also friends with the Fabulyaks: *“My grandmother Maria Okun was somehow connected with Alexander Khira even before Karaganda. They either sat in the same camp or had common acquaintances. But one way or another she became his confidante here, and because my grandmother, after returning from captivity, could afford to buy a separate dugout on Oktyabrskaya Street, and was a very religious and very patriotic person. On her wall, I remember, in that dugout there was an embroidery with the motto ‘Glory to Ukraine!’.* She was helping his excedence Alexander in this underground church life of ours. And she was very proud that the first Ukrainian liturgy here was served in her house” (AFM Volodymyr Ok 2022). Prelate Khira lived with the Fabulyaks for a short time, soon moving in with a German couple, Andreas and Barbara Hermann, who eventually became his relatives. Khira quickly became a favourite of the priests of the local German Catholics. He himself also seemed to be comfortable among them. At the same time, according to Ivan Boiko, Fr. Alexander worried a lot about the Protestant Germans of Karaganda, because they did not honour the Holy Mother of God properly (АИЦ УКУ, с. П-1-1-618, к. № 971). Of course, Khira could not allow himself to engage exclusively in spiritual activities. According to Soviet law, he had to work until the minimum retirement age, otherwise he risked being penalised as a ‘deadbeat’. The priest changed several jobs, and judging by information from different sources, he worked in a coal mine and on the construction of the city theatre [10, p. 176]. It is known from Khira’s letter that in 1962 he worked at a garment factory (ААКБОКЦА, Khira’s letter, 27.11.1962).

Alexander Khira did not intend to limit himself to pastoral work among the Catholics of Kazakhstan. He felt responsible for the fate of the Mukachevo Eparchy and cared for it until his death, visiting it during his holidays. In November 1956, ‘Owl’ notified the KGB that Hira had travelled to Uzhgorod, where he communicated with bishop Charnetsky and expressed some thoughts about the uprising in Hungary and Soviet intervention in that country. Hira, as the agent wrote, prayed that ev-

everything would be over sooner and there would be fewer victims: 'It would be good if a general burning did not come out of this' (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д.-9113, т. 5, л. 72–182).

In November 1957, officer Ershov, head of the 4th department of the Kazakhstani Department of the UKGB, proposed to his Ukrainian colleagues to summon priest M. Vonsul (an agent of 'Sincere') to Uzhgorod to 'Owl' in order to introduce him to A. Khira's confidants, and then to pass some message to the prelate through him. In this case it was necessary to use 'Sincere' blindly, and in order to verify his data, the first meeting with Khira was to be controlled by the letter 'N', i.e. with the help of microphone listening (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 120–121). But for some random reasons, that time it was 'not possible' to introduce 'Sincere' through the 'Owl' into Hira's development (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 120–121). Attempts would be repeated later. Already in December of the same year Khira himself went to Uzhgorod, where he stayed for a week, meeting with the catacomb priests and a brother who had arrived from Hungary. For the sake of this visit, the holy father *"obtained illegally in the police authorities of Karaganda a pass to enter the forbidden zone"*. Uzhgorod police at the command of the KGB detained Hira and deported him from Ukraine (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 119). The Karaganda policemen probably received penalties as well.

The authorities were irritated by the regular financial aid that Khira, collecting intents from Karaganda Germans, sent to underground church structures in Mukachevo. From another report of 'Owl' it can be learnt that he asked Khira to refrain from sending money because *"the time was not right"*. The same report mentions Oleksa Zaritsky, who is going to visit Metropolitan Slipyj in Maklakovo, and Greek Catholic priest Anthony Stankaninets, who settled in the village of Koscuduk in the Jambyl region after being banned from returning to Ukraine. Attached is a list of underground bishops, made from the words of Bishop N. Charnetsky, in which Khira is not mentioned (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 5, ч. 2, л. 224–235). In March 1958 a threat loomed over the secret bishop. The Ukrainian and Kazakh security agencies intensified joint development, aiming through agents and activities 'PK' (ПК; postal control) *"to identify his leading role in the uniate underground in Transcarpathia, as well as to establish practical hostile activities with the aim of documentation and arrest of the object in the near future"* (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 239–240). As an option, they considered inducing

him to co-operate with the KGB or discrediting him among the believers and clergy of Karaganda and Transcarpathia (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 10, л. 199–200).



Figure 6 – Alexander Khira's photo in the papers of the 'Reefs' agency file. Source: ГДА СБУ.

In June 1958, Metropolitan Iosif Slipyj was again arrested and subsequently sentenced to seven years in Dubravlag (Дубравлаг) and Siblag (Сиблаг). At the interrogation on 11 August 1958, he listed the leaders of the Greek Catholic underground who were in contact with him, noting that *"in Transcarpathia, in the Mukachevo eparchy, canon Khira should be in charge, but for some reason he did not write to me, I heard about him from other priests"* (State Archive of the SSU, f. 65, d. С-9113, vol. 8, pp. 89–92). Since the Mukachevo eparchy and the Lviv Metropolitanate were not legally bound to each other and were subject to Rome separately, Khira had no obligation to enter into correspondence with the Metropolitan and even less to fulfil his orders. It is possible that this cautious position of Khira somewhat smoothed his image in the eyes of the authorities. As a result, he is one of the few defendants in the "Reefs" file who remained at large.

Conclusion

The “Reefs” file, which focused in general on the figure of Metropolitan Joseph Slipyj, his entourage and participants in correspondence with him, was closed on 25 April 1963. Joseph Slipyj, condemned in 1958 to camp imprisonment, was pardoned in 1963 and ‘released’ from the country at the request of the United States and Western governments. Since then he has been living in the Vatican. Some of the so-called ‘leaders of the Uniate opposition’ were sentenced to new terms, others were subjected to ‘preventive measures’. About Alexander Khira in the decision to close the file it is reported that he was left on special settlement and operational registration in Karaganda (ГДА СБУ, ф. 65, д. С-9113, т. 1, л. 335–337). In the same 1963, he was given to understand that further attempts to influence from Kazakhstan on the life of the underground Greek Catholic Church in Transcarpathia would end with a new criminal sentence for the bishop. Attempting to make another trip to Uzhgorod in 1963, Khira was detained at the airport, and KGB agents gave him an ultimatum: either he would return immediately or go to prison. He was to forget about returning to his homeland. Alexander Khira remained in Kazakhstan and worked more within the German Roman Catholic community, obtaining in the late 1970s its registration and permission to build a church. He was also involved in the spiritual life of Ukrainian Greek Catholics, but the priests Mykolay Shaban and Stefan Prishlyak (Ukr. *Стефан Пришляк*), who remained in Kazakhstan until the late 1980s, were more active among them. The legalisation of Roman Catholics did not entail the legalisation of Greek Catholics. The uniats remained under prohibition and were controlled through surveillance, so-called ‘literary measures’ (wiretapping, outdoor surveillance) and recruitment of informants.

The studied materials allow us to conclude that Karaganda, along with the regions of Western Ukraine and large special settlements of Ukrainians in Siberia and the Far East, was seen by the Soviet security services as one of the centres of the underground UGCC. It was one of the reefs, i.e. underwater rocks dangerous for the official communist course. The Soviet authorities associated its danger with the activities of Ukrainian nationalists and dissidents, to whom most of the special resettlers and many of their descendants sympathised. Since the underground meetings of Greek Catholics involved sermons, prayers, chants and communica-

tion in Ukrainian, they allowed the special settlers to preserve their ethno-cultural identity away from their historical homeland. However, the Soviet authorities saw a political dimension to such activity. The KGB’s activities in 1950–1960 made it possible to strike a blow against the Greek-Catholic underground, to complicate and slow down communications between Western Ukraine, Siberia, the Far East and Kazakhstan (mainly Karaganda region), but did not put an end to the existence of the catacomb church.

It should be noted that the Soviet secret services managed to recruit not only ordinary parishioners of underground Greek Catholic communities, but also some priests. Not all were ready to resist the onslaught of the state, blackmail and threats of new imprisonment. In the context of Kazakhstan, it should be noted that such clergymen as Alexander Khira, Mykhailo Suliatitsky and Volodymyr Prokopiv remained loyal to the church and did not co-operate with the KGB. The authorities did not even try to recruit ‘fanatical’ priests like Oleksa Zaritsky. At the same time Nikolai Murani, Kindrat Vergun and Mikolai Vonsul, as it is evident from the materials of the “Reefs” file, worked for the KGB. It is quite likely that they wanted to escape from the pressure of the authorities by ‘feeding’ their handlers insignificant information and not giving out anything significant. But the KGB’s method of work allows to ‘improve’ not too diligent agents, which is done by collecting kompromat, threats of discrediting and new imprisonment. We do not know the inner state and motives of the above-mentioned agents-clerics, and therefore we should not rush to their moral condemnation. All that is clear is that they were morally broken in the Gulag camps and during interrogations by the secret services.

Despite the declaration of freedom of religion in the USSR constitution, the religious sphere was completely controlled by the state power. Many religious organisations were banned. Among them were the Ukrainian Greek Catholics. Forcibly evicted from their homeland to regions of the USSR, including Kazakhstan, they were able to preserve their culture and religion in underground conditions, under the pressure of the authorities and special services. At present, several Greek Catholic churches operate freely in Kazakhstan, monuments to victims of Stalinist repressions, including monuments to deportees from Ukraine and the obelisk of Oleksa Zaritsky in the Karlag cemetery, have been erected in memorial cemeteries, and the memory of repressed Roman Catholics

and Greek Catholics is maintained in the exposition of the Museum of the Memory of Victims of Political Repressions in Dolinka settlement (Karlag Museum), as well as in the liturgical activities of the believers themselves. At the same time, the history of Stalin's repressions still contains many gaps, the elimination of which remains the task of scientific specialists.

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