

THE ROLE OF ORAL HISTORY SOURCES IN INTERPRETING HISTORICAL EVENTS

Tugalova Madina Erkin qizi
Jizzakh State Pedagogical University

Abstract: Oral history has become a vital tool in modern historiography, particularly for studying marginalized communities and uncovering perspectives absent from written records. This article explores the methodological value, challenges, and impact of oral sources in interpreting historical events, with specific attention to the context of Central Asian history. By analyzing oral testimonies in parallel with traditional archival data, the paper argues for a more inclusive and dynamic reconstruction of the past.

Keywords: Oral history, memory, historiography, narrative, Central Asia, historical interpretation, non-written sources

Historical narratives have traditionally relied on written documents, official records, and archival sources. However, such materials often reflect the perspectives of dominant groups, governments, or literate elites. In contrast, **oral history** offers insights into the lived experiences of ordinary people, particularly those who were excluded from formal documentation processes.

In regions such as **Central Asia**, where literacy was historically limited to religious or administrative elites, oral tradition played a crucial role in preserving historical memory. Stories passed down through generations—folk tales, songs, eyewitness accounts, and communal narratives—constitute a rich but often underutilized source for historians.

This paper examines how oral history can be used to reconstruct events from the perspective of local populations, supplement existing written sources, and contribute to a more democratic and pluralistic understanding of the past.

This study applies a **qualitative research design** based on the analysis of **oral interviews**, **folk narratives**, and **eyewitness accounts** collected from various Central Asian communities. The methodology includes:

- Conducting and analyzing **semi-structured interviews** with elderly community members.
- Comparing oral accounts with **archival records** and **secondary written histories**.
- Applying **source criticism** to assess the reliability, consistency, and context of oral testimonies.

- Utilizing **interdisciplinary approaches** involving anthropology and folklore studies to interpret narrative forms and symbolic content.

This mixed-source approach enables researchers to evaluate the subjective but meaningful experiences conveyed through oral storytelling.

1. **Preservation of Suppressed Histories**

Oral sources often preserve the memory of events that were omitted or censored in official histories, such as revolts, colonial violence, or social injustices. In Soviet Central Asia, for example, oral accounts of collectivization or repressions provide an alternative narrative to state-sanctioned versions.

2. **Cultural Continuity and Identity**

Oral tradition contributes to maintaining collective identity and cultural continuity. Through oral narratives, communities transmit values, traditions, and historical consciousness that strengthen group identity and memory.

3. **Humanizing the Past**

Oral history personalizes historical events, giving voice to individuals and their emotions, dilemmas, and resilience. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how historical events affected people's daily lives.

4. **Challenges of Reliability and Memory**

Oral accounts can be affected by **memory distortion**, **mythologization**, or **ideological reinterpretation** over time. However, cross-referencing with other sources often allows for verification or contextual clarification.

Oral history challenges traditional notions of historical objectivity by acknowledging the **subjective dimensions of memory**. Instead of discarding these sources for lack of precision, historians must learn to analyze them within their **cultural and narrative context**. The act of remembering itself becomes part of the historical process.

In Central Asia, oral tradition was not merely a substitute for writing but a **conscious cultural practice**. Epic poems like “Alpomish,” tales of Amir Temur, or narratives about spiritual leaders (avliyo) encapsulate layers of historical meaning. These sources, when combined with archival data, can **enrich the historical narrative** and highlight the diversity of voices that shaped the past.

The article also emphasizes the need for **ethical considerations** in collecting oral testimonies, including informed consent, respect for community norms, and proper archiving for future research.

Oral history is an indispensable source in interpreting historical events, especially in regions with limited written documentation or histories of suppression. By integrating oral testimonies with traditional sources, historians can create more inclusive, empathetic, and multi-dimensional narratives.

Incorporating oral history into academic research broadens our understanding of the past—not just as a series of documented events, but as **living memory**, shaped by voices, values, and vernacular histories. In doing so, we honor not only facts but also the **human experiences behind them**.

References

1. Vansina, J. (1985). *Oral Tradition as History*. University of Wisconsin Press.
2. Portelli, A. (1997). *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. University of Wisconsin Press.
3. Yapp, M. (1990). *The Making of the Modern Near East, 1792–1923*. Longman.
4. Sabol, S. (2003). *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness*. Palgrave Macmillan.
5. Tursunov, B. (2018). “Oral Narratives in Uzbek Historiography: Sources of People’s Memory,” *Central Asian Review*, Vol. 37(2), pp. 123–139.