

go to another prisoner—and dump you in a mass grave, without a coffin.

One eyewitness interviewed in Zareh Tjeknavorian's 1998 documentary, *Enemy of the People: Armenians Look Back at the Stalin Terror*, confirmed this practice, and added that periods of drastic shortages of food and heating fuel escalated the mortality rate in the camp. Dying or already dead? The warder had to know in order to deal with the body, and the way he found out is appalling, as the interviewee recalled. If the warder had a hammer to hand, he would hit the prisoner on the head, and if he had a staff, he would poke him in the stomach. Once it was proven that the man was dead, a piece of wood with his name and number written on it would be tied to the corpse and it was taken to the dump.²²

The renowned Armenian writer Vahram Alazan testified that, due to malnutrition and the most extreme climatic conditions, the number of daily deaths in his labor camp was overwhelming—6,000 men died in two months—and burying them was a big problem. The warder promised an extra hundred grams of bread for taking care of two cadavers. Alazan described the appalling methods the prisoners used to quickly dispose of them and go back for more. Commenting sarcastically

22 Tjeknavorian's documentary, with a request to review it, was sent to me by the *American Historical Review* in 2014, and my review was published in the journal in April 2015. The fifty-eight-minute film contains black-and-white archival footage as well as interviews in color with former victims of Stalin's terror. It opens on the scene of Stalin's body lying in the coffin in Moscow, with a mournful voice-over announcing in Russian, "Dear comrades, it is difficult today to describe with mere words the feeling of our party, our people and all progressive humanity. Stalin is no more." Then it cuts to Yerevan, showing the sad faces of young and old in mourning.