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Kasimov Tatars during the Years of the Cultural Revolution in the USSR: On Materials of Regional Press of the 1920–1930s

Alfiya G. Gallyamova , Ilnara I. Khanipova  

Sh. Marjani Institute of History of the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences, Kazan, Russia

 ihanipova@mail.ru

Abstract: The authors analyze the cultural component of the social life of the Kasimov Tatars in the interwar period, the essence of which was the implementation of the Cultural Revolution. Along with the industrialization of the country and the collectivization of agriculture in the mid-1920s, it was declared an important part of the three-tier program of socialist construction. The purpose is to establish the peculiarities of the behavioral pattern of the Kasimov Tatars in the period under review. The source base is the materials from periodicals and ego-documents. The study shows the conditions and realities of the “reforging of consciousness,” the struggle against the remnants of the past which boiled down to the attempts to eradicate the religious cults and customs of the Kasimov Tatars. There is revealed the level of development, continuity, and specificity of local transformation in the most important segment of the cultural sphere – education. The authors come to the conclusion that at the sharp turn of history in the 1920s the Kasimov Tatars showed energy and freedom in order to become “equal among equal” peoples, as declared at the official level. Trying to preserve their own identity, they also showed etatism peculiar to them accepting and actively participating in the transformations as part of the implementation of the Cultural Revolution tasks.

Keywords: Kasimov Tatars, Tatar culture, identity, memory preservation, Ali-bek Kadyr, Kasimov, Ryazan region, Soviet cultural policy, ethnic minorities

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Касимовские татары в годы культурной революции в СССР: по материалам региональной печати 1920–1930-х гг.

Альфия Габдульнуровна Галлямова , Ильнара Ильдаровна Ханипова  

Институт истории имени Ш. Марджани Академии наук Республики Татарстан, Казань, Россия

 ihanipova@mail.ru

Аннотация: Анализируется культурная составляющая социальной жизни касимовских татар в межвоенный период, суть которой сводилась к реализации культурной революции, которая наряду с индустриализацией страны и коллективизацией сельского хозяйства в середине 1920-х гг. была объявлена важной частью трехзвенной программы социалистического строительства. Цель заключается в установлении особенности поведенческого паттерна касимовских татар указанного периода. Источниковая база основана на материалах периодической печати и эго-документах. Показаны условия и реалии «перековки сознания», борьба с пережитками прошлого, сводившая-

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ся к попыткам искоренения религиозных культов и обычаев у касимовских татар. Раскрыт уровень развития, преемственность, специфика локальной трансформации в важнейшем сегменте культурной сферы – образовании и просвещении. Авторы пришли к выводу, что касимовские татары на крутом повороте истории в 1920-е гг. проявили энергию и волю, чтобы стать «равными среди равных» народов, как это декларировалось на официальном уровне. Пытаясь сохранить собственную идентичность, они проявили и свойственный им этатизм, приняв и активно участвуя в преобразованиях в рамках реализации задач культурной революции.

Ключевые слова: татарская культура, национальная идентичность, Касимов, Рязанская область, советская культурная политика, этнические меньшинства

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Introduction

Relevance. In the 70-year history of the Soviet period, the issue of ethnocultural processes occupies a prominent place. An appeal to the retrospective of the local group of the second largest Tatar ethnic group in the Russian Federation (the Kasimov Tatars) is timely in the context of the practical-political discourse surrounding them. In June 2022, local officials unveiled a monument to legendary Tatar Queen Syuyumbike in the town of Kasimov, where she spent the last years of her life. This event caused a negative reaction from certain circles of the public which prefer to speak about the past of the region connecting it only with the Meshchersky area. Such attitude is clearly visible in the article by S.O. Savin, who is not satisfied with the fact that in the tourism industry that is developing, quite serious attention has been paid to the “myth-making,” as he puts it, of the town’s capital status¹.

This interpretation of the past of Kasimov is due to the national policy which was pursued in the USSR; the perspective relevant for this article consists in the fact that the ideologeme of culture “national in form and socialist in substance” officially developed mainly within the framework of national administrative-political entities.

Elaboration of the problem. The study of the history of the Tatars in the Soviet period was limited within the framework of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The Tatar issues outside its territory were developed only by linguists, ethnographers, archaeologists, folklorists, whose work was aimed, as a rule, at studying the pre-revolutionary period, that is, the traditional culture of the extraterritorial group of the Tatars².

In the post-Soviet time, the ethnographic study of the Kasimov Tatars was continued by F.L. Sharifullina³, D.M. Iskhakov⁴, in whose writings a large and multilateral work was done to consider material and traditional ritual culture. L.T. Makhmutova made

¹ S.O. Savin, “The capital as the center of state building – the historical memory of Kasimov’s capital city,” *Comparative Politics* 1, no. 4 (2015): 107–109.

² V.A. Gordlevsky, “Elements of culture among the Kasimov Tatars. From a trip to Kasimovsky district,” *Proceedings of the Society of Researchers of the Ryazan Region*, no. 10 (1927): 45–60; B.A. Kuftin, “Tatary kasimovskie i tatary-mishari TSPo. K voprosu vydeleniia oblastnykh tipov i sostavnykh elementov Volgo-Okskoi etnicheskoi kul'tury (Etnicheskoe naimenovanie i elementy zhilishcha) [Kasimov Tatars and Mishar Tatars of the TSPo. On the issue of identifying regional types and constituent elements of the Volga-Oka ethnic culture (Ethnic name and elements of housing)],” in *Kul'tura i byt naseleniia Tsentral'no-Promyshlennoi oblasti. Etnologicheskie issledovaniia i materialy*, 135–148 (Moscow: PTO MONO Publ., 1929).

³ F.L. Sharifullina, *Kasimovskie tatary* [Kasimov Tatars] (Kazan: Tatar Book Publishing House Publ., 1991).

⁴ D.M. Iskhakov, “Kasimov Tatars.” *Tatarstan*, no. 1/2 (1994): 78–80; “Tatary kasimovskiye [Kasimov Tatars],” in *Narody Rossii. Entsiklopediia*, 326–327 (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1994).

a significant contribution to the coverage of lexicography and folklore of the Kasimov Tatars⁵. As for modern historical works, they primarily examine the period of existence of the independent state formation of the Kasimov Tatars (1445–1681)⁶.

The nature and degree of study of this extraterritorial group of the Tatar nation was reflected in the work of V.V. Akimov⁷ which revealed changes in the views on the history of the Kasimov Tatars; it is stated in the message of the author:

Although by the will of fate the Kasimov Tatars live far from Tatarstan, they do not lose the sense of belonging to their nation; they preserve and develop its culture, strive to get to know each other closer and more fully, as they understand that any nation is alive and strong through unity and common aspirations⁸.

The work examines the history and culture of the Kasimov Khanate, and the past of the Tatars who inhabited it after they lost their independence. The book also gives an idea of the modern life of the Tatar population of the Kasimovsky district of the Ryazan region, their preserved traditions and ethnographic features of the population. The Soviet-era of Tatar life remains virtually unexplored.

A colorful, photo-rich edition of the “Shadows of the Kasimov Khanate” by Moscow historians M.A. Safarov and R.V. Abyanov visually recreates the surviving history of the Kasimov Tatars⁹. The contents of the book are based on the materials of “oral history”; the coverage of the Soviet period in it is of a lapidary nature; within it are revealed mainly fragments of the period of collectivization and the internal migration associated with it related to the fate of individual people. In the publications by M.A. Safarov, E.M. Seitov, R.V. Abyanov there are also touched upon the issues of ideological positions of the Kasimov Tatars, ethnocultural contacts, and mutual perception with the Russian people¹⁰.

Thus, although there are some works, to date no comprehensive research has been carried out on the history of the Kasimov Tatars in the Soviet period.

The purpose of the study is to identify the peculiarities of the behavioral pattern of the Kasimov Tatars after the collapse of the Russian Empire and the Civil War, when the victorious Bolshevik leadership began to globally reconstruct the country. One of its main strategic directions was the establishment of national entities of various ranks and the breaking of old foundations in all spheres of life. In spiritual terms, significant measures were outlined, during which the laconic concept of cultural revolution were comprised. This reception was formulated in the late 1920s, but, in fact, throughout the 1920s the socio-spiritual atmosphere in the country was filled with revolutionism.

The source base of the article includes published documents and, above all, journalistic materials of the regional newspaper of the Kasimovsky district “Krasny Voskhod [Red Sunrise].” Initially, it was the joint newspaper of the Kasimovsky and Elatomsky district executive committees and committees of the All-Union Communist Party (Bol-

⁵ L.T. Makhmutova, “Some observations on the vocabulary of the Kasimov dialect of the Tatar language,” *Materials on Tatar dialectology*, no. 2 (1962): 223–235; L.T. Makhmutova, “An ancient ritual song among the Kasimov Tatars,” *News of the Kazan branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences*, no. 2 (1957): 217–221.

⁶ A.V. Aksanov, “Kazanskoe i Kasimovskoe khanstvo [Kazan and Kasimov Khanates],” in *Tatary*, 147–161 (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 2017).

⁷ V.V. Akimov, *Kasimovskie tatary: mezhdru proshlym i budushchim* [Kasimov Tatars: between past and future] (Moscow: Veche Publ., 2004).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹ R.V. Abyanov, and M.A. Safarov, *Teni Kasimovskogo khanstva* [Shadows of the Kasimov Khanate] (Moscow: Read Publ., 2021).

¹⁰ M.A. Safarov, and E.M. Seitov, “If mosques open, then who will visit them?”: Religious life of the Kasimov Tatars in 1943 according to the report of G.P. Snesareva,” *Minbar. Islamic Studies*, no. 13 (2020): 335–337; R.V. Abyanov, and M.A. Safarov, “Tatar faith.” The image of Islam among the Russian population of the Ryazan region,” *Minbar. Islamic Studies*, no. 14 (2021): 335–337.

sheviks); later, in 1925, it became the press organ of the Kasimovsky district committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the district executive committee. Due to the zoning, from 1929 the newspaper was a representative of the party, executive and trade union district authorities – the Kasimovsky district committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), the district executive committee and the district trade union council. In 1930 it was renamed the “Kollektivist [Collectivist]” newspaper, and in October of the same year it began to be called “Bolshevistsky Put’ [Bolshevik Way]”. In 1934, the newspaper began publishing a special page in the Tatar language.

Preservation of historical memory and “reforging” of consciousness

In the 1920s, the struggle of the Tatar community of the Kasimovsky district for the independent existence as a national-administrative entity occurred during a period which was full of difficult collisions, and was closely connected with an appeal to the history of the once powerful Kasimov Khanate. Written individual and collective appeals to various official authorities discovered in the State Archive of the Russian Federation often began with a detailed presentation of the history of the Kasimov Khanate formation, proving that originally the Tatars lived on the Kasimov territory¹¹.

Admst post-revolutionary conditions, the vigorous actions of the Tatar community in Kasimov to preserve historical memory were most clear manifested in local museums. Active work was carried out by the Muslim subdivision at the Kasimov museum after it opened in the early 1920s. The main contribution to this was made by the Tatar population of the town and the district. “The museum receives donations from Muslims almost every day,”¹² a newspaper article noted. Despite the lack of funds, few exhibits – jewelry, vessels and woven products – were purchased by the museum.

The tasks of collecting objects of the Kasimov Tatars’ everyday life were not accidentally. Even then, contemporaries noted that “the Muslim costume was on the verge of disappearance.” Due to a number of reasons that arose even before the revolution, including the mass outflow of the Kasimov Tatars – to work in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and the influence of bourgeois innovations, local residents virtually stopped wearing national clothes, and they were largely sold to Muslims of the neighboring Tambov and Simbirsk provinces¹³. To a greater extent, in the Soviet years elements of ethnic culture were preserved in the traditional everyday and festive food of the Kasimov Tatars – byalish, lyavash, fried pie, etc.

Showing respect for the great past, the Kasimov Tatars did not cling to a bygone time at all. Admst new realities, they tried to find their place in world, especially when it concerned young people. A valuable source for understanding the moods and preferences of young Kasimov Tatars are the memoirs of K.M. Simakov, born in 1904, who had a spectacular career; he finished his career as Chairman of the State Planning Committee of the Kazakh SSR. Before the revolution, Kayum Simakov worked as his uncle’s assistant in a Simferopol restaurant; immediately after the revolution, he, like many Tatars, returned to his village. Growing up there and observing the changes taking place in social life, working for the benefit of the family, the young man began to look for another interest: “for a long time he was confused in his answers, he came into contradictions with himself.”¹⁴

¹¹ Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation] (henceforth – GARF), f. P-1235, op. 122, d. 43, l. 5.

¹² R.K., “Kasimovskii muzei [Kasimov Museum],” *Krasny voskhod*, June 24, 1923.

¹³ “Otchet o deiatel'nosti uiezdnoho muzeia Kasimovskogo UONO za fevral' mesiat's 1922 goda [Report on the activities of the district museum of the Kasimovsky UONO for the month of February 1922],” in *Fondy Kasimovskogo istoriko-kul'turnogo muzeia-zapovednika*.

¹⁴ K.M. Simakov, *Ot bylogo do neskonchaemogo nastoiashchego* [From the past to the endless present] (St. Petersburg: [N.s.], 2017), 227.

At first he wanted to make his household prosperous and productive. He also turned his attention to the “buffet business,” which during the New Economic Policy (NEP) years, and for a short time the hospitality industry got a second wind among the Kasimov Tatars, who were famous before the revolution for their restaurant and hotel businesses.

But in the end, he was attracted by the examples of revolutionaries A. Tukuzin, who became the secretary of the Kasimov district committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and V. Khudaiberdeev, the secretary of the party cell of the Tatar volost administration. Emulating them, young Kayum began to educate himself by reading newspapers, getting interested in political information, and communicating with Russian Communist Youth League (Komsomol) activists. It is worth noting that Kayum’s desire to become a Komsomol member was supported by his father. It should be emphasized that M. Simakov, Kayum’s father, who “didn’t like the new government,” but who wanted his son’s well-being, and advised him to search for his own path in the new emerging world. K.M. Simakov writes, “In 1923, at the age of 19, I became a Komsomol member, which determined my new way of life...”¹⁵

Joining the Komsomol influenced the lives of many Tatar young people. The organizational development of the Komsomol cells in the Kasimovsky district intensified in 1924. Then, at the same time, a whole group of enterprising guys from the village of Tsaritsino wrote an application to join the Russian Communist Youth League. An instructor was sent to the village to organize a Komsomol cell¹⁶. Following the Tsaritsyn cell, the Tatar cell of the Russian Communist Youth League was created in the village of Bolotsy, which the newspaper called the youngest “in terms of experience” and that it was in need of a leader¹⁷.

At the 15th Kasimovsky district party conference held in 1929, it was noted that in the Tatar volost there was a cell of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and two cells of the Russian Communist Youth League to work among national minorities. Judging by newspaper reports, they played a decisive role in carrying out the objectives of the Cultural Revolution¹⁸. Komsomol members were sent to villages to carry out propaganda and explanatory work, to create red corners, to issue wall newspapers, to organize sports and drama clubs, and to conduct collective reading of newspapers for collective farmers, etc.

The Komsomol members of the Torbaevsky cell were enterprising; they carried out explanatory work among the villagers during the election campaign. Pioneers provided assistance to Komsomol members by delivering notifications to voters and taking care of the children of collective farmers during meetings¹⁹.

Struggle against religion

The radical restructuring of cultural life was closely connected with the changes in the ideological sphere. The fight against the religious worldview was seen as an important direction in eliminating cultural backwardness and forming a new Soviet man.

Anti-religious activities against Muslims of the town of Kasimov began in the late 1920s²⁰. Opposing the traditional Muslim Uraza fast, ridiculing the villagers who kept the fast, characterizing mosques as “counter-revolutionary nests” under the influence of which collective farmers and poor people had forced 10–13-year-old children to keep

¹⁵ K.M. Simakov, *Ot bylogo do neskonchaemogo nastoiashchego*, 230.

¹⁶ S.-v., “Probuzhdaiutsia [Are awakening],” *Krasny voshod*, July 17, 1924.

¹⁷ “Rebiata, podtianites! [Guys, pull yourself up!],” *Krasny voshod*, July 17, 1924.

¹⁸ “Komsomol'tsy Tatarskoi volosti organizovali 5 otriadov! [Komsomol members of the Tatar volost organized 5 detachments],” *Krasny voshod*, June 27, 1929; “Giblitskie komsomol'tsy za kul'turnuiu revoliutsiiu na dele [Giblitsky Komsomol members for the cultural revolution in practice],” *Kollektivist*, August 30, 1930.

¹⁹ Muratov, “Perenimaite etot opyt [Adopt this experience],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, January 15, 1931.

²⁰ See: I. Bulatov, “Soiuz bezbozhnikov dolzhen byt' prevrashchen v mnogomilionnuiu organizatsiiu [The Union of Atheists must be turned into a multi-million dollar organization],” *Krasny voshod*, July 4, 1929.

the fast, non-religious contemporaries stated that over the decade of Soviet rule, religious foundations among the Tatars of the Kasimovsky district had begun to collapse²¹.

The Cultural Revolution was closely related to the introduction of new consciousness, and was accompanied by the destruction of the traditional everyday religious rituals of the Kasimov Tatars. Rejoicing at the success of the innovations, an eyewitness wrote as follows:

This was where relatively recently the faithful glorified Allah. Representatives of the young Tatar population, who have not yet been damaged by Sharia law, religious rituals and customs, organized the club. On the stage, Tatar students speak about their readiness to rebuild the old village into a new collective one²².

Calls for a radical transformation of the world outlook and the formation of atheistic views in society were accompanied by strong pressure on religious leaders, forcing the latter to change their position. Thus, former mullah of the second mosque in the town of Kasimov, F. Bashirov announced his resignation through a newspaper, “admitting” that by “preaching religion, he did to society nothing, but harm.”²³ A similar letter to the newspaper office was sent by K. Shirinsky, the former mullah of the village of Podlipki:

For 11 years I was mullah and performed religious duties in the village of Podlipki. But I got convinced that religion is essentially a dope for the people. At present, I no longer wish to deceive my fellow citizens and renounce the rank of mullah forever. From now on I ask you not to consider me a deceiver²⁴.

Pressure was also intensified on Tatar teachers who “due to religious convictions refused to conduct anti-religious propaganda” and did not participate in the work of atheist circles. Several articles in one of the June issues of the “Krasny Voskhod [Red Sunrise]” newspaper were published under the slogan “A teacher should be an active anti-religionist” reflected the events that took place in the villages²⁵.

In general, such powerful anti-religious influence, moreover in a mono-ethnic environment (Tatars accounted for 0.44% of the total population of the province), already in the first decades of Soviet rule virtually led to the rejection of external manifestations of the Tatars’ religious views.

Education

Almost from the very beginning, the Soviet government sought to take control over standardized education. The general educational institutions were transferred to the jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat of Education. At the same time, the revolutionary style of this sphere of culture affected the Kasimov Tatars to a lesser extent. In the first decades of Soviet rule, there was maintained continuity in the development of school education.

The Kasimov Tatars were notable for a high level of literacy. According to the 1926 census, 73.3% of the Kasimov Tatars were literate; whereas on average in the Ryazan province only 51.1% of people were literate. Among the Kasimov Tatars, 73.5% of men and 76.2% of women were literate, in the Ryazan province – 55.5% of men and 27.9% of women were literate²⁶. In the province, there were about 2,000 people at the age of 16–35 per literacy center, among the Kasimov Tatars – about 100 people²⁷.

²¹ Nuruddinov, “Protiv ‘Urazy’, za kolkhozy [Against ‘Uraza,’ for collective farms],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, February 1, 1931.

²² Chernyy, “Khazr bul! [Be ready !],” *Kollektivist*, April 19, 1930.

²³ “Pis'mo v redaktsiiu [Letter to the editor],” *Krasny voskhod*, May 18, 1929.

²⁴ K. Shirinsky, “Pis'mo v redaktsiiu [Letter to the editor],” *Kollektivist*, February 16, 1930.

²⁵ “Akt rassledovaniya zametki ‘Sryvaiut antireligioznuiu rabotu’ [Act of investigation of the note ‘They are disrupting anti-religious work’],” *Krasny voskhod*, June 22, 1929.

²⁶ *Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Riazanskoi oblasti* [State Archive of the Ryazan Region] (henceforth – GA RO), f. P-5, op. 1, d. 198, l. 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 22.

Many of the teachers of the Kasimov madrasah opened back in 1838, who found themselves in the midst of the revolutionary events, in Soviet times continued to work in the field of education; they were fluent in both Tatar and Russian. Among them, there should be particularly mentioned S. Bulatova; in the 1910s she opened the first school for girls in Kasimov. In the 1920s, while continuing to teach in the town schools, she was the commissioner of the Ryazan provincial department of public education for the Kasimovsky district and the neighboring Elatomsky and Shatsky districts. Before the revolution F. Bashirova worked in one of the maktab of the town of Kasimov, then in the 2nd women's Russian-Tatar gymnasium; in the 1920s she taught at the town Tatar school No. 5, at the same time was a local inspector of the Volost Education Authority for ethnic minorities; from 1933 she taught the Tatar language at the Kasimov pedagogical school²⁸.

In the late 1920s, the “Krasny Voskhod” newspaper wrote about the level of education development among the Tatars; it was very high for that time, primarily thanks to national schools:

A survey of a number of districts for ethnic minorities of our uezd has established that culturally they are in no way inferior to the Russians. For example, in the village of Podlipki there are no illiterate men or women. All school-age children go to primary schools. There is one book per resident and one newspaper per yard. For the adult population there are village reading rooms²⁹.

The 1926 census data confirmed the newspaper materials. As for literacy by age, especially school age, where the traditions of pre-revolutionary education were still preserved, the advantage remained with the ethnic minorities. For example, at the age of 12–15, the proportion of literate people was as follows: 91% of Tatars and 63.8% of Russians³⁰.

By the late 1930s, the Tatar people of the Kasimovsky, Ermishinsky and other districts of the Ryazan region went to primary schools, and in some villages (Bolottsy, Azevo, Bastanovo) the government opened junior high schools³¹.

To train Tatar teachers, in 1930 the Tatar school department was opened at the Kasimov pedagogical school, which in a few years trained about 100 Soviet teachers for primary national schools. More than 10 teachers came from Podlipki alone. In 1937, more than 20 children of Tatar collective farmers studied at the pedagogical school³².

However, the Tatar department did not last long. In the 1938/1939 academic year, it was planned that teaching at the pedagogical school would be conducted mainly in Russian. This shift coincided with another change of the Tatar alphabet, and secondary specialized education in the Tatar language in Kasimov came to naught.

Cultural and educational institutions and press

Along with schools, a decisive role in the implementation of the cultural transformation of society was played by village reading rooms and clubs; the main initiator of events was the Komsomol. A typical social event in the 1920s was collective reading of newspapers; this mission was entrusted to the best Komsomol members³³.

During the years of the Cultural Revolution the periodical press was a powerful means of the party's ideological influence on the population. Considering newspapers as

²⁸ “Materialy F.F. Bashirovoy, uchitel'nitsy tatarskoi shkoly g. Kasimova [Materials by F.F. Bashirova, teacher of the Tatar school in Kasimov],” in *Fondy Kasimovskogo istoriko-kul'turnogo muzeia-zapovednika*.

²⁹ “Kul'trabota v sele Podlipkakh [Cultural work in the village of Podlipki],” *Krasny voskhod*, April 20, 1929.

³⁰ GA RO, f. P-5, op. 1, d. 198, l. 22.

³¹ P. Avdin, “Za podgotovku natsional'no-pedagogicheskikh kadrov [For the preparation of national pedagogical personnel],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, August 6, 1938.

³² Kusaliev. “Prezhde i teper' [Before and now],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, November 7, 1937.

³³ P.A. Tsybikov, “Komsomolets Maganov – khoroshii chtets [Komsomol member Maganov is a good reader],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, April 23, 1935.

an important tool in cultural and educational work, activists recommended that public teachers who had the mission of propaganda and agitation subscribe to them³⁴.

At that time, it was wall newspapers that were both a source of information and creativity product of the masses. To educate the Muslim population by the Tatar youth of Kasimov, there was made a unanimous decision to publish the “Chalgy [Scythe]” newspaper in the native language³⁵. In Akhmatovo, there was published the wall newspaper “Udarniklar [Drummers],” later – “Beznen kuch [Our strength].”³⁶ In that period, there was encouraged and expanded the movement of rural correspondents who essentially played the role of cultural promoters among peasants. The initiator of the movement of rural correspondents in the Kasimovsky district was K.M. Simakov; he returned from the army and organized a wall newspaper involving the most enterprising peasants³⁷.

K.M. Simakov’s memoirs quite fully describe the activities that young people were engaged in when gathering in clubs. A. Davlikamov, a member of the Kasimov cell noted:

We will stage plays, and you will act. We will publish our own newspaper, we will go to the cinema, we will have our own library, we will listen to lectures in the town, and lecturers will come to us; in short, we will study³⁸.

The teams of propagandists operated in all settlements of the Kasimovsky district. For example, by the late 1930s in the Akhmatovsky village council there were 9 political circles³⁹. Collective farmers and their families were involved in amateur art activities⁴⁰.

Cultural work among the Tatars was significantly complicated by the lack of normal conditions. Representatives of the Tatar public appealed to the Kasimov authorities noting that while the cultural demands of the Tatars were growing, the authorities could not satisfy them. They reported to the newspaper:

We used to have a good club-theater, but now it has got dilapidated. We don’t have money for repairs, but the town council flatly refused to renovate it⁴¹.

“Tatars don’t have a club. When will it be repaired? – the author of the article in the “Krasny Voskhod” newspaper asked again stating the need for urgent repairs of the Tatar club-theater “Chulpan.” Noting the high need for premises, the absence of which affected the quality of cultural and educational work among the Tatars of the town, he called on the town council to “stop dragging out” and immediately start renovating it⁴².

The town Tatar club named after Narimanov was financed according to the residual principle, which was clearly illustrated by the “Bolshevistskii Put’ [Bolshevik Way]” newspaper:

Ethnic men who come to the club leave it dissatisfied only because in the club, as they say, there is nothing there except for the walls⁴³.

³⁴ Sirotkin, “Usilim podpisu [Let’s strengthen the subscription],” *Krasny voskhod*, February 5, 1924.

³⁵ V. “Svoiu gazetu [My own newspaper],” *Krasny voskhod*, January 10, 1924.

³⁶ “Borot’sia za deistvennost’ i gramotnost’ stennoi pechati [Fight for the effectiveness and literacy of wall printing],” *Bol’shevistskii put’*, October 21, 1938.

³⁷ “Sel’kor – natsmen [Selkor – national minority],” *Krasny voskhod*, May 11, 1929.

³⁸ K.M. Simakov, *Ot bylogo do neskonchaemogo nastoiashchego* [From the past to the never-ending present]. St. Petersburg: Peter Publ., 2017.

³⁹ Simakov, “Agitkolektiv Akhmatovskogo kolkhoza razvertyvaet politmassovuiu rabotu [The propaganda team of the Akhmatov collective farm is developing political mass work],” *Bol’shevistskii put’*, October 12, 1938.

⁴⁰ S. “Sem’ia kolkhoznika Faiskhanova [The family of collective farmer Faiskhanov],” *Bol’shevistskii put’*, January 11, 1939.

⁴¹ “Tatary bez kluba. Ne znam gde provodit’ prazdnik 1-go maia [Tatars without a club. We don’t know where to celebrate May 1st],” *Krasny voskhod*, April 22, 1928.

⁴² Otpusnik, “Tatary bez kluba [Tatars without a club],” *Krasny voskhod*, July 19, 1928.

⁴³ Levitov, “Klub imeni Narimanova dolzhen razvernut’ rabotu [Club named after Narimanov must expand his work],” *Bol’shevistskii put’*, March 11, 1933.

In the fall of 1934, due to lack of electricity, performances were repeatedly disrupted there. The appeals of the Tatar population representatives to the town council and the town board of education with requests to help organize mass cultural work among the Tatars, to provide electricity, and for funds for repairing the premises were neglected by the government agencies⁴⁴.

In April 1938, the worker-peasant correspondents who gathered at the district meeting came out in support of the Tatar club. They believed that “comrades Stepakov and Lunin, the leaders of the local education authority are not right when raising the issue of closing the national minority club.” Rural correspondent Ishmuratov noted as follows:

I think that the newspaper is right when raising the issue that the national minority club, and it should work even better, and in no case that it should be closed⁴⁵.

This fact was a clear example of the growing trend towards a decrease in national polyphony in the Kasimov Tatars’s life. An important factor in reducing the role of the Tatar language in the social life of the Kasimov Tatars was the result of those lived outside a monoethnic environment was, and which was the result in our opinion, of the forced paperwork of national village councils and other administrative bodies in the Russian language⁴⁶.

Soviet holidays and rituals

Obvious indicators of the Cultural Revolution results were new forms, scenarios and symbols of Soviet holidays that were part of the social life, the main one of which was the Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution annually covered on the pages of the district newspaper. The “Krasny Voskhod [Red Sunrise]” newspaper reported on the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the revolution in the village of Sobakino of the Tatar volost:

On November 6, the street opposite the village reading room was decorated with greenery and revolutionary slogans: they were waiting for the chief to arrive. The representative of the chief arrived on November 7. The speaker was given unlimited time. He spoke about what had been done in 10 years, and how we would build the national economy. On November 7, through voluntary collection of food, the population organized a dinner for 80 people and a party after the dinner. The dinner was attended by children and adults. People were singing and dancing; there were both Tatar and Russian dances. They said that the tsar’s rule gave villages no opportunity to develop culturally and socially, especially to small peoples, including us, the Tatars. Now we have gathered here to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution as free people, not slaves. Now we are happy for the youth having fun, because earlier we could not do this⁴⁷.

The festive narrative clearly demonstrated the mythologeme based on the opposition of the old and the new. People speaking at one of these ceremonial meetings of the Podlipki collective farm “Kzyl Yulduz” also appealed to life before and after the revolution⁴⁸.

20 years later, the celebration of the October Revolution anniversary was also festive, but the tense international situation affected the holiday⁴⁹. On this day in Torbaevo, a column of Osoaviakhim workers in gas masks marched through the village. After

⁴⁴ Abdullina, “Daite klubu svet [Give the club light],” *Bol’shevistskii put’*, October 10, 1934.

⁴⁵ “S raionnogo soveshchaniia rabsel’korov [From the regional meeting of rabselkorov],” *Bol’shevistskii put’*, April 22, 1938.

⁴⁶ See: GA RO, f. P-5, op. 1, d. 198, l. 11–12.

⁴⁷ *Krasny voskhod*, December 24, 1927.

⁴⁸ A.K. “XXI oktiabr’ v Podlipkakh [XXI October in Podlipki],” *Bol’shevistskii put’*, November 11, 1938.

⁴⁹ U. Bakeyev, “Prazdnik vstrechaem s novymi uspekhami [We celebrate the holiday with new successes],” *Bol’shevistskii put’*, November 3, 1938.

the greetings, a tea party was arranged for the detachment⁵⁰. All significant events of the cultural life were announced in detail on the special Tatar page of the district newspaper⁵¹.

The events related to the preparation and holding of elections were organized in a festive way. Elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on December 12, 1937 became a nation-wide holiday for voters of the town and the district. For example, in the village of Torbaevo, festively-minded people from Torbaevo, as well as from neighboring collective farms came to the polling station on festively decorated carts. The “*Bol'shevistskii Put'*” newspaper described the elections in the Tatar village as follows:

The first to enter the premises of the polling station to receive ballots were collective farmer Comrade Bekbulatov Gerye Nadirovich and collective farmer Berdieva Ainus. They received ballots in their native language. They were the first to cast their ballots in the ballot boxes. They did not conceal their joy⁵².

In the 1920–1930s in Tatar villages their appeared a new phenomenon – International Youth Days (IYD). In 1937, in honor of the XXIII IYD in the Tatar village of Shilino, a meeting of young collective farmers was held. Within the framework of the unofficial part of the event, there were organized family celebrations under the general slogan: “Work hard and have cultural leisure.” An eyewitness wrote as follows:

After the youth meeting and the tea party with plentiful treats (pies, byalishes, cookies, sweets), they began to play the accordion, young people began dancing. Collective farmers Zakhida and Akhmet Kashaev performed the national Tatar dance “dranka” to the applause of all young people. Bibishev, Kashaev and Devishev perfectly performed another dance “tura”. Akhmet Kashaev and collective farmer Izmail Takanaev also danced “tura.”⁵³

The holiday list also included the Bolshevik Press Day on May 5, and the Paris Commune Day on March 18. These days were celebrated by speeches in red corners, at the meetings of Stakhanovites and collective farm leaders and rural intelligentsia, as well as by the creation of new cells of public organizations, for example the International Workers Aid society⁵⁴.

The villagers were displeased with the new habits among young Tatars which appeared with the new holidays. On January 23, 1930, the Komsomol members of the village of Tsaritsyno organized the masquerade with a buffet, as well as “Russian vodka,” which became the reason for a caustic article in the district newspaper⁵⁵.

The study of the materials of the Kasimovsky district newspaper for the 1920–1930s shows that Tatar issues were widely covered on its pages.

In the late 1920s the Tatar public expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that there were few articles about the life of Tatars and Tatar villages, and asked to organize circles for rural correspondents⁵⁶. Obviously, that appeal had an effect: in the 1930s a special insert in Latin began to appear quite regularly until 1939, when the alphabet was changed to Cyrillic.

Conclusion

The Kasimov Tatars accepted the basic ideas of the Cultural Revolution, actively participated in all its transformations supporting the establishment of Soviet culture.

⁵⁰ “Pokhod v protivogazakh [Marching in gas masks],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, November 11, 1938.

⁵¹ Ap-va, “Tatarbajda zur kicə bula [There's a big party in Tatarbay],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, November 5, 1936; Virgazov, “Şəhərdəge tatar klubında [City Tatar Club],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, November 15, 1936.

⁵² M.K., “Vybery v Torbaeve [Elections in Torbaev],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, December 16, 1937.

⁵³ Kn. G., “Prazdnik v Shiline [Holiday in Shilin],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, September 9, 1937.

⁵⁴ “Den' pechati [Press Day],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, May 5, 1938; “25 kolkhoznikov vstupil v iacheiku MOPR [25 collective farmers joined the MOPR cell],” *Bol'shevistskii put'*, March 20, 1939.

⁵⁵ S.Z., “P'iany maskarad [Drunken masquerade],” *Kollektivist*, April 19, 1930.

⁵⁶ Dzhanbulatov, “Malo o zhizni natsmenov [Little about the life of the national minorities],” *Krasny voskhod*, June 6, 1929.

At the same time, they sought to develop their own national culture, seeing it an important factor in preserving their ethnic identity. Continuing the pre-revolutionary traditions, in the areas where the Tatars settled, they tried to conduct education in their native language, despite material and personnel difficulties. They fought for the independent existence of their national-administrative entity in the Kasimovsky district, thereby preserving the experience and culture of management practices. Realizing the complexity and lack of normal conditions for conducting social and cultural work among the Tatars, already in the 1920s, through the creation of the museum collection, they made an attempt to commemorate the festive and everyday culture of their people.

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Информация об авторах / Information about the authors

Альфия Габдулнуровна Галлямова, доктор исторических наук, ведущий научный сотрудник, Институт истории имени Ш. Марджани Академии наук Республики Татарстан; 420111, Россия, Казань, ул. Батурина, 7А; alfiya1955@gmail.com; SPIN-код: 8335-8920; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4344-902X>

Ильнара Ильдусовна Ханипова, кандидат исторических наук, старший научный сотрудник, заведующий отделом новейшей истории, Институт истории имени Ш. Марджани Академии наук Республики Татарстан; 420111, Россия, Казань, ул. Батурина, 7А; ihanipova@mail.ru; SPIN-код: 2258-5491; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7585-8069>

Alfiya Gabdulnurovna Gallyamova, Dr. Habil. History, Associate Professor, Leading Research Fellow of the Department of Contemporary History, Sh. Marjani Institute of History of the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences; 7A, Baturin St, Kazan 420111, Russia; alfiya1955@gmail.com; SPIN-code: 8335-8920; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4344-902X>

Il'nara Ildusovna Khanipova, PhD in History, Senior Research Fellow, Head of the Department of Contemporary History; Sh. Marjani Institute of History of the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences; 7A, Baturin St, Kazan, 420111, Russia; ihanipova@mail.ru; SPIN-code: 2258-5491; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7585-8069>