

## INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE PAST AND TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF TATARSTAN (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE MEMORY OF THE VOLGA BULGARIA PERIOD)

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### Maria Eflova

Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation

ORCID <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9573-2754>

Email: [meflova@gmail.com](mailto:meflova@gmail.com)

### Karina Garina

Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation

ORCID <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3131-2942>

Email: [karina.a.garina@mail.ru](mailto:karina.a.garina@mail.ru)

### Olga Maximova

Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation

ORCID <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4616-9488>

Email: [olga\\_max@list.ru](mailto:olga_max@list.ru)

### Anastasiya Mayakovskaya

Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation

ORCID <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7401-4534>

Email: [anastasiya.v.mayakovskaya@mail.ru](mailto:anastasiya.v.mayakovskaya@mail.ru)

### ABSTRACT

The text presents the results of the study of the relationship between memory politics and institutionalization of reference to the past on the example of the memory of the medieval state of Volga Bulgaria in the Republic of Tatarstan. Memory politics is defined from the position of constructivism as the creation by the state (or other social actors) of certain frames of perception and representations of the past. Memory politics is consolidated through the process of institutionalization (expressed both in the work with physical places of memory and in the creation of formal and informal institutional structures engaged in the construction of the past). Key elements of memory politics are institutionally reproduced: narratives, actors (e.g., through the training of representatives of a certain school of historical research, licensing of tour guides), channels of memory politics (museums, conferences, texts, etc.). Institutional anchoring sets the framework for interpreting both the image of the region and the image of the Tatar ethnic group on the basis of reference to the Bulgarian past. Thus, the construction of infrastructure (in a broad sense, both subject and organizational) presenting opportunities for the representation of a wide audience of the Bulgarian period, becomes another significant strategy of the policy of memory of the Volga Bulgaria in Tatarstan.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity; Institutionalization; Tourism; Regional tourism; Politics of memory; Social memory; Places of memory.

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## INTRODUCTION

The politics of memory is a definition that is often found in both scientific and public discourse. For example, V.I. Miller understands memory politics as "various social practices and norms related to the regulation of collective memory" (Meyer, 2008). In the context of this study, the concept of reproducing "narratives" by H. White (White, 2002), social constructivism by P. Berger and T. Luckman (Berger, Luckmann, 1966), works of representatives of structural linguistics and the idea of "signifier and signified" (F. de Saussure) are significant. (F. de Saussure, N.G. Bragina, B.M. Gasparov, O.G. Revzina) (Saussure, 1983), S. Hall's theory of representation (Hall, 1980).

Using the results of memory research in a constructivist way, we can define memory policy as the creation of some frameworks of perception and representations of the past, which can be set not only by the state. Memory politics can come from several actors and refer to periods of the past, individual personalities or events, or represent the history of a group and social space (region, country, city, etc.). And the final social results of memory policy may not correspond to the initial expectations of its key actors (Lebow, 2006).

The practices of memory politics are significantly influenced by the actions of political and ethnic elites in the region. Therefore, the approach of O.Y. Malinova, based on the concept of "symbolic power" by P. Bourdieu, is the most useful for this study P. Bourdieu (Edelman, 1988). According to O.Y. Malinova, not only the actions of the political elite (policy) (establishment of holidays, legitimization of the political regime) (Potseluev, 2012), but also the activity of a wider range of political, actors and dimensions of politics (politics), such as competition of representations and forms and mechanisms of fixing narratives in social memory (Assmann, 2014).

In addition, the politics of memory is not only the production of symbols and meanings, but also the initiation of the production of certain tangible and intangible objects that fix them. The process of "remembering" in a social context is a prolonged process of transmission rather than preservation and restoration (Balova, 2022). However, the mere fact of constructing representations of the past does not make them fictitious, fake or manipulated, since "the status of "constructedness" (long-standing or recent) applies to all cultural artifacts.

The way in which memory is institutionalized in the Republic of Tatarstan is particularly expressed through reference to the image of the Bulgar period of the region's history. The Volga Bulgaria was a large, politically, culturally and economically developed medieval state, which was located on the territory of modern Tatarstan and several neighboring regions. Many forms

of actualization of the region's past are associated with the Bulgar heritage in modern Tatarstan: specialized events are held, museums, reserves and the infrastructure around them are established, monuments are erected, operas and other cultural works are created. Such construction of meanings does not only take place in relation to the image of the Bulgarian past, but this very case is saturated with actualization practices (including institutionalized) in culture, science, as well as in the sphere of tourism and religious life (Levchenko, 2023).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The article uses materials of analysis of regional media publications devoted to the historical heritage of the Republic of Tatarstan, a series of expert interviews with specialists involved in the processes of constructing and broadcasting images of the past of the Republic of Tatarstan (archaeologists, professional historians, museum workers, guides, local historians, representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic, cultural workers and artists, n=36) and visitors to the museum-reserves Ostrov-grad Sviyazhsk and Velikiy Bolgar (n=33). The combination of different methods of data collection and analysis allowed to verify the results obtained in the course of the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The policy of remembrance of the Volga Bulgaria heritage and the ancient past of the region in general is expressed in the institutionalization of practices of actualization of the past. Institutionalization means the creation of formal and non-formal institutional structures engaged in "work" with the past of the region. And this work takes place simultaneously in several fields - tourism (standardization of tour guide training, licensing), academic environment, school education system. Institutional structures are being created to develop a brand of the region with an emphasis on its rich historical heritage (Fedchenko, 2023). The largest project reflecting the strategies and focus of efforts of the republican authorities and mass media in the field of social memory was the creation of the Revival Fund and its work aimed at the restoration and popularization of Bolgar and Sviyazhsk. The Republican Fund for the Revival of Historical and Cultural Monuments was established by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Tatarstan on February 17, 2010. In general, by 2023, more than 70 monuments of historical and cultural heritage were restored and more than 25 objects of tourist

infrastructure were created. In addition, the activities of the Renaissance Foundation as an actor in the memory policy are indirectly related to the creation of the official tourist portal of Tatarstan "Visit Tatarstan", which is focused on attracting tourists and investors at the expense of the rich historical and cultural heritage of the region.

In the academic environment, the strategy of institutionalization is expressed in the establishment of new scientific research units. This is, for example, the establishment of the Department of History of the Tatar-Bulgarian Civilization within the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences in 2014, the establishment of the Institute of Archaeology named after A.H. Khalikov within the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan. A.H. Khalikov Institute of Archaeology within the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, on the basis of which many archaeological excavations, preparation and publication of literature and organization of events dedicated to the period of the Volga Bulgaria take place.

In addition, each of these organizations is somehow connected with the process of training of professional historians and archaeologists in Tatarstan, and specialization of a large part of new specialists on the period of medieval and Bulgar history of the region.

Institutionalization captures also the sphere of training of guides, as the right to conduct excursions in the Bulgarian Museum-Reserve requires preliminary accreditation. Tour guides who have received accreditation to work in the Bulgarian reserve note: "Conduct for tour guides, meetings with specialists, architects, writers" (tour guide, Tatar).

Institutionalization, as a strategy of memory policy, is also expressed in the work with the physical places of memory of the Bulgarian period. A special role is played by the initiation of reconstruction of the historical and cultural reserve Velikiy Bolgar, which includes a number of separate museums, each of which is a structure engaged in scientific and educational work to actualize and disseminate images of the past associated with the heritage of the Volga Bulgaria. The creation of museum complexes both culturally significant, but at the same time convenient and adapted for visiting tourists - increase the amount of attention for the period to which these complexes are dedicated. As already mentioned, the Bulgarian Historical and Archaeological Reserve is one of the two largest tourist sites in the region. Significant infusion of funds into the infrastructure of the reserve in Bulgaria also affects tourist flows, as noted by an employee of the reserve: "We used to make do with what we have, well, we used to take excursions in the field and so on... And it turns out that it matters now for people, people have become a little spoiled by everyday life, amenities, good conditions" (museum researcher, Russian).

Work with infrastructure can also include the laying and renewal of roads, the

construction of hotel complexes, restaurants, parking lots and stores around the Bulgarian reserve (Balova, 2022). The developed infrastructure of the monument, which in the mass consciousness is associated with the Bulgar period, largely determines the work on popularization of the Bulgar historical heritage of the region. For example, within the framework of the school education system: "in our republic, trips to Bulgars are already massively organized by children... Not because of the idea: we are Bulgars, but because they do not know what else to show us nearby" (historian, teacher, Tatar).

The creation of religious sites and infrastructure for them is also significant: an Islamic academy is being built near the reserve, and the White Mosque (one of the largest and most ornate mosques in Tatarstan) has been built on the territory of the monument. A memorial sign dedicated to the voluntary adoption of Islam in Volga Bulgaria, depicting a reconstruction of the scenes of this event, has also been erected. Thus, on the basis of symbolic religious meanings associated with the Bulgarian settlement as a place of adoption of Islam by the ancestors of the Tatars, there is the creation of objects that fix the connection between the physical space of the monument and religious narratives. In turn, the objects associated with religious meanings and the infrastructure growing around them (roads, hotels, etc.) become a significant factor in the actualization of various practices. For example, the growth of those wishing to make a "small hajj" to Bolgar, or visitors to the celebration of the day of the adoption of Islam.

## CONCLUSION

The strategies of institutionalization allow us to pay attention not only to the images and meanings about the past, with which the politics of memory "works", but also to the way in which individual actors and channels of memory politics reproduce themselves at the organizational and institutional levels.

There is an institutionalization of the practices of academic consideration of Bulgarian heritage and the production of scholarly discourse, and the institutionalization of a "scientific school" within the framework of the problems of the Bulgarian period and the training of professional archaeologists and historians.

Institutionalization also covers the sphere of training of tour guides and is expressed also in the work with the physical places of memory of the Bulgarian period - through the creation of a developed and convenient infrastructure for tourists and small businesses. Separately, it is worth noting the importance of institutionalizing religious pilgrimage on the

territory of the monument.

Thus, the construction of infrastructure (in a broad sense, both object and organizational) presenting opportunities for the representation of a wide audience of the Bulgarian period, becomes another significant strategy of the policy of memory of the Volga Bulgaria in Tatarstan. It is within the framework of institutionalization that the key components of memory policy such as actors (socialized as representatives of a certain school of research, tour guides, history teachers), content of representations, channels (museums, conferences, events, TV programs, songs, etc.) are reproduced.

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