Identity and Memory in the Tatarstan Republic

Sarah Argodale

College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Recommended Citation


This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Identity and Memory in the Tatarstan Republic

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in Global Studies from The College of William and Mary

by

Sarah Argodale

Accepted for Highest Honors

Frederick Corney, Director

Alexander Prokhorov

Elena Prokhorova

Williamsburg, VA
April 29, 2010
Thank you to:

Frederick Corney

Elena Prokhorova

Alexandr Prokhorov

The Charles Center

For helping to support this research
# Table of Contents

1.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1-4

2.1 Making Memory ................................................................................................................... 4-10

2.2 Tatar as a Subject Population .......................................................................................... 10-11

3.1 Russian Expansion and its Impact on Tatar National Development ............................... 11

3.2 Tatars During Imperial Rule ............................................................................................. 12-23

3.3 Tatars Under the Soviets ..................................................................................................... 23-29

4.1 The Post-Soviet Political Context of Tatar Identity .......................................................... 29-34

Sties of Memory

5.1 Kul Sharif ........................................................................................................................... 34-41

5.2 Bolghar Capital City Ruins ............................................................................................... 41-49

5.3 Ğabdulla Tuqay .................................................................................................................. 49-56

6.1 Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 56-58

7.1 Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 59-62

8.1 Appendixes

8.1 Appendix A: Kul Sharif Mosque ....................................................................................... 63

8.2 Appendix B: “To the Architects of Kazan” ...................................................................... 64

8.3 Appendix C: Bolghar Ruins ............................................................................................... 65

8.4 Appendix D: Ğabdulla Tuqay statue in Kushlavych .......................................................... 66
Introduction

The ethnic composition of the Russian Federation is a product of centuries of colonization polices from both the imperial and Soviet governments. Once the Russian state had solidified around a common national identity, it began expanding into new territories, often forcefully. The tactics used by the Russian rulers were at times that of either pure colonizers or of modernizers who wanted to create complete cultural and religious unity and tolerance within their borders. The changing administrative practices between the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, as well as the differences in policy within these two specific eras, prevented the stable construction of national memory and identity in the colonized areas. When the Soviet Union dissolved, some of these territories regained the ethnic sovereignty they had lost to the Russians. Others, however, were granted partial sovereignty within the newly created Russian Federation. This nebulous political status created an interesting challenge for post-independence memory construction in these regions.

Traditionally, when territories gain independence from their rulers, a period of rampant nationalism follows. These communities are attempting to legitimize their new governments on the basis of a common identity, and doing so often requires the construction of a shared history for all the inhabitants. This creation of a new group memory often involves an act of intentional distancing from their rulers, wherein they are vilified and used as a rallying point against which citizens might unify. Where the settled territories experienced culturally or religiously oppressive policies, there is a tendency for the creation of nationalist sentiment that is aggressively against the previous rulers’
ethnic identity and culture. In this way, the newly independent group’s identity is often defined by what it is not.

The semi-autonomous regions in the Russian Federation, however, did not have this ability to break cleanly from the Russians. The legacy of Russian colonial and expansionist rule from the tsarist to Soviet period, and the current political relationships between the Russian center and its diverse regions, provides a unique environment for memory creation. This is particularly true in the case of the Kazan Tatars, the majority of whom reside in the Tatarstan Republic. This region became a part of the Russian Empire in the sixteenth century and has not possessed a greater amount of cultural and political sovereignty from the Russian state in over five hundred years. Even today, with the varying degrees of sovereignty that the Tatarstan Republic possesses, it still remains tied to the Russians and their culture. This intertwined relationship between Tatar and Russian cultures resulted in Tatar memory construction that is used to advance a specific group of people, while still remaining in the political and societal paradigm established by their Russian rulers.

While living in Kazan, I was struck by the seeming ease with which the Tatar and Russian cultures coexisted. The Tatar culture, comprised primarily of Islamic and Asian influences, does not easily meld with the traditional Orthodox culture of the Russians. In other territories in the Russian Federation with sizable Islamic populations, particularly the Caucasus, there is outright conflict between these two groups. Tatarstan, even during the brutal wars in Chechnya following the collapse of the Soviet Union, never experienced outright conflict between the two large ethnic groups. Peaceful relations have remained between the Russians and Tatars despite the political upheavals in other
parts of the Federation. However, this has not prohibited the Tatars from launching several nationalist campaigns, which are designed to promote the importance of the Tatar national identity. As a former traveler to the Tatarstan Republic, I was able to witness first-hand examples of modern day Tatar nationalist and memory construction.

I can clearly remember my first visit to the Kul Sharif mosque. The guide, a Tatar, framed the history of this mosque in nationalistic language, with a true sense of an “us vs. them” mentality in regard to the Tatars and the Russians. It was clear that the mosque symbolized the strength of Tatar memory and identity and was not something that the Russians could take part in. However, the guide was then quick to point to the Orthodox Church that stood directly across from the mosque. With great pride, she discussed how in no other place in the world could you see such structures so close to one another. The implications were clear. In less than five minutes, the theme of her speech had changed from nationalistic pride to peaceful coexistence with the Russians, who had just been described as conquerors and intolerant oppressors. While it is clear that the Tatars have a sense of their own national memory, they also cannot completely erase the Russian presence in their history. Studying sites of memory in Kazan, like the Kul Sharif mosque, better illuminates the multicultural memory construction that has occurred in this territory in the post-1991 world.

This paper will examine memory creation in the Tatarstan Republic by analyzing different sites that represent particular memorial or historical themes for the Tatars. It is divided into four sections: a discussion of the field of cultural and historical memory studies, a history of the Russian rule of the Tatars and its effect on modern memory construction, the current political relationship between the Russians and the Tatars, and
finally, the sites of memory themselves. Ultimately, the complex legacy of Russian rule in Tatarstan has forced the Tatars to deviate from traditional post-independence, nationalistic memory construction, in pursuit of a more appeasing approach when constructing their new national myth.

**Making Memory**

Examining the collective memory of a given national group has in recent years become a popular method for analyzing a state’s past and present. National entities throughout history constructed societal memories and traditions in order to strengthen certain cultural or political values and legitimize their power.¹ These constructed national memories were embodied in physical monuments and museums but also in more intangible ways. For example, Americans possess a specific memory of the Revolutionary War, which creates a narrative around the themes of patriotism and freedom. It is likely that the American collective memory of the Revolution and the actual events are inconsistent, but memory study is not concerned with historical accuracy per se. Memory constructions are paramount in the insights they can offer into a community or state’s specific culture and identity.

Scholars warn against placing too much emphasis on collective memory at the expense of attention to individual memories, or against assuming that individual memories simply mirror the general memory.² All individual memories play a part in

---

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15-43. One such ‘invented tradition’ was the Scottish kilt. For centuries, the kilt was seen as a representation of a more barbaric period. However, the kilt was later adopted to symbolize national pride, as the Scots attempted to separate themselves from the dominant English culture. Today, the kilt is only associated with positive imagery in the Scottish psyche, even though this is a very recent development in the Scottish existence. This construction of memory and tradition occurs in all societies throughout history.

² Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (Dec 1997): 1397. The Zionist tradition is an instance where the group memory is assumed to mimic individual memories of the Zionist participants. Confino discusses the fallacy in
shaping collective memory. Indeed, the process by which collective memories are formed is often as important as the memories themselves. As historian Alon Confino demonstrates in his discussion of German national memory, “memory operates in society through a multiplicity of social times, social experiences, and representations.”

Martin Evans’ examination of French memory of the 1950s Algerian war is a groundbreaking example of the importance of focusing on the memories of individuals rather than of larger entities. Evans examines oral testimonies of a range of French citizens about their memories of their country’s war with Algeria. If only a collective memory approach is taken with this conflict, the narrative suggests that French citizens – as a collective - were patriotic and fiercely loyal to their government’s actions in the former colonial territory. The official French government narrative of this engagement was not of a colonial war, but rather of France’s preservation of its natural borders and defense of French identity in the face of Algerian terrorism. Evans presents a different view of events, as he interviews French citizens who were against the deployment of French troops to Algeria. At the time, any divergent views from the metanarrative created by French ideologues, was seen as unpatriotic. Evans’ attention to individual memory produces a counter-narrative of the French-Algerian war, wherein the French-Algerian war was not seen as a just war to keep possession of French territory, but as a war fueled

---

3 Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History,” 1400.
6 Evans, 24.
by anachronistic colonial desires. Without Evans’ attention to individual memory, the traditional narrative of this war may have gone unchallenged.

Scholars of historical or collective memory are also wary of focusing too heavily on elite memories over the memories of the “common person.” The elites of society are more likely to construct memories or traditions that preserve or legitimize their power, ideologizing these memories for political ends. While the politics of memory has become a popular subject, especially in post-colonial or post-communist states, it too frequently takes the place of the cultural or social implications of memories.  

Confino offers a critique of top-down memory studies in his analysis of historian Henry Rousso’s work on memories of the Vichy regime. Rousso studies the mobilization of Vichy memories by political elites in post-war France. He looks to the statesman Charles De Gaulle, the French Communist Party, and literary and cinematic representations of Vichy France, to analyze how Vichy memory was constructed and used in French society after the war. Confino criticizes Rousso’s reliance on only elite segments of the French population. He points out that while elites are integral forces in memory construction, ignoring other segments of the population results in an incomplete picture. In some cases, examination of non-elites results in a completely different constructed memory.

---

7 Kathleen Smith, *Mythmaking in New Russia: Politics and Memory during the Yeltsin Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). Smith’s book examines memory construction in post-Communist Russia. While it is an interesting exploration of the politics of remembrance and forgetting, it largely deals with Russian politicians and how they relate to the political history of communist Russia. It thus fails to include any discussion of cultural memory construction.

8 Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History,” 1394.


10 Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History,” 1394.
The official memory of the Nazi period in Germany immediately after World War II involves a suppression of the past, a failure to ‘come to terms’ with it. This may have been from the elite, political perspective, but studies conducted with individuals from this period demonstrate an entirely different picture. Many German citizens were active participants in remembering and interpreting the tragedies of the Holocaust.  

While elites wield a strong influence over how the lower classes interpret different events, a total reliance on them in memory studies can sometimes be misleading. Finally, scholars caution against artificially separating memory from history. When memory and oral history were first used as scholarly sources, many were quick to claim that memory was not the same as history. History was seen as the more stable, accurate force, whereas memory was viewed as a fluid construct that was not as reliable as history. More recently, scholars have argued that memory shapes history, and vice versa, and that a strong interdependence exists between the two concepts. In the 1920s, Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist and theorist of memory studies, noted that memory is a socially constructed concept, whose purpose is to support events in the present, as opposed to actually depict the events of the past. The same can be said of history, which is constantly being revised or changed to a given end. Thinking of history as a rigid, immovable construct fails to grasp the fluidity of history. The link between memory and history is undeniable. To ignore it is to lower the value that memory can

11 Robert Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 1-20. Moeller analyzes the various West German methods for interpreting the war. Following the events of 1945, West Germans needed a lens through which to view the actions of their political leadership, in a way that did not frame them as complacent in the atrocities of the Holocaust. As Moeller describes, while some Germans did not fully expunge the Holocaust from their collective memory, the major focus of this memory was the victimization of the Germans at the hands of the invading Soviet army or the Nazi party.


13 Davis and Starn, 5.
have in illuminating societal constructs, and the motivations behind promoting one history over another.

For the purposes of this paper, I will examine three analytical methods used in memory studies: oral history, group study, and monument analysis. Oral history is the most commonly used methods affording access to memory. The oral history interview relies on living subjects who experienced the actual events being studied. As already noted, Evans’ work on the French-Algerian war utilizes oral interviews with average French citizens, to gather reflections on the engagement with France’s former colonial possessions. Oral history allows individuals from a society to express their remembrances, often as an active part in a generalized narrative. It provides an individualized view of events, with information and viewpoints from all segments of the population.

While oral history, because of its first hand recounting of memory, may be the most desirable of all the potential forms of study, it is also the most complex. Notwithstanding the logistical implications of conducting them, oral interviews evolve with the fluidity of memory. What one interviewee remembers about an event will change with each passing year, as new details emerge and old ones are forgotten, making the maintenance of oral history difficult to sustain over significant periods of time.

Pieter Lagrou uses group study as a method to examine memory construction of post-war France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Lagrou claims that the trauma of occupation did not allow these countries to create a cohesive narrative of the Second

---

14 Evans, 3.
World War.\textsuperscript{16} Instead of looking at the general to understand memories of the war, Lagrou examines specific segments of the population, namely the resistance movements, victims of persecution, and forced labor conscripts.\textsuperscript{17} Lagrou defends his decision to focus on specific groups’ memories, as opposed to the memories of the “silent majority,” by claiming that no such concept existed in these societies.\textsuperscript{18} Confino was particularly impressed by Lagrou’s methods, because it demonstrates that a society can have varying viewpoints on significant historical events.\textsuperscript{19} While Lagrou’s methods were pertinent to disordered occupied territories, these divisions in society are not always applicable in memory studies, simply because they do not always neatly exist.

A third form of memory study is the interpretation of national monuments. This can include museums, libraries, statues, important historical figures, or a variety of symbolic entities, even dates, which come to be revered by the broader population. These sites are a more recent tool of memory studies, as French historian Pierre Nora outlines in his major works. He argues that modern society’s need to create tangible markers of history is evidence of the erosion of the difference between history and memory.\textsuperscript{20} If history were a more stable concept in this present age, there would be no need to physically mark or commemorate events. However, the presence of these sites provides a window into how a society chooses to construct its own national narrative.

Scholars examine the issues and purposes surrounding the construction of these sites, and from this extrapolate the meaning each constitutes in the national identity. This

\textsuperscript{17} Lagrou, 4.
\textsuperscript{18} Lagrou, 6.
\textsuperscript{19} Confino, “Telling About Germany,” 403-404.
method is particularly applicable to post-colonial states. Upon gaining independence from their colonial rulers, these newly free states seek to establish new memories and traditions, which will connect their present incarnation with that which existed prior to colonization. Building sites of memory is the quickest and simplest method for constructing a new national identity.

Focusing on such sites of memory as a way of examining national identity carries the danger of focusing too much on top-down constructions. Since elites generally construct these sites, using them for historical analysis invites the risk of disregarding the memories of the lower level of societies. However, this possibility is somewhat avoided by including an examination of how the common people identify and relate to each site of memory. In this way, the top-down and bottom-up perspectives are both included in the analysis.

**Tatars as a Subject Population**

The national development of Tatarstan, first under Imperial Russia and then Communist Russia, are events that modern Tatars have attempted to rewrite in order to legitimize their newly gained partial independence from the Russian state. Examining the history of Russian rule over the Tatars helps to understand why the modern Tatars are practicing a particular form of memory construction. Often, when discussing Russian expansion outside of the traditional borders of the Muscovite state, many scholars are quick to label these actions as colonization. It is clear, however, that the ultimate goal of the Russian tsars was not pure colonization, but rather to form a modern multi-ethnic state. The same can be said of the Soviet Union and its leadership, who are also often mislabeled as colonizers. While the modernizing policies of imperial and Soviet Russia

---

21 Nora, 7.
were frequently brutal and repressive, it would be incorrect to liken them to the colonial actions of the other European powers at that time. This has created a complex relationship between the Tatars and the Russians, which lacks a clear delineation between a colonizer and a colonized group. The sites of memory constructed in Tatarstan after 1991 further emphasize the complicated history between these two groups. Further exploring the impact of Russian rule over the Tatars, will help better elicit why these sites of memory are an attempt to break from the tsarist and Soviet past, but not an outright denial of Russian cultural influence on the Tatar community.

**Russian Expansion and its Impact on Tatar National Development**

Russian expansion and accumulation of territory was never a uniformly applied endeavor. Variations of colonizing and settlement practices existed throughout the Tsarist and Soviet periods, as each new leader developed different strategies for dealing with the multi-ethnic Russian state. The Tatars experienced different expansionist tactics beginning with the fifteenth century Kazan Khanate and leading up to the twentieth century Tatarstan Socialist Republic. As a now sovereign group in the Russian Federation, the Tatar people have attempted to construct a cohesive national identity of long standing for themselves. However, inconsistently implemented imperial and communist polices, and their legacy on Tatar development, have severally hampered the creation of a stable identity. Examining the fluctuating Russian policy to the Tatars, demonstrates the modern difficulty faced by this ethnicity to successfully assert a nationalist sentiment.

**Tatars during Imperial Rule**
The Kazan Khanate first emerged following the decline of the Mongol Golden Horde. Civil strife amongst the Mongol khans had severely weakened the Horde’s grasp over the Muscovy Grand Dukes and the surrounding territories.\textsuperscript{22} The Tatar Mongol Ulu Muhammed took advantage of the instability caused by the inner power struggle of other Mongol leaders, and established a Kazan Khanate. Muscovy officially recognized the legitimacy of this khanate after Muhammed defeated and captured its leader Vasilii II in 1445. Together they created a pragmatic relationship, where both states were able to influence the other’s politics and they became strong economic and military allies.\textsuperscript{23} Consequently, the balance of power was constantly shifting between Muscovy and Kazan throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{24} However, Muscovy increasingly came to view the Tatars as ethnically and culturally inferior, causing them to redefine their relationship and move away from the traditional regional diplomacy.

To undermine the position of the Khanate and as a result gain more control over it, the Muscovite leadership attempted to influence the political situation in Kazan, by promoting rulers who were friendly to Muscovy.\textsuperscript{25} This political influence was later used as support for the Russia takeover of the Khanate. For example, Ivan III’s assistance with moderating a dynastic succession debate was later used as Muscovites’ evidence of their ownership of the territory.\textsuperscript{26} Still, Muscovy was unable to completely control the Kazan Tatars. Instead, it remained immersed in the politics that had guided its relationship with the Khanate since Ulu Muhammed’s rule. Ivan IV would briefly

\textsuperscript{22} Charles Halperin, \textit{The Tatar Yoke} (Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1985), 149.
\textsuperscript{23} Janet Martin, \textit{Medieval Russia, 980-1584} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 319.
\textsuperscript{26} Jaroslaw Pelenski, “Muscovite Imperial Claims to the Kazan Khanate,” \textit{Slavic Review} 26, no. 4 (Dec 1967): 561.
abandon these traditional practices in favor of more aggressive tactics. This allowed him to conquer the Kazan Khanate, changing Muscovy into a multi-ethnic empire, as well as overturning steppe diplomacy. Eventually, Ivan would return to the pragmatic relationship with Kazan, but not before the territory was integrated under Muscovy’s rule.

When Ivan IV came to power, Muscovy was at the height of its regional power. At first, Ivan was content with continuing the relationship with Kazan established by previous Muscovite rulers. However, when a favorable Khanate was rejected in Kazan, Ivan chose to exert his authority and forcefully subdue the region. Even though Muscovy had always considered the Khanate beholden to them, direct action had never before been deployed. To legitimize Ivan’s actions, Muscovite leaders developed the theory for gathering the lands of the Golden Horde. This explanation for their rights to the Khanate allowed Muscovy to abandon the traditional political relationship with the Khanate in favor of outright colonization in Kazan and other territories in the former Mongol Empire.

The newly adopted Muscovite historiography argued that the Kazan Khanate had once been a part of the ancient lands of Rus’ ruled by Grand Prince Riurik and his successors. Therefore, Muscovy was entitled to claim the Golden Horde territory that historically had belonged to the Russian people. Ivan’s military campaign in Kazan was therefore viewed as a natural continuation of Rus’s history.

Ivan IV’s procurement of the Kazan Khanate was also grounded in an argument for the dominant influence of the Orthodox Church in Russian affairs. The tsar’s

---

27 Kappeler, 22.
28 Keenan, 556.
29 Keenan, 557.
30 Pelenski, 560.
31 Pelenski, 565.
religious advisors asserted that the Russians had a Christian duty to spread their religion to the Muslim Kazan Khanate.\textsuperscript{32} Russia’s relationship with the vestiges of the Mongol Empire was rooted in religious sentiment, because of the over two centuries of Islamic dominance under the Mongol yoke. It seems natural that Muscovy religious leaders would desire to restore authority to the Orthodox Church by subjugating the previously dominant Islamic religion. While the Muscovite rulers briefly applied a policy of forced religious suppression to the Khanate, it was eventually abandoned for more pragmatic policies.

One of Ivan’s first actions after conquering the Khanate of Kazan was to raze its largest mosque. In a highly symbolic move, an Orthodox Church named the Blagoveshchenskii Sobor was erected on the sight where the old mosque once stood.\textsuperscript{33} This action reveals the accepted moral superiority of the Orthodox religion over Islam, and by an extension, the superiority of the Russian people over those residing in the Khanate. Many religious figures linked the victory in Kazan to divine retribution for the earlier actions of the Mongol invaders.\textsuperscript{34} Powerful religious leaders like Metropolitan Makarii exerted their influence over Ivan IV to attack the Islamic faith and increase Orthodoxy’s power.\textsuperscript{35}

To bolster Muscovy’s religious claim to the Khanate, religious myths were developed that praised Muscovy’s actions in conquering the Khanate. One of the most famous tales to originate from this period involved the appearance of an icon depicting the Virgin Mary. The icon was revealed to the Christian people in Kazan, after a fire

\textsuperscript{33} Graney, 54.
\textsuperscript{34} Pelenski, 572.
\textsuperscript{35} Kappeler, 27.
broke out in the city.\textsuperscript{36} Several miraculous events have been attributed to the icon, as it still maintains a revered position in Russian religious mythology.

Mass conversions were another method used by Ivan IV and his advisors to solidify their religious claims on the Volga region.\textsuperscript{37} The Islamic Tatars and other ethnic groups residing in the Khanate were viewed as inferior to the Orthodox Russians, and conversion was seen as the only avenue for them to reach enlightenment.\textsuperscript{38} The Archpriest of the Annunciation Cathedral claimed that it was necessary “to convert pagans to the Orthodox faith even if they do not desire it…so that all the universe should be permeated with Orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{39} Religious fervor was a clear motivator for Muscovy’s actions in the Khanate, as different Orthodox leaders encouraged Ivan IV to frame his expansion into the Volga as divinely inspired. In response to the Russian incursions into the Islamic faith, there were widespread Tatar uprisings. This forced Muscovy to reconsider its treatment of the region and adopt more pragmatic methods that would help define later policies towards other colonized nationalities.\textsuperscript{40}

There was understandable opposition to conversion, and the Russians were met with strong resistance from the Tatars and other groups. This forced Muscovy to lessen its religious zeal and instead adopt a more appeasing policy. In 1555, conversion was abandoned and a modicum of religious tolerance was allowed to exist in the Khanate.\textsuperscript{41} However, religious concessions were not sufficient in quelling opposition. Compensation in the political as well as economic realms was required to create the peaceful and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Pelenski, 573.
\item Kappeler, 27.
\item Pelenski, 574.
\item Pelenski, 575.
\item Kappeler, 28.
\item Kappeler, 27.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
dependent relationship Moscow desired with the Volga territory. Muscovy rewarded the Khanate elites with these concessions, as a way to curry favor and support for colonization. This technique would later serve the Russian Empire as it expanded its borders in all directions.

Since the political and economic structures of Muscovy and the Khanate were roughly equivalent, the Muscovite leaders chose to rely on the Khanate elites for assistance. In return, the elites were given the ability to govern independently, while still under the purview of Muscovite rule. Since the elites of the Kazan Khanate’s society were predominantly Tatar, they were given preferential treatment and seen as equals by Muscovy. Non-elites, often from other ethnic groups like the Chuvash and Cheremis, were expected to abide by the established Mongolian tax system and continue paying their iasak (tax). Instead of going to the leaders in Kazan, the tax now went directly to Moscow.

Following the events of 1552, the Muscovite state had briefly tried to alter the Tatar culture. With the colonization of the Kazan Khanate, Ivan and his advisors desired to refashion what the Tatar ethnicity represented, mostly through religious conversion. Their failure is evident in the later return to more conciliatory policies, and the preservation of traditional Tatar culture. Still, the Tatar identity had changed in some ways because of Muscovy’s colonization of the Golden Horde territories. The Tatars could no longer define themselves as the successors to the Mongol Empire, because the Muscovite leaders had claimed this position. Starting with Dmitrii Donskoi’s defeat of the Mongol leader Mamai in 1380 to Ivan IV’s annexation of the splintered remains of

---

42 Kappeler, 25.
43 Kappeler, 30.
the Golden Horde, Muscovy pushed to replace the Mongols as rulers in the region. The Tatar’s defeat at the hand of Ivan IV severed their historical connection to the Golden Horde, and by extension the Kazan Khanate, as the Tatars were incorporated into the larger Muscovite state. Later Russian activity in the Kazan region would further erode the Tatar national character, as other imperial leaders broke with the relationship model practiced by Ivan IV’s government.

The practical economic and political Tatar colonization policies established by the Muscovite state dampened the threat of revolt in the Volga region. While there were sporadic instances of violence, the area was mostly incorporated into the Russian state by the seventeenth century.44 Still, much was unknown about the territory, and threat of future violence was a detriment to Russian leaders launching full-scale colonization activities.45 Peter the Great’s ascension to the throne however, reversed established Russian policies to the Tatars. Inspired by the achievements of the Western empires, Peter was determined to refashion Russia into a more European state. This required that the empire be transformed into a more uniform, cohesive entity. To do so, Peter abandoned the established pragmatic measures, and returned to more assertive colonizing activities regarding religion and social restructuring.

A major policy reversal involved rescinding religious tolerance. Once again, the Russian state encouraged conversion to Orthodoxy, often in exchange for monetary compensation.46 Baptism was encouraged with bribery, and a number of minority ethnic groups in the former Khanate ostensibly converted.47 In addition to economic pressure,

44 Kappeler, 31.
46 Kappeler, 31.
47 Kappeler, 32.
the Russian state tried more destructive measures to eradicate the influence of Islam. A staggeringly high number of mosques were destroyed in the religious campaign in an attempt to force the Volga peoples away from Islam.\textsuperscript{48}

Previously, the Muscovite state had relied on non-Russian elites as allies. Under Peter, however, elites were no longer viewed as equals. Peter redefined the entire political structure, in an attempt to create a more uniform state. In an effort to promote conversion to Orthodoxy, the upper class Muslim Tatars were told to convert or risk losing their property.\textsuperscript{49} The non-Russian lower classes that had previously received separate treatment from the Russian peasants were also not immune to Peter’s reorganization. All peasants were grouped in the same social class, regardless of their ethnic background. This action further blurred the divisions between the various ethnic groups of the former Kazan Khanate.

The eighteenth century colonization activity denotes the first true mixing of Tatar and Russian cultures. Unlike during the Muscovite period, when the Tatar identity was allowed to maintain its independence, Peter forced the Tatars to share the Russian national religion and culture. He also removed the barriers separating Russian and Tatar lower classes, further steeping the Tatars in the Russian nationality. The Tatar national identity was being sacrificed, in effort to create a unified Russian nationality. This was reversed under Catherine II, who returned to the pragmatic expansionary policies of the pre-Petrine era. Her liberal policies encouraged an era of Tatar enlightenment, which led to the rebirth of Tatar identity and the development of the modern Tatar nation.

\textsuperscript{48} Kappeler, 32.
\textsuperscript{49} Kappeler, 31.
Catherine’s earlier experiences as the Russian leader affected her later policies towards the Kazan region. After coming to power, Catherine endured a bloody insurrection of southern Cossacks, known as the Pugachev Rebellion. The rebellion was a reaction to the modernizing attempts of the Russian state, and was led by the Cossacks with strong peasant support.\textsuperscript{50} Even though the uprising eventually stagnated as peasant support wavered, it was understood that the potential for another such event was great. In order to prevent this from occurring, Catherine granted the Cossack elites certain privileges, making them compliant to the Russia state.\textsuperscript{51} The lesson Catherine gained from this brief instability was to rely on society’s elites to maintain order throughout the empire, which she later applied to the Tatar aristocracy in Kazan.

In the wake of the Pugachev Rebellion, it was obvious that reform of the Russian colonization policy was needed. In a move to restructure the Russian law code, Catherine convened the Legislative Commission with several representatives from across the empire.\textsuperscript{52} Tatar support during the rebellion gained them representation in this national body, in which they expressed their desire for greater religious freedom and a reversal of Peter’s harsh policies for Tatar elites.\textsuperscript{53} Sympathetic to their plight, Catherine encouraged the development of Tatar religion and trade, which flourished up until the revolutions in 1917, and established the ethnic structure in the former Khanate that is still reflected in the modern Tatarstan Republic.

With Catherine, the oppression of the Islamic religion was curtailed. Shortly after the first meeting of her Legislative Commission, Catherine granted the request for

\textsuperscript{50} Marc Raeff, \textit{Imperial Russia 1682-1825} (New York: Columbia University, 1971), 118.
\textsuperscript{51} Raeff, 119.
\textsuperscript{52} Raeff, 24.
building new mosques in Kazan, the first erected since the Russian occupation of 1552.\textsuperscript{54} This act encouraged Tatar Muslims to continue pressing the Tsarina for concessions towards Islam. Acquiescing to their demands, the Tsarina passed the Act of Tolerance for Muslims in Russia, which offered the numerous Muslim practitioners a modicum of legal protection in the Russian Empire.\textsuperscript{55} Greater freedoms led to an increased religious debate amongst the Tatar Muslims, as many in the intelligentsia began constructing a historical Tatar identity.

With the revival of Islam, the Tatar elites desired to increase their legitimacy by creating an unbroken connection from their eighteenth century existence to the precursor of the Kazan Khanate, the Volga Bolghar state. Historical claims were made that the Tatars were descendants of the Bolghar state, which had converted to Islam in 922 and was situated around the city of Kazan.\textsuperscript{56} By positioning themselves as the successors to this Islamic state, the Kazan Tatars were establishing themselves as a powerful political and religious entity. As the Empire extended into Central Asia, the Kazan Tatars utilized their similar culture and language to promote their leadership over Russia’s Muslims and to revolutionize Islamic education.\textsuperscript{57}

After Peter’s restrictive measures towards Islam, religious education had faltered. Most Tatars turned to Central Asia and its Bokhara schools for theological instruction. However, once Catherine lifted Peter’s bans, an outpouring of religious reform occurred. The Tatar Shihabeddin Merdzani spearheaded a campaign to overturn the traditional

\textsuperscript{54} Zenkovsky, 303.
\textsuperscript{55} Zenkovsky, 304.
\textsuperscript{57} Zenkovsky, 307.
conservative instruction of the Bokhara schools in favor of more progressive teachings.\(^{58}\) One of his pupils named Hussein Feizhani modernized Islamic education further, by promoting more progressive and reformist tenets. His teachings soon became the standard of all Tatar theological institutions.\(^{59}\)

Literary scholarship also flourished with the lessening of religious restrictions. For the first time, copies of the Koran were widely disseminated. There was a strong push by Tatar intellectuals to publish religious texts in the vernacular Tatar language.\(^{60}\) The move to use the Tatar language in print advanced the formation of secular journals and newspapers. The majority of these publications were located in Kazan. With this, the center of Muslim scholarship shifted from Central Asia to Kazan, making it one of the most prominent Islamic cities in the world.\(^{61}\) This also gave the Tatars residing in the area undue influence over other ethnic Muslim groups in the Russian Empire, which was only bolstered by their economic prosperity.

Aside from lessening religious restrictions, Catherine also allowed the Tatar aristocracy to regain trading rights. Under Peter, Tatars and other non-Russian elites were barred from residing in Kazan. By allowing them to return to the economic center, Catherine authorized Tatar dominance in eastern trading.\(^{62}\) The already close cultural ties between Central Asia and the Tatars made establishing trade relationships simpler, allowing the Tatars to eliminate other foreign competition in the Central Asian markets.

---

\(^{58}\) Zenkovsky, 312.

\(^{59}\) Zenkovsky, 313.

\(^{60}\) Zenkovsky, 313.

\(^{61}\) Zenkovsky, 315.

\(^{62}\) Zenkovsky, 306.
Kazan resumed its role as a center of economic trade, a position that the Tatar nobles had promoted under khanate rule.

The Tatars became the Russian government’s trade emissaries in the eastern parts of the empire. Windfall profits were accrued by the Kazan Tatars, as the city’s influence spread throughout Central Asia and Siberia. This inevitably led to the Tatarization of different ethnic groups, including those groups from the original Kazan Khanate, the Chuvash and the Mordvinians. Influential Tatar leaders began pushing for unification of all Turkic peoples residing in the Russian Empire. Presumably, the Kazan Tatars would use their power to lead the other Turkic ethnicities in a national movement. The threat of such an event worried the Russian state, and as a result, Tatar merchants were replaced with Russians. Kazan’s grip on eastern trade slowly diminished throughout the nineteenth century.

The religious, political, and economic authority that the Kazan Tatars were able to accumulate under Catherine II helped to solidify their national identity. Not since the Khanate period had the Tatars been able to so freely express their religious or cultural beliefs. This strong nationalist expression, however, was diminished by the continued dominance of the Tatars by the Russians. Even though Catherine had loosened cultural restrictions, the Tatars remained beholden to the Russians for their ability to formulate a national identity. Aware of the potential risk a strong nationality could pose, the Russian state maintained strict control of their territorial possession. Their pragmatic approach to administering non-Russian territories, allowed the Russian rulers to grant some allowances of cultural and political independence to their multi-ethnic subjects.

---

63 Keenan, 551.
64 Zenkovsky, 306.
65 Zenkovsky, 311.
Unfortunately, the pragmatic approach of their colonial practices also allowed the Russians to stamp out any signs of nationalist uprising, when it threatened Russia’s control over its empire.

These pragmatic policies prevented a cohesive colonial strategy from developing, demonstrated in the divergent practices of Peter I and Catherine II. This severely undermined any organic development of a Tatar national consciousness. The Tatar culture was either harshly suppressed under Russian rule, or it was given the opportunity to flourish. Moments of cultural revival were often followed by periods of repression and religious intolerance to any markers of Islam. The Tatars were never permitted to have any permanent cultural identity; it was constantly fluctuating based on the colonial decisions of the Russian state. At some points, it even seemed as if the Tatars were not colonial subjects, but near equals to the Russians in an expansive multi-ethnic empire. Catherine and other tsars’ allowance of Tatar elites to hold prominent political positions, give the impression that the relationship between the Tatars and the Russians did not always follow that of the traditional colonizer, colonized roles. It is unsurprising then, that the Tatar identity that emerged from the Russian imperial period was fragmented and ill defined. The Soviet style of governance that replaced imperial rule only helped to further fracture the Tatar identity.

**Tatars Under the Soviets**

When the Bolsheviks seized power in the early part of the twentieth century, many of their policy decisions were made with the purpose of distancing themselves with the authoritarianism of the tsars. In the early stages of the revolution, primarily to gain support from the ethnic masses, the Bolsheviks called for self-determination amongst the
non-Russian populations across the empire. However, any ideas of self-determination were abandoned once the Bolsheviks achieved firm control of the country.\(^{66}\) Lenin and his supporters recognized that allowing the different territories in Russia to practice self-rule, would drastically shrink the country’s borders and leave it vulnerable to outside forces. Still, to continue the practices of imperial Russian to the non-Russian subjects, would unfavorably link the Soviets with a colonial power. To rectify this issue, the Soviets developed a nationalist policy that would inform how non-Russian territories, like Kazan, would be administered for the greater part of the Soviet Union’s existence.

The debate over what degree of self-determination should be permitted in the Soviet Union split the fledgling government into two camps. Detractors of self-determination, the internationalists, felt that any form of nationalism was irrelevant, and that the Soviet leaders should simply focus on building class-consciousness amongst the population.\(^{67}\) Stalin and Lenin, however, both supported self-determination as a method of nation building in the non-Russian communities. They both felt that nationalism was a distracter from class identity politics, but as part of the dialectics of history, it could not be stopped.\(^{68}\) Since Lenin viewed nationalism was inevitable, by controlling its development within the confines of the Soviet Union, he hoped to redirect nationalist sentiment towards supporting the new communist government. The phrase, “national in form, socialist in content,” describes the goals of the early Soviet Union and their

---


\(^{67}\) Martin, 67.

\(^{68}\) Martin, 68.
nationalist policies. Nationalism was permitted, so long as it ultimately helped legitimize the political ideology of the Soviet Union throughout the region.

Despite the acceptance of his nation building policies, Lenin still feared continuing the oppressive policies of the tsarist state towards the non-Russians of the Soviet Union. His “Greater Danger Principle,” warned that Russian chauvinism towards different ethnic groups was more dangerous than the local nationalism he wanted to promote in those areas. This led to formation of a policy called korenizatsiia or indigenization, wherein affirmative action was used to bring in non-Russians as part of the Soviet Union’s administrative structure. As the second largest ethnic group in the Soviet Union, the Tatars were one of the main targets of korenizatsiia. The strategy of affirmative action lasted until Lenin’s death and Stalin’s rise to power in the late 1920s. For that brief time, the Tatars underwent a second cultural revival, similar to the one that occurred during Catherine II’s reign.

Lenin’s desire for a federative system in the Soviet Union, led to the creation of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) on June 25, 1920, as part of the larger Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). As an ASSR, the Tatar people were not granted the same independence as the Union Republics in Central Asia and the West and were still under Russian control. However, korenizatsiia permitted cultural and political freedoms that the Tatars had not experienced in decades. Tatar was declared the official language of the ASSR, which allowed the Soviets in Moscow to

---

70 Martin, 71.
71 Khalid, 65.
72 Grenoble, 68.
73 Kappeler, 379.
74 Grenoble, 69.
spread socialism in the local language of the Tatars.\textsuperscript{75} Tatars were promoted to all levels of the Soviet party, within both the Tatar ASSR, as well as central state organs in the capital.\textsuperscript{76} Affirmative action allowed the Tatars to achieve equal status with the Russians under the banner of socialism. Unfortunately, the resentment created by these polices within the Russian population, resulted in the end of korenizatsiia following Lenin’s death in 1924. Stalin reversed many of the liberal nationalist policies of the 1920s, and replaced them with anti-nationalist rhetoric that would endure for the following decades.

Stalin had always been an opponent to Lenin’s “Greater Danger Principle,” never fully believing that the Russians should be labeled as a chauvinistic ethnicity and that local nationalism was not a threat to Communism.\textsuperscript{77} After coming to power, he abolished the policies of korenizatsiia, and with it, the idea of the Soviet Union as an affirmative action state.\textsuperscript{78} He also reestablished the importance of the Russian ethnicity and culture.\textsuperscript{79} Lenin had purposefully downplayed Russian nationalism, for free that it would give the Soviet Union the appearance of a colonial empire. By reversing this measure, Stalin enacted a period of indirect Russification across the Soviet Union. With no affirmative action restrictions left on the Russian nationality, it quickly took on a position of superiority amongst the different ethnicities. For Stalin and other Soviet leaders, the meaning of a Soviet identity became congruous with the Russian identity. Therefore many of the policies that were meant to unify and standardize the territories of the Soviet Union, also forced the Russian culture and identity on the non-Russian communities. While the original intention may not have been forced Russification of the Tatars and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{75} Grenoble, 71. \textsuperscript{76} Martin, 73. \textsuperscript{77} Martin, 70. \textsuperscript{78} Martin, 79. \textsuperscript{79} Martin, 80.}
other groups, it was undeniably one of the outcomes of Stalin’s abolition of the “Greater Danger Principle.”

One of the first actions taken by Stalin was to instill bilingualism in all of the federal districts of the Soviet Union. While Tatar and other titular languages were not banned outright, it quickly became clear which language was the most important. The lack of state support and the difficulty of non-Russian speakers gaining employment caused a linguistic shift to Russian in the decades of Soviet rule. The Tatar language itself was streamlined by Soviet edict. From the Turkic linguistic branch, Tatar is based on Arabic script. This was changed to Latin and then Cyrillic, under the pretense of standardizing and modernizing the language. Instead, the change in language script inhibited Tatars from reading older documents, essentially separating them from their historical precursors.

To replace this loss of Tatar history, Soviet historiographers wrote a new narrative that legitimized the state’s actions and justify the Tatars’ position in the Soviet Union. In the new Soviet narrative, the Tatar ethnicity was described as less developed than the Russians, and in need of Soviet assistance in order to progress. This claim was supported by the idea that the Kazan Khanate was economically and political weaker than the Muscovite state, framing the events of 1552 as constructive for Tatar advancement. While Tatar intellectuals naturally objected to this rendering of their history, it was the official Soviet view until after Stalin’s death in 1953. After that, limited claims were

---

80 Grenoble, 71.
81 Grenoble, 70.
permitted that placed Muscovy and the Kazan Khanate on equal developmental stages. Still, the Soviet recasting of Tatar history was yet another attempt by the state to oversee the maturation of their national identity.

A final and most obvious impact of Soviet policy on Tatar national identity involved its Muslim culture. This presented an interesting dilemma for the Soviets who feared a pan-Islamic threat. Religion was naturally in opposition to the communist ideology, but Islam was considered more deadly than Orthodoxy, since the former was believed to have no connections with traditional Russian culture. To combat Islam, atheistic propaganda was disseminated, especially in Tatarstan, which had historically been the center of Islamic movements in Russia. Publications were circulated in the Tatar language that extolled the merits of atheism. In a more direct attack, mosques and educational institutions were closed and dismantled, drastically reducing the number of Islamic structures in Tatarstan. While attempts to eradicated Islam were not completely successful, this aspect of the Soviet nationalist policies was the most damaging to national identity. Its legacy continues to be felt in Islamic culture throughout the Federation, as well as the former Republics.

These policies of sporadic Russification and anti-Islamic propaganda continued even after Stalin’s death. As a result of this, fewer and fewer non-Russians held prominent positions in the Communist party. A population increase and resulting migration of Russians created several instances where Russians were the major ethnicity

---

83 Lazzerini, 629.
86 Deviet, 108.
87 Kappeler, 382.
in many of the non-Russian republics, including Tatarstan. This would have major effects on Tatar national identity during the periods of perestroika and post-communist Russia. This liberalizing period provided the first opportunity for the Tatars to fully control their national development since the time of Ivan the Terrible. While labeling the Soviet Union, as a colonizing state is a confusion of terms, the fragmentation and dilution of Tatar national identity because of Soviet policies is unquestionable.

The legacy of imperial and Soviet rule over the Tatars has left a visible mark on this group’s identity. What started as a purely expansionary, colonizing mission under Ivan the Terrible, evolved into a more sophisticated modernizing movement under the subsequent imperial and Soviet leaders. While at times the policies of these different empires had the appearance of oppression, specifically in relation to anti-Islam campaigns, the overall goal of the Russians was never to subjugate the Tatars. Rather, it was to create a stable, cohesive state that was comprised of different ethnicities. Some rulers were more aggressive in trying to integrate the Tatars, especially during the Soviet period. The rapid assimilation that occurred under the Soviet Union resulted in entire generations of Tatars who had more cultural in common with their Russian neighbors than with the Tatars of the imperial or khanate periods. This inability of the Tatars to extract themselves from the culture and history of the Russians has been a major obstacle to modern identity construction in the region, and is only further exacerbated by the current political relationship between the Tatarstan Republic and the new Russian state.

**The Post-Soviet Political Context of Tatar Identity**

As the Soviet Union moved quickly to dissolution at the beginning of the 1990s, drastic political reshuffling was occurring across the Russian territory. Leaders of

---

88 Kappeler, 383.
ethnocentrically dominated territories began asserting more and more independence from the central government apparatuses. In places that had long felt dominated by the Russians, like the tumultuous Caucasus, talk of complete breaks with the Russians were widespread. The Soviet Republics in the Baltic were leaders in the sovereignty movement, as some of the earliest states to declare complete independence.\(^{89}\) This was eventually followed in Ukraine and the Southern Caucasus states. Areas that had either been absorbed by the Russians took advantage of the political chaos to reassert their power. The Tatar leader and future Tatarstan president, Mintimer Shaimiev, saw the opportunity for the Tatars to regain their lost control and prestige in the territory.

In August 1990, Shaimiev issued a decree of sovereignty for the Tatarstan Republic.\(^{90}\) The wide number of areas that were following similar independent actions bolstered Shaimiev’s actions. However, unlike the republics in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, Tatarstan did not completely break away from the Russian state. President Boris Yeltsin was able to maintain certain territories as parts of the Russian Federation, in exchange for large political and economic concessions. On February 15, 1994, Yeltsin and Shaimiev signed a bilateral agreement between Russia and Tatarstan, which formally recognized the latter’s sovereignty.\(^{91}\) While many other territories were given similar political treatments, the agreement with Tatarstan was notable for the large degree of economic and political freedom accorded it. For example, Tatarstan has its own foreign


policy, which in some cases does not coincide with official Russian positions. For the greater part of the 1990s, Tatarstan was a near separate entity from the central Russian state. The twenty-first century, however, has seen new developments in the relationship between Kazan and Moscow.

Recent political restructuring in the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin and his presidential successor Dmitrii Medvedev has threatened much of the sovereignty once enjoyed by the peripheral territories. This diminishing of independence, coupled with growing violence in other primarily Islamic areas of Russia as well as a highly publicized international context of an extreme “Islamic” terrorist threat, have forced the Tatarstan leaders to move away from a purely nationalist policy, lest Tatarstan follow the same historical trajectory as Chechnya. Instead, Shaimiev and others have advanced cooperation with the Russian ethnic majority as a way to maintain good relations with the Russian central authority in Moscow and to hold onto to their political independence.

Due to the political situation in the Russian Federation, and the complex relationships between the central and peripheral governments, the Tatars face an interesting challenge in reconstructing their national identity. The tendency for groups emerging from oppressive rule is to pursue strongly nationalistic, ethnocentric campaigns, with the purpose of aggrandizing the past and inflating the intrinsic coherence of the particular ethnicity. The Tatars however cannot have a nationalist campaign because of the political control that the Russian government still has over their territory. With the new freedoms of the 1990s then the Tatars created a national myth that enhanced the idea of the vitality of Tatar ethnicity without completely disparaging the Russian influence.

92 Slocum, 52.
This balancing act between the Tatar self-promotion and appeasement of the Russians is visible throughout much of Tatar society. Its signs can be seen in the construction of the Kul Sharif mosque, the preservation of the Bolghar capital city ruins, and the commemoration of the poet Ğabdulla Tuqay. While not the only examples of modern Tatar memory, these three sites particularly highlight the intentions of the Tatars to overwrite their history, without depicting the Russians as an entirely negative force. What emerges then is a pattern of placing the Tatars and Russians on an equal level, so that the Tatars are no longer represented as subservient to the group that has had political and economic control over them for centuries.

These kinds of sites figure not infrequently in the efforts of newly independent states to recast their identities, religious buildings, historical ruins, and literary figures representing mainstays of such efforts around the world. In Tatarstan, however, these three selected sites illustrate the limits of such self-aggrandizing possibilities. In each instance, the Tatars not only promote the superiority or importance of their own community, they also represent the Russian presence in their national memory in a generally positive manner that is surprising in a post-colonial context.

The selection of Kul Sharif as a site of memory for the Tatars is the most obvious choice. As will be discussed later, its construction was one of the first actions undertaken by the quasi-independent Tatar state. Its importance in the modern Tatar identity is undeniable. The other two sites, Bolghar are Tuqay are less obvious, but still important Tatar cultural markers. Bolghar represents a development of a new, more faltering Tatar historiography that helps to diminish the Tatar’s embarrassment of being conquered by another Empire. Tuqay as a person demonstrates the cultural reawakening that occurred
in Kazan at the beginning of the twentieth century. His importance as a site of memory, however, is more prevalent in how the Tatars choose to commemorate his life and work, which manages to balance a nationalist sentiment within the confines of a Russian sphere. There are naturally, several other sites that depict the modern form of Tatar memory, but these three best demonstrate the inescapable influence Russia has had over Tatar development.

In studying these sites, a pattern emerges regarding memory construction in Tatarstan. All three champion an idea of multiculturalism in Tatarstan, specifically the link between the Russians and the Tatars. The reality of the Tatar cultural domination by the Russians left them with few opportunities to be nothing more than a sub-ethnicity within the Empire and later the Soviet Union. With the newly afforded freedoms that the post-Soviet era has granted them, it is reasonable that the Tatars would want to transform their history to a more patriotic, pro-Tatar concept. However, instead of pursuing a purely nationalistic message with their memory construction, the Tatars chose a more nuanced approach to their past. The current political realities in the Russian Federation play a major role in how the Tatars were able to form their new national identity.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Tatarstan government was presented with an opportunity to create an ethnic identity as something other than a colonized territory of the Russian state. The transformation that the Tatars had undergone through Russian rule, however, was a formidable obstacle to reconstruction. In the years following 1991, Tatar leaders reshaped their territories’ history, downplaying the role of the Russians. They constructed physical representations of Tatarstan’s new identity, a deployment of memory construction that, Pierre Nora notes, is intended to create “the illusion of
eternity." These monuments harkened back to pre-Russian era Tatarstan, and helped to emphasize the separation of the Tatar identity from the Russian one. Prominent examples of sites of memory within the Republic include the Kul-Sharif mosque, the Bolghar ruins, and the museums devoted to the Tatar poet Tuqay. These entities are testaments to the new memories and history that the Tatars have created for themselves, and demonstrate the way in which established groups can refashion their own historical identities.

The remainder of this paper will focus on the history and meaning of the aforementioned sites of memory. A deeper examination of their importance in Tatar memory construction reveals how the modern Tatars choose to view their past and its impact on the present. In the end, it is apparent that the Russians had and continue to have a major impact on how the Tatars choose to remember and represent their culture in this modern era.

**Kul Sharif Mosque**

Located within the Kazan Kremlin walls, this is the largest mosque in the Russian Federation, a state with a significant Muslim population. Its construction in the late 1990s was an obvious example of the Tatars’ reconstruction of their history. As a dominantly Islamic people, the Tatars place huge cultural significance in the mosques as a major site of Islamic memory. However, centuries of Russian rule had all but erased the physical representations of Islam in the Tatar culture. Constructing this mosque was a calculated physical and symbolic attempt to erase the religious restrictions that had once been placed on the Tatar people. However, the Kul Sharif does not only stand for

---

93 Nora, 12.
the reconstruction of Islam in Tatar society. It has also taken on a highly multicultural meaning in the national memory of Tatarstan, specifically in relation to Russian Orthodoxy. The history of its construction, demonstrates a concerted effort in Tatar society to create an identity that leaves room for the traditional Islamic background of the Tatars, as well as the recent Russian religious presence.

After invading the Kazan Khanate in 1552, one of Ivan the Terrible’s first actions was to raze the capital’s largest mosque. In a highly symbolic move, an Orthodox Church named the Blagoveshchenskii Sobor was erected on the site where the old mosque once stood. This was an attempt to demoralize the Islamic Tatar people, and reinforce the inferior position of the Tatars to the conquering Russians. Additionally, the razing of the Kul Sharif mosque marked the beginning of a centuries-long campaign to convert them to Russian Orthodoxy and erase the existence of Islam in the collective Tatar memory. The destruction of Kazan’s largest mosque, was the beginning of a centuries long campaign of the Russians and Soviets attempting to diminish the position of Islam in its newly acquired territory.

Anti-Islamic policies were a common action carried out by the imperial tsars and Soviet leaders. During Ivan’s reign, a staggeringly high number of mosques were destroyed and often replaced with Orthodox cathedrals. The Tatar landscape was quickly transformed to mirror the religion of its Russian conquerors. Prior to Ivan’s invasion, Tatar historians report, five mosques stood within the Kazan Kremlin’s walls. The practice of constructing cathedrals and limiting the number of mosques in conquered

95 Graney, 21.
96 Kappeler, 32.
territories endured throughout the imperial and communist rule over the Tatars. With a growing Muslim population as the Russian Empire swept through the Central Asian region, harsher limitations on Islamic religious architecture were enacted. Many state officials called for a complete ban on mosque construction. Often, the Russian state would sponsor eradication of still-working mosques. Between 1738 and 1745, 418 mosques were dismantled in the district of Kazan alone.\(^8\) Destruction of mosques was also not uncommon in the Soviet period, especially after Stalin began rolling back Lenin’s more tolerant nationalities policy. In the late 1920s and 1930s, mosques throughout the Union were closed or destroyed in an effort to eradicate religious sentiment amongst the Muslim population.\(^9\) While the destruction of mosques was not common in the latter parts of Soviet rule, the political and social atmosphere remained unfriendly towards the practicing of the Islamic religion.

Despite these harsh anti-mosque policies a small number of mosques escaped destruction, even in the city of Kazan.\(^10\) At different times, Russian rulers were actually responsible for the preservation of these buildings. Primarily, Catherine II’s religious tolerance edict of 1773, which outlawed the destruction of mosques, was instrumental in preserving the few Islamic structures that still survived.\(^11\) The construction of new mosques was also allowed at several points during imperial and Soviet rule, most noticeably during the early, more liberal Soviet era of the 1920s.\(^12\) These intermittent periods of religious tolerance were one of the factors that helped preserve Islam in Tatar

---

9 Khalid, 72.
11 Hunter, 9.
12 Frank, 162.
culture. However, after centuries of Russian rule, Islam in Tatarstan was permeated with Russian Orthodoxy, either through the construction of churches, conversions, or simply the migration of Russians to the territory. This relationship between Islam and Orthodoxy, whether welcome or not, had a profound effect on how the Tatars chose to reconstruct their religious memory in the post-1991 Russian Federation.

When religious freedoms were fully restored in Russia following the events of 1991, there was a strong movement amongst the Tatar to create a national identity around their Islamic heritage. The mosque is an obvious symbol to demonstrate and promote Islamic revival in Tatar society, and following the fall of the Soviet Union, mosques once again became a dominant presence in the Tatar landscape. In an effort to fully reconstruct their Islamic roots, the Tatars turned their attention to the Kazan Khanate and its appearance prior to Ivan the Terrible’s invasion. Even though the citizens of the Khanate have little historically in common with modern Tatars, the fact this period was absence of a Russian influence, made it an obvious choice for promoting Islamic memories. From here, the proposal to erect the Kul Sharif mosque emerged, a replacement of the mosque destroyed by Ivan during his invasion. As a site of memory, the Kul Sharif mosque represents the formation of a collective Tatar religious identity in their modern cultural reality.

In 2005 the construction of the Kul Sharif mosque and its inauguration were complete, coinciding with the millennial celebration of Kazan’s own construction. Its impressive structure dominates the Kazan skyline, towering over many of the other

buildings in the Kremlin. Much smaller than other mosques found throughout the Middle East and South East Asia, the Kul Sharif has many architectural influences that are typically seen in the mosques of the former Ottoman Empire. The slender design of the minarets and the surrounding domes mirror those of the famous Blue Mosque in Istanbul, although on a smaller scale.

Despite its likeness to mosques of the ancient world, however, there is a certain modernistic feel to the mosque’s structure. Its clean and even shape and its simple colors of white and blue, make it impossible to mistake for anything but a recent construction. This makes juxtaposition between the mosque and the buildings that surround it all the more apparent. The Kremlin fortress is ancient, and many of the structures that reside within its white walls have been there for centuries. Immediately the eye is drawn to the mosque, which provides a bright contrast to the graying buildings that surround it. At night, a ring of garish spotlights illuminates it, as if to ensure that even when nothing else is visible, the Kul Sharif still holds the eye of a passerby.

To counteract its obvious appearance of being a recent construction, the mosque was furnished with a detailed historiography in order to justify its placement within the Kremlin. The name Kul Sharif comes from a Tatar soldier who died in battle against Ivan’s army.105 The message conveyed by this mosque then is one of defiance to the Russian state, an unwelcome presence in the Tatar land. By referring back to their opposition to Russian encroachment, the Tatars wish to evoke feelings of independence and national sovereignty with the Kul Sharif mosque. It is easy to simply interpret the

---

mosque as a defiant gesture against the Russian state. The symbolic intricacies of the mosque do not stop there though.

During the construction of the Kul Sharif, many Tatar nationalists demanded that the Russian-built Blagoveshchenskii Sobor be torn down and replaced with the new mosque. This would effectively undo Ivan’s earlier actions, and restore the mosque to its earlier location inside the Kremlin. The proposal was overturned by the Tatar government and in a highly symbolic gesture, it was decided that the Kul Sharif mosque would be situated across from Ivan’s cathedral. Only a stone path currently separates these religious structures. In the middle of this path is the recently constructed monument “To the Architects of Kazan.” It is composed of two figures, one in traditional Russian dress who is holding building plans for an Orthodox church and another in traditional Tatar dress with the plans for a Khan palace. Clearly, this statuary is meant to reinforce the equal relationship between the two religious buildings.

Still, the Kul Sharif is the obvious focal point, its minarets towering over the onion domes of the cathedral. In comparison to the open location of the mosque, the cathedral is almost hidden amongst the other structures in the Kremlin. It was permitted to remain in the Kremlin, but it is clear that it was never the intention to allow the cathedral to overshadow the mosque.

Despite the obvious privileging of the Kul Sharif mosque, Tatar leaders are quick to use the proximity of these two religious icons as an example of the Tatar community’s tolerance and acceptance of their Russian cousins. Tatars promote the idea that the Kazan Kremlin is the only location in the world where both a Christian and Islamic building can

---

106 Graney, 21.
107 Graney, 22.
be seen so close to one another. When the current United States’ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Kazan in 2009, one of the most reported stops on her tour was the Kul Sharif. “You are well known as someone who has fostered religious tolerance,” she said, congratulating the Tatars for their tolerant attitudes. “It's a wonderful example of what can be done if people work together. I am happy to be here in a place that models interfaith tolerance. So important in the world today.”

Clinton’s acceptance of the Tatar’s tolerance narrative, demonstrates how successful their society has been in constructing a new memory about the Kazan Kremlin.

The Kul Sharif mosque and its construction represent the realities of the historical control by Russian imperial and Soviet authorities over Tatar development. Despite the obviously nationalistic symbolism that comes with the construction of the Kul Sharif mosque, the overall message that it extends to its Tatar population is one of cooperation and acceptance of a strong Russian presence. The fact that Shaimiev and other Tatar officials chose not to replace the Blagoveshchenskii Sobor with the new mosque, but instead erect the Kul Sharif close by, is a major indicator of their recognition of the important relationship between the Russians and the Tatars.

The history surrounding the construction of the Kul Sharif mosque reveals more complex meaning than simply an exertion of nationalistic desires. While the mosque is meant to demonstrate the longevity and vitality of the Tatar ethnic identity and its ties with the Islamic religion, it also demonstrates the inextricable link between the Tatar and Russian cultures. Centuries of colonial rule continue to mark the political relationship between Tatarstan and the central Russian government. Shaimiev and other elite Tatars

---

recognized the impossibility of completely erasing the Russian influence from a modern Tatar identity. What the Kul Sharif mosque represents as a site of memory has dual meanings for the Tatars: their avowed ‘reclaiming’ of an ancient history, and their abiding connections with their Russian conquerors. However, the Kul Sharif reconstructs this relationship with the Russians so as to create a more equal relationship, as opposed to that of the oppressor and the oppressed. Herein lies the construction of memory that the Kul Sharif mosque demonstrates.

**Bolghar Capital City Ruins**

A second prominent site of memory in the Tatarstan Republic is the ancient Bolghar capital. Already a major tourist attraction for all residents of the Republic, the ruins go further than the Kul Sharif mosque to reinforce historical Tatar preeminence. Whereas the mosque is at least publicly intended to symbolize the peaceful coexistence of the Russian and Tatar ethnicities, the Bolghar ruins symbolize the strength of the Tatar ethnicity and its historical legacy. How modern Tatars relate to this historical capital reveals a desire to connect their current national identity with the Tatar Empire of the past. The history of Bolghar and how that history has been embraced and reformed by the Tatars is another instance of memory construction to legitimize their current political position within the Russian Federation.

From the 800s to 1236, the Khanate of Bolghar was a major force in the Volga region. The Khanate possessed significant territorial holdings, and in 922 it became an important Islamic state. Its power as an empire was removed, however, in 1236 when the invading Mongol horde captured the territory. This led to a complete restructuring of

---

the Khanate's political power system, as the Mongols removed Bolghar elites from power. Following its conquest of the Khanate of Bolghar, the Mongol army spread throughout Kievan Rus’, capturing a large portion of the territory by 1240. Two centuries of Mongol dominance in the area ensued, which only began to recede at the end of the fifteenth century. At this time, the Mongol Golden Horde collapsed and a restructuring of the Muscovite and Tatar territories began.

The Kazan Tatars had been a major ethnic portion of the Bolghar state during its several centuries of existence. With the dissolution of the Golden Horde, the Kazan Tatars had the opportunity to become a major ruling force in the area. The Khanate of Bolghar had been nearly destroyed through 200 years of Mongol rule, and it was not difficult for the Kazan Tatars to wrest power from this former powerful entity. Ulu Mohammed officially founded the city of Kazan at the end of the fifteenth century, establishing the Kazan Tatars’ dominance of the former Khanate of Bolghar.

Ulu Mohammed saw the Khanate of Kazan as a natural extension of the Mongol Empire. He claimed to be part of the Mongol khan lineage, arrogating to himself the legitimacy to continue the practices of the Golden Horde. As such, the princes of Muscovy were expected to pay tribute or vykhod to the rulers of the Kazan Khanate. The historical record suggests that the Muscovite princes honored this agreement, and did in

---

110 Charles Halperin, “Russia in the Mongol Empire in Comparative Perspective,” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 43, no. 1 (Jun 1983): 251. This strategy of Mongol rule is markedly different from that used in the Russian territory. Russian princes were allowed to continue governing their land holdings, as the Mongols chose to rule the area indirectly. The Mongol influence on Russian culture is therefore less than its influence on the Bolghars.
113 Howorth, 284.
fact pay a tribute to the successors to the Golden Horde until Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan in 1552.\textsuperscript{115} The short-lived recognition of the Kazan Khanate as a successor to the Golden Horde would later inform the argument that the Bolghar state was the precursor to the modern-day incarnation of the Tatarstan Republic.

Numerous aspects of the Bolghar Khanate’s existence were reinterpreted by the Kazan Tatars to legitimize their claim as not only successors of the Golden Horde but of the equally influential Bolghar Empire. The territorial boundaries that the Khanate of Bolghar shared with the Kazan Khanate and later the Tatarstan Republic, as well as its state religion of Islam, are just two prominent examples of their connection. During the the tsarist and Soviet eras, Tatar elites attempted to justify this relationship between their state and that of the Bolghars through various means. A popular method in the twentieth century was to novelize the history of the Bolghars during the Golden Horde’s occupation. This allowed Tatar literary figures to bolster the position of the Bolghars, at times claiming that they were an important buffer against further Mongol encroachments on Europe.\textsuperscript{116}

Despite the persistent protests of Tatar scholars, Russian historians, particularly in the Soviet era, attempted to downplay any possible connections between the Bolghars and the Tatars. The Russians were in support of this counter-narrative for two notable reasons. During the Russian Imperial period, it was common to link the Tatars with the Mongols, which led to the period of Mongol rule being misnamed the “Tatar yoke.”\textsuperscript{117} By linking the Mongols with the Tatars, as equal oppressors of the Russian people, the

\textsuperscript{116} Rolich, 382.
\textsuperscript{117} Halperin, 7.
Muscovite rulers could justify invading the Khanate of Kazan. If the Kazan Tatars were seen as the successors to the Bolghars, then their justification of retribution would no longer apply. Another reason for the Russians to discredit the link between Kazan and Bolghar was the growing independence in the Tatarstan territory during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{118} To establish legitimacy as a sovereign territory, the Tatar intellectual class argued for a connection with the ancient Bolghar state. It was politically viable for the Soviets to dispute this idea, and thereby dampen any independence movements among the Kazan Tatars.

In spite of Russian scholars’ attempts to discredit the importance of Bolghar in Tatar history, many Tatar figures have championed the idea of a direct evolution from the Bolghars to the Tatars. One way, in which they defend this position, is by claiming that the Bolghars influenced the Mongols’ cultural and societal development. Essentially they argue that the advanced Bolghar civilization did have an effect on the invading Mongol hordes, as they assumed the traditions of the Bolghars.\textsuperscript{119} Thus, the evolution from a Bolghar state to a Tatar one becomes a more feasible argument.

Whether or not the historical evidence supports the theory of a succession from the Khanate of Bolghar to the Tatarstan Republic is irrelevant. What is important is how the Tatars interpret their relationship to the Bolghar Empire. By linking themselves with this ancient state, the Tatars create more historical legitimacy for their dominance in the Volga area. The modern-day treatment of Bolghar by the Tatars further illuminates their construction of a historical tradition that relates the two Khanates of Bolghar and Kazan. Unlike the Kul Sharif mosque, however, Bolghar is not meant to establish a balance

\textsuperscript{118} Rorlich, 380.

\textsuperscript{119} Rorlich, 383.
between the Russians and the Tatars. Instead, the site represents a reconstruction of Tatar memory that helps to legitimize its political existence in the present.

When the Tatars were pushing for increased independence from the central Russian government in the 1990s, the link between the Khanate of Kazan and Bolghar was stressed. The Tatar website dedicated to the Bolghar archeological site discusses this link and emphasizes the ancient status of the Bolghars.\textsuperscript{120} Even the official website of the Republic of Tatarstan discusses the link between Bolghar and the present day Tatarstan.\textsuperscript{121} Its simplified discussion of Tatar history portrays Bolghar as the precursor to the Kazan Khanate, and again highlights the territorial and religious similarities that these two historical entities shared. It is a clear intent by the Tatars to create a memory of the past that recognizes an historical evolution from the powerful Bolghar state to the Khanate of Kazan, thereby further legitimizing Tatarstan’s historical claim to statehood. This campaign of memory formation has been successfully carried in Tatarstan. In fact, the lines between the Bolghar tribe and the Tatars have become so blurred by modern-day memory constructions that many Tatars consider themselves ethnically Bolghar.

The complexities surrounding the ethnic identity of Tatar are many. When the Mongol hordes invaded Kievan Rus’, their name was interchangeable with Tatar. It is a common practice today to refer to the Tatars as the invading force that overran the Russians for two centuries.\textsuperscript{122} The designation Tatar was ubiquitous for all Turkic tribes by the thirteenth century, historians noting that groups like the Karluk, Turkmen,

Kashgaris, and Kucharis were referred to as Tatars. Meanwhile, the Bolghar ethnic identity was well documented in the Volga region, the very same territory where the modern inception of the Tatar state is located. By linking themselves with the Bolghar state, the Tatars deny any connection with the Mongols that invaded the Russian territory. While Tatar historians do not deny the likelihood that Mongols and Tatars intermarried during the invasion period, the supposition still exists that some form of Bolghar ethnic identity was preserved and transferred through successive Tatar generations. During the Tatar cultural revival of the nineteenth century, Tatars who added the word “Bulgari” to their names promoted this idea.

This claim of ethnic connection between the Bolghars and the Tatars further legitimizes the claims of an evolutionary link between two ancient empires. Tatars clearly want to distance themselves from the imagery of invading Mongol troops, and instead associate themselves with the powerful Bolghar state that had well-formed trade relations with the princes of Kievan Rus’. Here again is the theme of an equal relationship between the Russians and the Tatars. If the Tatars are believed to be a successor to the Bolghars, than they historically shared strong relationships with Russian rulers. The Republic of Tatarstan website that deals with the issue of the Tatar/Bolghar ethnic divide states the following:

Knowledge of and respect for the history of both the Russian and Bulgar/Tatar ethnic groups is bound to add to mutual respect, confidence, and tolerance in building new interethnic relations. While refusing to give in to ethnocentrism, a

---

people having a glorious centuries-old history cannot but speak of its patriotic sentiments.125

This passage perfectly summarizes the modern day relationship Tatars have both with their ethnic identity and their relationship with the Russians.

This recasting of the Tatar identity as a successor to the Bolghars is not entirely without historical basis. As formal protests to the Russian government from the Bulgaran National Congress, an organization which promotes awareness of Bolghar history and preservation, attests, a study released in the Soviet era relates the misnomer of identifying the inhabitants of the Tatarstan territory as “Tatars.”126 There is a movement within Tatarstan, mostly championed by the Bulgaran National Congress, to change the identification of Tatar back to Bolghar. The implications of this renaming campaign are many. If successful, it would further the Tatar attempt to transform their national memory into something more inspiring than that of colonial subjugation at the hands of the Russians. What this renaming movement and arguments about Tatar ethnicity ultimately show, however, is the significance that Bolghar and its history have in Tatar memory and culture.

When present-day Tatars speak of Bolghar and its ruins, there is a defiant feeling of reverence in their discussion. For many of the Tatars, visiting Bolghar has the same religious and cultural significance as the yearly hajj to Mecca has for all Muslims. Bolghar’s conversion to Islam in 922, marking its status as an Islamic empire that the Kazan Khanate would later assume, holds significant meaning for the largely Muslim

---

Tatars. The preservation of the few remaining buildings in Bolghar testifies to the weight the Tatar community places on including the Bolghar past in modern Tatar memory. However, this modern day veneration of Bolghar was notably absent from the Tatar past. It was a Russian tsar, Peter the Great, who first proposed the idea to preserve the buildings of Bolghar. Sadly the surrounding Tatars were largely uninterested in any preservation projects, and for this reason a large number of the Bolghar structures that were present in the eighteenth century have disintegrated into ruins. The official museum of the Bolghar region was not opened until 1969. Attitudes have obviously changed towards this territory, as Bolghar has come to hold a more significant position in Tatar national memory.

What the commemoration of the Bolghar Empire demonstrates is the new multicultural approach the Tatars are following in regards to their memory constructions. As the few remaining icons of a faded empire that pre-dated the Kazan Khanate, Bolghar has become an important aspect of the modern Tatar psyche. The claims that the Kazan Khanate is a political descendant of the Bolghar state add legitimacy to the sovereignty claims the Tatars make. Tatarstan is more justifiable as a politically and economically independent state if it has an historical lineage that dates back centuries before the Kazan Khanate. In addition to the political power it provides the Tatar state, Bolghar also fits the cultural mold that the Tatars have reconstructed for themselves.

As discussed with the construction of the Kul Sharif mosque, the intention of the Tatars is to recast their historical memory into an image that is more acceptable to them.

---

The portrayed linkage between the Tatars and the Bolghars invokes the memory of the economic relationship between the Russian princes and the Bolghar elites. It also helps to distance the Tatars from their association with the invading Mongol hordes, a designation that has helped the Russians to recast the Tatars as villains and justify their expansion and domination in the region. By claiming a shared heritage with the Bolghars, the Tatars escape any historical connection with the Mongols and reestablish a better relationship with the Russians that does not directly evoke the period of Russian rule from 1552 to 1991.

Ğabdulla Tuqay

When communities are reconstructing national memory and myths, literary figures often play an important role. Their cultural significance makes them the perfect conduits for advancing new myths about a particular group. History is replete with examples of poets and writers ushering in a new sense of identity for various cultural and ethnic groups. Sometimes it is not even the direct intention of the poet to craft a new collective memory for the people. Instead, the work and life of these writers are often co-opted, to fit the mold of whatever current construction is being undertaken. The famous Tatar poet, Ğabdulla Tuqay, is an example of a writer being used to advance a particular cultural idea. While Tuqay was an influential writer amongst the Tatars in his lifetime, his impact on the Tatars’ collective memory has only increased since his death. The ways in which the Tatars commemorate Tuqay’s life demonstrate how his image is being used for a greater national purpose. Examining the numerous sites of memory that are dedicated to Tuqay will illuminate how Tatars perceive their nationality within the confines of a Russian state.
Tuqay’s background makes him an ideal candidate for a national hero amongst the Tatars. He was born in 1886 in a village not far from the city of Kazan called Kushlavych. Orphaned at a young age, he was sent to live in Kazan with relatives in 1889 and then later to Uralsk. Here he toiled in menial positions for local newspapers, all the while writing the poetry for which he would eventually become famous. He would eventually return to Kazan, and continue writing in the city he had always loved. Sadly, as was common at the time, his difficult life led to various health complications. Tuqay died in 1913, still a young man.129 Despite his short time spent writing, his position in Tatar literary history was incontestable. How Tatars have chosen to remember Tuqay, demonstrates the cultural balancing with the Russians that the Tatars have undergone during the modern memory construction.

The myth surrounding Tuqay that is now widely accepted in the Tatar community is not dissimilar to the legends about any other national literary figure. The most obvious comparison is with the Russian icon, Aleksandr Pushkin, primarily because of the tendency for the Tatars to refer to Tuqay as the Tatar Pushkin.130 Pushkin, like Tuqay, had a relatively short life, but his superior status in the Russian collective cultural existence is unquestionable. Many studies have been conducted about the commemoration and use of Pushkin to promote various Russia ideologies. Pushkin has become so idealized in Russian society that it is impossible to differentiate between reality and creation when talking about the poet. This is not uncommon for all poet or literary figures, as each are given a mythological status that almost completely eclipses

their true identity.\textsuperscript{131} The various ways in which the Tatars have commemorated Tuqay demonstrate his ascension to mythical status in Tatar culture and his continued influence on national memory construction for this group.

Numerous cultural campaigns after Tuqay’s death were used to solidify his position in Tatar national memory. First, the annual literary prize given out by the Tatarstan government for producers of high-quality work is named after Tuqay, furthering the poet’s association with literary accomplishment.\textsuperscript{132} The city of Kazan contains numerous monuments to the poet. The most prominent example is one of main roads in Kazan, which stretches through the city center and its outskirts and bears the name of the famous poet. Important dates in Tuqay’s life are another instance of mythicization by the Tatars. His birthday is considered a national holiday; the 120\textsuperscript{th} anniversary was celebrated in 2006.\textsuperscript{133} This national recognition leaves little question as to the high position Tuqay has been assigned in the Tatar national consciousness.

Aside from the above examples of Tuqay’s prevalence in Tatar society, the two most visible monuments to the memory of Tuqay are the museums that commemorate different stages in his life. The first is a museum dedicated to his childhood in Kushlavych. The second is a museum that contains many documents and items that are connected to Tuqay’s adult life; this museum is located in one of the more populated sections of Kazan. Though the aspects of each museum represent two different periods in his life, the overall collective theme that they both produce remains the same. That is,

\textsuperscript{131} Stephanie Sandler, “‘Pushkin’ and Identity,” \textit{National Identity in Russian Culture} ed. Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 198.
Tuqay’s history, whether real or imagined, is the quintessential story of the Tatar people and culture. These two museums, therefore, are the most significant examples of Tatar identity construction in relation to the poet Tuqay.

The village of Kushlavych is not far from Kazan, and is a popular tourist attraction for Tatars across the Republic. It is possible to tour the small domicile where Tuqay was born and spent the first two-years of his life. The village house is arranged in the traditional Tatar style, with various outfits, cooking tools, and other equipment displayed throughout. Plaques are present everywhere to commemorate the existence of Tuqay, lest the viewer forget for a second in whose home they are standing.

Interestingly, the primary language is inverted in this village. Though the Tatarstan Republic is a bilingual society where most signs and official documents are written in both Russian and Tatar, Russian is the clearly dominant language of the two. In Kushlavych however, Tatar is spoken almost exclusively. The guides, who take curious tourists through Tuqay’s brief childhood home, speak only Tatar. All the aforementioned plaques show the Tatar text first, with a Russian translation in a lower, less important position. Whether this prevalence of Tatar language is intentional or not, it reflects the national and ethnic pride that the Tatars have imposed on Tuqay’s memory.

Along with the preserved village house, a museum dedicated to Tuqay was also built in Kushlavych. This two-story building is a noticeable contrast to the rundown houses that are ubiquitous in the village. It dominates the landscape and the large statue of an adult Tuqay that stands before the museum serves as a remainder to the grand nature of the man that the building is meant to represent. Inside is a seemingly haphazard collection of artifacts from Tuqay’s life, primarily from the periods spent living in Kazan.
Personal correspondences, private journal writings, pictures, all the remains of Tuqay’s life are preserved in small glass cases. His poetry is also prominently displayed throughout the building, in the original Tatar. A truly astounding event, which surely most be a requirement for all tour groups that enter the building, is when the guide reads an excerpt from one of Tuqay’s most famous poems and Tatarstan’s unofficial national anthem, “Oh My Mother Tongue”:

Oh, beloved native language
Oh, enchanting mother tongue!
You enabled my search for knowledge
Of the world, since I was young
As a child, when I was sleepless
Mother sung me lullabies
And my grandma told me stories
Through the night, to shut my eyes
Oh, my tongue!
You have been always
My support in grief and joy
Understood and cherished fondly
Since I was a little boy
In my tongue, I learned with patience
To express my faith and say
"Oh, Creator! Bless my parents
Take, Allah, my sins away!"134

This poem’s popularity in Tatarstan is unsurprising. It praises the value of the Tatar language and references the importance of Islam, two themes that are vital in Tatar memory construction. With the poem and all that is associated with it, nationalist sentiments are inescapable in Tuqay’s ancestral home of Kushlavych. Clearly, the museum’s creators intended to incite cultural pride and reverence within all visitors to the village.

The other major museum dedicated to Tuqay is located in Kazan. Built in 1986, this museum certainly has a more organized method of constructing the myth of Tuqay than its sister building in Kushlavych. Kazan was a major influence in Tuqay’s life, the place where Tuqay began his political education. Shortly after moving to Kazan, Tuqay became acquainted with Kh. Yamashev, who is known as the first Tatar Bolshevik. Through this connection, Tuqay was introduced to many young, radical thinkers living in Kazan, and this was heavily reflected in the writings he produced at this time. Poems like "What does not suffice village people?" (1912), "Hopes of the people …" (1913), and “Oppression” (1911), had obvious social reform messages. Sadly, Tuqay’s associations would bring him retribution from the Russian state. The repressive nature of the Russian state at this time, in response to the political upheaval that had spread throughout the country, was not a conducive atmosphere for political poetry. Much of Tuqay’s work from the Kazan period, therefore, was not published.

Despite the political hardships that befell Tuqay while he worked and lived in Kazan, his love of the city never waned. It is unsurprising then that the most famous Tuqay museum is located there. The building itself is an impressive structure that even outshines the corresponding museum in Kushlavych. A requisite destination for all visiting Tatars within a short distance from Kazan, its national importance is difficult to underestimate. The museum contains personal effects, letters, and many other items that one would expect to find in a museum devoted to an individual. Perhaps its most

important piece, however, is Tuqay’s death mask. Tatars who lived generations after their national poet died can see what the face of their hero looked like. Very few Tatars who visit this museum neglect to retell their impressions of seeing this death mask, often as an evocation of cultural pride.

The universal tendency when societies commemorate national heroes is inflate their importance for the purpose of promoting nationalistic pride. The Tatars have followed a pattern in commemorating Tuqay that is replicated in nearly every modern cohesive society. The monuments dedicated to him, more than any previously mentioned site of memory, advance Tatar nationalism. However, even with such a pure national monument as a famous poet, the Tatar collective memory still cannot completely disengage itself from its Russian colonial past. Although the rhetoric surrounding Tuqay is couched in the promotion of Tatar ethnicity, - primarily in the argument that Tuqay helped to purify and standardize the Tatar language -, there is still a visible Russian cultural presence in the Tatar national myth of Tuqay. When describing Tuqay to the unfamiliar, Tatars almost always refer to him as the “Tatar Pushkin,” rather than, say, a “Tatar Shakespeare.” Even with a national symbol as pure as a literary figure, the Tatars cannot erase the reality of their relationship with Russia.

While the numerous museums and national holidays that commemorate Tuqay are meant to heighten national pride among the Tatars, these sites are never used to create nationalist hatred against the Russians. Societies that were ruled by a different cultural entity often choose literary figures that attacked these supposed cultural oppressors. Tuqay, however, did not use his literary talent to encourage the Tatars to break connections with the Russians. Instead, he openly recognized Tatar’s cultural place in a
Russian paradigm, and called for a Tatar cultural and national development that did not overstep these limitations. An excerpt from one of Tuqay’s poems, further demonstrates his feelings towards the relationship between the Tatars and the Russians:

Here we are born, grew up, and here we shall meet the death hour, 
Fate itself has bound us to this Russian land. 
Be gone, you low creatures, you cannot confuse our sacred dreams! 
We all aspire to the universal goal—we all want a free Russia.¹³⁸

Based on this poem and its discussion of a free Russia, the Tatar culture that Tuqay envisioned was never meant to exist outside the realm of Russian rule.

By adopting Ğabdulla Tuqay as a national and cultural hero, the Tatars demonstrate a very pointed message on how they have collectively chosen to view their history. Tuqay, as evidenced by his writings, was accepting of the Tatar position in the Russian Empire, and called for a Tatar cultural revolution within these imposed boundaries. His current position in modern Tatar collective memory denotes an acceptance amongst the Tatars that any cultural achievements they make, Tuqay is a continuation of a theme seen with the Kul Sharif mosque and the Bolghar ruins; that is, a desire for the Tatars to create a national identity, that obscures but does not completely deny Russia’s cultural and political influence on the territory’s development.

Conclusion

The post-1991 era has proved to be a challenging time of memory construction for a society that for over four hundred years was prevented from completely controlling its own cultural development. First the Russian imperialists, and then the Soviet communists, imposed their cultural and political values on the Tatars, sometimes in place of Tatar culture or parallel to it. The ever-changing relationship between the Tatars and

¹³⁸ Ravil Bukharaev, Tatarstan: A ‘Can-Do’ Culture (Kent: Global Oriental, 2007), 135.
the Russians prevented the Tatars from ever fully becoming assimilated with their conquerors. Even during the most repressive periods of Russian rule, the Tatars were able to hold onto their cultural memories. However, over the centuries, Russian identity and memory has expectedly permeated into the Tatar existence. When this community was finally afforded the ability to fully control its national memory, the Russian presence was an unavoidable dilemma. This can clearly be seen in these three sites of memory, the Kul Sharif mosque, the Bolghar ruins, and Ğabdulla Tuqay.

What these three images reveal is a conflicted view of Tatar history. Obviously, each site has its own nationalist purpose. The Kul Sharif promotes the importance of Islam in Tatar culture and history. Bolghar’s significance comes from its evocation of a mythic past in which the Tatars were a dominant force in the Volga region. Finally, Ğabdulla Tuqay and his literary works are intended to illustrate the high levels Tatar culture can achieve. All these sites are meant to elevate the status of a state that was long dominated by an unrelated group of people. All three seek to diminish the presence of Russia in Tatar culture, while nonetheless acknowledging the unavoidable presence of Russian culture.

Were the preceding five hundred years a simple case of colonial rule of the Tatars by the Russians, a vastly different memory construction would have occurred in Tatarstan after the events of 1991. In that case, a purer form of nationalistic memory would have emerged, with the sole purpose of casting off any evidence of Russian influence on the Tatar national identity. However, since the relationship between the Tatars and the Russians has also been more intricate than that of pure colonizers and colonized, the
Tatars were faced with a unique challenge of how to construct a national memory in a post-independence atmosphere.

These sites of memory reveal an attempt by the Tatars to overcome the cultural and historical embarrassment of their defeat at the hands of the Russians in the sixteenth century, without completely casting off the impact Russia had on Tatar identity. The Kul Sharif mosque, Bolghar ruins, and Ğabdulla Tuqay, all present the Tatars as cultural equals to the Russians and reinforce the theme of peaceful coexistence between these two differing cultures. This form of post-independence memory construction, the simultaneous elevation of one nationality while acknowledging the presence of another, does not exist in many other cultures, even within the Russian Federation. The uniqueness of Tatarstan in Russian cultural and political history has afforded them the opportunity to pursue an entirely new form of memory construction, as demonstrated in these different sites. These three sites of memory reveal a complex picture of modern Tatar collective identity and memory.
Bibliography


“Famous People of the Kazan City.” Official Millennium Server. n.d.


Appendix A

Kul Sharif Mosque
Appendix B

“To the Architects of Kazan”
Appendix C

Bolghar Ruins
Appendix D

Ğabdulla Tuqay statue in Kushlavych