

PARTICIPATION OF POLITICAL LEADERS IN ETHNIC FEASTS AS AN ELEMENT OF POLITICAL RITUAL

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Abstract: This report discusses the behavioral aspects of the participation of the federal and regional political leaders in the two non-religious ethnic festivals held in the Republic of Tatarstan - Sabantuy and Karavon - over the last 20 years. The method of the study is a content and traditional analysis of the federal and regional resources: articles, news reports, photographs. Identified: the dynamics of participation, the leaders in celebrations, the ratio between their participation in the opening ceremonies of the (political ritual, called the official language of the civil service protocol) and actually in the ritual celebrations, the extent and nature of the use of its participation in the celebrations for the promulgation of new policy ideas programs. The conclusions made in the context of status holidays (non-state), the historical (the period of the 90s. - the institutionalization of a new Russian statehood and 2000-2012 - period of stabilization), personal (as Presidents of Russia B.N. Yeltsin, V.V. Putin, D.A. Medvedev). This article also attempts to identify region-specific integration of a political ritual into ritual environment of national and cultural holidays of modern Tatarstan.

Keywords: Sabantuy, Karavon, festive ritual, political ritual, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation

There are serious socio-cultural transformations in modern Russia. They affect different areas of life and often have ethno-regional specificity. One such transformation is the including of political trends in the festive ritual. The main scientific hypothesis of the study was the idea that the politicization of the festive rituals aimed at achieving the objectives of the regional authorities.

The objects of this study were non-religious rituals of the two holidays of the population of one of the national republics of the Russian Federation - Republic of Tatarstan. We have chosen two of the most characteristic of the region's non-religious holidays – Sabantuy and Karavon. Sabantuy – ancient festival of the Turkic peoples of the Volga region, including the titular ethnic group in Tatarstan – Tatars, symbolizing the beginning of the summer agricultural work. Karavon – Russian local folk festival, reanimated and has become the regional fest over the past 15 years.

Subject area of analysis in our study was the interlacement of political and ceremonial rituals. For a variety of reasons, including the constitutional nature (the separate existence of church and state), It is easier for politics to intervene in a ritual involving secular national holidays. There is no need to negotiate with

the church hierarchy, less risk to affect the mentality of the population; ritual of non-religious festivals is historically more mobile.

The methods of the study were traditional and content-analysis of the publications of the federal, regional and local publications: articles, news reports, photographs, Internet sources, as well as observation, narrative interviews.

The Republic of Tatarstan (Tatarstan) is one of the 83 member states of the Russian Federation, one of the national republics have large compared to other subjects of powers. In particular, the national republic has as the official languages, along with Russian, the native language of the titular nation. The law "On languages of the Republic of Tatarstan" states that the Tatar and Russian languages are defined as equal. According to the population census in 2010, region was home to 3,823,000 people, including Tatars – 53.2%, Russians – 39.7%. It is important to note that compliance with ethno-sociocultural parity is an important element of the policy of the regional government.

Location: the region is located in the Volga Federal District and is located at the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers between Moscow and the Urals. Around it, there are other national republics of the Volga and Ural regions with predominantly Finno-Ugric, Turkic and Russian population. The capital is the city of Kazan with a population of almost 1.2 million people.

Government: The President (Rustam Minnikhanov) is the Head of the Republic, executive power is exercised by the Cabinet of Ministers (Chairman – Ildar Halikov), the legislature - the State Council of the Republic (Chairman – Farid Mukhametshin).

Sabantuy or "plow festival", as it is most often translated by Tatar researchers, has been known since 921, when the Arab traveler Ibn Fadlan traveled among the Volga Bulgarians and was the first to describe this folk festival. Sabantuy was carried on by the Turkic population of the Volga region through the centuries of the Golden Horde, the Khanate of Kazan, and the Russian Empire. Sabantuy was primarily characteristic of the Kazan Tatars, farmers, initially conducted to appease the pagan spirits before harvesting. This magic ritual feast had purely practical purposes, even after the conversion of the Volga Bulgars to Islam in the 10th century, when Sabantuy was gradually transformed into a purely economic festival, not completely formed in the framework of religion.

Sabantuy's rituals have been subject to constant change for a millennium. They have particularly intensified in the last 100-150 years. By the end of the 19th century, Sabantuy in the Tatar village consisted of three main elements: children going house-to-house in the settlements to collect gifts (traditionally gifts were given by each family, not going into the house was perceived as an insult), horse racing and the belt wrestling called *kuresh*, which later became a national sport.¹ In the larger settlements in connection with the development of industry, crafts and trade, this time in a celebratory ritual appeared as a fairground competition: the bag fights on logs, pole-climbing, etc. In the Soviet period, after the brief years of civil war and devastation, the tradition of celebrating Sabantuy resumed in the

¹ Уразманова 2011. 143-144.

Tatar villages. Then, under the patronage of the local and regional authorities and with the consent of the authorities of the central government, celebration was conducted in four phases: the village, the district, the towns under republican authority, the capital of Kazan. The ritual of the holiday became more and more of a trade fair and adversarial, the traditions children collecting gifts, for instance, being lost. Authorities were equipped with a special place for the celebration, the center of which was a place for the competition – Maidan, surrounded by shopping pavilions. A mandatory element of the landscape of Sabantuy is a birch grove – a place of celebrating, one of the symbols of the festival.

It is important to note that Sabantuy happily escaped the fate of the vast majority of national holidays that were prohibited in the 1950s by the Soviet government. The reason for this should be sought first of all in its deep national character, and the elite realized that it is much more profitable not to prohibit, “to ride” Sabantuy and make it serve their interests. Hence, the politicization of Sabantuy is rooted in Soviet times.

In the post-Soviet period, especially in recent years, Sabantuy became the visiting card of Tatarstan, a Tatar festival known all over the world. The date of the event and its funding is determined by a special decision of the first persons of authority. Sabantuy is held in Kazan, one Sunday in the last ten days of June, but there are exceptions. For example, in 2013, by decree of the President of Tatarstan, Sabantuy in Kazan was held in the days of the Summer Universiade, July 13, especially for the guests of this global sporting event.²

Since 2001, a general federal festival was added in the hierarchy of Sabantuyes, organized in turn in different regions of the Russian Federation in the areas densely populated by Tatars. However, the principal festival, in the number of participants, the level of organization, and in socio-cultural values remains the Kazan Sabantuy.

Each of the three Presidents of Russia visited the Kazan Sabantuy once. President B.N. Yeltsin did it in 1996 as part of his campaign for the presidential election. President V.V. Putin was a guest of the celebration in 2000, a few months after his election as President. His visit was part of a major campaign to build the image of the new leader of the country. In 2011, President D.A. Medvedev visited the Kazan Sabantuy during his official trip to the Republic of Tatarstan.

The President of the Republic of Tatarstan attends the Kazan Sabantuy without fail. His speech is part of the holiday ritual and serves as a signal for the start of the main program of the event. The entourage of the President, among other officials, is sure to include the mayor, who plays the second role in the official ritual.

I provide details of the scenario of the festival based on the example of the 2011 Kazan Sabantuy. It started with the horse races at the track on Saturday, June 25. Further events are as follows:

- Arrival of the ordinary guests. Performances by folk groups, the beginning of the commercial and cultural pavilions' activity;

2 Указ Президента РТ от 22 февраля 2013 г.

- Arrival of VIPs (political leaders, federal and foreign guests), two of the presidents (D.A. Medvedev and R.N. Minnikhanov); D.A. Medvedev tried *kazi* (horse sausage), *chak-chak* (honey cakes), and forged an *ogo* (horse-shoe) on Russian courtyard;
- Opening ceremony: speeches of political leaders;
- Performances by professional and amateur artists, including children;
- Sports: *kuresh*, sack-fighting on logs, sack races, chess, running with buckets, rope, etc;
- Folk festivals.

Sabantuy ritual, conducted in rural areas, has as its essential features:

- Collecting gifts;
- Maidan: Welcome guests. Starting points of exit trade;
- Maidan: the grand opening of the guests, who are mainly representatives of the regional authorities;
- Then folk groups from the Maidan district perform;
- Maidan: sport competitions – horse racing, *kuresh*, pole-climbing, tug-of-war, sack races, etc.

Then comes the time of festivals – the non-official element of festive ritual. Family and friends meet in the shade of the trees on the banks of water bodies for a celebratory meal, communicating in a private situation.

Thus, the difference between the main Sabantuy in Kazan and the way it is celebrated in rural areas is that the latter have somewhat more traditional rituals. However, the difference is gradually diminishing, now being mainly a difference in scale.

In the last 15 years, we have seen the process of globalization of Sabantuy, which was initiated either from the top (the organization of celebrations in major cities around the world, the efforts of representatives of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan – the neighboring region, at the expense of the regional budget), and from below, mainly by Tatars living away from their historical homeland. Sabantuy as organized by ordinary people, has not the political ritual, but is a ritual feast as close to the traditional, but without giving gifts.

The next part of this article addresses Karavon – a regional festival of Russian folklore, the traditional celebration of which dates back to the 16th century. Until the 1950s, it was regularly celebrated in the village of Nikolsky in the Laishevsky district of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. It was abolished and banned by the Soviet authorities as a religious event. Through the efforts of long-time residents of the village and members of the folk group “Karavon”, created in 1988, it was revived in the early 1990s. Until 2003, the festival was held as a purely local one. In 2003, by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Tatarstan it became a state regional holiday and is held annually in the village of Nikolsky under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture of Tatarstan as a national festival of Russian folklore.

The historic ritual of the holiday was as follows. The action began with a church service at the local church of St. Nicholas. After the service the villagers sat down at home for the holiday meal. Then residents staged merry street festivals and dance. The participants of the round dance held one another's little fingers and did the "Karavon" or "duck" step, first decreasing, then increasing the diameter of the circle and moving clockwise as "the sun."³

The ritual of modern Karavon expanded to a large number of performances of folk groups and fair presentations. The political element of the ritual involved participation of the leaders of the Republic - the Chairman of the State Council or the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and the heads of the municipal district in the opening ceremony and other activities. They pronounce solemn speeches, hand out cash and other gifts, and make a tour of the pavilions. Since Karavon is done a month before Sabantuy, the actors practiced the scenario of involvement of top officials in the festive activities, if they are coming to Sabantuy. Certainly, as regards the scale and the role in implementation of regional policy, including the field of tourism, Karavon is significantly less important than Sabantuy.

The reasons for the growth of interest on the part of the political elite in ritual national holidays, from our point of view, are the following:

1. A significant accumulation of participants (sometimes up to 200,000 people) plus resonance in the mass media.
2. Emotional enthusiasm of viewers, which significantly improves the popularity of a representative of power and, therefore, reinforces the ranking political leader. Between the lines, we note that the term "sabantuy" in the modern Russian language has become a household word, synonymous with a fun-filled holiday for the soul.
3. Operation expressing a sense of hospitality and gratitude, let us recall the delivery of the gifts financed by the regional and local budgets.

We have identified the following forms of participation of political leaders in the conduct of events:

- Participating in the opening ceremony of the festival, delivering a speech;
- Tasting food;
- Participation in the "craft show";
- Participation in one of the ritual scenes on a noncompetitive basis;
- Attending folk dances;
- Inspection of the pavilions, sports venues;
- Viewing the main events, performances of folk groups, professional artists.

In modern Russia a huge multinational renaissance of festival culture, manifesting itself in different ways in different parts of the country is under way. Participation in the process by political elites also has many shades of meaning. The regional

³ Официальный Татарстан: Каравон.

specificity of political integration and festive rites peculiar to the Republic of Tatarstan, in the opinion of the author, is as follows:

- “gigantomania”: the desire to invite political heavyweights, including top officials, to the celebrations, with the necessary inclusion of the holiday ritual;
- Globalization of Sabantuy on the basis of the location of Tatars around the world today;
- Formation of system of political events around Sabantuy.
- Thus, the outlook is justified by the author of the electronic report Sabantuy-2000 in Kazan that the presidential improvisations can become part of the Kremlin diplomacy.⁴ These can be “impromptu”, of course, not limited to participation in celebratory rituals. Flying a fighter aircraft, a hang-glider with a Siberian Crane, a trip to see vintage cars, riding a motorcycle with bikers, diving for treasure in the sea, and other similar actions of President V.V. Putin - a major element of efforts to strengthen and diversify the image of the leader of the Russian state.

Conclusions

- 1) We are seeing a distinct process of integrating political ritual in ritual of feasts. The main determinants of this process are the administrative and financial resources of power in the organization of events, and the formation of modern political ritual in the Soviet period, when acting directly or under a hidden ban on ethnicity and existing festivals organized exclusively by major power-holders. This list could be added to and includes the traditional weakness of civil society.
- 2) Increase the proportion of political ritual in non-religious ritual folk festivals (Sabantuy and Karavon);
- 3) Strengthening the elements of tourism shown in the ritual of non-religious holidays as a result of the policy of the regional government in the marketing of the Republic of Tatarstan. Here the focus is paramount for the factor of foreign tourism. The highest manifestation of this policy was the main constraint to visit the site of the Republican Sabantui July 14, 2013, when entrance to a few hours was available only to guests of the city - the 2013 Universiade participants and officials.
- 4) Conversion of the festival into an ethnic-integrated, marketing tool aimed at the promotion of the region to the all-Russian, Eurasian and Global stages, the strengthening of the influence of regional and local elites over the people of the region, the formation, development and capture of new segments of the touristic market.

⁴ Президент Татарии устроил Путину Сабантуй.

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Fig. 1. President B.N.Yeltsin on Sabantuy (1996)



Fig. 2. Sabantuy (2013)