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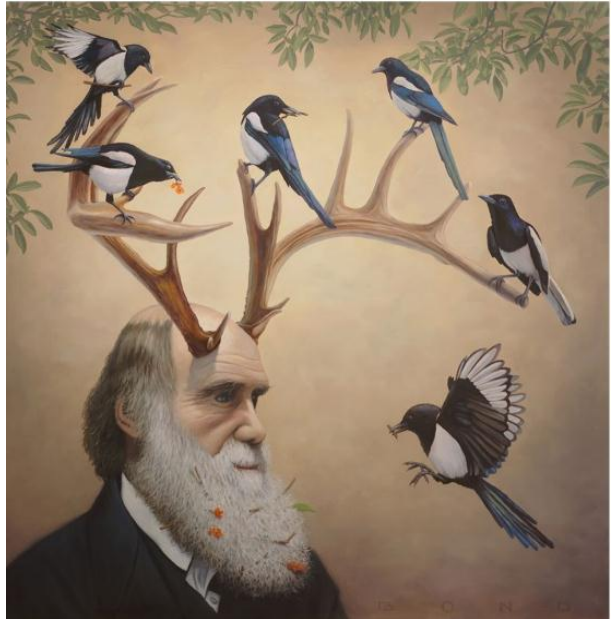
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## Development of documentary films in the Tatar autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

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### Abstract

The aim of the article is to explore the process of the documentary film production's formation and to determine the main directions of its development in one of the national republics of the USSR, namely the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, since the pre-Soviet period of cinema. The problem-chronological approach is the leading one in this research. In result, by the end of the 1980s, the sharply worsening situation in the country in all spheres of life affected public institutions. In conclusion, a distinctive feature of this work is an integrated approach to the study of the TASSR cinematography history.

**Keywords:** documentary, Tatar, Autonomous, Soviet, Socialist.

## Desarrollo de documentales en la República Socialista Soviética Autónoma Tártara

### Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es explorar el proceso de formación de la producción de documentales y determinar las principales direcciones de su desarrollo en una de las repúblicas nacionales de la URSS, a saber, la República Socialista Soviética Autónoma Tártara, desde el período pre-soviético de cine. El enfoque cronológico del problema es el principal en esta investigación. Como resultado, a fines de los años ochenta, la aguda situación del país en todas las esferas de la vida afectó a las instituciones públicas. En conclusión, una característica distintiva de este trabajo es un enfoque integrado para el estudio de la historia cinematográfica de TASSR.

**Palabras clave:** documental, tártaro, autónomo, soviético, socialista.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Soviet era was the golden age of the national non-fiction cinema. It played an important role in outreach activities. Therefore, documentary films were still relevant, important, essential even in the period of feature films' reduced production. In the TASSR the process of development and formation of documentary film directing as a fully-fledged independent industry, which acquired an institutional character, began only in the era of the Khrushchev's thaw. But the first film on the territory of the republic was shot back in the pre-revolutionary period, long before the establishment of the Soviet government. Since then, the cinema chronicle of Kazan province and then Tatar ASSR begins its countdown. The first shooting was conducted not systematically, but occasionally. Nevertheless, it is possible to talk about the stage of emergence and formation of our own film production in the territory of the republic.

The chronological framework of the study covers mainly three periods which have stable designations in the historical literature: the thaw period, the era of standstill and the reformation period. The end of this stage was determined in 1961 when Kazan studio of newsreel (KSN) was established. However, the objectives of the research required some expansion of the time frame. The article presents the prehistory review of the TASSR cinematography since the beginning of the XX century because from the very beginning of the republic formation numerous intensive efforts to develop the cinema art have been made. The leadership of the newly-formed Tatar Autonomous

Soviet Socialist Republic persistently sought to the full-fledged development of the cinema.

However, institutionally at the state level, the film industry started to develop only in the early 1960s marked as the conditional lower limit. The upper limit of the research is determined at the beginning of the 1990s when the KSN activities, as well as the Russian documentary film directing, came into decay due to the fundamental change in the socio-economic and socio-political conditions.

## **2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

The methodological basis of the work is constituted by the principles of historicism, objectivity, and complexity. The principle of historicism made it possible to highlight the problem of the cinematograph establishment in the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the specific historical conditions of the country's development. The principle of objectivity can be seen in following the course of adequate reality, which was achieved by referring to historical records. The principle of complexity is ensured by addressing the interrelationship of selected facts and phenomena that occurred both in the country as a whole and in the region.

The study is based on the complex of the comparative-historical, problematic chronological, system structured methods. The comparative historical method made it possible to reveal the specifics

of the documentary film directing development in the republic. The problematic chronological method allowed us to trace some characteristics of the republic cinema development at various stages of the Soviet period, to identify some features and dynamic pattern of the state policy in the cinematography, to uncover the evolution of the ideological and creative capabilities of cinema workers in the multinational region. The system structured method helped to explore various aspects of the documentary film formation and development consisting of a set of interacting structural elements, internal and external relations.

In addition, the oral history method (in-depth interview) was used in the research including content and discourse analysis. The complex application of the methods above allowed us to obtain a full-fledged retrospective picture of the cinema development in the Tatar ASSR (BELOSHAPKA, 2012).

### **3. RESULTS**

The comprehensive analysis of Kazan studio of newsreels' activities, as well as the historical background preceding to its creation, give insight into the development of a new type of art in the Tatar ASSR in particular and the Volga region in general. First attempts to develop the film industry were made almost immediately, as soon as this type of cultural activity appeared in people's life. The first newsreel on the territory of Kazan province was filmed in 1898.

With the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic formation its leadership made considerable efforts to create a full-fledged film studio for the production of not only documentary, but feature films.

However, endless reorganizations led to the fact that in the 1940–1950s there was no institutional formation in the cinema industry in the republic. Thanks to the enthusiasm of Kazan city people, in the TASSR their own film studio appeared only in the early 1960s when a whole network of regional newsreel studios was established. All efforts to create a full-fledged studio for the production of feature films in the republic were vain.

The film studio leadership had to carry out very multifaceted work: to coordinate creative activities that took place in different parts of the Volga region, to communicate with the Russian State University of Cinematography regarding personnel training and development, to monitor compliance with the ideological recipe, to achieve scarce funds and to create a production infrastructure. The material and technical base of the studio, as well as its branches, was far from perfect and demanded considerable ingenuity and skills from cameramen to operate the equipment. The creative activity of the film studio began with the production of plots for the film magazine *On the Volga Broad*, and only 2 years later the studio released its first documentary (LIMA, MENDES & PAIVA, 2018; NOURI, BRAUMANN, CHAMPIRI, SCHRÖDER & AKOCHAKIAN, 2018; SARAC, 2018).

The activity of Kazan studio of newsreels, as well as all the cultural institutions of the country, was managed ideologically, and films had to undergo numerous control procedures before the release. The Arts Council of the studio was the lowest instance of the screenplay inspection. Then there was the Office for the Protection of Military and State Secrets in the press at the Council of Ministers of the Tatar ASSR. The highest level in this control system was the General Directorate for the Production of Films (Goskino). Kazan studio of newsreel influenced not only the territory of the TASSR, but also the neighboring autonomous republics. KSN had its own correspondent offices there. As a rule, local residents worked there. Films produced by KSN covered the life of the Tatar, Mordovian, Chuvash, Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics in the Volga region. Filming took place both on the territory of the USSR and abroad (in Germany, Poland, Egypt, Iraq, China).

The presence of the newsreel studio in the republic played an important role in the development of socio-economic and cultural contacts between the nations of the Volga region and the country as a whole. Numerous film festivals, which were held in Kazan, testified to the broad creative ties of Kazan filmmakers with the country's leading studios. Moreover, documentary films of the TASSR took prizes in all-Soviet Union and international competitions; they were bought not only in the Union republics, but abroad, and they were demonstrated in many European and Asian countries. In general, the history of the TASSR documentary films based on Kazan studio of newsreel can be divided into 4 stages: 1961–1964, 1965–1974, 1974–1986, 1987–1991.

The beginning of KSN activity coincided with the rollback of democratic tendencies in the cultural policy manifested in the campaign against new trends in art, which was called abstract art and formalism in set terms. From the very beginning of the studio work, innovative ideas of documentary filmmakers used to stumble upon the bans of a multi-level check-out system. Nevertheless, at the first stage, the studio managed to release film production, making up to 5 documentaries a year. These films promoted the Soviet way of life, moral ideals of the builder of communism, achievements of the Soviet culture in the context of social realism, the communist attitude in work and life. It was commonplace to return films for revision in order to achieve ideological perfection, which brought them to the state of slogan stamps with clichéd phraseology (BUREEVA, 2011: SOHRABI, 2017).

At the second stage, it became more obvious to use the screen as the main tool for intensified propaganda of the so-called gains of October, Victory in the Great Patriotic War. In the same period, the industrial film genre became very popular. Kazan filmmakers created a lot of films about KamAZ in this genre. The topic of agriculture was not shot out either. A typical hero of movies of the agrarian theme was the best worker who serves as an example to follow. It was usually filmed in the industrial collectives against the background of the rural scenery, which was a genuine decoration of the film. They artificially created a feeling of constant labor holiday, and if something was not made after a model, it resulted in the fact that the film did not appear on the screen and was put on the shelf. Therefore, innovations were



not encouraged, film studios were required to make informative ideological films. However, such products did not find a response in the hearts of viewers.

In the 1970s the situation of the general stagnation in the cultural life of the country was becoming more and more obvious. The vast majority of the total studio's production was made up of ordinary films about success in industry and agriculture. They were designed to demonstrate the well-being of the Soviet system and the heroic labour of factory workers and members of collective farms. However, there was a new stage in the activities of KSN in the mid-1970s. It was caused by a change of the studio managers and a significant rejuvenation of personnel with high-quality professional education (KHRENOV, 2013).

At that particular time, the best KSN films were screened. There were undertaken some steps to move away from the coverage of production heroes, who became tedious and were molded in accordance with a predetermined stencil. Now authors fell into courage in reflecting personalities that did not correspond to the communist pattern. Documentary filmmakers more often began to turn to historical personalities with an ambiguous fate, focusing on moral aspects that were not tied to political truisms. Kazan filmmakers noticeably advanced in the genre of the so-called problem cinema, which dealt with asocial phenomena. But the limits of creativity were still restricted by the confines of the class-communist morality. Even though filmmakers were able to make a film that reflected the truth of

life in its true colours, the fate of such films was often very sad. It had a small print run, and worse than that, the film did not reach the viewer at all, acquiring the status of so-termed a shelving film.

The socio-political conditions for the development of documentary filmmakers fundamentally changed in 1985 when the policy of restructuring was proclaimed. But until 1987, films of the Kazan studio of newsreel had a strong imprint of the compression syndrome, habits of unfreedom. Radical changes in the cinematography of Tatarstan occurred during the period of publicity and pluralism in the country. For the first time, not a hero, but an antihero in focus in documentaries. At last, having enjoyed the freedom for creative expression, the Kazan filmmakers began to raise acute questions about the causes and manifestations of deviant behavior of the Soviet youth, deplorable living conditions of people, repressed countrymen, abandoned places and people.

As a result, criticism was often directed at the power structures. The approach to the formation of the films' composition changed. They were often built in the cinema investigation genre, where documentarists started a direct dialogue with the main character, encouraging viewers to think, to search for their own position on the problem raised by the authors. 1987–1989 were a period of the real flourish of documentary film directing, which attracted the attention of the wide audience and received recognition from democratized government institutions. However, by the end of the 1980s, the sharply worsening situation in the country in all spheres of life affected public

institutions. KSN was able to last longer as a single working structure than many other regional film studios. But in 1990 KSN activities declined under pressure of financial difficulties and disputes between employees.

#### **4. DISCUSSIONS**

Most of the research on this topic is devoted to the study of cinema history in the all-Union scale. Such writers as BARYSHNIKOV (2016), GOLOVSKOY (2004), ZORKAYA (2010), PROZHIKO (2011) help to identify the main trends in the development of the documentary cinematography in the historical aspect, as well as its specificity and role in shaping the mass consciousness in the Soviet society. VANYUKOV (2008) studies the problem of choosing the topic of documentary films, the fate of innovative ideas in the field of cinematography. SYCHEV (2009) analyzes the development of documentary films from the standpoint of its relevance in the society and features of the film's release. In the considered chronological framework, the works of DANILOV (2009) on the study of the Tatar ASSR cultural history rank high in the republican historiography. They contain an analytical study of the ideological situation and the implementation of the cultural policy in the Tatar Republic, rich factography as well (SABITOVA, 2014).

Since the development of TV took place in the Soviet period in parallel with the cinematography, the works by DAUTOVA (2008) are

of great interest for us. Authors give an opportunity to trace peculiarities of the television formation and development at various historical stages, they find out the state policy in this area. Investigations made by DAUTOVA's (2008) doctoral dissertation are devoted to the implementation of the political course in press, radio and television. The research of ALEKSEEVA (2007) is devoted directly to the study of Kazan cinema history. Her work is chronologically brought up to 2014, but mainly the author reveals the pre-war period of the cinema formation. She particularly describes in detail the film industry system in Kazan province. Thus, the work presented is the first comprehensive research on the Tatar ASSR documentary film history in the indicated space-time parameters.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

As can be seen from the above, this research presents a general description of the film producing organization in one of the autonomous republics of the USSR. A distinctive feature of this work is an integrated approach to the study of the TASSR cinematography history. The author analyzed the difficulties of Kazan newsreel studio's formation, its material and technical characteristics, cadre personnel at various stages of its activity, the connection of the film studio and the relationship with similar structures of the country. The unique feature of the research is the author's own vision of the stages of the republican film industry's development based on the analysis of the

previous time of KSN creation, and the study of the content of its products.

The study records can be used to create generalized works on the cultural history of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic or the national cinema, in the preparation of relevant lecture courses or teaching aids for students. The work also has practical significance in studies of the regional history at school, since it is possible to create a methodical complex for studying the history of the native land on the basis of studio's films.

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