

FOREWORD: TATARS IN FINLAND IN THE TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION

Sabira Ståhlberg and Sebastian Cwiklinski

The Tatar diaspora in Finland has attracted researchers for over a century, but studies traditionally focus on topics such as origins and general Tatar history, religion, identity or language. One of the most important aspects of research on Tatars both historically and today, however, is the transnational context. Migrating from villages in Nizhny Novgorod province, often via the Russian capital Saint Petersburg at the end of the nineteenth century, the forming Tatar diaspora communities in the Baltic Sea region maintained, developed and extended their previous networks and also created new connections over national borders despite periods of political difficulties. New research about Tatars in the Baltic Sea region – with the focal point of the Tatars in Finland and their connections chiefly in Estonia, Russia and Sweden – was presented during a seminar called *Tatars in Finland in the Transnational Context of the Baltic Sea Region* at the University of Helsinki in October 2018. Scholars from Finland, Sweden, Russia, Estonia and Hungary spoke about the past and present of the diaspora. A result of the seminar, this special issue of *Studia Orientalia Electronica* is dedicated to new research on Tatars in a transnational context.

RESEARCH ON TATARS IN THE TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

In October 2018, a seminar called *Tatars in Finland in the Transnational Context of the Baltic Sea Region* was organized by Sabira Ståhlberg and Kaarina Aitamurto at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland. The seminar was supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation.¹ Researchers from Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Russia and Hungary discussed the past and present of the Tatars around the Baltic Sea (see Appendix with programme). The overall concept, main focus and goal of the seminar were the connections between Tatars in the Baltic Sea region. Topics ranged from Tatar language and identity, adaptation and religion to new research. Among the new topics were migration, trade, political and economic connections, majority attitudes and stereotypes, Tatar strategies for survival as a minority and in the face of political oppression, and the sources and archives which could be used for more extensive research.

¹ The editors and organizers would like to thank the Finnish Cultural Foundation for its generous support for the event and the Aleksanteri Institute for hosting it; the foundation also supported the language revision of this publication. The editors also wish to thank Kaarina Aitamurto, who co-organized the event and read an early version of this issue, and Albion M. Butters for the professional English revision.

For more than a century, the Tatar communities in the Baltic Sea area have been studied by scholars, but still much remains to be researched. Studies until recently have focused mainly on their origins, general Tatar history, religion, identity, traditions or language. Many other aspects remain to be investigated, however, starting from the historical context, formation and development of the communities to their networks and connections throughout the Baltic Sea region and beyond, as well as the present situation. The publication of a comprehensive history of the Tatars in Finland would be important, as it could give an overview not only of this so-called traditional minority but also explain the history of Finland from the point of view of a small group that has lived and experienced it in a different way than the majority population. The Tatars have witnessed and participated in more than a hundred years of Finnish history, from the Russian Empire to independent Finland, simultaneously adapting to the culture and integrating in the society, yet still keeping their own identity, language and cultural heritage for several generations. Researchers have tried to find out the “secret” behind the successful adjustment. In this issue, some authors discuss the historical background and underlying reasons for the adaptation.

One significant aspects of research on Tatars in the Baltic Sea region is the topic of transnational contexts and connections. The Tatars have for at least a century and a half taken an active part in local, regional, continental and global networks, trying to keep them alive even in the face of political changes or danger. Whenever possible, they have re-created contacts or formed new ones, constantly building and expanding their networks. Today they continue to create and support connections on many levels. The networks are very broad and consist among others of Tatar and Turkic communities and groups, organizations, business connections, institutions and even states. National or local studies about Tatars can therefore only shed light on certain aspects of the Tatar world but never show the full extent of the various dimensions in which Tatars usually live and act. The study of Tatars in Finland and especially the Baltic Sea region must thus be carried out as cross-border and interdisciplinary research.

PERSPECTIVES

The seminar at the University of Helsinki in 2018 offered an important forum for new researchers in Tatar studies. In recent years, a growing interest toward the Tatar diaspora can be observed among younger scholars in the Baltic Sea region and researchers also from other fields than linguistics or religion, for example historians. Their participation in seminars and conferences with specifically Tatar topics has so far been limited. This seminar gave them an opportunity to meet and connect with researchers from several fields.

While most previous seminars or conferences in Finland have focused on Tatar religion and religious life or identity, at this seminar these themes remained in the background, leaving the floor open for social, political, economic, historical and other discussions, including media analysis. The seminar audience included scientists from a wide range of fields, mainly from the University of Helsinki, and representatives from archives, libraries and the Tatar community who contributed their expertise and offered insights into a range of important topics discussed at the seminar.

This seminar showed that the direction of research about Tatars in Finland and its neighbouring countries is changing. Modern methods and digitalized materials create new topics and questions but also huge possibilities for researchers. Scholars can compare and update materials and different topics more efficiently when there are library and archival databases, newspapers

and magazines and other sources more easily available. From these Tatar communities and individual Tatars can be situated in a larger historical, social, political and economic context.

The transnational theme of the seminar highlighted the necessity of more cross-border and interdisciplinary studies and cooperation between scholars on Tatar topics. One significant reason for cross-border work is that many of the key persons in Tatar history appear in several contexts in the Baltic Sea region and sometimes beyond and their trails need to be followed through two or more countries. Moreover, their networks were international and the events in one community influenced the activities of another community of Tatars in another country. Interdisciplinary research is needed to understand the larger context of the Tatars in diaspora and the development of the communities. Some of the participants have already cooperated and published articles or book chapters together, but in discussing cooperation a broader collaboration was called for to map out the common history of the Tatars in the region.

In addition to creating contacts and discovering ideas and possibilities for future cooperation, the need for documentation and the collection of sources and all kinds of materials was identified as the most urgent task at present. To some degree, materials need to be gathered from the Tatar communities, but archives and private archives can yield new perspectives on Tatar history as well. Materials from and about the Tatar communities need still to be collected into accessible archives; for instance, to date very little exists in national or regional archives. Interviews with Tatars – not only key persons or activists but with persons from different backgrounds – could also broaden the traditional views and provide researchers with interesting and new perspectives.

The participants in the seminar emphasized the need for much more data and analysis than exists today about migration, demographics and historical, social, political, economic and cultural processes among the Tatars in the Baltic Sea region, as well as research on their adaptation and dialogue with the majority societies in which they live. An analysis of the development of the different Tatar communities in relation to their national and cross-border contexts is also required for deeper understanding. Analysing the Tatars and their relationship with the surrounding society can contribute to increased knowledge not only about the Tatars and their history but also about the countries they live in.

This special issue of *Studia Orientalia Electronica* is one of the results of the seminar. For the issue we have been fortunate to additionally receive articles by researchers who did not participate in the seminar but whose work contributes to the topic. Other results will hopefully be published in the future internationally. We believe that these studies with innovative topics will inspire and advance modern research and cooperation in Tatar studies.

ARTICLES

The article by Johanna Wassholm (Åbo Akademi University, Finland), *Tatar pedlars in the Grand Duchy of Finland in the late nineteenth century*, discusses the first decades of Tatar migration to Finland from the 1860s until the beginning of the twentieth century. The conditions in which the small traders and pedlars worked and the attitudes of the surrounding society are the topic of this article. Based on newspaper articles and statements in Swedish and Finnish from the early period of Tatar settlement in Finland, the article shows that Tatars were at first seen as just another kind of pedlars from the East but they soon gained a stereotype of their own. This picture of “Tatars” reflected the attitudes, prejudices and fears prevalent in Finnish

society towards outsiders, especially traders who arrived in Finland from other parts of the Russian Empire.

Ainur Elmgren's (University of Helsinki, Finland) article *Visual stereotypes of Tatars in the Finnish press from the 1890s to the 1910s* continues the debate about encounters between Tatars, the majority population and other groups in Finland. The article reflects on media reactions and satirical and stereotypical depictions of Tatars in newspapers. The author compares the pictures of Tatars with other groups perceived as foreign and the attitudes and presentations of the Other. The cartoons in turn mirror the social processes – among them urbanization, growing consumerism and changing social relations – in Finland around the end of the nineteenth century.

Connections between Tatars in Finland with relatives, friends and Tatar intellectuals in the capital of the Russian Empire, Saint Petersburg, are discussed by Islam Zaripov (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences) and Ramil Belyaev (University of Helsinki, Finland). Their article "*Our religious mentor*": *Musa Bigeev and the Tatars in Finland* shows the influence of the Tatar Jadidist (modernist or reformist), intellectual and religious mentor Musa Bigeev on the congregation in Finland and the preservation of Tatar language, culture and identity. The Tatars already encountered and often embraced reformist ideas before moving to Finland, but the continuous support by internationally active intellectuals such as Bigeev was crucial for the Tatar diaspora. The "success story" or model of adaptation used by the Tatars in Finland can be traced back to ideas about education and modernization advocated by Tatar reformists.

Renat Bekkin (The Institute of Oriental Studies at the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, Saint Petersburg) continues in the article *Connections between Tatars in Petrograd-Leningrad and Finland during the 1920s and 1930s* the discussion about cross-border relations between Finland and Saint Petersburg. Contrary to common belief, the close connections and the common cultural space between the Tatars in Finland and Saint Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad continued after 1917 and were disrupted only in the early 1930s. The Tatars tried to keep their networks on both sides of the border, but political changes, tightening control and persecution broke the relationships and separated relatives, friends and trade partners. The Tatars in Finland continued to preserve their heritage through mediators or cultural "guides", who carried and transmitted tradition and language.

Ege Lepa (University of Tartu, Estonia) interviewed Estonian Tatars about their religious life, concepts about Tatar identity and the history of the Tatar community in Estonia. The article "*The Tatar way*" of understanding and practising Islam in Estonia presents the development of the Estonian Tatar community from the beginning of the twentieth century until today. During the Soviet era, religion was confined to homes and families who strove to keep alive the traditions and the faith of their ancestors. The article also discusses the challenges that the changing Muslim community poses to the Tatar-based congregation. The influx of Muslims from other countries and a growing number of Estonian converts introduce other understandings of Islamic practice than the traditional Tatar way.

Simon Sorgenfrei (Södertörn University, Sweden) discusses Tatar connections in Sweden in the twentieth century in the article *Establishing Islam in Sweden: The first Tatar community and Muslim congregation and their sources*. At the end of the nineteenth century there was only one documented Tatar in Sweden, but after World War II Tatar immigration increased and a religious-cultural association was founded as a space for Tatars and Turks to meet and maintain their traditions. Within a few decades, however, Muslim immigrants from other parts

of the world outnumbered the Tatars. The article reviews the sources and the main figures in the Swedish Tatar community in a historical perspective.

In the last article of this issue, *The Story of an unusual book*, Sebastian Cwiklinski (Free University of Berlin, Germany) discusses the history of a Festschrift from 1987 which honours Ymär Daher, an activist in the Tatar community in Finland. Cwiklinski argues that Daher's networking activities within the international community of Altaic scholars and with Tatar intellectuals in the Soviet Union since the 1960s might help to explain the peculiarities of the volume, among others the high number of Tatars from the Soviet Union contributing to it and an article written in Arabic script instead of Cyrillic script.

NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTION

Whenever an English version of a geographical or personal name is widely known, the English form is used (for instance, *Saint Petersburg* and *Nizhny Novgorod*), rather than transcription from Russian (*Sankt-Peterburg* and *Nizhniy Novgorod*). As for the geographical names in Finland, the Finnish versions appear first, as they are predominantly used in maps today. However, as most of the articles deal with a historical time during which the Swedish names played an important role, the Swedish names are mentioned at least once in each article.

Tatar personal names are written in the Latin script when commonly used by Tatars in Finland or other countries, or chosen by the persons themselves. Accordingly, we write *Ymär Daher* rather than *Ĝömär Taher* or *Daher*, which would be the correct transcription from the Tatar language. As for Turkic texts or names, the original version is used when it has been written in the Latin script.

If there is no Latin script version, texts and names are transcribed from the Arabic or the Cyrillic alphabet with transcriptions close to the respective present literary languages. In the case of the Turkic sources in Arabic script, the transcription is close to the literary language that the text shows most similarities with, be it Volga-Ural Tatar, Crimean Tatar or Turkish.

There is no rule without an exception, however. The name of the ethnic subgroup of the Tatar people that most Tatars in Finland belong to is written *Mishär* and not *Mishar*, as is usual in English-language texts. This version is closer to the pronunciation of the name.

APPENDIX

Programme of the Seminar Tatars in Finland in the Transnational Context of the Baltic Sea Region



Seminar supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation
Wednesday 17 October 2018 at 10:00–17:00
Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Unioninkatu 33
Moderator: Sabira Ståhlberg



10:00 Registration and coffee

10:15 Welcome

Kaarina Aitamurto, Aleksanteri Institute

Introduction to the seminar topic

Sabira Ståhlberg, independent researcher

10:30 Cultural encounter in mobile trade

Tatar pedlars in the Grand Duchy of Finland, 1870–1920

Johanna Wassholm, Åbo Akademi

Tatar pedlars began to engage in mobile trade in the Grand Duchy of Finland from the 1870s. New research shows how Finnish newspapers constructed notions of the encounter between these “newcomers” in the trading landscape and the local society in Finland. Themes include accounts of ethnified trading practices and debates about illicit trade and transnational mobility.

11:00 Language as a fundamental component of identity within the Tatar community in Finland

Orsolya Kiss, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

What is the role of Tatar language for the Tatar community in Finland? Is it a fundamental part of Tatar identity or does it contain other aspects as well? Preliminary research results show that Finnish plays a dominant role in everyday communication, and Tatar language functions as the basis for family and community interaction. How is the language used today among the Tatars in Finland and how could such a small minority preserve its own language for more than a century?

11:30 The “Tatar way” of understanding and practising Islam in Estonia

Ege Lepa, University of Tartu

Tatars have played an important role in the Estonian Islamic community, but today the long domination of the Tatar way of “moderate”, secular type of practice is challenged by newcomers mainly from North Africa and South Asia. The presentation focuses on the historical background and how the changing community deals with the new challenges. What happens to the cultural and religious identity of the Tatars in this situation? On a personal level unique relationships are formed, but on the national level differences appear to exist about what Islam is and how it should be practised.

12:00 Lunch

13:30 Connections between the Muslim community in Petrograd-Leningrad and Tatars in Finland during the 1920s

Renat Bekkin, Södertörn University

Saint Petersburg historically served as a transit point for Tatars moving to the Grand Duchy of Finland, where by the twentieth century a small community had formed. It maintained contacts after 1917 with relatives, friends and other Mishār Tatars from the Sergach district in Nizhny Novgorod Province, Saint Petersburg, etc. Tatars in Petrograd-Leningrad often illegally crossed the border to Finland in the 1920s, fleeing from Soviet Russia or helping relatives and friends. Tatars in independent Finland also actively used this “corridor”, sending couriers with considerable financial aid to the Leningrad Muslims, mostly Tatars. The connections are illustrated by two criminal cases, instituted by OGPU (Soviet political police agency) against representatives of the Leningrad community in 1931 and 1932.

14:00 Sources to the early Tatar community in Sweden

Simon Sorgenfrei, Södertörn University

The presentation focuses on the existing sources for research on the early Tatar community in Sweden, discussing archives containing information on the group, what kinds of materials are available and also what sort of material is lacking.

14:30 Coffee break

15:30 “Our Secret Weapon” – Majority Prejudices and Minority Strategies of the Finnish Tatars 1880–1945

Ainur Elmgren, University of Helsinki

In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, Volga Tatars settling in Finland were targets of prejudices and suspicions, even political conspiracy theories. This paper explores how Tatars responded to such accusations and how they attempted to defend their rights through the majority’s channels, such as newspapers and courts.

16:00 Discussion: Future research perspectives

17:00 Conclusion