

▣ “OUR RELIGIOUS MENTOR”: MUSA BIGEEV AND THE TATARS IN FINLAND

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The influence of progressive Muslim theologian Musa Jarullah Bigeev (1875–1949) on the Tatar community in Finland during the first half of the twentieth century is the focus of this article. Bigeev was very popular among the Tatar bourgeoisie in Russia and the diaspora abroad. Already at an early stage of his career he became widely known as the “Muslim Luther”. We briefly describe the scientific biography of this theologian, his relations with the Tatars in Finland and personal memories from visiting the country. The main part of the study presents an analysis of the perception of his ideas by a few important community leaders in Finland, Weli-Ahmed Hakim, Zinnetullah Ahsen Böre and Habibur-Rahman Shakir, as reflected in their correspondence and publications. This article also provides examples of Bigeev’s recommendations to the community on various issues of their ethno-confessional life, transmitted through letters to its leaders. The recommendations include a range of aspects from the establishment of an organization and development of the community’s education system to questions of religious practice and personal spiritual growth. His ideas contributed to the adaptation of the Tatars to Finnish society and simultaneously to the preservation of Tatar culture, language and identity.

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest period of its formation, the Tatar community in Finland has successfully combined deep integration in Finnish and European society with the development of their own ethno-confessional identity and infrastructure. This was possible due to a coincidence of many factors but one of the most important is ideological. In traditional societies, religion often occupies an important space. After the loss of statehood in the sixteenth century, Islamic institutions began to play a key role for the Volga Tatars. The religious leaders first responded to the challenges of the modern era and its changing political and social circumstances and already at the end of the eighteenth century they were discussing ways for further development of the Tatars.

Conservatives or *Qadimists* (Arabic: *qadīm* ‘old’) believed that any transformation will lead to the erosion of ethnic and religious identity. Therefore, they advocated the preservation of existing institutions and preached strict adherence (*taqlīd*) to the medieval theological tradition. The conservatives rejected innovations (*bid‘ah*), not only in the cult but also in the public sphere. This was particularly manifested in the categorical refusal of European clothing and culture, a ban on the study of secular subjects and Russian language and negative attitude to the education of women.

Other theologians criticized medieval scholasticism (*qalām*) and the imitation of tradition. They called for rationality and self-creative review (*ijtihād*) of the primary sources, the *Qur'ān*, *Sunnah* and practices of the first generations of Muslims for the extraction of the legal provisions, taking into account the modern and regional needs of the community. They and their followers expressed ideas about reforming education and added to their study programme not only religious disciplines but also secular sciences and Russian language. The reform-minded further advocated the development of female education and the empowerment of women. This direction of the Tatar theological thought received the name *tajdīd* 'renewal' which is also called religious reformism, revivalism or progressive theology. In this paper, we will use the term *progressive theology*.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a secular direction for reformation also became influential in Tatar social thought. Its representatives did not deny the importance of religion, but believed that the modernization of Tatar society should take place through the creation of new secular and national institutions according to European models. Despite existing differences and the variance in approaches, to some extent progressive theologians and secular modernists had common goals and most often acted as a united front in the opening of schools, the establishment of public organizations and political parties, the convening of national congresses, the creation of national-cultural autonomy and activities among the Tatar diaspora. In this regard, these two directions of are often combined in research literature under the common name *Jadidism* (about Jadidism and Qadimism, see Iskhakov 1997; Kanlıdere 1997; 2010; Lazzerini 2015; 2017; Zaripov 2013; Mukhametshin 2017).¹

Jadidism became the ideology of the Tatar bourgeoisie who were seeking to integrate more widely in the socio-economic space of the Russian Empire but at the same time wanted to preserve and develop their ethno-confessional identity. The goal was to remake the Tatars into a modern nation with its own religion, language and culture; a nation which possessed equal rights and opportunities with the other peoples in the state.

The modern Tatar diaspora in Finland began to take shape in the late nineteenth century. The educated members of the diaspora were well aware of the ideas and educational programmes of Jadidism through publications and personal contacts in Saint Petersburg and other cities where these Mishār Tatars from the Sergach district in Nizhny Novgorod province traded. The Tatar Muslims were under the official jurisdiction of the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly, which defended the interests of the conservatives, but the community in Finland – possibly because of its peripheral location, small numbers and encounters with a different society – was outside its sphere of influence and quite independent.

In 1909, the Jadidist writer and politician Ğayaz Isxaqi (also written Ayaz İshaki, 1878–1954) for the first time visited Finland, followed in 1914 by one of the most authoritative progressive theologians, Rizaeddin Fakhreddin (1858–1936). After the revolution in Russia and independence of Finland in 1917, major figures of the Jadidism movement, including Musa Bigeev (also known as Bigiev, Bigi, Jarullah, Rostovdonî and Ibn Fatimah; 1875–1949), Sadri Maqsudi (1878–1957), Ğayaz Isxaqi, Abdullah Battal-Taymas (1883–1969), Lütfi İshaki (d. 1925), Zakir Kadiri

1 Some modern scholars believe that the differences between conservative and progressive theologians were devoid of clear ideological definitions and were closely linked in a single Muslim discourse (see Dudoignon 1997; Kemper 2008). Edward Lazzerini (2017) also indicates that the ideological opponents of all theologians appear among the secular reformers, whose alliance with the progressives was only of a temporary nature for the sake of achieving short-term goals.

(1878–1954) and other Tatar intellectuals lived for some time in Finland (Belyaev 2017: 117–132). Between the 1920s and the 1980s, the Tatars in Finland maintained close contacts with other emigrant communities in Japan and Turkey which had also formed on the basis of Jadidism and progressive theology. Beginning in the mid-1950s, relations with Tatar and religious organizations in the Soviet Union were renewed (Belyaev, Zaripov & Safarov 2016).

In many respects, the development of official Islam in the Soviet Union was based on the ideas of the progressive theology of Jadidism. The official clergy consisted mainly of graduates from Jadidist Islamic religious schools (*madrasas*). They knew and shared the ideas of progressive theologians of the beginning of the century. For example, the *imam-khatib* (leader) of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, Akhmetzyan Mustafin (1902–1986) who visited Finland in 1967, referred in one of his official speeches to the works of Bigeev and called him a great theologian (Mustafin 1970: 33). Still, official Islam in the Soviet Union was severely limited by the control of state authorities and repressed during the purges in the 1930s. To mention Bigeev's name was practically forbidden from the 1930s until the end of the 1980s. Mustafin's statement should therefore be seen as an exception, permitted by the censorship only for "foreign export". Almost immediately after his speech, one of the prominent communist ideologists of the Tatar Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR), Kamil' Faseev (1919–2005), released a crushing criticism of Bigeev in his work *Na putyakh proletarskogo internatsionalizma* 'On the paths of proletarian internationalism' (Faseev 1972).

In independent Finland, the Freedom of Religion Act of 1923 allowed believers of any confession to organize their communities and independently regulate their activities (Markkola 2015: 9). This made it possible for the Tatars in Finland to determine the internal policy of their community which in many ways became the local embodiment of the ideas of Jadidism.² The process of creating a Finnish Tatar identity was also facilitated by the particular influence of reformist leaders in exile, namely Sadri Maqsudi and Ğayaz Isxaqi in the socio-cultural sphere and Lütfi Ishaki and Musa Bigeev in the religious sphere. In this study, we aim to examine the influence of Bigeev on the Tatar Muslim community in Finland and explore the aspects contributing to the adaptation and identity preservation of the group.

“A MUSLIM LUTHER”

Musa Jarullah Bigeev was born in the Penza province of Russia. He was a Mishār Tatar like the Tatars in Finland. After receiving his initial education at a public school in Rostov-on-Don, he travelled for eleven years throughout the Muslim world in search of knowledge. At this time he visited the largest *madrasas* in Kazan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Cairo and Hejaz, as well as in India and the Levant. In 1904, the young theologian returned to Russia and a year later settled in Saint Petersburg, where he lived before emigrating in 1930. He quickly gained widespread authority and became one of the leaders in the Muslim community of the imperial capital (for details of his life in Saint Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad, see Bekkin 2017).

Before the Bolsheviks came to power, Musa Bigeev engaged in social activities, journalism and theological studies in Saint Petersburg. He was one of the organizers of the all-Russia Muslim congresses and a co-developer of the Charter and programme of the liberal political party of Muslims in Russia, the *Ittifaq al-muslimin* 'Union of Muslims'. With Abdurrashid

² Another place where the ideas of Jadidism were developed was the Tatar community in Japan. The identification of their interrelations and special features requires a separate study.

Ibrahim (Ibragimov; 1857–1944) he participated in the publishing of the newspapers *at-Tilmīdh* 'The Pupil' and *Ölfāt* 'Accord', and with Ğayaz Isxaqi he published the newspaper *Il* 'Land'. In addition to these periodicals, his articles appeared in the Jadidist newspapers *al-'Asr al-Jadīd* 'The New Century' and *Vaqīt* 'Time' and the magazine *Shura* 'Council'. In the period between 1905 and 1917, Bigeev also published a few dozen books in Turkic and Arabic (Kanlıdere 2005: 143–168).

In the beginning of the 1920s, Musa Bigeev actively participated in establishing contacts with Muslims in India and Afghanistan and he personally took part in the negotiations between Lenin and the Indian Muslim revolutionary Mohamed Barakatullah (1854–1927). However, Bigeev did not agree with the teachings and policies of the Bolsheviks. Already in 1920, in response to Nikolai Bukharin's *The ABC of Communism*, he wrote an "ABC of Islam" which was published in 1923 in Berlin (Musa Jarullah 1923). In 1926, Bigeev participated in the Congress of the Islamic World in Mecca. On the way, he also visited Turkey where among others he met the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In 1929–1930, a number of new laws restricted the activities of religious organizations and clergy in the Soviet Union. A campaign was launched to "fight against counter-revolutionary elements in the governing bodies of religious associations" and to curtail communication with diaspora and foreign organizations. The persecution also targeted Bigeev and as a result he was forced to leave the country in November 1930 without his wife and six children.³

Musa Bigeev first travelled to Kashgar in East Turkestan (today Xinjiang) where he intended to stay and teach in one of the *madrāsas* there. Almost immediately, however, the Chinese administration sent him onwards to Afghanistan. Here he was warmly welcomed personally by King Nadir Shah (1884–1933) who provided Bigeev with a foreign passport and other necessities. Having stayed in Kabul for only 40 days, he visited Egypt, Germany and Finland until the end of 1931. In December, together with Ğayaz Isxaqi he participated on behalf of the Russian Muslims in the world Muslim Congress in Jerusalem. In 1932–1933 he moved between Germany and Finland, planning to open his own scientific and religious centre in Berlin. In 1934, Bigeev wanted to study the Shia school of Islam in more detail and went on a trip to Iraq and Iran.

At the end of 1935, Musa Bigeev arrived in Egypt, where he met the Australian researcher of the *Qur'ān* Arthur Jeffery (1892–1959) and helped him in the study of ancient texts. Jeffery gratefully mentioned Bigeev in the preface to his fundamental work *Materials for the history of the text of the Qur'ān: The old codices* (Jeffery 1937: X). In 1937, Bigeev continued on to India, where he visited Bombay (now Mumbai) and Aligarh, and then stopped in Varanasi (then Benares), the spiritual centre of Hinduism, studying Sanskrit as well as the Vedas and Indian philosophy. Via the island of Java, Bigeev travelled to Japan, visiting the well-organized Turkic-Tatar community. His time there is not well documented, but one detail is known: in addition to lessons at a community school, he taught Arabic for about a year to Toshihiko Izutsu (1914–1993) who later became a well-known Arabist (Kanlıdere 2005: 128).

Leaving Japan before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Bigeev planned to settle in Kabul. In Peshawar, however, he was arrested by the British military. One possible reason was the war; another might be the theologian's effort to establish contacts between Muslim leaders in India and the Soviet government in the 1920s. He was imprisoned for about two years and only after the personal intervention of Hamidullah Khan (1894–1960), the ruler of Bhopal, was

3 For details of the judicial case concerning Bigeev, see Bekkin (2020) in this volume.

he liberated and remained under house arrest until the end of the war. In 1947, Bigeev returned to Cairo where he died in 1949. During his period in exile, he wrote dozens of works in Arabic and Turkic, many of which were published in Berlin, Cairo and Bhopal (for more details, see Kanlıdere 2005; Khairutdinov 2005; Görmez 2010; Altuntas 2018).

Bigeev's scientific interests covered a wide range of disciplines: religious philosophy, history of religions, methodological and practical issues of law, *Qur'ān* and *Hadith* (record of the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) studies, and Arab and Persian literature as well as many other branches of Muslim theology and Oriental studies (Frolov & Zaripov 2018: 72; Zaripov 2018: 31–33). Bigeev criticized the undiscerning orientation towards the epigonism (*taqlīd*) of the medieval foundations of Muslim theological-legal schools (*madhhab*). He was a supporter of independent learning of the original sources (*Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*) and practices of the first Muslim generations for derivation of legal foundations (*ijtihād*), but he took into account the current needs of the Muslim community. Bigeev believed also that it was essential to have profound knowledge of Arabic philology and the peculiarities of the Arabic poetic style for independent derivation of the foundations of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. He focused on the search for rational answers to the relevant questions of the present, taking into account the historical context but not considering his work a reform in the proper sense of the word. Bigeev wrote:

In my opinion, Islam absolutely does not need any religious reforms. Public, religious, political evils happen not because of Islam, but because of ourselves. [...] Islam should not be reformed, but our heads should be treated with the help of Islam. In the Christian world there was Reformation. But it does not mean that it is necessary to adjust the history of Islam to the history of Christianity. (Musa Jarullah 1914: 5)

Bigeev's original ideas included the doctrine of the inclusiveness of divine mercy (Bigeev 1911b), the permission to take industrial credits and the concept of an Islamic Bank within the global credit and financial system (Musa Jarullah 1916), as well as innovative approaches to the women's question (Ibn Fatimah 1933). In particular, he defended women's educational and electoral rights, the right to divorce and the obligation to consent to marriage. He discussed the priority of monogamy and the admission of polygamy only in extreme cases. Bigeev also considered the *hijāb* (headscarf) as an indication of the preservation of chastity and honour in society, but disagreed with the obligation to cover the face (*niqāb*). In matters of education, Bigeev spoke about the importance of studying not only theological disciplines, but also all modern achievements of European science in the natural and humanitarian spheres (Musa Jarullah 1946).

Musa Bigeev's innovative works with reformist topics at an early stage earned him the nickname "Muslim Luther" even outside Russia. In 1914, the Russian-language journal *Istoricheskiy vestnik* 'The Historical Gazette' wrote: "With the name of the Western reformer [Martin Luther], the progressive part of the Russian and foreign Muslim society calls the Tatar theologian and philosopher Musa Bigeev" (Fedotov 1914: 527). In 1927 Turkology professor Bekir Choban-zade (1927: 60) called Bigeev a "late Luther".

The analogy is not surprising, as Bigeev wrote in Arabic as well as in several Turkic languages and his works attracted attention throughout the Muslim world. One of the most famous Egyptian religious reformers, Rashid Rida, reprinted Bigeev's work *Tarikh al-Qur'ān wa al-masāhif* 'The History of the *Qur'ān* and Scrolls' in his journal *al-Manar* 'The Beacon'. Bigeev was well known also to Muslim politicians and religious figures in Central Asia, East Turkestan, Afghanistan and India. On the other hand, conservative theologians – for example,

the *sheikhulislam* (official head of the Muslim clergy) of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Sabri – criticized Bigeev's idea of an all-embracing divine mercy (Kanlıdere 2005: 234).

European Orientalists held a high opinion of Bigeev's work. The famous *Qur'ān* scholar Arthur Jeffery defined the above-mentioned work *Tarikh al-Qur'ān wa al-masāhif* as the first work of a Muslim author to use the critical approach of European science (Jeffery 1957: 5). The famous Russian Orientalist Vasily Bartold (1869–1930) noted in his review of one of Bigeev's books, *Šārgiyat āsasları* 'Basics of Sharia', the skills of the writer and his progressiveness as well as the fact that "his own thinking is determined not so much by Muslim traditions as by European education" (Zaitsev 2013: 163). A German researcher of the *Qur'ān*, Otto Pretzel, called Musa Bigeev the greatest modern expert of the holy scripture of Muslims and sought to invite him to work at the Munich Institute of the *Qur'ān*; the creation of the institute was prevented by the outbreak of World War II (Görmez 2010: 59).

There is no doubt that Bigeev was highly popular among the Tatars in Russia and in the diaspora. Despite the criticism and prohibitions on the distribution of his books by the conservative Muslim clergy in the Russian Empire, his ideas aroused great interest among the Tatar intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie, including those living in the Grand Duchy of Finland.

BIGEEV IN FINLAND: A HAPPY SOCIETY

Saint Petersburg was the main transit point on the route of Tatar migration from the Nizhny Novgorod province to Finland in the early twentieth century. In the capital of the Russian Empire, the Tatars from villages in the Sergach district had the opportunity to meet and make friends with Bigeev and other prominent intellectuals.

Safiye Ahsen Böre (1899–1973) was born in Tsarskoye Selo near Saint Petersburg and lived in the Finnish city of Tampere from 1920. In her book about a colleague of Musa Bigeev, *imam Lütfi Ishaki*, she describes how these two young theologians impressed the Tatar community in the imperial capital with their deep knowledge and innovative approaches to religious and community life. An example is that the two theologians began to deliver Friday sermons not only in the traditional Arabic but also in Tatar (Ahsen Böre 1945: 7).⁴

Mehmet Görmez, a Turkish biographer of Musa Bigeev, indicates that "all the Tatars compelled to stay in Finland after Russia let the iron curtain fall, lived before that in Petrograd [previously Saint Petersburg] and considered Musa Bigeev and Lütfi Ishaki their *imams* and teachers" (Görmez 2010: 35). This statement is not quite true, because there were Tatars who had moved to Finland before the appearance of the two theologians in the city and many more who had migrated directly from their home villages. Yet the Tatars in Finland also began to consider the two teachers their religious mentors as a consequence of their close ties with the Tatar Muslim community in Saint Petersburg and the visits of the theologians to the Grand Duchy.

In the late autumn of 1910, Musa Bigeev for the first time arrived in Finland and for two weeks he toured various cities, including Helsinki (Helsingfors), Lahti (Lahtis) and Turku (Åbo). He met not only Tatars (in particular, he mentions Hassan, probably Hasan Husnetdin from Lahti) but also local residents, and he visited schools and museums (Figure 1). Bigeev was struck by the social culture in Finland, its hard-working people, cleanliness, decency and commitment to education which he describes in detail in his work *Ozin könlärdä ruza* 'Fasting

4 Böre gives the date of their first appearance as "approximately 1903" but Bigeev arrived in Saint Petersburg only in 1905.



Figure 1 Meeting of the planning group for the building of a mosque in Finland, Helsinki 1917. First row from left to right: Fatih Karimi, Hadi Maksudi, Weli-Ahmed Hakim, Musa Bigeev, Abdulfattah Hajiev (Hodsajeff). Second row: Rushan Ali, Fathulla Kari, Umar Abdrahim, Rahim Batyrakov, Imad Camaletdin. Courtesy of Fazile Nasretidin, private archive.

in the long days' (Bigeev 1911a). This book was written after a second visit to Finland in the summer of the following year. In 1911, together with Lütfi Ishaki he wanted to witness the eternal polar day. On their way to the North, they stayed in Tampere where in the house of Imad Camaletdin (1880–1967) they spoke before the local Tatar community, who according to Bigeev "knew us well, and we knew them well". Bigeev (1911a: 44–45) mentions the names of a few participants at this meeting: Hasan Hairetdin (Kanykoff), Kemaletdin Baibulat, Ahmedshan Camaletdin (Samaletdin) and a Mr. Fattahetdin.

In the course of this journey, the two theologians discussed the work of the first new-method (*Jadid*) school for Muslim girls which opened in 1910 in the village of Aktukovo (Tatar: Aqtuq or Yaña Par) on their initiative and with the financial support of Tatars in Finland. This precedent encouraged others to open similar schools in neighbouring villages (Belyaev 2017: 113–114; Bigeev 1911a: 45–46). The final destination of Bigeev and Isxaqi's journey was Rovaniemi, where they were met by the local Tatars Musa Kalimullah and Lotfulla Camaletdin, who accompanied them on a trek to a mountain from which they watched the never-setting sun.

Bigeev found that the Tatars in Finland had "everything that is published in Russia: newspapers, magazines, large and small books and treatises. Political and daily news they learn from Finnish newspapers and apparently under their influence they subscribe to all Russian newspapers and magazines. The community also receives all books which appear in Turkish, Persian and Arabic". He especially noted the business-like attitudes and educational level of

the local Tatars, who "gained credibility in the eyes of the Finns and adopted the best qualities of the locals: truthfulness, purity, diligence, loyalty, honesty, thrift and diligence". Also the Finnish society made a deep impression: "Here a person feels part of a happy society, a kind of beautiful society: he sees first-hand the peace and security arising from justice; he sees hope born of well-being; he sees the work generated by hope, and observes in all manifestations of contentment and happiness as a result of work." (Bigeev 1911a: 45–46)

Describing his further journey, Bigeev continued to admire the customs of the Finns and their everyday culture, safety and atmosphere of general trust and the clean streets and hotels even in small towns. Bigeev was not unique in his praise; the positive image of Finland in this period as an "ideal province of an ideal Empire" was quite common in Russian literature (Naumenko 2010; Minard-Törmänen 2016). Many Tatars did not read Russian, so Bigeev became one of the first authors to describe "the land of a thousand lakes" for Tatar-speaking readers in the Russian Empire. It is possible that these laudatory characteristics, given by an authoritative religious mentor in a book published in Tatar language in 1911, played an advertising role and led to further migration of Tatars to Finland.

The Tatars already living in Finland recognized Bigeev as one of their spiritual authorities and revered him "like an angel descended from the heaven" (Altuntas 2018: 151). Until the end of his life, Tatars in Finland provided Musa Bigeev with great material and moral support, reflecting their special attitude to their teacher. In 1917–1918, for example, patrons of the community (Imad, Ahmedshan and Lotfulla Camaletdin and Kemaletdin Baibulat) financed the publishing of Bigeev's newspaper *al-Minbar* 'The Pulpit'. In letters to the *imam* of the Tatars in Finland, Weli-Ahmed Hakim (1882–1970), Bigeev constantly thanked him and the other Tatars in Finland for their financial assistance (Battal-Taymas 1958: 55–56; Khairutdinov 2005: 334).

One of the most important works of Bigeev, *Islam millätlärenä: dini, ädäbi, iğtimagi, säyäsi mäs 'älälär tädbirlär haqında*, 'To the Muslim Nations: about religious, moral, social and political problems and actions' (Musa Jarullah 1923), was also published with the financial assistance of the Tatars in Finland. Having no material and political opportunities to publish this work in the Soviet Union or Turkey, the author passed it on to Weli-Ahmed Hakim and asked him to find funds and publish it "in Europe". To this call, the brothers Camaletdin and Zinnetullah Ahsen Böre (1886–1945) responded. In his biography of Musa Bigeev, Abdullah Battal-Taymas (1958: 19) calls them his admirers (Turkish: *perestişkâr*); 5,000 copies of the book were published at the brothers' expense in 1923 in Berlin under the editorship of Ğayaz Isxaqi.

The publication of this book became one of the reasons for Bigeev's arrest in the Soviet Union in 1923. The Tatars in Finland immediately appealed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Turkey, İsmet İnönü, and sent telegrams to the Turkish and French press. The Istanbul newspapers *Vakit* 'Time' and *Cumhuriyet* 'Republic' and the Ankara newspapers *Hakimiyet-i milliye* 'National Rule' and *Yeni Gün* 'The New Day' published the following news: "In Russia the well-known and revered throughout the Islamic and Turkic world scientist Musa Jarullah Bigi has been arrested. Please express your protest to the Soviet government." Largely due to these protests, the theologian was released. The Turkish Ambassador in Sweden officially informed Weli-Ahmed Hakim in Finland about it (Battal-Taymas 1958: 20). Already in 1919, Hakim had applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland, asking the state to grant asylum to Professor Bigeev. The application was endorsed by the well-known professors G.J. Ramstedt and J.J. Mikkola, but the answer (if there was any) from the Ministry is unknown (Document 8 May 1919; SIS).

After his emigration from the Soviet Union in 1930, Bigeev visited Finland twice: in 1931–1932 and in 1933–1934.⁵ During his last visit, Bigeev lived almost for a year in Finland, working on his new books and lecturing. Receiving patronage from Imad Camaledin in Tampere, during 1933 another important book by Bigeev was published in Berlin, *Qur'ane kârim ayatî kârimäläreneñ nurlarî xozirında xatîn* 'The Woman in the light of the holy verses of the noble *Qur'ân*' (Ibn Fatimah 1933). The leaders of the Tatar community in Finland repeatedly requested Bigeev to stay, but his passionate desire to continue his theological studies and take an active part in the life of the global Muslim community caused him to decline the offer. Still, until the end of his life, he kept close contacts with the Tatars in Finland by correspondence, answering their questions and giving advice. The great authority of Bigeev among the Tatars in Finland is reflected also by the fact that on the 40th day after his death in 1949, two official evenings were held in Helsinki and Tampere in memoriam and they were attended by around 400 people (Hakim 1950: 33; Baibulat 2004: 96). The memory of Bigeev remained with the next generation of Tatars who had seen him in childhood and heard stories about him from their parents. For example, Esad Baibulat (1925–2018), who from 1984 to 2015 was the head of the Tatar Muslim community in Tampere, often recalled how Bigeev once gave him a silver coin, the loss of which he regretted all his life (interview with E. Baibulat 2.7.2016).

TUTOR OF TEACHERS

Weli-Ahmed Hakim is considered one of the founders of the official Tatar Muslim organization in Finland and as *imam* he acted as its spiritual leader for many years. Born in the village of Bol'shoe Rybushkino (Tatar: Olî Rbišča) in Nizhny Novgorod province, he gained his education in various Jadidist *madradas* in Russia. In 1914, Tatars in Finland invited him to perform the duties of *imam*. In order to get an official appointment to this position, he successfully passed the exam at the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly the same year and received a decree to serve in Helsinki. There he remained until the end of his life, being one of the most active figures of the Tatar community (Daher & Bilal 2007: 5).

It is not known exactly where and when Hakim met Bigeev for the first time. According to Safiye Ahsen Böre (1943), it was largely on his and Lütfî Ishaki's initiative that the young Hakim became actively involved in the organization of a first official Muslim society in Finland, the *Charitable Musulman Society of Helsinki* founded in 1915. This association was almost a complete analogue of the Muslim charitable society in Saint Petersburg which existed since 1898; the most active members in the Russian capital were the *imams* Bigeev and Ishaki (Tagirdzhanova 2009: 37–38).

After the independence of Finland in 1917 and adoption of a new law on freedom of religion, Hakim became one of the initiators for the creation of a congregation, *Suomen Muhammetilainen Seurakunta*, in Tatar *Finlandiya Cemaati Islamiyesi*, registered in 1925 (now *Suomen Islam-seurakunta; Finlandiya İslam Cemaati*). He was elected its first president and within two years he combined this post with the tasks of *imam*, which he retained until 1962. Hakim enjoyed great authority in the community and played a leading role in taking decisions. (Figure 2.)

5 On 18–19 November 1931, Bigeev visited the family of Imad Camaletdin in Tampere, as evidenced by the note in the guest book of his daughter Halida (1914–1992). Here the theologian writes about the importance of education, culture and morality and he quotes poems in Tatar and Arabic. We thank her grandson, Okan Daher, the honorary Chairman of the Tatar community of Finland, for giving us a copy of this note.

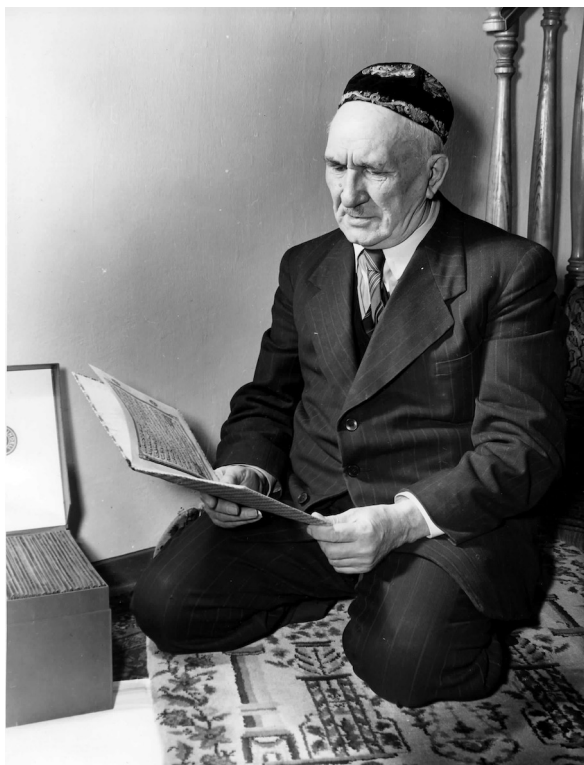


Figure 2 Imam Weli-Ahmed Hakim.
Courtesy of Fazile Nasretidin, private archive.

This organization had largely absorbed the ideas of national and cultural autonomy held by the Tatars and other Turkic Muslims in European Russia and Siberia. It was originally developed by the Jadidists but after the revolution in 1917 it came to life as a larger project. With the strengthening of Bolshevik power in April 1918, however, the national project ceased to exist in Russia. Only the spiritual administration (*diniyā nāzarāte*) remained but it was forbidden to interfere in political, educational and cultural issues.

Bigeev's aforementioned book, *Islam millätlärenä*, had a deep influence on the internal structure of the Muslim society of Finland. Besides describing his position on the general issues of the Islamic religion and his attitude regarding contemporary international political and economic problems, in this book the theologian offers his own vision of the spiritual administration as independent from the state-centralized, national cultural organization of Muslims. He also describes the project of a national fund and the development of national education for Muslims. This book was published at the expense of patrons from Finland through the mediation of Weli-Ahmed Hakim. Aydar Khairutdinov, a Russian biographer of Bigeev, notes that Hakim even wrote a small introduction (Khairutdinov 2006: 9).

In the view of his contemporaries, Hakim was a liberal thinker: "In an interview he compares religions with candles. Just like many candles burn together in the dark night, the religions brighten the same way together in peace without disturbing each other" (Baibulat 2004: 51–52). This world view, developed under the influence of Bigeev and his famous work *Räxmäte ilahiyä burxanları* 'The Proofs of Divine Mercy' and *Insanların 'aqidai ilahiyälärenä ber nazar* 'A view on the beliefs of people in the Deity' (Bigeev 1911c), found wide resonance among Muslims in Russia and also in the Ottoman Empire. In these works, among other things the theologian speaks of maintaining a benevolent attitude towards the followers of all religions and criticizes fanaticism and religious intolerance.

The most complete description of Hakim's stance on Bigeev, as well as his assessment of the degree of influence of this theologian on the Tatars in Finland, is reflected in his speech at the memorial evening on the occasion of the scholar's death, published in 1950 as a separate book called *Ustaz-ı Şehîr Musa Carullah Hazretleri hakkında mülahazalar* 'Notes about the famous mentor Musa Jarullah'.⁶ Hakim called Bigeev "the greatest religious scholar of the Islamic and Turkic world", "the greatest Muslim theologian since the fourteenth century [of the Hijra]" and "our religious mentor" (*dini rāxbārebez*). Briefly retelling Bigeev's biography, he dwelt in particular on the letters of the theologian to the Muslims in Finland, each of which according to him contained instructions and advice on the structure of national and cultural life. Through Hakim, Bigeev addressed the whole community and possibly some of Bigeev's letters were read during or after Friday sermons:

Every time I write letters to you, I imagine like in a film that I see every [Tatar] family of Helsinki and Finland in front of me. For each individually I pray, to each I send my greetings and thanks. To those you would meet on your way, to those you would talk on the phone, to those who would write letters – always pass on my greetings. (Hakim 1950: 13)

In one of the letters, Musa Bigeev sent his congratulations on the occasion of the New Year in the Islamic calendar (*Hijra*) to the whole community, asking the *imam* to expose the meaning of one Arabic verse and pray for him as he prayed for them (Hakim 1950: 14). In a letter written on the eve of the Ramadan fast, Bigeev called on the Muslims in Finland to read a few pages of his work *al-Vashi'a* 'The Reel', in which he commented on the verses of the *Qur'ān* about fasting. At the same time, as a personal spiritual mentor Bigeev gave special tasks to specific members of the community: "Fasting is the religious duty (*fard*) of every Muslim, while for people like Hayretidin Ali, Imad Camal[etdin], Zuhur Tahir and Ismail Arif, the daily feeding of the poor and almsgiving is also a duty" (Hakim 1950: 25). In his book Hakim quoted several letters from India, Iraq, Iran, Egypt and Turkey. In the letters, Bigeev not only shared impressions from his travels but almost every time noted the socio-economic backwardness of Muslim countries and their deviation from the postulates of the *Qur'ān* and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. He called on the Tatars of Finland to especially appreciate the opportunities they had in their new homeland:

I have seen all the good and bad in the Muslim world. Today, your country is the most comfortable, safest and most legal country on earth. Out of respect for your government, more than any other people, always take care to comply with all its laws. Be better than all other nations in reliability, honesty and diligence. (Hakim 1950: 14)

Today, the most powerful colony of the Muslims [in the world] are the Muslims of Finland. (Hakim 1950: 16)

At the same time, Bigeev urged the Tatars in Finland to use these opportunities to preserve and develop their ethnic and religious identity and infrastructure. He exhorted: "Use all of your powers for the organization of Islamic schools which will conduct courses on religion in the free time from Finnish schools" (Hakim 1950: 16).

Hakim also reported that Bigeev was very happy to receive news about the opening of the Turkic school in Helsinki in 1948. He made a number of comments on the organization of the educational process: in his opinion, the students of this school should learn to read the *Qur'ān* in the original Arabic, to know the basic provisions and rituals of Islam, to study the history of Muslim civilization and the Turkic peoples and be able to equally well write and read in Tatar

6 We thank Cingiz Safiulla for giving us a copy of this book.



Figure 3 Tatars at a celebration, Helsinki 1938. Courtesy of Fazile Nasretidin, private archive.

in both Arabic and Latin letters. At the same time, he emphasized the importance of studying general subjects at a regular Finnish school. The Tatar community was, as history shows, clearly guided in the organization of the educational process by these provisions (Figure 3).

In several letters, Bigeev described in detail purely theological issues, such as the definition of the beginning of the Ramadan fast and the importance of Muslim feasts. He commented on verses about retribution (*qasas*) and he talked about justice as a fundamental principle of the teachings of the *Qur'ān*. In one of his last letters, written shortly before his death, Bigeev said that he could leave his collection of books gathered during his exile only to the Tatars in Finland. He expressed the hope that they would open a beautiful library which one day could be replenished with the books he had left behind in Saint Petersburg (Hakim 1950: 14). Unfortunately, the library was never opened and there is no information about the fate of his Saint Petersburg collection.

Aside from his contact with Hakim, Bigeev was in constant correspondence with another activist of the Tatar community, Zinnetullah Ahsen Böre. Born in the village of Aktukovo, Nizhny Novgorod province, Ahsen Böre arrived in Terijoki (now Zelenogorsk) before 1917. There, in parallel with trade activities, he also served as *imam*. In 1916, he successfully passed the exam for the title of *imam* in the Orenburg Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly. Ahsen Böre moved to Tampere in 1920, where he actively participated in the life of the local Tatar Muslim community combining it with entrepreneurship. He was especially interested in the idea of opening a Finnish-Turkic school and regarding the development of the project, he consulted Musa Bigeev. In one of the written answers of the theologian from 1929, published by Battal-Taymas,⁷ Bigeev wrote that Tatar children should receive the same knowledge as Finnish pupils. In case it was impossible to create such a full-fledged private school for Tatars, Bigeev

⁷ We thank Cingiz Safiulla for giving us also a copy of this book.

proposed to organize special weekly classes on Islam, Tatar language and Turkic history in the communities, as well as annual summer courses (Battal-Taymas 1958: 56–61). In 1930 in Tampere, the *Committee for the Opening of a Finnish-Turkic school* was established; Bigeev was listed as the *imam* in official documents (Ahsen Böre 1943: 183).

A four-year primary school was opened in Helsinki in September 1948. Its programme fully corresponded with the state standard for primary education. General subjects were taught in Finnish. Additional ethno-confessional disciplines were conducted in the Tatar language, such as basics of Islam, Arabic and reading of the *Qur'ān*, native language and literature, history of Muslim civilization and Turkic peoples (Belyaev 2017: 182–187).

In other cities where Tatars resided, there was an out-of-school system of teaching the native language and the basics of Islam. It was also applied to Helsinki after the closing of the bilingual school in 1969. Extracurricular teaching continues until today and a summer children's camp is held annually. With the blessing of Bigeev and his theological support, Ahsen Böre carried out another important project. He organized and sponsored work on the preparation of a translation of the *Qur'ān* into Finnish (Baibulat 2004: 128).

A third key person also distributed the ideas of Bigeev in Finland. Habibur-Rahman Shakir (1903–1975) was invited by the community of Tampere to the post of local *imam* on the direct recommendation of Bigeev (Baibulat 2004: 52). While his exact place of birth is uncertain, it is known that unlike the vast majority of Tatars in Finland, he was not originally from the Nizhny Novgorod province. Educated in Bukhara, he moved to Kabul after 1917 and then lived in Peshawar and Bombay in India. In 1947, Shakir moved to Finland where until the end of his life he served as the spiritual mentor of the Tatar community in Tampere.

In addition to his direct duties of prayer, preaching and teaching children, Shakir published several books on the basics of Islam and its history. In addition, he wrote on the Tatar poet Ğabdulla Tuqay and penned a play. In 1949, he launched the publication in Arabic-script Tatar of a monthly national-religious (*dini-milli*) journal called *Islam mäğälläse* 'Islamic Journal', which was distributed not only in Finland but also among the émigré communities in Japan and Turkey, as well as among his personal acquaintances in other regions of the Muslim world. The majority of articles in the journal, written by Shakir, were devoted to the current problems of the religious life in the Tatar community.

Islam mäğälläse also contained extracts from the works of Bigeev, not only on religious subjects but also questions concerning language. For example, in the July 1950 issue, the journal published his article *Lisanimiz mäsäläse* 'The issue of our language', which had first been published in 1912 (Belyaev & Zaripov 2016: 31–32; Musa Efendi 1950). In one of the articles, the author (most likely Shakir himself) referred to Bigeev's books *Ayyām hayāt an-nabī* 'The Days of the Prophet's Life' and *Qawā'id fiqhīya* 'Rules of Muslim Law' and called him our 'deceased mentor' (*mārxüm ustazimiz*) (Abu al-Hadi 1950: 54).

CONCLUSIONS

Imam Lütfi Ishaki gave Musa Jarullah Bigeev the classic epithets of a Sufi mentor in one of his letters to Zinnetullah Ahsen Böre in Tampere: *Veliullah Eşşeyhul mürşid üstad Musa Efendi* – 'friend of God, mentor, tutor, teacher, master Musa' (Ahsen Böre 1945: 35). Bigeev certainly expressed in his works a positive assessment of intellectual Sufism, but he was not a follower of any mystical order (*tarīqa*) and he had his own views on this branch of Muslim knowledge. He did not establish any new brotherhood, school or movement, but he was a leader

of opinion, a religious authority and spiritual mentor for many Tatars during the first half of the twentieth century. This politically turbulent period was especially challenging for the Tatars in Russia, part of whom had to take refuge in countries far from their home villages and towns. Those who remained had to adapt to the new Soviet regime. Bigeev's broad knowledge, travels and continuous interest in many different questions, ranging from religion to education and modernization, puts him in a special position among Tatar intellectuals.

The adaptation to Finnish society and construction of a specific Tatar identity as well as the preservation of Tatar culture and language in Finland reflect the enormous influence of Bigeev on the first generation in the new country, and consequently also on the later development of the Tatar community. Many decisions in the community's ethno-confessional life, from creation of the organization and the education system to problems of religious practice and personal spiritual development were made according to his direct recommendations. Furthermore, his progressive ideas encouraged the Tatars to integrate into majority society, educate their children and follow the general development of the society around them. This process of adaptation and integration in dialogue with Bigeev's ideas and in comparison with other similar ethno-confessional groups in Finland is a field which should be further researched.

Already from the first stage of its development, the Tatar community in Finland was based on the principles of Jadidism and progressive Muslim theology which was clearly and comprehensively explained by Musa Bigeev. Therefore, the study of the Tatar Muslim community in Finland during its formation years is of particular interest. On a global level it is a unique example of the implementation of Tatar Jadidist ideology in practice.

After the passing of the first generation of Tatars in Finland, the memory of Bigeev and other Tatar thinkers has gradually disappeared. The second generation still remembers the names and the mentors' meetings with their parents but they do not perceive them as religious authorities, and they do not know their works and ideas. This is largely due to the global process of secularization in the second half of the twentieth century which has occurred especially in the Nordic countries.

Another important factor in this process of moving away from Jadidism is the fact that the Tatar *imams* in the 1960s and 1970s were replaced by religious figures from Turkey; unfamiliar with the heritage of Tatar Jadidism, they brought with them a different set of values. However, with the revival of the Tatar intellectual heritage in Russia and the re-establishment of community relations with other Tatar communities with the modern generation of progressive *imams* and scholars, a rethinking of Tatar spiritual origins is in progress. These processes are very interesting, but require a separate study.

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