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Mosque Attendance in the Current Religious Practice of Moscow Tatars

Historiography and sources

The Moscow Tatar community, which has existed since the Middle Ages, is one of the oldest and most distinctive ethnic groups of the capital, and the last decades have seen the appearance of a fairly large number of works dealing with its history. It should be noted that the majority of authors address the history of the Moscow Tatars in the context of studies of the city's Muslim community, which is reasonable, since until the beginning of the 1990s this community was basically made up of Tatars [Rozenberg 1987; Sadur 1987; Khairtdinov 2002: 11; Shevchenko, Gavrilo 2006; Safarov 2012: 139]. In turn, the works in this list — which essentially comprise the entire historiography of the subject — are dedicated to the pre-revolutionary or Soviet periods.¹ The present condition of the Tatar community has been given far less attention. Yet it is obvious that there have been substantial changes in the Moscow Tatar community in recent years, and

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¹ The Soviet period in the history of the community has begun to be properly studied only recently. Overall, the basic thematic parameters for the study of the Soviet period of the history of the Moscow Muslim community are being defined, and empirical material, mostly relating to various aspects of the functioning of the Moscow Central Mosque, is being collected and analysed. Studies of the subject mostly concentrate on state policy towards the Muslims of Moscow and the mechanisms by which the community existed in the Soviet context. More recently the tendency has been towards a greater interest in the social history of Muslims in Moscow and their everyday life, and towards the analysis of sources not hitherto used in this field of research, above all narratives.

that these require detailed study.¹ The subject of my research, current practices of mosque attendance among Moscow Tatars, allows us to understand many processes taking place both in the community and in the metropolis at large. Ethno-confessional and ethno-linguistic situation, assimilation, attitudes to immigrants, the transformation of religious practices, public and private religious life — all these subjects are illuminated by such a study. Added to that, the present-day life and experience of the Tatars of Moscow is of significant interest not just in its own right, but in broader terms, since it is in many ways a model for the development of Muslim communities in major cities across Russia.

Germane to such a study are the analysis of the changes in the institutional forms under which the community has existed, the ethno-linguistic situation (also in the context of ethno-confessional processes), and the character of everyday religious practices, all of which will be touched upon here.²

N. A. Goncharova's thesis *The Tatars in Moscow: an Attempt at Historico-Statistical Research*, defended in 2003, is an example of scholarly research on the recent history of the Tatar community in Moscow; a small part of Goncharova's study was devoted to the study of the post-Soviet period of the history of the Tatars of Moscow. D. A. Khalturina's thesis *Moscow Muslims: the Level of their Ethno-Confessional Tolerance (based on Surveys in Mosques)* was also defended in 2003; here, essentially for the first time, sociological tools were used to study the contemporary development of the Muslim community in Moscow, rather than vague evaluation data.³ Certainly G. V. Starovoitova's study of late Soviet Leningrad already adopted sociological methods back in the 1980s, and this was reflected in her monograph [Starovoitova 1987], but so far little use has been made of such methods in studying the Tatar community in

¹ According to the 2010 census, there were at that time 149 043 Tatars resident in Moscow. According to the 2002 census there were 166 083 Tatars in Moscow, and in 1989 there were 157 376. It is noteworthy that the leaders of Moscow Tatar social organisations point out that there is no decrease in the number of Tatars; furthermore, according to their evaluation data, the real number of Tatars is much greater, though they do not give the sources on which this evaluation is based. It is also worth noting here that there is a certain parallel between the activity of 'secular' Tatar organisations (mostly concentrated around the national-cultural autonomy based in the Asadullaev House in the Zamoskvorechye) and the religious communities around the mosques. This parallel began in Moscow as early as the 1920s, when the secular Tatar institutions (the club, the library, the Soviet school, the newspaper editorial office, etc.) were founded.

² The study of processes of assimilation within the Tatar community is obviously also relevant, but this is a subject for a separate investigation.

³ However, Khalturina's material only touches indirectly on the religious life of Moscow Tatars at the beginning of the present century. F. A. Asadullin [Asadullin 2004: 156–238] has studied the processes whereby the Muslim religious structures of Moscow in the 1990s came into being. The distinctive feature of his work is the nature of his sources, such as 'internal' documents and materials of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of European Russia.

Moscow.¹ Overall, the situation regarding contemporary studies of the Moscow Tatars is more or less fully reflected only in the contents of the *Islam in Moscow* encyclopaedia, published in 2008 [*Islam v Moskve* 2008].

It should be noted that the study of the current state of the Tatar community is in its initial stages, and is primarily characterised by the analysis of the formation and evolution of religious structures. There has so far been little study of ethnic (including ethno-demographic) processes as such. There is an acute awareness that many questions concerning sources remain unresolved, for example that of how representative narrative sources are, and the correlation between narrative and documentary sources.²

In the course of my research, I conducted nineteen interviews with Tatars of various ages belonging to the community of the Moscow Central Mosque in 2011–2012. The programme of the interviews assumed an analysis of the following thematic nodes: origin and identification, length and frequency of visits to the mosque, observance of rituals (above all performing *namaz* five times a day), attitude to Russian as the language of preaching (*hötbä*), etc. In addition, using the method of participant observation, I analysed the religious situation in other Moscow mosques (the Historic Mosque, the Memorial Mosque, the Yadryam), where the number of Tatars who attend is insignificant.

The sub-ethnic composition of the Tatar community of Moscow

The current phase in the history of the Tatar community may be dated as beginning in 1987–1990. These were the years in which Tatar language courses were started, the campaign for the return to the Tatar community of its historical national cultural centre, the Asadullaev House in the Zamoskvorechye, got underway, and a religious school was opened at the Moscow Central Mosque [*Islam v Moskve* 2008: 73, 136, 211–12, 254]. Tatar religious and secular events began to take place actively and openly in Moscow, and various social organisations came into being. There were also more profound transformations.

In analysing the sub-ethnic character of the community, it is necessary to point out that the overwhelming majority of Moscow Tatars are Mişärlär (Volga Tatars), with only a slight sprinkling of Kazan and Kasimov Tatars.³

¹ The only attempt at an ethno-sociological study of the modern Moscow Tatar community is reflected in the work of Yu. V. Arutyunyan [Arutyunyan 2007].

² For approaches to the study and analysis of narratives with reference to the study of the Muslim community of Moscow in the Soviet period, see [Safarov 2011].

³ Before the revolution it was the Kasimov Tatars [from Kasimov or Qasim, a small town in Ryazan province, south-east of Moscow. — Eds.] who were the elite of the Moscow Muslim community. The early

The present sub-ethnic composition of the Tatar community of Moscow was formed as a result of processes of migration during the pre-revolutionary and Soviet periods, in which the greatest part was played by the Mişärlär — a sub-ethnos of the Tatars whose ethnogenesis took place mostly on the right bank of the Volga, as far as the right bank of the Oka in the north. The area traditionally inhabited by the Mişärlär includes various regions of the Volga littoral and western foothills of the Urals.¹ The Mişärlär have their own dialect of Tatar, which is in turn divided into ‘ç-dialects’ and ‘ı-dialects’, and they have characteristic features of material and spiritual culture. To a large extent living surrounded by a Russian and Finno-Ugric population, and in close contact with it (unlike the Kazan Tatars, who on the whole lived in a more ethnically homogeneous area) provided the conditions for considerable social mobility among the Mişärlär and their capability of adapting to new socio-cultural conditions. In our opinion, the fact that the Mişärlär lived in a multi-ethnic environment was also responsible for their high degree of religious expression (probably as a demonstration of their distinctiveness and as a defence mechanism against assimilation) in comparison with the Kazan Tatars; this is confirmed by statistical research [Kildeev 2014: 136]. Kazan was by no means a beacon for the Mişärlär in their migrations, falling far behind Moscow in this respect.

When considering the Mişär character of the Moscow Tatar community, it is worth noting that the concept of the Mişär has undergone a complex transformation. It was traditionally an exoethnonym [Mukhamedova 1972]. In Soviet times the Mişär Tatars in Moscow typically defined themselves simultaneously as Tatars, as Muslims (*möselmanlar*), or as natives of a particular settlement in the Gorky (Nizhnii Novgorod) or Penza provinces, or of Mordovia — the regions with which Moscow Tatar families had the most historical connexions [Safarov 2012: 139–40]. Present-day Moscow Tatars, people born in Mişär villages or descended from

involvement of the Kasimov Tatars in capitalist economic relations meant that they needed to have secular education and to be fluent in Russian. Overall, the urbanising process took place much earlier among the Kasimov Tatars than among many other sub-ethnic groups of the Tatar nation, which allows Kasimov to be called a peculiar phenomenon of Tatar civilisation. It was economic interests that made many wealthy Kasimov Tatars spend time in Moscow, and later settle there. As they actively expanded their businesses, they were impelled to move to St Petersburg or Moscow. This process gathered momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century: even though the period of Alexander II's reforms had been succeeded by that of Alexander III's counter-reforms, the number of Tatars from Kasimov in both Moscow and St Petersburg grew rapidly. Although that number of Tatars from Kasimov was notably less than that of other sub-ethnic groups of Tatars living in Moscow, they occupied leading positions in the spiritual and economic life of the Moscow Muslim community, and were instrumental in the growth of trade in the city. In the Soviet period, as a result of repressions, the position of the Kasimov Tatars was largely lost.

¹ Even though the entire population of the Tatar Republic is stereotypically thought to consist of Kazan Tatars, a number of its regions are traditionally inhabited by Mişärlär.

them, still do not identify themselves as Mişärlär, but the concept of the Mişär is nevertheless beginning to penetrate into their milieu. To a large extent this is the result of the active media activity undertaken by the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Nizhnii Novgorod Province, which is influencing some young Tatars in Moscow who are connected with religious institutions (the so-called ‘Mişär project’, intended to demonstrate the particular role played by Mişär Tatars from the Nizhnii Novgorod area in the history and modern development of the Tatar people).

Informants who are young Moscow Tatars today have indicated that talking to their elderly relatives and visiting Tatar villages as children significantly affected their self-awareness as Tatars. Their first studies of the Tatar language and elementary Muslim ritual also usually took place in regions traditionally inhabited by Mişärlär.¹ It is notable that young informants frequently remark that they understand Tatar (i.e. the lexicon of various Mişär dialects) but are unable to sustain a conversation in it. This is evidently a little-studied phenomenon amongst Russian-speaking Tatars who on the one hand are inclined to assimilation, but on the other preserve their Tatar Muslim ethno-confessional identity, though without one important component — the Tatar language.

It is notable that in Soviet times the Tatar language was an important component of the Moscow Tatars’ religious practice. Alongside Arabic, in which the canonical prayer formulas were expressed, Tatar was also the language of worship. Arabo-Tatar canons defined the contents of most of the collective and private prayers and rituals, such as preaching (*hötbä*, *vägaz*) or the invocation of Allah (*doga*). The merging of the Tatar language and religious practice was a logical continuation of the idea that Tatar identity and Muslim religious belief were one and the same, the concept of the ‘Tatar Muslim’.² For older people, all the religious side of life could be adequately and authentically verbalised only in their native Tatar language.³

Nowadays many Russian-speaking Moscow Tatars who profess Islam express their religion publicly in Russian. This is supported by the formation of a special Russian-language Muslim religious literature (for example, the publication of books by the Moscow

¹ On Muslim identity among modern Tatars living in Tatarstan, including young people, see [Musina 2009; Khodzhaeva 2009].

² It is characteristic that the few Moscow Bashkirs (according to the 2010 census, there were 6 609 of them in the capital) are mostly Tatar-speaking, and marriages between Tatars and Bashkirs are not perceived as ethnically mixed. It is also worth considering the mobility and vagueness of the ethnic identity of Tatars and Bashkirs living in Bashkiriä, which remains when they move to Moscow [Makarov 2008: 31–2]. However, a certain surge in Bashkir national self-awareness in Moscow has recently been observed (particularly in cyberspace).

³ This peculiarity was observed when working with elderly informants from among the Moscow Tatars to collect information on Muslim religious life in Soviet Moscow [Safarov 2011: 12].

imam Shamil Alyautdinov).¹ Although many Russian-speaking Tatars are active within the Moscow Tatar community and are trying to create religious and secular projects and compete with the older generation of national leaders, it is hard for the time being to forecast how profoundly the linguistic assimilation of Moscow Tatars will affect the further evolution of the community.

The assimilative processes among Moscow Tatars (linguistic at the very least) are reinforced by changes in the vector of migration. The flow of immigrants to Moscow from Tatar villages (mostly Mişärlär from Nizhnii Novgorod Province) had practically ceased by the beginning of the 1990s. It was this factor of the constant replenishment of the Tatar population of Moscow by the migration of Mişärlär who had preserved their religion and many aspects of their national culture in their traditional homeland which resisted the inevitable processes of assimilation amongst the Tatars of Moscow during the Soviet period. It was Mişär Tatars, who kept up their close links with each other in Moscow, who formed the core of the community at the Moscow Central Mosque. They have provided most of the religious leaders of the Moscow community. The current processes of the economic migration of Tatars from the Volga region and the Urals to Moscow, or of the migration of Tatars from the Central Asian republics to the Moscow area, have little effect on the growth of the numbers of Tatars in the capital.²

The Moscow Central Mosque and its role in the lives of Tatars today

The 'religious renaissance' in the Moscow Tatar community in the 1990s was largely grounded in a solid tradition of the observance of Muslim ritual, which had remained unbroken during the Soviet period. The Moscow Central Mosque had played an important part in the religious life of the Moscow Tatars, fulfilling not only religious but also a wide range of social functions. The mosque was perceived as a place where common prayer took place, the rituals were observed, and it was possible to meet with people from the homeland and hear the Tatar language in public use. All this gave it the significance of a most important gravitational centre for the Tatars, and attendance there was felt to be a manifestation of ethno-confessional identity. Despite the well-known restrictions on religion during the Soviet

¹ The topical subject of the use of Russian in the religious life of Muslims in Russia is being researched by A. Bustanov and M. Kemper [Bustanov, Kemper 2013]. The authors have proposed the hypothesis that there may exist an 'Islamic Russian' sociolect. There remains the important question of whether this sociolect will evolve into a discrete socio-linguistic system, or whether it is a sort of denominational slang in the making.

² Despite living in Central Asia and speaking the 'official' Turkic languages, by the late Soviet period the local Tatars were for the most part Russian-speaking. Now, when they move to various parts of Russia, including Moscow, they often become actively involved in Muslim community life, but continue to speak Russian.

period, there were many young and middle-aged people among the community of the Moscow Central Mosque (who attended mostly on major festivals).

By and large, this model of perceiving the mosque persisted into the 1990s. At the same time, the growth of infrastructure around the Central Mosque in the post-Soviet period (ranging from the organisation of religious education to the sale of halal foodstuffs) had a significant effect in changing the institutional forms of the Moscow Tatars' religious life. The practice of regular attendance at the mosque became more and more widespread during the 1990s both among Russian-speaking Moscow Tatars and among Tatars who did not observe all the prescribed ordinances of Islam but who regarded participation in the common prayers as an important indicator of their ethno-confessional identity. All this led to a significant drop in the average age of the mosque community.

At the same time, even though the absolute number of young Tatars in the Moscow Central Mosque community (including those attending daily and Friday prayers) increased, as a proportion of the community the Tatars gradually gave way to other nationalities. Two stages may be identified in the change in the ethnic make-up of the Moscow Central Mosque:

- 1) mid-1990s: an increase in the number of people born in the republics of the North Caucasus;
- 2) early 2000s: an increase in the number of people who were economic migrants from Central Asia, primarily from Uzbekistan and Kirgizia.

The change in the ethnic composition of the community had a significant effect on the internal life of the mosque. For example, whereas the language of *hötbä* in the mosque had been Tatar until the mid-nineties, thereafter it was read in both Tatar and Russian. In all, there was a definite transformation in the role played by the Moscow Central Mosque in the contemporary religious practice of the Moscow Tatars.

Within the present composition, of the community it is possible to identify a particular group of Tatars consisting of elderly men, most of whom have been attending the mosque since Soviet times. There are about twenty-five or thirty of them in all. They enjoy a status of honour within the mosque: for example, even though the mosque is extremely overcrowded on Fridays and festivals, these elderly men are always assured of a place to pray. In the past some of them were members of the administration of the mosque ('committees of twenty',¹ 'inspection commissions'), but now their influence on its

¹ In Soviet times every place of worship had to have a committee of twenty members of the community who were responsible for the upkeep of the buildings and other practical matters [Transl.].

internal life is minimal. Some of them are regarded as authorities on religious ritual and read the prayers of commemoration when requested to do so by Tatars who attend the mosque.

As is known, the tradition of dividing Soviet Islam into 'official' and 'unofficial', which goes back to the work of the well-known scholar Aleksandr Bennigsen (1913–1988), has been criticised in recent work on the subject [Bobrovnikov 2007: 10–11]. The interview materials bear witness that the everyday life of Muslims in Moscow — now as in Soviet times — is characterised by contact with the imams of the Moscow Central Mosque and with religious figures such as the elderly authorities on ritual. It is obvious that there is some cross-over between 'official' and 'unofficial' Islam in present-day Moscow, as there was under Soviet conditions, and that the two complement each other and are not developing in parallel. Overall, the legitimacy of Tatar religious figures has always been determined by their knowledge of ritual, their origins (the homeland factor), their personal qualities, etc., but by no means by their 'official' status. At the same time, a certain hierarchical distinction is observed, and reflected in the way that the clergy of the mosque are addressed as *hazrat* (the traditional respectful form of address to an imam), and the elderly authorities on ritual as *abzıy* ('uncle' in Tatar).¹

In recent years there has been a change of generation among the authorities on ritual. The elderly members of the community of the Moscow Central Mosque, who used to have a real influence on the organisation and maintenance of Muslim burial and commemorative ritual, are being replaced by young Tatars, from the villages as a rule, who speak Tatar and have had a special religious education. Most of them are connected with the structures of the mosque and 'authorised' to conduct the rituals. This is particularly noticeable at the Danilovskoe and Kuzminki Muslim cemeteries, where the religious life is organised in the most 'exemplary' manner and fully connected with the mosque. The young authorities on ritual do not lead the common prayer in the mosques, but concentrate on the organisation of funerals and prayers of commemoration, but their status is closer to that of the mosque clergy than is that of the elderly keepers of the tradition.

The elderly Tatar members of the community likewise conduct religious rituals less and less often in the Moscow Central Mosque itself. It is the imams that most people who come want to see, so that they will read suras of the Koran to commemorate their deceased relations, or else to perform a ritual that is becoming more and more widespread in the Moscow Muslim community, a sort of blessing of

¹ The believers also refer to them as *babaylar* ('grandfathers', 'old men'), but they do not address them as such.

water by the imam for sick or old people or children (by reading the Koran over the vessel containing the water). However, as we shall see below, for various reasons religious practices unconnected with the mosque and limited to the family circle are also gathering strength among the Tatars of Moscow.

Among the regular members of the community there are about thirty or forty middle-aged and elderly women who also attend the Moscow Central Mosque for Friday prayers and festivals. Many of them are also authorities on ritual.¹ Overall, the phenomenon of the religious activity of Tatar women, which manifested itself in the Soviet period, is indirectly linked to the tradition that girls were taught by the imams' wives in pre-revolutionary Tatar communities. This entire issue deserves to be studied in detail. Particularly interesting is the question of the sources of female religious leaders' legitimisation, because in the interviews there are mentions of occasions when many of the basic Muslim rituals were performed by women, including *isem kuşu* ('naming').² According to our informants' evidence, the only rituals that women in Moscow did not perform were *cenaza namaz* (the burial prayers) and *nikax* (the marriage service). In Soviet times, elderly women began to be actively involved in both exclusively female and mixed *meclisler* (religious gatherings with a meal) which included readings of suras of the Koran. The main reasons for this were evidently the insufficient numbers of male authorities on ritual due to repressions and the consequences of the Second World War, and the improved status of women among Muslims (for example, active attendance at the mosque by women in the Soviet period).³ Nowadays women at the Moscow Central Mosque (usually in the part set aside for women's prayers) and in the community as a whole still conduct commemorative rituals, but their particular socio-cultural significance, in comparison with Soviet times, is somewhat

¹ Yu. N. Guseva, the well-known historian of Islam, calls them 'female mullahs' [Guseva 2012]. This description does not seem entirely correct to us. An analysis of the interviews which we have conducted both in Moscow and in the traditional Tatar homelands (for example, among Kasimov Tatars and Mişärlär living in eastern and north-eastern parts of Ryazan Province) has shown that even when there is a total absence of male religious leaders, female religious authorities are not accepted by the believers as 'imams' or 'mullahs' (even though the notion of a 'clergy' is somewhat artificial in terms of Muslim religious life). In the Tatar milieu these women were called *abıstay*, which originally meant an imam's wife or female relative. Later they came to be called more simply *apa* (the traditional form of address to an older woman among the Tatars). The idea of the *abıstay* acquired a very wide meaning, and lost the family connexion with the imam. Respected among the Muslims and possessing a certain charisma, they essentially 'deputised' for male religious figures.

² We have recorded an occasion when a Tatar woman in Moscow performed the sacred rite of reading the prayer *namaz-istiğare* (in which a person asks for guidance from Allah when faced with a problem which has no obvious solution) at the request of believers. However, we are only aware of such cases taking place during the Second World War.

³ In pre-revolutionary Moscow women practically did not visit the Danilovskoe Muslim Cemetery, though they were not forbidden to do so. The tradition of women's visiting the cemetery only began in the 1920s, in the time of Abdulla Shamsutdinov (1878–1937), imam-hatib of the mosque on the Bolshaya Tatarskaya.

lower, primarily as a result of the appearance of young male religious experts.

The young and middle-aged Tatars who attend the Moscow Central Mosque are largely connected with various Muslim educational and social institutions active in Moscow (the *mādrāsä*, the Islamic Institute, humanitarian funds).¹ Some of them work nearby, in the Mufti's office on Vypolzov pereulok, while others come specially for the prayers. It is notable that there are no particular contacts between elderly and younger (largely Russian-speaking) members of the community. The young Tatars usually socialise within their own small circles of friends, or come to the mosque only to pray.

Other mosques

The opening of new mosques in Moscow in the 1990s did not lead to many Tatars transferring their allegiance to these. Indeed, while the perceptions of the new mosques in the Moscow Muslim milieu varied at the time of their opening and the first years of their operation, now they are similar in the composition of their communities, which mostly consist of people from the North Caucasian parts of the Russian Federation, and in particular from the republics of Central Asia. Practically none of the representatives of the core Tatar community, least of all the elderly Tatars from the Moscow Central Mosque, joined the new mosques' communities.

At the Historic Mosque, re-opened in 1993, situated in the former Tatar Suburb in the Zamoskvorechye, the overwhelming majority of the community were from the start people from the North Caucasus. Even though it is topographically very close to the cultural centre of the Moscow Tatar community, the Asadullaev House, there are hardly any Tatars in the community of Moscow's oldest mosque.²

The Memorial Mosque on Poklonnaya Gora, opened in 1997, is known among the Muslims of Moscow principally for the personality and preaching of its imam-hatib, Shamil Alyautdinov (born 1972), an ethnic Tatar who since the very beginning of the mosque's operation has preached exclusively in Russian.³ The community at

¹ On the whole, both the leadership of the Moscow Central Mosque itself and of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of European Russia has got younger in recent years (D. Mukhetdinov, I. Alyautdinov and others). Around these young religious leaders a group of activists (researchers, journalists) has formed, including Russian-speaking Tatars who take part in various events and humanitarian projects.

² Both in the 1990s, when the Historic Mosque kept changing jurisdiction, and in the 2000s, when it was stable in its allegiance to the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of European Russia, there were Tatar imams. Recently the ethnic make-up of the community has slightly changed, the North Caucasian dominance waning, and with a greater proportion of people from Central Asia.

³ It is notable that Alyautdinov's brother, Ildar Alyautdinov (born 1978), who has become imam-hatib at the Moscow Central Mosque, preserves the balance of interests within the community, which is ethnically diverse, and the Tatar-speaking minority, and preaches in both Tatar and Russian. This results

this mosque is mostly young and belongs to various ethnic groups, with Tatars in a minority.

The Yadryam Mosque at Otradnoe in north-east Moscow, opened in 1997, originally positioned itself as a ‘Tatar’ and even ‘Mişār’ mosque. This had a lot to do with the personality of the entrepreneur Rashit Bayazitov (born 1960), who sponsored its construction; he came from Nizhnii Novgorod Province, and in the 1990s aspired to the leadership of various Tatar Muslim structures. The imams and clergy of the mosque are still Tatars today. However, while it retains many features typical of the religious practice of Mişār Tatars, most of the people who go there are from the North Caucasus or Central Asia.¹

As a result, it is the Moscow Central Mosque that is perceived as the most ‘Tatar’ of the Muslim structures in the city. Although the overall number of Tatars at the Moscow Central Mosque has declined, the Tatar factor still plays an important part in the Muslim life of Moscow.

Most of the Muslim structures and mosques in Moscow come under the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of European Russia (DUMER), headed by Mufti Ravil Gainutdin. Its general policy regarding the functioning of mosques takes account of the ethno-demographic situation in Moscow (the preponderance of immigrants among the congregations and the necessity of forging good contacts with them) *while at the same time retaining and strengthening the position of the Tatars as imams and leaders of the communities*. In the policy speeches of the leaders of the Spiritual Administration, the role of the mosques in socialising immigrants is particularly stressed. However, the balance between faithfulness to the ‘Tatar tradition’ and a policy oriented towards immigrant worshippers has not always been successfully maintained.

The most difficult of recent years for Ravil Gainutdin’s organisation was 2011, when, as part of its plan for global reconstruction and building new religious buildings in the Vypolzov pereulok, DUMER initiated the demolition of the building of the Moscow Central Mosque, which had been built in 1904 at the expense of the prominent Tatar philanthropist Salikh Erzín (1833–1911). This event received a very varied reception on the part of the Moscow Tatars. While there was no doubt in the Tatar milieu that a new mosque needed to be built, the demolition of a mosque that had remained open in Soviet times was perceived by many Moscow Tatars as tantamount to the

from the particular status of the Moscow Central Mosque. However, the Alyautdinov brothers belong to the ‘new type’ of Moscow religious leader, oriented towards interaction with the universal multi-ethnic composition of the communities of the mosque and young Russian-speaking Tatars.

¹ Beside the Sunni Yadryam Mosque is the Shia Inam Mosque, with an Azeri congregation.

elision of the Tatar element in the Muslim community of the capital. And although the congregation in the temporary prayer room which is functioning until the new building of the Moscow Central Mosque is ready has more or less the same ethnic and demographic composition, the demolition of the old building has been a far from painless event in the religious life of Moscow Muslims.

It was typical that Ravil Gainutdin's historic rival, the Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia (TsDUM), headed by Mufti Talgat Talzhuddinov, should not only have come out in opposition to the demolition of the mosque, but also in defence of the religious interests of the Moscow Tatar Muslims. On the same plane, TsDUM also developed parallel religious structures in Moscow, which were largely positioned as 'Tatar'. However, in Moscow only the Yadryam Mosque in Otradnoe comes under the jurisdiction of TsDUM, so that there has been no real growth in the influence of the Ufa Spiritual Administration among Muslims in Moscow.¹

In general the reduced number of Tatars in the community of the Moscow Central Mosque is usually explained by the overcrowding of the building (both the old one and the present temporary one) at prayer times. However, there is probably also a 'mental', 'value' factor at work. The fact that most of the Tatars are urbanised, Russian-speaking, and firmly incorporated into Moscow life radically distinguishes them from the 'new' members of the mosque community who have come from traditionally Muslim regions and countries with a rural way of life. The Moscow Tatars, who traditionally perceived the mosque as their own ethno-confessional centre, are extremely unaccustomed to the present multi-ethnic character of the Moscow Central Mosque, and to the lack of social contacts between 'old' and 'new' worshippers — typical features of the religious life of the modern metropolis. Besides, many Moscow Tatars, for lack of religious knowledge, do not often visit the actual prayer hall, and are content to come and see the imam for the performance of rituals (above all those for the commemoration of the dead). In these conditions their contacts with the 'new' members of the community remain minimal.

For this reason, *meclisler* at home, so typical of the Moscow Tatars in Soviet times [Safarov 2012: 142–3], are acquiring an ever greater

¹ Besides this the influence of the Mufti of Ufa on the life of the Yadryan Mosque is limited, so that it was necessary to create additional religious structures in order to represent the interests of TsDUM in Moscow, both in the 1990s and at present. It is notable that the deputy chairman of TsDUM and the creator of the 'Moscow Muftiate', Albir Krganov, tried in 2011–2012 to appeal to the Tatars as his constituency, noting the need to defend their religious interests in mosques where immigrants are now in the majority. In this way Krganov and TsDUM tried to use the Tatar factor in their activities. However, at the end of 2012 Krganov, who had actively promoted his policies in the media, was replaced at the head of TsDUM by T. Tadzhuiddin.

significance in religious practice. Frequently it is the *meclisler*, where relatives and acquaintances meet, that become an important means of expressing ethno-confessional identity and for many Moscow Tatars are replacing mosque attendance.¹ Whereas in Soviet times, under conditions of state atheism, one of the reasons for holding *meclisler* was that they were private in the sense of safe from intrusion by the authorities, now it is rather a question of restricting the religious event to a small circle of close friends.

In this, in my opinion, we see the expression of a typical norm of the Tatar community in Moscow: while modern Islam is public and socially active, some of the Tatar Muslims are doing their best to keep their religious life private and to preserve their accustomed ethno-confessional elements, being unable to find a place for themselves in the changing religious life of the metropolis. It is typical that, like many other rituals connected with funerals and commemorations, the order for celebrating *meclisler* is strictly observed, particularly amongst the Mişärlär. They also preserve the tradition of visiting the ceremonies with the obligatory recitation of commemorative prayers.²

In this way, by analysing the contemporary religious practices of the Moscow Tatars, it is possible to identify a definite tendency towards localising these in the family circle, and a diminution in the role of the public forms of religious life traditionally centred on the mosque. Evidently an alternative strategy would be for the Moscow Tatars to adapt to the changed demographic and ethno-confessional conditions of life in the metropolis and to the multi-ethnic character of the mosque, but so far there is little sign that this strategy has any popularity in the community.

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¹ The transformation of Muslim rituals among modern Tatars living in different regions of the Russian Federation, has been studied in detail by Raufa Urazmanova, an ethnographer from Kazan [Urazmanova 2009].

² The tradition of indicating the birthplace of the deceased upon monuments is gradually disappearing amongst Moscow Tatars. (It was formerly the custom to indicate the name of the village, and Tatar placenames could be used as well as the official ones.) Until the beginning of the 1990s this was a universal custom in the Muslim cemeteries of Moscow [Safarov 2008: 68]. Evidently the disappearance of this practice marks the final urbanisation of the Moscow Tatars and the Mişär immigrants. It is worth noting that the Muslim cemeteries were traditionally regarded as sacred places by the Moscow Tatars. Thus those Moscow Tatars who came from the village of Ust-Inza (in Penza Province) commonly visited their relatives' graves immediately after a wedding, a custom brought with them from their homeland and probably linked to an ancient Turkic tradition of admitting a new person into the family. Nowadays Moscow Tatars are more inclined to see visits to the cemetery in the context of the universal Muslim traditions of commemorative rituals.

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