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Islam in the Far North of Europe: The Tatars of Finland

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Project Presentation
LIISAMAIJA JURVALA

'An old Muslim minority in Finland'; 'an officially acknowledged religious community since 1925*...'; 'Secularization or still active religious worship...'. Such statements about the Tatars of Finland caught my attention some years ago. The Tatars are an old ethnic Turkic Islamic national minority consisting of about 850 people, hardly known either in Finland or the rest of Europe.

The ISIM Newsletter would like to urge researchers to introduce their projects in this section. Introducing new research in the field of Islamic studies can serve to stimulate interest as well as to strengthen networks amongst researchers.

Islam in the Far North of Europe: The Tatars of Finland

I have been writing a dissertation on the contemporary religious worship of the Tatars in Finland since February 1999, specifically concerning such matters as the importance of Islam to the Tatars in ordinary everyday life, their understanding of essential Islamic concepts, norms, values, moral conception and their contacts abroad. From August to October 1999, I conducted research in Finland: establishing contact with the Tatars, making inquiries, interviewing the imam Ahmet Naim Atasever, and participating as an observer in Friday prayer at the community centre in Helsinki.

Framework of the dissertation
I intend to focus on the following questions: What is the role played by the five pillars, i.e. the creed, prayer, the alms tax, the fast in the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca? What does the celebration of religious festivals mean to a Tatar? Is religiosity visible in everyday life and behaviour? Who transfers religious knowledge (imams, the oldest members of families, influential families or other actors) and to whom?
The contemporary religious worship of the Tatars in Finland is seemingly of no interest in scientific discussions and publications. It is commonly assumed that the Tatars are a homogeneous group in view of their religion, i.e. Sunnites and secularized Muslims. Within this

project my aim is also to analyse more carefully the far too general and loose characterization of the Islam practised by the Tatars in Finland as Euro-Islam and to use a more precise definition for the term Euro-Islam in this connection. ◆

Note
* The second country in Europe to officially acknowledge the rights of a Muslim community was Belgium in 1974.

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