

Muslim Minorities

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Muslim Tatar Minorities in the Baltic Sea Region

Edited by

**Ingvar Svanberg
David Westerlund**



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PART 1

Early Settlements



Lithuania

Egdūnas Račius and Tamara Bairašauskaitė

In the fourteenth century, a diaspora of Tatars began to take shape on the territory of what was then the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It consisted of Turkic-speaking Kipchak immigrants from the Golden Horde (later the Great Horde and the khanates of Kazan and Crimea). They were driven to the grand duchy by political upheavals that had engulfed the former Mongol empire founded by Chingiz Khan, intense fighting for power and the search for allies. The formation of the diaspora and its development, especially the beginning of this process, are shrouded in legend, although more in-depth research allows us to discern periods of Tatar immigration and settlement in the Grand Duchy. Tatars did not leave any visible traces even when they took part in the military expedition of Gediminas (1275–1341), the Grand Duke of Lithuania, against the crusaders (Batūra 1975: 125–147, 156–168).

It is believed that Tatars were attracted to the grand duchy first of all through the Eastern politics of Grand Duke Vytautas (1350–1430); military support was given by him to Togtamysh Khan (died 1405) of the White Horde and his progeny, who were attempting to regain the lost throne. According to an account written by the chronicler Janusz Długosz 80 years after the purported events, Vytautas should have brought back with him Tatars and another ethno-confessional group, Karaims, during his military expeditions to the Don Steppes and Crimea in 1397 or 1398. In any case, the arrival of Tatars in the grand duchy and the formation of their settlements, first of all next to the main centres in the state, namely, Vilnius, Grodno, Kreva, Lida, Novgorodek and Trakai (Kryczyński 1938; Sobczak 1984: 20–21), is associated with the name of Vytautas. Such arrangement of settlements allowed the Lithuanian ruler to have Tatars at hand wherever he was at the moment.

It was these colonies that made up the core of the Tatar settlements in Lithuania. With time, their net would grow or shrink, depending upon economical, political and social factors. Toponyms with Kipchak elements still remind us where the first Tatar settlements were located. Research conducted by the Polish Orientalist scholar Henryk Jankowski shows that of the 26 places with names with Turkic roots found by him, 18 are around Vilnius and Trakai, and that is indeed there where the early Tatar settlements are mentioned in historical sources (Jankowski 2001: 189–200; Borawski et al. 1991: 59–135). In the sixteenth century, the net of settlements expanded to the

territory of contemporary Belarus. Immigrants from the Great Horde and the khanates of Kazan and Crimea would settle next in Ashmiany, Lida, Minsk and Slonim. It must have been then that Tatar prisoners of war, taken captive during military encounters with armies of khans, settled there. Such prisoners would often be bought out of captivity by their relatives already residing in Lithuania, although the social status of former prisoners of war is not known.

Some Tatar settlements were established on the private lands of the Lithuanian nobility, for instance, in the duchies of Kletsk, Nesvizh and Biržai, all of which belonged to the noble Radvilos family (Borawski 1991a: 33–49; Sobczak 2000: 190–204; Karvelis 2004: 41–43). By the seventeenth century, Tatar immigration died out, and due to wars with the Duchy of Moscow and the Kingdom of Sweden, the net of their settlements thinned. At the end of that century, the geography of Tatar settlements changed. King John II Casimir Vasa allocated several villages for Tatars in Alytus District, and King Jan Sobieski allowed Tatars to settle in the royal districts of Brasta, Grodno and Kobrin (Sobczak 1991: 70–90). Over time, some of the Tatars moved to towns where as a rule they formed separate colonies or lived on certain streets called “Tatar ends”. Such colonies or streets were present in Vilnius (in the suburb of Lukiškės), Kaunas, Novgorodek, Slonim and elsewhere. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with more and more Tatars moving to towns, smaller Tatar settlements disappeared. In the territory of contemporary Lithuania, there are several remaining Tatar settlements believed to have been formed over a long period of time between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Those are the villages of Keturiasdešimt totorių and Nemėžis in the vicinity of Vilnius and the village of Raižiai in Alytus District.

Tatar Muslims in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Tatars occupied different positions in the society of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there existed an elite stratum, composed of families of Tatars who used the titles of ulan, seit, murza and duke, brought over from the Golden Horde. The exceptionality of their position is attested to by the fact that members of such families as a rule led the Tatar flags (military units) and headed the Tatar community. Gradually, this stratum merged with the group of Tatar servicemen, and the titles that were carried along turned into parts of family names (for instance, Murza Tuhan Baranovskis, Ulan Maliuszicki, Seit Tupalski), while the title of duke no longer indicated belonging to the nobility of the Horde. In fact, it was also used by Tatars who had personally earned it (Dumin 1989: 7–49).

However, the social position of Tatars was first of all defined by their relation to the ruler and the land (called *beneficija*). Some of the Tatars, in return for the households provided, had to provide an equipped soldier, complete with horse, and reported only directly to the grand duke. Personal military service was also provided by Tatars-Cosacks, who owned medium-sized plots of land. Additionally, they served as couriers, postmen, guardsmen, road-workers, bridge-builders and the like. Besides these, there were "ordinary" Tatars: servicemen in the households of the Lithuanian nobility, peasants, artisans, carriers and gardeners (Zakrzewski 2002: 125–126). In due course, the former nobility of the Horde, as well as the descendants of the military elite and soldiers, merged into these social groups.

The integration of Tatars into the society of the grand duchy went along two distinct paths: those Tatars who had converted to Christianity soon assimilated. Their social status must have depended to a great deal on the position they had held in the Golden Horde, because in the grand duchy, there emerged many noble families with Tatar roots (Borawski and Sienkiewicz 1998: 87–114). On the other hand, followers of Islam made a separate community which was awarded certain privileges, while at the same time certain restrictions were placed upon them.

There is much discussion about the place of the Muslim Tatars in the social structure of the grand duchy. The sixteenth century codex of feudal rights, the Third Lithuanian Statute (promulgated in 1588), described Tatar rights separately from the rights of Christians. The statute made a distinction between the group of noble Tatars, such as dukes, murzas and ulans, who could use the privileges of the noblemen, and free men. Another article of the codex distinguished those Tatars who did military service and could use privileges of the nobility, but there were restrictions imposed upon them in the judicial process. The statute did not bestow any special rights upon, or assign duties to, the rest of Tatars, though Tatars living in the cities had to pay a poll-tax (Wisner 2001: 80). Despite the favourable social environment and legal status, Muslim Tatars in the Grand Duchy had no political rights and could not be members of local councils of the noblemen, nor could they serve in local municipalities or courts. In essence, their main task was to defend the ruler and the state from enemies. Therefore, they were a specific ethno-social group occupying a peculiar place in society and, because of their non-Christian faith, had not merged with any other social group (Sobczak 1986: 467–480).

Lithuanian Tatars in the Russian Empire

After the third division of the Polish-Lithuanian state in 1795, almost the entire diaspora of the Lithuanian Tatars found themselves within the borders of the Russian Empire. The imperial government distinguished the Tatars, very much

like Karaims, Jews and Roma, as non-Christians. However, it recognised the Tatar right to immovable property, preserved their former freedoms and did not restrict their religious practices.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Tatars – making use of the imperial laws requiring the privileged social strata of the newly acquired lands to prove their noble rank – approached the institutions of representatives of regional nobility seeking recognition of their nobility status. Top governmental institutions, after specifically considering the Tatar issue, came to the conclusion that they could pursue recognition of their nobility status because, due to their social situation, they met the criteria for the Russian nobility. The imperial order of 6 March 1819 commissioned a compilation of a separate list of the Lithuanian Tatar nobility. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, in the Provinces (*guberniya*) of Grodno, Minsk and Vilnius alone, the nobility status of 237 Tatar family lines (or 2,325 direct male descendents of the lines) was recognised. Tatars once again had to prove their nobility status when on 27 March 1840 an order “On the rights to nobility status of Greeks and Mohammedans living in Russia” was promulgated. Not all families of Tatars who had secured their nobility rank in the beginning of the nineteenth century were successful in proving their nobility in the second round. As a rule, it was only those who had managed to strengthen their social status after having become subjects of the Russian Empire: land-owners, military officers and civil servants (Bairašauskaitė 1996: 46–71).

Also in the nineteenth century, coats of arms of Tatar families were finalised. Tatars created these attributes of nobility with inspiration from different sources. Some of them pictured *tamgas*, ancestral tribal-familial signs, which until the end of the eighteenth century had been used by Tatars in their official stamps, and also symbols connected to family traditions. Other coats of arms were taken from old Polish lists of coats of arms and especially popular ones were those that pictured an arrow, a sword, a crescent, or a star. Some 60 Tatar families attempted to register their old titles of duke and murza. However, the Russian Imperial Governing Senate’s Department of Heraldry did not recognise these titles of Tatar families (Dumin 1999). The recognised nobility status opened the way for Tatars to the civil service as well as service in the Russian military. Owners of estates with serfs had the right to take part in the nobility’s self-governing. Tatar names can be seen in documents of local governing bodies of the nobility of the nineteenth century. They served in various institutions of governorates and districts, in courts, the police force, custom and post offices, and worked with the telegraph system and railways.

The imperial government made use of Tatar military skills and, out of the advance guard regiments of the former grand duchy, formed in 1797 the

Lithuanian Tatar regiment. In 1803, out of it, separate Lithuanian cavalry and Tatar cavalry (since 1807, Tatar ulans) regiments were formed. In 1819, both regiments were assigned to the separate Lithuanian corps, which, however, was dissolved in 1833. Since then, Tatars served in the Russian imperial military as professional soldiers, graduates from special military academies. Until the First World War, 20 generals, descendants of Lithuanian Tatars, had served in the Russian military (Bairišauskaitė 1996: 84–121).

The Twentieth Century

In the beginning of the twentieth century, amidst the First World War, the Russian Empire collapsed, and in the territories of its former western governorates new young independent states emerged. This led to a break-up of the Tatar diaspora: their historic settlements and inhabitants found themselves in the territories of contemporary Belarus, Poland and Lithuania. According to the 1922 census, only 961 Lithuanian Tatars, mostly farmers, artisans, petty civil servants and military officers, remained in the territory of the newly formed Republic of Lithuania. They were concentrated in three Muslim parishes: Kaunas, Raižiai (in Butrimonys County of Alytus District), and Vinkšnupiai (in Bartninkai County of Vilkaviškis District). Some 5,000 Tatars had become residents (and ultimately citizens) of the Republic of Poland, with another several thousand in Soviet Byelorussia.

The main concerns for the Lithuanian Tatars in Lithuania at that time were the revival of the community, repair of the surviving mosques, registration of congregations and appointment of imams. In 1923, a secular organisation, Kauno totorių draugija (Kaunas Tatar Society), was established. It was planning to engage in cultural and educational activities, address social welfare issues and govern parish property. Its plans also included establishing a Tatar school, a bookshop and a library; however, these plans remained unrealised. On the other hand, the Tatar Society managed to organise the building of a new brick mosque in Kaunas, which began in 1930. In 1936, the society was renamed Kauno musulmonų draugija (Kaunas Muslim Society). Its main aim was to unite Lithuania's Muslim congregations and establish a Muftiate similar to the one established by Tatars in Poland; however, the society failed to do either (Bairišauskaitė 1992: 98–114).

In the interwar period, the main centre of the revival and cultural, educational and religious activities of the Lithuanian Tatar diaspora was Vilnius, then part of the Polish state. It was there where the Tatar intelligentsia, who played a major role in the revival of the Tatar community, was concentrated.

As the result of the efforts of several Tatar families, Tatar gatherings took place in Vilnius every year; more prosperous Tatars sought to buy back former Tatar estates. In 1925, a Tatar congress took place in Vilnius. It founded a Muslim religious union of Poland, a new religious-administrative institution – the Muftiate, and elected the first and, as it later turned out, the only mufti of the interwar period, Dr Jakób Szynekiewicz (1884–1966) (Miśkiewicz 1986). Throughout that period, these organs took care of the religious matters of the Polish Muslim community, education of imams, instruction in religion for Muslim children, and engaged in publishing and the promotion of relations with the Muslim world.

During the same congress, a separate secular organisation, Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Cultural and Educational Union of Polish Tatars), was established. Its aim was to unite the ethnic Tatar community by supporting the cultural, economic, social and professional interests of its members. Chapters of this union functioned in the provinces, where amateur art groups were set up. In 1939, Tatar women founded their own organisation. In Vilnius, a Tatar youth circle started operating in 1934. In 1929, the Tatar museum and archive were founded in Vilnius. Between 1934 and 1939, Tatars published their own journal, *Życie Tatarskie* (Tatar Life). The most notable community figures were the brothers Leon (1887–1939) and Olgierd (1884–1942) Kryczyński. In the beginning of the twentieth century, while studying in Saint Petersburg, they headed the circle of Polish Muslim students, which was interested in the history, religion, customs and material heritage of the Tatars. It was Leon Kryczyński, who – by then in Vilnius – initiated serious research into the history, religion and culture of Lithuanian Tatars; the results were published in three separate issues of the *Rocznik Tatarski* (Tatar Yearbook) between 1932 and 1938 (Miśkiewicz 1990).

With the start of the Second World War, activities of Tatar organisations in both countries (Poland and Lithuania) froze, and by the time it ended they ceased completely. After the war, many of the Tatar families, along with the Polish repatriates, resettled in northern and northwestern Poland (Miśkiewicz 1993). Some of the Tatars, particularly the intelligentsia, migrated to the U.K., the U.S.A., Turkey and other countries.

The Contemporary Situation

Though, as indicated above, Muslims have been an integral part of Lithuanian society since at least the fourteenth century, the newly independent post-communist Lithuania has witnessed a (re)appearance of Islam on its soil, where

the revived indigenous Tatar Muslim community is gradually being supplemented by immigrant Muslims and even more so by a steadily growing group of Lithuanian converts and their progeny. The 2011 official census found 2,727 residents of Lithuania to be specifically Sunni Muslims (Department 2013: 14), or 0.1 per cent of the total population of three million. In the 2001 census that number stood at 2,860 (Department 2002: 204–205) and thus had decreased in a decade by some 5 per cent. Of 2,727 Sunni Muslims in 2011, 1,441 identified themselves as ethnic Tatars (Department 2013: 14), or 52.8 per cent of all Sunni Muslims and just 51.6 per cent of all 2,793 ethnic Tatars (Department 2013: 7), while 374 identified themselves as ethnic Lithuanians (Department 2013: 14). In the previous (2001) census, there were 1,679 ethnic Muslim Tatars (or 58.7 per cent of all Sunni Muslims and 51.9 per cent of all 3,235 ethnic Tatars) and 185 Lithuanians (Department 2002: 204–205). As the total number of Lithuania's residents who identified themselves as ethnic Tatars in 2001 stood at 3,235 and in 2011 at 2,793, there was a significant 13.7 per cent decrease in a decade.

Although many Lithuanian Tatars took it for granted in the early years of independence that all Lithuanian Tatars are by default Muslims, and this was more or less true until the Second World War, recent censuses figures suggest that is no longer the case – just a little over 50 per cent of the ethnic Tatars identified themselves as Muslims. The current mufti, Romas Jakubauskas, in an interview in September 2011 also expressed the opinion that amongst the Lithuanian Tatars only half can be regarded as Muslim, the rest being agnostic or altogether atheist.¹ Consequently, the Lithuanian Tatars have a double, although overlapping, internal structure in the form of ethnic and faith-based organisations.

As an ethnic community, it consists of a number of regionally-based (chiefly in Kaunas, Alytus and Vilnius Districts and the Vilnius region) organisations, formally called *Totorių bendruomenės* (Tatar communities), most of which were established in the early 1990s. The umbrella organisation for these communities was supposed to be Lietuvos totorių bendruomenių sąjunga (Union of Lithuanian Tatar Communities), founded in 1996 and registered in Kaunas. However, since its founding, the union was rejected by the Vilniaus rajono totorių bendruomenė (Vilnius Region Tatar Community), formally comprising five sections, those of Nemežis, Keturasdešimt totorių, Švenčionys, Trakai and Vilnius City, as an illegitimate representative organisation for all of the Lithuanian Tatars. A letter, dated 7 February 2005, written in the name of the Vilnius Region Tatar Community (Vilnius 2005) to the Ministry of Justice explicitly shows its hostility toward the Union of the Lithuanian Tatar

1 Interview with Romas Jakubauskas, Vilnius, September 2011.

Communities, which in the letter is even deemed as deviant for allegedly having relations with or even being dependent upon the Ahmadiyya movement's British branch.

Since the Vilnius Region Tatar Community's board remained immovable in its view of the union, on the union's initiative an alternative community, Vilniaus apskrities totorių bendruomenė (Vilnius District Tatar Community), was established in 2005 and was immediately made a member of the union. Since then Vilnius has had two rather antagonistic Tatar communities (Sitdykovas 2005: 1–2). The animosity flared up to the point that the Vilnius Region Tatar Community formally asked the Lithuanian authorities to ban the Union of Tatar Communities and prosecute its chairman Dr Adas Jakubauskas for alleged embezzlement of community funds (Vilnius Region Tatar Community 2005). The state then took no heed, and since the death of the chairman of the Vilnius Region Tatar Community, its new leadership is no longer as hostile to the union, thus paving the way for an inevitable merger of the Vilnius-based communities and the general restructuring of the union itself.

Next to these “purely” Lithuanian Tatar communities, there are several other Tatar communities whose membership or location is not traditionally Lithuanian Tatar. Thus, for example, in Visaginas there is a Tatar community, comprised mainly of recent Tatar immigrants from inner Russia, while in Panevėžys and Klaipėda (cities with no traditional Lithuanian Tatar presence) there are also communities of mixed background with a heavy presence of “Soviet” Tatars. Thus, strictly speaking, communities in Visaginas, Panevėžys and Klaipėda, while bearing a self-designation as Tatar, are not those of Lithuanian Tatars. However, the Panevėžys and Klaipėda communities are members of the Union of Lithuanian Tatar Communities, while the one in Visaginas is not. Asked about the union's (and, by extension, Lithuanian Tatars') relations with Tatars who settled in Lithuania during the Soviet period, the current chairman of the union, Dr Adas Jakubauskas, in a conversation in September 2011 stated that they are friendly and that Lithuanian Tatars treat the Tatars of inner Russia as their cousins, while the mufti asserted that from a religious perspective there is no difference between Lithuanian and non-Lithuanian Tatars.² A certain feeling of kinship can certainly be felt in the Tatar-published periodical *Lietuvos totoriai* (Lithuanian Tatars), which routinely devotes several pages to the Kazan Tatar history and the present. This can be explained in part by the fact that the editor-in-chief of the publication, Galimas Sitdykovas, who has had this position since its inception, is himself a Soviet-time immigrant.

2 Interviews with Adas Jakubauskas and Romas Jakubauskas in Vilnius, September 2011.

As for the religious organisation of Lithuania's Muslims, the main body (according to Article 1.1. of its statute), "the supreme governing body of Lithuanian Sunni Muslims" (Spiritual Centre...1998) is the Vilnius-based Lietuvos musulmonų sunitų dvasinis centras – muftiatas (Spiritual Centre of the Lithuanian Sunni Muslims – Muftiate), was (re)established in 1998 and has since then been dominated by Lithuanian Tatars (only one person on the current muftiate board is a non-Tatar – a Lithuanian convert to Islam). For a decade and a half after its establishment, the muftiate was headquartered on state-owned property in a downtown apartment block, rented by the Vilnius city section of the Vilnius Region Tatar Community, and, next to the mufti's office, had several classrooms and a prayer hall, which used to serve as the space for Friday prayers. In 2013, however, both the religious and the ethnic organisations moved into new premises privately owned by a public enterprise founded by the muftiate and the Turkish Department for Religious Affairs (popularly called by its Turkish name, *Diyānet*).

The muftiate currently formally supervises activities of some nine Muslim communities in Lithuania, though two of them, according to the mufti himself, have long been defunct.³ Membership in those religious organisations based in the traditional localities of Lithuanian Tatars (namely, Nemėžis, the village of Keturiasdešimt totorių, Raižiai, Švenčionys, and to a high degree also Vilnius and Kaunas) virtually coincides with membership in ethnic organisations.

So far, there have been two muftis, both Lithuanian Tatars – Romualdas Krinickis (born in 1973), who served as the mufti between 1998 and 2008, and the current mufti (since 2008) Romualdas Jakubauskas (also born in 1973). The former mufti, Krinickis, a native of Vilnius, at the time of election to the post was 25 years of age. In addition to his duties as mufti, he served as imam in the village of Keturiasdešimt totorių (where one of the four purpose-built historical Tatar mosques is situated) congregations. Upon relinquishing his duties as the mufti to Jakubauskas, Krinickis kept his position as imam of the Keturiasdešimt totorių mosque and currently leads Friday prayers in Vilnius occasionally.

The current mufti, Jakubauskas, a native of Kaunas, acquired his religious education in Lebanon, where he studied at a religious college between 1992 and 1999. After returning to Lithuania, he assumed the position of imam of the Kaunas mosque and kept it until 2012, when a Turkish imam, sent by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyānet*), succeeded him. The elections

3 Centre of Registers 2011. Available at: <www.registrucentras.lt/jar/p/index.php?pav=musulmon%F8&kod=&sav=&sta=&for=700&p=1> (accessed 6 September 2011).

of 2008 catapulted Jakubauskas to the mufti position. For the first two years he chose to reside in Kaunas, but after realising that this led to a paralysis of muftiate activities, he finally (in 2011) decided to move with his family to Vilnius. Next to the mufti, who is the supreme Muslim religious authority in Lithuania, and the former mufti, there are several elderly, self-styled Lithuanian Tatar imams in once Tatar-dominated villages who formally submit to the mufti's authority but by now rarely perform their duties as imams.

Though traditionally the majority of Lithuanian Tatars were countryside dwellers, during Soviet times (mainly due to kolhozisation and industrialisation) many moved to nearby towns and cities. In this way, the capital city Vilnius and the second biggest city in the country, Kaunas, received the bulk of the migrants. Once settled in the urban milieu, most of the Tatars successfully blended into it. This was to a great extent facilitated by the fact that Tatars did not in any respect differ from the non-Tatar majority: they spoke the local languages (Lithuanian, Russian or local Polish), dressed the same way the rest of people in society did, and their physical appearance (the phenotype), with a few individual exceptions, did not differ noticeably from other inhabitants of the land. The only aspect that made Tatars clearly different to the majority was their belonging to Islam. However, in the Soviet Union with its official aversion to religion and pervasive atheistic policies alongside draconian restrictions on the religious activities of all religious groups, religious identity mattered little if at all. All in all, in Soviet times, being a Tatar was not an obstacle to becoming a well-integrated member of society. Consequently, a number of Lithuanian Tatars became academics, artists and civil servants. This trend has continued to the present with a number of Tatars, or at least people of Tatar descent, holding high positions in academic, military and public administration fields.

Since at least after the First World War, the Lithuanian Tatars have been pursuing a mythology of the settlement and genesis of their community in Lithuania in which by far the most prominent role has been accorded to Grand Duke Vytautas, the loyalty to whom – and by extension to his state – is the focal point in this mythology. It has now been revived in post-communist Lithuania with Tatars vehemently insisting on their complete loyalty to the Lithuanian state and the nation, disregarding its Catholic background. An expression of the veneration of Vytautas can be observed in the efforts of the Lithuanian Tatar community to erect a monument to him in Raižiai, a once Tatar-dominated village – the site of the sole operating mosque during the Soviet period and a sprawling Tatar cemetery – which some Tatars informally call “the capital of Lithuanian Tatars”. In June 2010, on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of a legendary Grunwald battle (in the territory of today's Poland) in which Tatar horsemen took part on the side of the joint Polish-Lithuanian

army, such a monument, financed largely through donations made by Lithuanian Tatars, was finally erected and officially unveiled (Kaunas 2010).⁴ The following year, the Union of Lithuanian Tatar Communities officially passed the possession and maintenance rights of the monument on to the Alytus District Administration.

Soon after regaining independence, the Lithuanian state recognised Islam as one of the nine so-called traditional faith communities to be protected by the state itself. Article 5 of the Law on Traditional Religious Communities and Associations of the Republic of Lithuania, promulgated in 1995, reads: "The state recognises nine traditional religious communities and associations existing in Lithuania, which comprise a part of the historical, spiritual and social heritage of Lithuania: Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Evangelical Reformed, Russian Orthodox, Old Believer, Judaical, Sunni Muslim and Karaite". Such an attitude on the side of the state would be only laudable. However, the Lithuanian state out of inertia recognises only the Lithuanian version of Islam, which is the version of it practised by the Lithuanian Tatar Muslims, officially as Sunni Islam. Thus, the Lithuanian Muslims – that is, Lithuanian Tatars – while registering their muftiate with the Ministry of Justice in 1998, in their words, "were forced" to put the word "Sunni" in the title. As the then head of the Vilnius congregation, Asanavičius, explained: "The Muslims could expect to receive financial support from the state only if they put 'Sunni' in the title of their organisation" (Sitdykovas 1999: 1); otherwise, their organisation would not be regarded as an organisation of one of the nine officially protected traditional confessions. Since the state allocates funds for the traditional religious communities recognised by the state as such, Tatars (who until now make the majority in the registered Muslim congregations and control the muftiate itself) receive annual support from the state in the range of 3,500 euros⁵ – which, however, even by Lithuanian standards is a meager amount.

Moreover, it is *a priori* presumed by the Lithuanian state that a Muslim religious organisation in Lithuania is an organisation of Lithuanian Tatars, who historically have been Sunni of the Hanafi school of law. This was confirmed in an interview in March 2011 with a civil servant at the Ministry of Justice, who

4 Kauno apskrities totorių bendruomenė (Kaunas District Tatar Community) 2010. *Vytauto Didžiojo ir Žalgirio mūšio 600-ųjų metinių paminklo atidengimo išskilmės*. Available at: <http://www.totoriai.lt/raiziai_paminklas.htm> (accessed 10 April 2014).

5 Government of the Republic of Lithuania 2010. *Nutarimas dėl lėšų paskirstymo tradicinių Lietuvos bažnyčių ir religinių organizacijų vadovybėms (Resolution on Allocation of Funds to Authorities of Traditional Lithuanian Churches and Religious Organizations)*. Available at: <http://www.lrvk.lt/bylos/Teises_aktai/2010/05/15313.doc> (accessed 5 July 2010).

has been in charge of religious affairs there for over a decade. In 2002, the muftiate addressed the Ministry of Justice with a request “not to register [with the Ministry] newly forming Muslim congregations without permission from our Spiritual Centre of the Lithuanian Sunni Muslims – Muftiate, as it is stipulated in the Article 3.5 of our statute”.⁶ Since then, two new congregations in the seaport city of Klaipėda (where there has never been any Tatar – or Muslim, for that matter – presence as the city since its founding in the thirteenth century had been part of Prussia, not the Grand Duchy) – Klaipėdos miesto musulmonų religinė bendruomenė Al-Tauhyd (Klaipėda City Muslim Religious Community Al-Tauhyd, established in 2007) and Klaipėdos krašto musulmonų bendruomenė Iman (Klaipėda Region Muslim Community Iman, founded in 2009) – have been formed. Both have received the muftiate’s blessing (the first one still by Krinickis, the second by Jakubauskas) to receive official state recognition as traditional religious communities.

Religion and Culture

In the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the local Muslim community was comparatively small, closed and independent. It did not submit to any lay or spiritual authority from without. One or several Tatar settlements comprised what would locally be called a “parish”, which would have its own mosque. Members of these congregations would elect their imams, popularly called mulla until the nineteenth century. The congregations would take care of their mosques and any possible endowments of property for religious purposes (known in Arabic as *waqf*) attached to them, as a rule a plot of communal land devoted to the sustenance of the imam. Along with Islam, the term “jamaat” arrived in the grand duchy. To Lithuanian Tatars it meant congregation but also the meeting of the congregation. Until the eighteenth century, *jamaat* testified to its Tatar origins and represented the religious community in its relations with the government. Andrzej Zakrzewski even argues that *jamaat* was a self-governing body of the community, led by senior Tatar officers responsible for the diaspora’s military-administrative organisation (Zakrzewski 1989: 137–138). The autonomy of the Lithuanian Muslim religious community was curtailed in 1832, when the Muslims of the western provinces of the Russian Empire became subjects of Таврическое магометанское духовное

6 “Dėl naujų musulmonų religinių bendruomenių registravimo”. Unpublished letter from the Spiritual Centre of the Lithuanian Sunni Muslims – Muftiate to the Ministry of Justice, 28 June 2002.

правление (Taurida Mohammedan Spiritual Board) and of the mufti whose headquarters was in Crimea. The Tatars had to submit to laws pertaining to non-Christian religious communities, and in addition to performing their religious duties, imams had to register the births, marriages and deaths of their community members (Bairašauskaitė 1996: 130–150).

Islam as historically practised by Lithuanian Tatars has been researched very little. The contention commonly found in literature on Lithuanian Tatars that they are Sunni of the Hanafi school of law has, however, been challenged by, amongst others, Piotr Borawski. He has noted that the belonging of the Lithuanian Muslims to any branch of Islam was a mere formality as the Lithuanian Tatar community never had any religious scholars or experts on Islamic law, and in general Tatars were not interested in interpretations of Islam (Borawski 1991a: 183). One may safely argue that the beliefs and practices of Lithuania's Muslims were formed under the influence of various trends and at the same time were simplistic with expressed features of what some researchers of Islam call folk Islam.

Since the majority of Lithuanian Tatars traditionally lived in the countryside, most of their mosques, around which religious life revolved, were situated in villages rather than cities. By the beginning of the twentieth century, on the territory of today's Republic of Lithuania, only half a dozen mosques remained. During the Soviet era they were all, except for the one in Raižiai, closed. Only four of them have survived into the present. The oldest (built in 1815) amongst them is situated in the village of Keturiasdešimt totorių (20 kilometres south of Vilnius). The second-oldest (built in 1889) is the one in Raižiai (Alytus District, some 90 kilometres south-west of Vilnius). Besides these, there are the Nemėžis village (10 kilometres southeast of Vilnius) mosque (built in 1909) and, finally, the one in Kaunas city (the only brick mosque in Lithuania, built in the 1930s). In the capital city, Vilnius, there is currently no purpose-built mosque at all as the pre-First World War Tatar mosque was demolished by Soviet authorities in the 1960s and has not been rebuilt. With the advent of independence, the Kaunas mosque was restored and reopened as early as 1991, while the ones in the villages of Nemėžis and Keturiasdešimt totorių were restored in 1993.⁷

However, due to lack of attending worshippers, the three historical Tatar mosques located in once Tatar-dominated villages, though they formally have imams in charge of them, open their doors only during religious festivities like

7 The current interior of Keturiasdešimt totorių, Raižiai and Nemėžis mosques has been recently digitalized and can be viewed at <http://www.panoramas.lt/index.php?page_id=132&pan_type=242&show=yes&search_katalog=mecete> (accessed 5 September 2011).



FIGURE 1.1 *The Nemėžis mosque from 1909*
 PHOTO: EGDŪNAS RAČIUS, 2013

the two Bayrams (the feasts at the end of the fasting and the pilgrimage seasons). The Kaunas mosque, with its vibrant multicultural congregation, mainly composed of foreign students and businessmen, has fared better, especially after 2000, when Romas Jakubauskas (the current mufti), a young and energetic native Tatar with a proper Islamic education, assumed the position of imam there.

Though through Jakubauskas' organised summer camps (annually organised between 1994 and 2005) and other activities aimed at Tatar youth, some young Tatars have (re)discovered their Muslim roots and as a result have become more observant. The Muslim Tatar community in general is, due to emigration, assimilation, intermarriage and above all secularisation, apparently dwindling, and there is little hope that it will ever produce a deeply religious component of any significance in the future composition of the Muslim community in Lithuania, let alone spiritual leaders. Their virtual absence from

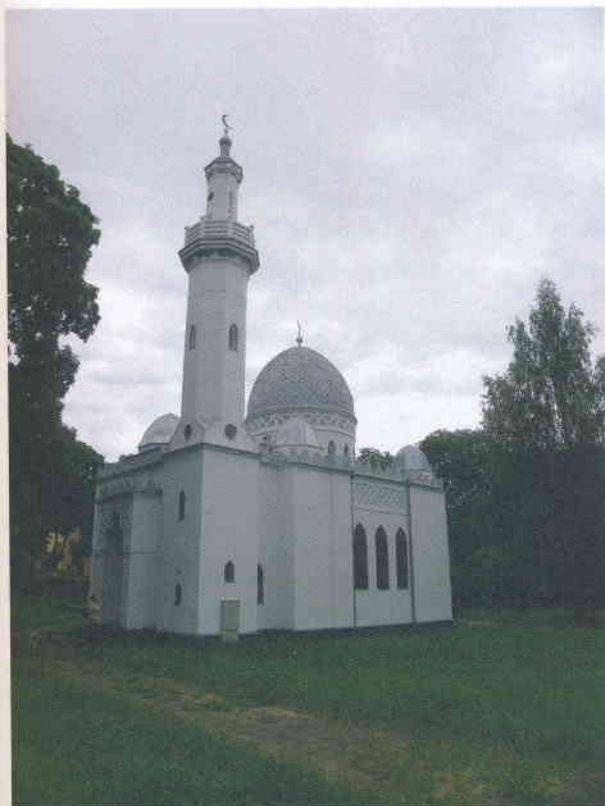


FIGURE 1.2 *The mosque in Kaunas from 1932*
 PHOTO: EGDŪNAS RAČIUS, 2013

the communal Friday prayers in Vilnius and Kaunas further attests to the Lithuanian Tatars' effective loss of interest in religion, something that is routinely lamented by those still paying attention to religious duties (Klemkaitė 2008: 38).

Traditionally, mosques would be surrounded by cemeteries (although there have been numerous cemeteries without mosques nearby). Currently, the mosques of Keturiasdešimt totorių, Raižiai and Nemėžis have cemeteries attached to them. The cemeteries in Raižiai and Nemėžis still accept the dead for burial, while Keturiasdešimt totorių Cemetery is closed for burying.⁸ While the earlier graves strictly follow Islamic requirements (with two unpolished

8 A digitalized view of Keturiasdešimt totorių cemetery with the mosque in the middle can be viewed at <http://www.panoramas.lt/index.php?page_id=132&pan_type=242&show=yes&search_katalog=mecete> (accessed 5 September 2011).



FIGURE 1.3 *The Tatar cemetery in Nemėžis*
PHOTO: EGDŪNAS RAČIUS, 2013

stones of different size marking the burial site), later (starting with the nineteenth century) ones reflect the fashions of the day typical to the region – with monuments of polished stone, adorned with inscriptions in Arabic, Russian, Polish or (most recently) Lithuanian, sometimes with photos or engravings of the faces of the deceased. It is worth noting that many Arabic inscriptions have orthographic mistakes, presumably because they were done by local non-Tatar (hence non-Muslim) artisans from the same blueprints. A group of Polish researchers did an extensive analysis of these cemeteries in the wider region (Drozd 1999).

Lithuanian Tatar manuscript literature makes up a distinctive cultural stratum. It has been forming since the sixteenth century when the dialects of Kipchak-Turkic languages of the Tatars were supplanted by the dominant local languages, Byelorussian and Polish (Dubniński 1981: 85). Until that time, the Tatar elite could use the manuscripts brought over from the Muslim East, most likely through the Ottoman Turks. Lithuanian Tatars took over and also used texts written in Arabic, Chagatay, Ottoman Turkish and even some in Persian. In the sixteenth century, they started translating them into Byelorussian and Polish, but still using the Arabic script, albeit modified.

The humanist culture of Lithuanian Tatars was evidently influenced by the Reformation, the social, religious and cultural movement that started in Lithuania in the 1530s and 1540s and which brought to maturation a new approach to literature in one's mother tongue (Lukšaitė 1994: 9–11). To satisfy their religious, educational and daily needs, Tatars created or adapted texts of different types and genres. The most popular amongst them was the so-called *kitab*. It is a collection of relevant texts of secular and religious nature, comprising *ahadith* (narrative reports of Muhammad's sayings and actions), apocrypha, Quranic and Biblical stories, stories of moral and didactic nature or having to do with adventure, descriptions of Muslim obligations, rituals and prayers. As a rule, *kitabs* were written in either Byelorussian or Polish, but there have also been those written in Middle Eastern languages, accompanied by a translation. Another type of manuscripts was *hamail*, a collection of prayers in Arabic and/or Ottoman Turkish with explanations in Byelorussian or Polish. In these prayer books, medical and household advice as well as explanations of dreams and the like can often be found. Practically all Tatar families had such prayer books. Much less common types of manuscripts were *tafsir*, the Quranic text written in Arabic and its verbatim translation into Byelorussian or Polish, and *tajweed*, a textbook for Quran recitation. The contents of the latter would usually be rendered in either Ottoman Turkish, Byelorussian or Polish (Antonovich 1968: 14–20).

Andrzej Drozd argues that as early as in the seventeenth century, wealthy members of the Tatar elite were well familiar with both the Middle Eastern and the old Polish literature, knew Arabic, Persian and Turkish, and were distinguishable by their humanist culture (Drozd 1999: 30–37). For instance, the fact that Tatars had interpreters amongst themselves who knew the Turkish language is attested to by insertions of new Turkish texts into the manuscripts of the first part of the seventeenth century or a Turkish-Byelorussian dictionary written by a Slonim mulla, Mustapha Szehidevicz, in the 1830s (Antonovich 1968: 123; Aleksandrovich-Michkinene and Shupa 1995; Suter 2004: 87, 537). The educational level of translators is further confirmed by translations of the Quran and other liturgical texts from Arabic into Polish and Byelorussian (Drozd 1999: 52–80). However, there are no data testifying that Tatars would know Arabic in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and insertions in texts in Persian can most certainly be treated as accidental (Antonovich 1968: 125).

The manuscript literature of the Lithuanian Tatars is an excellent example of what may be called cultural and religious syncretism. Hence, in it, cultural layers of the Muslim East and Eastern Europe are intertwined. In Tatar religious manuscripts, there are a number of texts directly related to Christian and

Jewish religious cultures. For instance, while stories about Jesus' life and death or about how his disciples converted pagans can be attributed to both the Christian and the Muslim traditions, the genealogy of Adam's descendants and the description of the Great Deluge are almost taken verbatim from the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament (Antonovich 1968: 178–179, 185–186, 190).

Moreover, researchers have noted that most of the common Muslim narratives, like the creation of the world, Judgment Day, or the Prophet's renowned trip to heaven (*miraj*), have been semantically adapted in the manuscripts of the Lithuanian Tatars to correspond to their social environment and realities of the time, for instance, in regards to mixed marriages or relations with Jews and Christians (Łapicz 1989: 173). This leads to a working conclusion that the Lithuanian Tatars were engaged in the creation of a specific understanding of Islam and at the same time endeavoured to implant their version of this religion and culture in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Compilers and copyists of *kitab*s were well acquainted with the local literature of the grand duchy. In some of the Tatar manuscripts, the Bible, translated into Polish by Arian Symon Budny in 1571–1572, is used. A hagiographic story, the hymn about Saint Job (Drozd 1995: 166–167), which is very popular in medieval European literature, and polemical texts taken from Protestant religious literature are also found in Tatar manuscripts (Drozd 1994: 220–227). Names of the authors and translators of Tatar manuscripts are not known. The first manuscripts have not survived, and most of the preserved manuscripts are copies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which contain new texts often added when copying or translating the earlier versions of the manuscripts. Therefore, the manuscript literature of Lithuanian Tatars should be treated as a result of collective effort.

Due to the specificity of the manuscript literature, its cultural user was solely the Tatar community. The only known impulse for the Tatar writing for an outside readership was a challenge thrown at them in the beginning of the seventeenth century, when a person – believed to have been a Catholic priest – under the pseudonym of Piotr Czyżewski published the pamphlet *Alfurkan* (Czyżewski 1617; Nosowski 1974: 351–368), degrading Tatar origins and their religion. There are hints that a Tatar by the name of Azulewicz responded to this charge by writing *Apologia Tatarow* (Apology of the Tatars), but the manuscript of this text has not survived.

Printed literature written by and for Tatars did not appear until the nineteenth century. The first printed book was published in Vilnius in 1830 and was titled *Wyktad wiary mahometańskiej czyli islamskiej z części Koranu i przykazań proroka chadisiem zwanych* (Presentation of the Mohammedan Faith) (Sobolewski 1830). Its author, Józef Sobolewski, was a local judge in Novgorodek.

Another author, Maciej Tuhan-Baranowski, was the first Tatar who made an attempt to write the history of Lithuanian Tatars. His *O muślimach litewskich* (About Lithuanian Muslims), based on a mythologised romantic concept of Tatar origins, was published in 1896 in Warsaw (Bairišauskaitė 1997: 253–284).

There was virtually no original literary output made by Tatars in Lithuania either in the interwar or Soviet periods. Even today, there is little original literary activity amongst Lithuanian Tatars with the exception of several poets, who write in one of the languages spoken in the country, there is virtually no Tatar prose. However, several Tatar activists are engaged in the procurement of academic and semi-academic literature on Lithuanian Tatars. Noteworthy amongst recent publications are an edited volume on the history of Lithuanian Tatars and an annotated translation into Lithuanian and Russian of a hefty Tatar *kitab* dating back to the eighteenth century (Miškinienė 2009). Though some of these publications indeed have academic value, most are meant for wider audiences, both Tatar and non-Tatar, although it remains to be seen if non-Tatars are much interested in (or in fact have access to) such publications, given that most of them tend to be published in small quantities and distributed amongst Tatars themselves. In order to salvage their cultural identity, Tatars in settlements with big enough communities, such as Vilnius, Kaunas, Keturiasdešimt totorių, Raižiai and Nemėžis, have maintained weekend schools for Tatar youngsters, where teenagers are given classes on Tatar history and the religion of Islam. Since the Lithuanian Tatars lost their old mother tongue several centuries ago and now speak one of the languages of the country (Lithuanian, Polish, Russian or Byelorussian) as their mother tongue, language teaching focuses on Turkish (usually taught by the imam supplied by the Turkish embassy) and Arabic (usually taught by Arab students).

Amongst the communal festivals, probably the most well known is Sabantuy (summer plough festival), an event spanning several days which features songs, dances, games and cuisine. Though not known amongst Lithuanian Tatars until practically the very end of the twentieth century, it was introduced to them by Tatars who arrived in and settled in Lithuania during Soviet times. However, some of the Lithuanian Tatars have now internalised this festival and have started branding it as their own. For instance, in June 2011, when the seventh Baltic States' Tatar Sabantuy was organised in Trakai, a historic capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the chairman of the Union of Lithuanian Tatar Communities, Adas Jakubauskas, is quoted as having said that:

“Trakai since the times of Grand Duke Vytautas was famous for being one of the largest places of concentration of Tatar communities in Lithuania. [...] This is why we decided to publicise this Sabantuy with the slogan

'Return to Trakai' and hope that Trakai will become a traditional place to hold this festival, which helps Lithuanian Tatars to preserve their national traditions, develop their culture and bring together the community" ("Visi nori būti savarankiški...", 2011).

Since 2011, Sabantuy is organised in Trakai by the Union of Lithuanian Tatar Communities every year. The mufti is not enchanted by this idea; in his opinion, Sabantuy is an alien festival with which Lithuanian Tatars historically have nothing to do and should not identify. However, he is not against the participation of Lithuanian Tatars, if invited as guests, in Sabantuy organised by Tatars with a Kazan background (Jakubauskas R. 2011).

Apart from the annual Sabantuy festival, Tatars gather together for other annual religious celebrations (Bayrams), which they, however, treat like occasions for communal get-togethers rather than religious rituals. Though some do take part in communal prayers, many stay outdoors and simply congregate with relatives and long-not-seen acquaintances.⁹ Occasionally, the religious component in these celebrations is supplemented with artistic performances in the evening in rented halls, with dance and music performed by either local Tatars or guests from Tatarstan. Given their small numbers, Tatars (although mainly non-Lithuanian) appear to be rather active in participating in performative arts, such as folk dance. For instance, in 1996, when celebrating the 600th anniversary of Tatar residence in Lithuania, a folklore ensemble called Alije was founded. Since then it has become a prominent feature at many Tatar celebrations and festivals not only in Lithuania but also in Poland and Belarus. Another folk dance ensemble, Miras, based in Visaginas (in the far northeastern corner of the country, bordering Belarus), has lately been as active as Alije. In the autumn of 2010, Tatars organised in Vilnius the seventh International Lithuanian Tatars' culture and sports festival, which took two days and featured, amongst other things, music and dance performances by Lithuanian and foreign Tatar bands, troupes and choirs as well as a photo exhibition.

Another, very new, occasion for getting together – or rather a means of getting Tatars to get together – is the so-called festival of *šimtalapis* (hundred-listed), a specific type of pastry prepared exclusively by Lithuanian Tatars and branded by themselves and others as a top dish of their cuisine. In February 2011, some 150 people gathered in Vilnius for such a Šimtalapis festival, organised by the Union of Lithuanian Tatar Communities. The festival comprised culinary competitions, a folk music, song and dance concert, poetry readings

⁹ One of the authors' (Račius) observation from the celebrations after Ramadan in the mosque of the village of Keturiasdešimt totorių in the autumn of 2009.



FIGURE 1.4 *Timur Seifullen (left), chairman of the Estonian Islamic Congregation, and Radik Mažitov, a member of the Lithuanian Muslim community, on a pilgrimage in Mecca, 2003*

PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN; COURTESY TALLINN CITY MUSEUM

and a youth disco. A report on the festival on one of the Tatar-maintained websites expressed its wish that “in the future the festival of ‘Šimtalapis’ will become traditional, during which Lithuanian Tatars will get together, and women and girls of the Lithuanian Tatar community will demonstrate their culinary mastery”.¹⁰

In order to familiarise the non-Tatar population of Lithuania, as well as visitors to the country, with the heritage of Lithuanian Tatars, some of the activists from amongst the Lithuanian Tatars have, with the help of tourism agencies, organised public lectures and guided tours to sites of note, such as Tatar mosques and cemeteries in and around Vilnius, thus making Lithuanian Tatar culture into a brand of its own.

Epilogue

The twentieth century brought many new challenges to the survival of the Muslim Lithuanian Tatars – wars of the first part of the century displaced

¹⁰ Kauno apskrities totorių bendruomenė (Kaunas District Tatar Community) 2011. *Ivyko „Šimtalapio šventė“*. Available at: <http://www.totoriai.lt/simtalapio_svente.htm> (accessed 10 April 2014).

communities, caused the loss of numerous lives, and broke the intellectual spine of the community. The Soviet period alienated Tatars from their religion and suppressed their ethnic identity and creativity, while the current period of Lithuania's independence facilitated rapid demographic changes (due to migration and shifts in birth-death ratio) in the numbers and composition of the community. The official statistics attest to the inevitable fate of the community to disappear from the list of national minorities of the county, and although some of the younger Tatars (re)discover their Muslim roots and become devout believers, very few amongst them identify with the Tatar communities living elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. The language barrier is one of the obstacles preventing closer communication and cooperation with Tatars abroad – young Lithuanian Tatars do not speak the Tatar language, and very few of them have mastered Russian, while those in Russia and Ukraine hardly speak English. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that some sort of lifeline would be forged with those Tatar communities abroad. On the other hand, there is evidence of some contact-seeking with the Tatar diaspora in Western Europe. If this is pursued in earnest, in the future, the Lithuanian Tatars, albeit autochthonous to Lithuania, and thus Europe, will potentially become part of a pan-European (in the sense of the EU) diaspora identity movement.

One also has to realise that in the post-communist context most of the Lithuanian Tatars are highly secularised, and for them Islam tends to bear a festive character rather than being a comprehensive system of beliefs and daily practices as it once was, especially for tightly-knit rural communities. And although due to inertia Islam and Tartars are still, in the popular mind of Lithuanians, inseparable, it is more and more obvious that the face of the living Islam in Lithuania (in both the physical appearance of the worshippers but even more importantly in its contents), with accelerating conversions of Lithuanians to Islam and immigration from Muslim majority countries, has already become anything but Tatar. It remains to be seen how the Tatar-owned religious property, foremost the surviving mosques, will fare – whether they will become state-protected historical sites or, if passed into the hands of practicing non-Tatar Muslims, they will be reborn to new life. The Kaunas mosque appears to be on the latter path already.

In any case, the preserved cultural heritage of Lithuanian Tatars, in whatever form, is becoming more and more the artefacts of history and museums as well as a form of consumerised attraction at the expense of authentic living cultural life amongst the Tatars themselves. Yet, there is so much of this centuries-long heritage that has either not been made accessible to wider audiences or not even (re)discovered, even amongst the surviving Tatars themselves. With every year passing and those who still remember and care

about it from amongst the community itself departing, it is more urgent than ever to record and relate it to the wider cultural heritage of Lithuania but also to the wider Baltic Sea basin.

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