

## Polish Connections to the Hajj between Mystical Experience, Imaginary Travelogues, and Actual Reality

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The main purpose of this chapter is to present the legend of a mystical travel to Mecca as was preserved in the (mainly oral) tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars and another literary text on the Hajj from the nineteenth century. The first travel is associated with a local holy man, a simple countryside dweller, who through his exceptional piety achieved the faculty of translocating in his body to Mecca where he eventually met his fellow countryman to the latter's great surprise and amazement. The second travel is meant as a non-fiction imaginary travel report by Ignacy Żagiell, which appeared in 1884 (and reprinted in 2012). His imaginary travel story gained a certain notoriety and popularity in the history of Polish travel writing and in Polish literature in general. However, a closer examination of the text and of the alleged circumstances reveals the fictitious character of that report.

Both accounts testify to a wide interest in Poland in the nineteenth century, extending also to non-Muslims, in Islamic culture and traditions. It should be borne in mind that Poland was a vast country, but at that time without sovereignty, having fallen since 1795 under the Prussian, Austrian (subsequently—Austro-Hungarian), and Russian empires. The Russian territories included the areas of pre-partition Poland which hosted a permanent Muslim sedentary population.

Polish Muslims (so-called Polish or Lithuanian Tatars, also Belarussian Tatars, sometimes Polish-Lithuanian Tatars or Lithuanian-Polish Tatars, as well as Lipka or Lipka Tatars) lived since the 14th century in a region with a multiethnic conglomerate of peoples, who witnessed changing political status several times, resulting in uprisings, wars, ethnic cleansings, mass murders, political repressions, and resettlements.<sup>1</sup> Villages and towns were burnt and ruined.

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1 On the history of Islam in Poland see, for example, Harry T. Norris, *Islam in the Baltic: Europe's Early Muslim Community* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), Piotr Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1986), Piotr Borawski

Poland, or a Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in historical times, was an asylum and a homeland for local Muslims during a period of more than 600 years, which was a unique situation in Europe. Nowadays Muslims in Poland are mostly of Tatar origins, recent migrants from Arab and other Muslim countries, as well as native converts.<sup>2</sup>

The two relations need to be put, however, in a wider historical context of actual travels to Mecca from the Polish lands.

### *Risale-i Tatar-ı Leh*—The Only Remnant of an Old Tradition?

As for the Polish connection to the Hajj, we do not have any direct evidence indicating the travel of Tatar Muslims to Mecca in pre-modern times. However, there is a unique remaining text connected to the Hajj, a somewhat mysterious Ottoman document under the title *Risāleh-i Tātār-ı Leh* (An Account of the Polish Tatars). It refers to a hajj journey by three unnamed Polish Tatars who travelled to Mecca in 1558. On their way, they passed through Istanbul in order to pay their tribute to Sultan Süleyman I (1494–1566), as the Commander of the Faithful. During their stay in Istanbul, they were asked by the Grand Vizier, Rüstem Paşa (d. 1561), to write an account of the history and status of Muslims in the Polish-Lithuanian regions. With the help of some local writers, they composed this Ottoman text, which was only published three hundred years later by the Polish Orientalist Antoni Muchliński (1808–1877).<sup>3</sup> A debate over its originality ensued, which possibly could be resolved through direct examination of the original manuscript, but its present whereabouts remain unknown.<sup>4</sup>

A terminological dilemma arose, among others, in respect of a name applied to the ethnic group, the subject of the account. The Ottoman text was citing Tatar-ıLeh, the Polish Tatars, in the same way as it was common in other Otto-

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and Aleksander Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy. Dzieje, obrzędy, legendy, tradycje* (Warszawa: Iskry, 1986), Jan Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy na Litwie i w Polsce. Studia z dziejów XIII–XVIII w.* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1989), Jan Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów polskich 1794–1944* (Pułtusk: Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna, 2002), Ali Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy 1918–1939. Życie społeczno-kulturalne i religijne* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1990).

2 See Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, ed., *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse on Islam* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, Faculty of Oriental Studies, 2011).

3 Antoni Muchliński (ed.), *Zdanie sprawy o Tatarach litewskich przez jednego z tych Tatarów złożone sułtanowi Sulejmanowi w r. 1558: Risale-i Tatarı Leh* (Wilno, 1858).

4 Krzysztof Grygajtis, "Obraz Tatarszczyzny litewskiej na dworze tureckim w połowie XVI wieku," *Studia z dziejów nowożytnych* (Wrocław 1988), 25–40.