

Conference Session 4.1: Media – Publications

The Importance of Images in presentation of the history of Muslims and the Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Poland

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1. History of Islamic Presence in Poland

The documented history of bilateral contacts between Poland and the Islamic World goes back over a thousand years, to the 10th century. The first written mention of Polish state was made in a chronicle by Ibrahim ibn Ya‘qub, a Jewish-Arab merchant sent by Caliph Al-Hakam II to serve as an envoy (960-966) to the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I.¹ However, until the 14th century, Islamic presence on the Polish and Lithuanian lands had been rather random and disorderly.

It was only after the creation of a nominally Muslim Mongol state in Eastern Europe in the 13th century² – the Golden Horde – that contacts with Muslims intensified. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in a personal union, that is connected through the person of the ruler, with Poland (known then as the Crown of the Polish Kingdom, Pol. ‘Korona Królestwa Polskiego’) since 1385, shared borders with the Golden Horde and fought against it to prevent its invasions of Lithuanian lands. Lithuanian princes fought against the Golden Horde to prevent its invasions of Lithuanian lands, but already in the 14th century the first Muslims began to settle in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They left their country and came to live in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for various reasons.³ Some of them were brought to help the Lithuanians defend their territories from enemies, e.g. the Teutonic Knights. Others were refugees, who fled for fear of disturbances within the Mongol state engaged in civil wars.⁴

Only a century later did it come to a significant increase in the number of Tatars in Lithuania, when Grand Prince Vytautas the Great had them settled systematically in the Trakai (Pol. Troki) area.⁵ They were granted land in exchange for military service in the Lithuanian army and helping sustain contact among Duke’s garrisons.⁶ In addition to land they were also granted the right to practice their religion and build mosques.⁷

The number of Muslim settlers, both refugees and prisoners of war, kept increasing during the whole of the 15th century, but it was the two subsequent centuries that saw the most significant influx of Muslims to Polish territories.⁸ Some historical sources assess the number of Muslims in Poland at that time at 25,000 people.⁹ Their legal status was defined in the 16th century.¹⁰ The ones who served in Tatar regiments were granted fief, just as those who served at royal courts as interpreters and translators from oriental languages.¹¹ There were also Tatars among city dwellers (tradesmen, cart drivers, gardeners) and

¹ For more details see: T. Kowalski, *Relacja Ibrāhīma Ibn Ja‘qūba z podróży do krajów słowiańskich w przekładzie al-Bekrīego* (Kraków: Skład Główny w Księgarniach Gebethnera i Wolfa, 1946).

² P. Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: LSW, 1986), p. 5.

³ It is possible that first war prisoners from the Golden Horde were brought as early as the 13th century as a result of wars against Lithuania over Smolensk and Chernihiv provinces, but they did not settle for good; for more details see: J. Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii Tatarów polskich 1794-1944. Zbiór szkiców z aneksami źródłowymi* (Pułtusk: WSH, 1998), p. 11f.

⁴ P. Borawski and A. Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy. Dzieje, obrzędy, legendy, tradycje* (Warszawa: Iskry, 1986), p. 18.

⁵ Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 14f; Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 6.

⁶ S. Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy. Próba monografii historyczno-etnograficznej* (Gdańsk: Rocznik tatarów Polskich, 2000 [1st ed. Warszawa 1938]), p. 4f.

⁷ Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 159.

⁸ Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 15f.

⁹ J. Sobczak, *Położenie prawne ludności tatarskiej w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim* (Warszawa-Poznań: PWN, 1984), p. 43f.

¹⁰ Borawski and Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 55f.

¹¹ Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 17.

servants on lordly estates.¹² Their settlements centred around Vilnius (Pol. Wilno), Trakai, Hrodna (Pol. Grodno) and Navahradak (Pol. Nowogródek)¹³ and existed at least until the 18th century.¹⁴ On the territories of the Crown of the Polish Kingdom, King John III Sobieski granted land to Tatars in Podlachia in 1679.¹⁵

Tatars were King's subjects, their superiors being ensigns and marshals appointed by the King, who were also representatives of judicial power authorized to adjudicate in civil cases. Generally, Tatars served as soldiers, in separate units of light cavalry.¹⁶ They fought in all major battles of the time, among others, in the Battle of Vienna in 1683 against the Ottoman Empire. In the 17th century, the Tatar gentry in the Grand Duchy received the rights and privileges of the Polish *szlachta* (the noble class),¹⁷ and in the second half of the 18th century the legal status of their land ownership was changed from fief to hereditary property.¹⁸ The Constitution of 3rd May 1791 finally granted them full political rights.¹⁹

Tatars - Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School, enjoyed freedom of worship in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They lived in Muslim religious communities headed by imams called *molla* (Arab. *mawla*) elected by all members of the community. At the beginning of the 17th century, there were about 60 mosques in Poland.²⁰ Sources say nothing about any major Christianization of Muslim Tatars. But the Tatars kept their religious beliefs, even though they lost their mother tongue in the 16th century and gradually started to speak one of the Slavonic dialects or languages.²¹ At the same time they kept the Arabic alphabet, which they used not only to write down Koran passages or prayers in Arabic,²² but also for Polish texts, in combination with which it made a very unique kind of writing. They used this script for handwriting *tafsirs* (passages of the Koran with a translation into one of the Slavonic languages), *chamail* (Arab. *hama'il*; prayer books containing texts in Arabic and Turkish) and *kitab*s (compilations of various texts: *hadith*, prayers, rituals, legends).²³

After the three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the majority of Tatars got under Russian authority. Some fought in uprisings against the Russian Empire and fell victim to repression²⁴ – they were deprived of the *szlachta* status, and were subjected to Russification²⁵ (e.g. they were made to use Russian inscriptions on tombstones²⁶).

Around that time, other Muslims started coming to Poland. They were the Crimean Tatars, the Cherkessians, the Chechens, the Azerbaijanis and other Muslims from the Caucasus and Central Asia, who served in the tsarist army.²⁷ Apart from soldiers there were also merchants, craftsmen (mainly bakers

¹² L. Bohdanowicz, S. Chazbijewicz and J. Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy muzułmanie w Polsce* (Gdańsk: Rocznik Tatarów Polskich, 1997), p. 25f.

¹³ Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 14.

¹⁴ Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 19f.

¹⁵ A. Miśkiewicz, *Tatarska legenda. Tatarzy polscy 1945-1990* (Białystok: KAW, 1993), p. 25-26. In two of the granted villages Bohoniki and Kruszyniany, there are still Muslim communities, mosques and *mizars* (cemeteries). There are also Tatars living in Krynki and Sokółka to this day.

¹⁶ Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 118. For more details on the participation of Tatar units and individual Tatar officers in battles of this period see: Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 19 and on.

¹⁷ Borawski and Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 85-87.

¹⁸ Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 31f.

¹⁹ Bohdanowicz, Chazbijewicz and Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy muzułmanie...*, p. 14.

²⁰ Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 122-123.

²¹ Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 199-202

²² For information on hand-written Koran in the culture of Polish Tatars see: N. Jord, *Koran rękopiśmienny w Polsce* (Lublin: Wyd. UMCS, 1994).

²³ For more details see: J. Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 59f; Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 190 and on. Further details on *kitab*s in: Cz. Łapicz, *Kitab Tatarów litewsko-polskich. Paleografia, grafia, język* (Torun: Wyd. UMK, 1986); A. Drozd, M. M. Dziekan, T. Majda, *Piśmiennictwo i muhiry Tatarów polsko-litewskich* (Warszawa: Res Publica Multiethnica, 2000).

²⁴ Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 45 and on; Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 258f.

²⁵ A. Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy 1918-1939* (Warszawa: PWN, 1990), p. 20-21; Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 35f.

²⁶ Borawski and Dubiński, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 135.

²⁷ Bohdanowicz, Chazbijewicz and Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy muzułmanie...*, p. 40; A. Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia z dziejów Tatarów litewsko-polskich i islamu w Polsce w XVII-XX w.* (Siedlce: IH WSRP 1997), p. 22, 39f.

and confectioners) and clerks among the new immigrants.²⁸ It was for them that Muslim cemeteries were founded in Warsaw, one of which is still open. It is situated in Tatarska Street and is itself called the Tatar Cemetery.²⁹

The Great War thinned the number of Tatars, the majority of whom were resettled deep in Russia. Many mosques, houses and cemeteries were demolished.³⁰

When Poland attained independent statehood in 1918, the population of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars on its lands numbered about 5,500, and there were 19 Muslim religious communities operating. Polish Muslims enjoyed full freedom of worship but they did not have their all-Polish organization. Before 1918 they were under the authority of the Mufti of Simferopol (Crimea) – head of Taurid Muslim Spiritual Board,³¹ otherwise closed down after the Soviet army conquered Crimea in 1920. In such circumstances, two organizations: Union of Muslims in Warsaw (*Związek Muzułmanów m.st. Warszawy*) and Muslim Religious Community in Vilnius (*Muzułmańska Gmina Wyznaniowa z Wilna*), made efforts to appoint one superior body for all Polish Muslims - one that would be acknowledged by the Polish government.³² They were successful in their attempts. In 1925, with the consent of the Ministry of Interior and with the financial support from the Ministry of Denominations and Public Enlightenment, an all-Polish Convention of Delegates from Muslim Communities (*Wszepolski Zjazd Delegatów Gmin Muzułmańskich*) took place in Vilnius. Delegates to the convention set up Muslim Religious Union (*Muzułmański Związek Religijny* - henceforward MZR) and elected the mufti – an orientalist Dr. Jakub Szynekiewicz (1884-1966),³³ with the seat in Vilnius. However, it was only in 1936 that Islam was finally officially recognized by the Polish Parliament in the Act of 21st April 1936, which defined the relationship between the State and the MZR (see below).³⁴ The Union was independent of any clerical or secular authorities, it gained legal entity. All historical buildings belonging to the communities were taken care of by the state, and *waqfs*, i.e. religious foundations, were exempt from taxation and other payments.

In 1926, another Tatar organization called *Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (Polish Tatar Association for Culture and Education) was founded in Vilnius.³⁵ It carried out cultural, scientific and publishing activities (e.g. „Rocznik Tatarski” – a yearly publication³⁶). As part of its activity, they established the Tatar National Museum (1929), and the Tatar National Archive (1931), both in Vilnius.³⁷ In 1928, the Mosque Building Committee was formed in Warsaw, but even though it was given a piece of land in Ochota the mosque was never erected.³⁸

Polish-Lithuanian Tatars were also willing to serve in the Polish army in the Interwar Period. Already in 1919, the Tatar Uhlan Regiment was formed.³⁹ Polish Tatars also fought in the World War II; in 1939 they served in the 1st Squadron of the 13th Regiment of Vilnius Uhlans (formed in 1936, all Muslims enlisted in military service served in this regiment),⁴⁰ and then in the underground forces of *Armia Krajowa* (*Home Army*), in the Vilnius Area.

After World War II, 90 percent of the territories formerly inhabited by Tatars were incorporated into the USSR.⁴¹ The only three pre-war religious communities that remained within Polish lands were in Warsaw, Bohoniki and Kruszyniany. Many Tatars had to leave their homes and were subjected to

²⁸ Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 113.

²⁹ It was opened in 1867, an older one, called Caucasian, founded in 1839, is no longer open; for more details see: Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia...*, p. 86f.

³⁰ Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 44.

³¹ Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 77-78.

³² Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 35f.

³³ For more information about Szynekiewicz see: Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 146.

³⁴ For the circumstances of passing the bill see J. Sobczak, ‘Położenie prawne polskich wyznawców islamu’, in: R. Baecker, Sh. Kitab (eds.), *Islam a świat* (Torun: Mado, 2004), p. 173f.

³⁵ Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 47.

³⁶ For more details see: Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 125f; Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia...*, p. 75f.

³⁷ Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 299-300, Tyszkiewicz, *Z historii...*, p. 142.

³⁸ For more details see: Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 92-96.

³⁹ The word ‘uhlan’ (Pol. ‘ułan’, Tur.-Osm. *oghlan*) has a Tatar-Turkish origin.

⁴⁰ Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy...*, p. 155-159.

⁴¹ Kołodziejczyk, *Rozprawy i studia...*, p. 29.

repatriation to Western Territories,⁴² where they formed two Muslim communities – in Gdansk and Gorzów Wielkopolski.⁴³ However, due to postwar migrations, the Islamic population was dispersed. There weren't enough clergymen, places of worship or religion teachers. The level of religious education wasn't high either, which was partly a result of the isolation of Poland from other countries, where there existed centres of education in Muslim theology.⁴⁴ Although ethnically distinct, Tatars are united by Islam and they think of themselves as Muslim Poles.

In 1997, a celebration took place to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the presence of Tatars in Poland.⁴⁵

2. Muslim Minority in Poland Today

Muslim minority in Poland is not very sizeable. Neither had it been very diverse ethnically before the 20th century, when newcomers from Islamic countries started to join the ranks of Muslims in Poland, side by side with Tatars. They were mostly students from the Arab countries, but also from Iran or Afghanistan. During the communist era in Poland many of them kept their faith secret, as it wasn't approved of; and some were actually communists, e.g. members of the Iranian party *Tudeh*.

Ever since Polish borders were re-opened in 1989, new waves of Muslim immigrants have made their home in Poland. They come here mostly from the Arab countries in order to study or to open a business. There are also political refugees among them. Statistics show that most of them come from Iraq (10 percent of all the refugees in 1997), from Afghanistan (4 percent), from Bosnia and Herzegovina (5 percent)⁴⁶. Nowadays a sizeable group of refugees comes from Chechnya.

We have no exact data on the number of Muslims living in Poland, as people are not asked about denomination in the national census. Estimated numbers differ depending on the source. Official statistics provide us only with the number of Muslims associated in the MZR – in 2001 there were 5,123 people.⁴⁷ The population of Tatars in Poland is estimated at 5-6 thousand, and the number of immigrant Muslims at 20-30 thousand⁴⁸. These two numbers amount to 0,06-0,08 percent of the total population of Poland.

3. Organization of Religious Life of Muslims in Poland

Islam is an officially recognized religion in Poland by the Act of 21st April 1936, which defines the mutual relationship between the State and MZR in the Republic of Poland. Art. 1 of the Act states: *Wyznawcy islamu na obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, pozostając w łączności religijno-moralnej ze związkami religijnymi muzułmańskimi zagranicznymi, tworzą Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, niezależny od jakichkolwiek obcokrajowych władz duchownych i świeckich.*⁴⁹ [Eng.: Muslims in the Republic of Poland, remaining in a religious-ethical contact with foreign religious communities, form Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland, independent of any foreign authorities – neither clerical nor secular.]

There are 5 Islamic religious communities operating in Poland. Apart from the Sunni MZR, there is also the Sunni Muslim League (*Liga Muzułmańska*) which was registered in 2004; two Shi'i organizations: the Muslim Unity Society (*Stowarzyszenie Jedności Muzułmańskiej*) and the *Ahl-ul-Bayt* Islamic Assembly

⁴² Bohdanowicz, Chazbijewicz and Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy muzułmanie...*, p. 80f.

⁴³ Miśkiewicz, *Tatarska legenda...*, p. 11f.

⁴⁴ Borawski, *Tatarzy w dawnej...*, p. 307-308.

⁴⁵ In Jan Długosz's *Roczniki*, under the year 1397 one can read about Tatars living in Poland. It is the first written mention of Tatars in the Polish historiography; J. Długosz, *Roczniki czyli kroniki sławnego Królestwa Polskiego*, Warszawa 1975, book V-VI, sub anno 1187, p. 180.

⁴⁶ *Migracje zagraniczne ludności w Polsce w latach 1988-1997*, GUS (<http://www.stat.gov.pl>), <http://www.stat.gov.pl/publikacje/demogr/migracje.htm>; accessed on: 10.04.2013.

⁴⁷ 'Niektóre wyznania religijne w Polsce w 2001 r.', in *Mały rocznik statystyczny 2003*, GUS (<http://www.stat.gov.pl>), <http://www.stat.gov.pl/serwis/polska/2003/rocznik4/relig.htm>, 20.12.2003, 17:17. *Mały rocznik statystyczny 2004* does not quote any data concerning members of MZR in Poland.

⁴⁸ According to representatives of Muslim organizations like MZR, SSM or Muslim League, the number is 30.000.

⁴⁹ Original spelling.

(Islamskie Zgromadzenie *Ahl-ul-Bayt*) both registered in 1990; and unorthodox: the *Ahmadiyya* Muslim Association (Stowarzyszenie Muzułmańskie *Ahmadiyya*) registered in 1990.

Among these organizations MZR has the highest number of members (the Muslim League has 120 members), and is the only one to operate based on a special act of Parliament. Despite being partly outdated, the Act gives the MZR special privileges, e.g. the right to conduct religious education in schools. In March 2004, the position of Mufti of Poland was filled for the first time since World War II. At the 15th All-Polish Congress of MZR, the imam of Białystok and former President of the Council of Imams – Tomasz Miśkiewicz, was elected the Mufti of the Republic of Poland. The same Congress passed a new Statute of MZR.⁵⁰

Every religious community with a regulated legal status has the right to teach its religion in schools. In practice, however, according to the regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14 April 1992 religious education classes can be organized when there are at least seven students of a particular denomination in one school.⁵¹ All religious organizations, however, have the right to organize after-school religious education, and to establish denominational schools, the only requirement is a specially prepared room.

4. Mosques in Poland

The first mosques were built in the Polish-Lithuanian state by Muslim Tatars residing in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. They enjoyed various privileges such as religious freedom and the right to build mosques.⁵² The first record of mosques in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania came from the sixteenth century. The mosques of Lithuanian Tatars were built with funds from usually poor local communities.⁵³ It is interesting to note that Tatars who served lords were granted by their masters finance to build their places of worship.⁵⁴ The mosques were built by local carpenters who constructed Catholic and Orthodox churches, which is why the concept and appearance of the buildings were so similar. These were rather modest and simple buildings.⁵⁵

Until the seventeenth century there were no formal obligatory stipulations or restraints for the construction of Muslim sacred places.⁵⁶ It was only in 1668 that the constraint on building mosques was introduced on land where previously no such buildings had existed.⁵⁷ However, there were exceptions, as demonstrated by new mosques built in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki on the territory of newly-bestowed lands in the Podlaskie Region in 1679. Freedom to erect new mosques and renovate existing mosques was unequivocally granted by the Constitution of 1768 and ratified by the Constitution of 1775.⁵⁸

Historical sources do not record any protests in the Polish-Lithuanian state against the building of the mosques or any hostility towards the already-existing buildings,⁵⁹ apart from one exception, when, in 1609 a fanatical crowd ravaged a mosque in Trakai (Pol. Troki). However, this took place during a period of escalated religious activity during the counter-reformation.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Approved by the Department of Religions and Ethnic Minorities of the Ministry of Interior and Administration of the Republic of Poland.

⁵¹ For more details see: A. S. Nalborczyk, "Islamic religious education in Poland – curricula and textbooks", in E. Aslan (ed.), *Islamic textbooks and curricula in Europe* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 183.

⁵² P. Borawski, 'O sytuacji wyznaniowej ludności tatarskiej w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w Polsce (XVI-XVIII w.)', *Euhemer – Przegląd Religioznawczy*, 118:4, 1980, p. 43f.

⁵³ A. Konopacki, *Życie religijne Tatarów na ziemiach Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego w XVI-XIX w.* (Warszawa: Wyd. UW, 2010), p. 110f.

⁵⁴ Konopacki, *Życie religijne...*, p. 114f.

⁵⁵ Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 165-166; A. Drozd, 'Meczety tatarskie', in A. Drozd, M. M. Dziekan, T. Majda (eds), *Meczety i cmentarze Tatarów polsko-litewskich* (Warszawa: Res Publica Multiethnica, 1999), p. 16-17.

⁵⁶ Konopacki, *Życie religijne...*, p. 105f.

⁵⁷ Drozd, 'Meczety tatarskie', p. 14.

⁵⁸ Konopacki, *Życie religijne...*, p. 109.

⁵⁹ Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 159.

⁶⁰ Sobczak, *Położenie prawne ludności tatarskiej...*, p. 104.

According to Stanisław Kryczyński (2000 [1938]: 160-161), before 1795, when Poland lost its independence for more than one hundred years, there were twenty-three mosques and five places of worship in Lithuania.⁶¹

There are three mosques in Poland at the moment.⁶² Two wooden mosques, the eighteenth century mosque in Kruszyniany and nineteenth century mosque in Bohoniki,⁶³ are located in the Podlaskie region and a new brick mosque was opened in 1990 in Gdańsk. Other Muslim communities in Poland have only prayer rooms. Even the largest Muslim community, MRU, in Białystok has only one prayer room in a communal wooden building that it has owned since the 1970s and which used to be a public library.⁶⁴ In Gdańsk the Tatars established a completely new local religious community after 1945. Being new, they had no place of prayer in the city and met at private houses. In 1980 the community started considering the construction of a place of prayer. The money came mostly from fellow worshippers and benefactors both from Poland and abroad (from Grand Mufti of Lebanon among others), diplomats and Muslim businessmen.⁶⁵ The brick mosque in Turkish style was designed by Polish architect, Marian Wszelaki. A corner-stone was laid in 1984. The opening of the mosque took place in 1990 in the presence not only of fellow believers from abroad, but also the bishop of Gdańsk, priest Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski and the future President Lech Wałęsa,⁶⁶ a legendary leader of 'Solidarność'. The next President, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, visited the mosque in October 2001.⁶⁷

Although the majority of Muslims of Poland live in Warsaw (approximately 10,000-11,000 persons, with an estimated number of 25,000-35,000 Muslims in Poland), there is no purpose-built mosque in the capital.

The MZR has a purposely-adapted room of prayers in a 1992 villa in Wiertnicza Street. There is also an Islamic Centre and seat for the Warsaw community.

The Muslim League authorities decided to build a Centre for Muslim Culture. A donation, came from a Saudi Arabian sponsor who wished to remain anonymous until the opening of the building. A further donation was made by the fellow worshippers. By 2006 the project, the purchase of the lot and the plans for the building were completed. The project of the Centre for Muslim Culture envisages a room of prayers covered by a dome, a minaret eighteen meters high (azan will not be audible), a conference room, a cafeteria and a commercial section. In 2008 building permission was granted and the construction works began.

5. Interreligious Dialogue

Despite the relatively small number of Muslims living in Poland various initiatives are undertaken to promote Christian-Muslim dialogue.

In 1997, the Common Council of Catholics and Muslims (*Rada Wspólna Katolików i Muzułmanów*⁶⁸) was established. Its members, on the part of the Muslim Tatars, include the Mufti of Poland – Tomasz Ahmed Miśkiewicz. The council cooperates with the Bishop Romuald Kamiński, head of the Committee

⁶¹ There were few mosques more in Volyn annexed to the Polish Crown in 1569; Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy...*, p. 161. Turkish historian, Paşa Peçevi (1572-1650) noted in his *Tarih-i Peçevi* that in the seventeenth century Tatars owned 60 mosques; L. Kryczyński, *Historia meczetu w Wilnie. Próba monografii* (Warszawa: Przegląd Islamski, 1937, p. 17. However, Andrzej Drozd thinks there were only 20; .

⁶² After Second World War two out of six mosques were destroyed in Soviet Lithuania – in Vilnius and Wiksznup (Pol. Wiksznupie), and six out of eight in Belarus – in Dowbuciszki, Lachowicze, Łowczyce, Minsk, Niekraszuńce and Osmołów Drozd, 'Meczety tatarskie', p. 15.

⁶³ At the end of the twentieth century there were projects to expand the mosque in Bohoniki. However, it was not well received by the majority of the community and heritage conservator (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki, 2004: 106).

⁶⁴ In the 1960s of the twentieth century a construction of a new mosque in Białystok was considered (Miśkiewicz and Kamocki, 2004: 104f).

⁶⁵ A.A. Miśkiewicz and J. Kamocki, *Tatarzy Słowiańszczyzną oblaskawieni* (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), p. 104.

⁶⁶ Lech Wałęsa, before the 'Solidarność' uprising in 1980, worked in the Gdańsk Shipyard; he lives in Gdańsk.

⁶⁷ *Prezydent Kwaśniewski odwiedził gdański meczet*, Wirtualna Polska, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Prezydent-Kwasniewski-odwiedzil-gdanski-meczet,wid,207731,wiadomosc.html>, Accessem on: 18.03.2013.

⁶⁸ <http://www.radawspolna.pl>

for Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions in Polish Episcopal Conference. The Council is lead jointly by a Catholic and a Muslim. It organizes conferences that help increase general knowledge about the Islamic presence in the Mid-Eastern Europe and promote the idea of interreligious dialogue in Poland.

One of the joint initiatives of the Council and the Committee for Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions in Polish Episcopal Conference is an annual Day of Islam in the Catholic Church in Poland, organized since the year 2000 every year on the 26th of January. This initiative has been incorporated into the church calendar of events. The main celebration takes place in Warsaw. The celebration is attended by Bishop Romuald Kamiński, Mufti Tomasz Miśkiewicz, the imam of Warsaw and diplomats from Islamic countries. The annual Day of Islam in the Catholic Church in Poland is celebrated in other cities as well, e.g. in Lublin, Pieniężno and Cracow, where they have a less official character and more time is allotted for prayers. Sometimes they are accompanied by artistic or scholarly events.

After the attacks of 11th September 2001 there have been many occasions when Christians and Muslims have prayed together for peace in the world, e.g. on 1st October 2001 at a monthly ecumenical mass in an Evangelic Augsburg Church dedicated to the Ascension, in Warsaw.

MZR invites people of various denominations to pray together for peace and justice in the world – the last such meeting took place in Kruszyniany on 6th July 2004. Muslim League in Poland also invited non-Muslim guests to a meeting organized to celebrate the Ramadan in November 2004.

In September 2005, St Adalbert's Forum – an association of Polish Christian movements, organized 6th Gniezno Convention entitled „Europe of Dialogue”. Among the honourable guests there were Mufti of Poland, Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mustafa Cerić and Professor Mona Siddiqui from the University of Glasgow.

In November 2010, the Common Council of Catholics and Muslims, together with *Collegium Bobolanum* and *Laboratorium Więzi*, and in cooperation with the *Groupe d'Amitié Islamo-Chrétienne* (see www.semaineseric.eu) and others organised a session on “Church and mosque –places of celebration for Christians and Muslims” and in November 2011, in Białystok, together with University of Białystok and the local Muslim community of MZR, a session on “Sacred places in Christianity and Islam”.

Conclusions

Islam is one of Poland's traditional religions. The first Muslims to settle in the present-day territory of Poland were Tatars, who arrived more than three hundred years ago. From the beginning of their settlement they were allowed to practise their religion, erect mosques and bury their dead according to the Islamic regulations. This history is still very visible. There are two historical wooden mosques (from the eighteenth and nineteenth century) in the north-eastern part of Poland with historical cemeteries in the neighbourhood. The presence of Islamic architecture and Muslim burial grounds demonstrates the long history of Muslims on the Polish soil. At the same time, it is a proof of religious freedom and tolerance of the Polish state towards Muslims.

Photographs of these buildings and graveyards speak louder than words. Anyone looking at them can see that the history of Polish Muslims is long. The dates on the tombs are very revealing – 1699, 1709 etc. The modern Christian-Muslim dialogue is another sign of the positive attitude towards Muslims in Poland. The Islam Day in the Roman Catholic church in Poland, organized since 2000, together with the activities of the Common Council of Catholics and Muslims, numerous inter-religious meetings, panels, lectures and prayers attended by Christians, Muslims, and sometimes Jews are documented in pictures. These pictures tell us the story of Christians and Muslims living together undisturbed in a European state.