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The Decade of Exploration of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars’ Epigraphy. Results and Perspectives

Abstract

Since 1998, when the first field works on the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars’ material culture was carried out in Belarus, Lithuania and Poland, we have been able to draw certain conclusions concerning the epigraphy.

Epigraphical activity of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars has been revealed in the four major areas:

- a) decoration of minbars and mihrabs,
- b) devotional panels (muhirs),
- c) textiles (predominantly funerary ones),
- d) gravestones.

Epigraphy of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars proves to be one of the most important elements of the culture of this Oriental community inhabiting the territory of the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth since the end of the 14th cent. The Tatars’ epigraphy reflects their complex cultural situation, like the Tatars’ handwritten religious literature in Polish – Byelorussian language and its dialects but rendered with the Arabic script.

The most significant part of the Tatars epigraphy are the grave inscriptions. The oldest ones can be dated back to the 1st decades of the 17th cent. They became more frequent in the 18/19th cent. Several languages have occurred in them within centuries, such as Polish, Turkish, Arabic, Russian, presently also Lithuanian and English (in the New York Tatar’s cemetery), written with the use of three scripts: Arabic (used also to render Polish texts), Latin, Cyrillic. The Oriental contents of the grave inscriptions usually does not follow the Ottoman patterns, the Polish contents is patterned on the Christian noblemen neighbors’ customs. But generally it follows the Islamic ideas, individual confirmation of faith, submission to God and the equality of men.

It was spring of 1998 when the “Res Publica Muliethnica” Foundation from Warsaw invited me to cooperate in preparing the 2nd volume of the *Katalog Zabytków Tatarskich* [*Catalogue of the Tatar Monuments*], which was about to be published to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the Tatar settlement in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was to be devoted to the samples of material culture of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. The edition was supported financially by the Polish Ministry of Culture.

At that time we knew that very little of original material culture was preserved by Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. Most of what we had expected to present in the *Catalogue* was the handwriting (religious books, as *kitab*s, *khamails* – though they were rather the subject of literature research) and the architecture of the mosques (though the mosques were also predominantly creations of local carpenters).

Another area to be presented was the cemeteries (Pltat. *mizar* < Tur. *mezar*, and the older form Pltat. *zireć* < Tat. *zerät* / *ziyarät* < Ar. *ziyārat*). The cemeteries, until that time had been the subject of one chapter of Stanisław Kryczyński's ‘Hauptwerk’ *Tatarzy litewscy. Próba monografii historyczno-etnograficznej* [‘Lithuanian Tatars. An Attempt of the historical-ethnographical monograph’] (1938). Before the 2nd World War also some papers had been written by young Tatar scholars, Ali Woronowicz and his colleague, Mustafa Aleksandrowicz. Probably most of their works had not been published and now we know them only from the second hand, that is the Kryczyński's book. That is an unrecoverable loss, because they probably registered some of the oldest gravestones of Sorok Tatars mizars, destroyed during the 2nd W.W.

After the 2nd W.W. only one scholar dealt with the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars' cemeteries and gravestones, and it was Dr. Arkadiusz Kołodziejczyk from the Academy of Podlasie in Siedlce. In the 1980s and 1990s he carried out field works on Podlasie mizars (Kruszyniany, Bohoniki, Studzianka, Lebedziew) and published a number of works (1997, 1998). Since he was not an Orientalist, he could explore the gravestones only within the scope of the Slavic material (in Latin or Cyrillic script), which nevertheless turned out to be very interesting for historical and social studies on the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars; the oriental parts of grave inscriptions were left untouched.

But from our today's perspective we should say that in 1998 the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars epigraphy was generally unexplored area, an area which rather did not attract the researchers. As far as other (than the gravestones) fields of the Tatar epigraphy are concerned, we should state that they had not existed as a research subject, which could be only partly explained by the lack of access to the Tatar material culture.

The invitation for the work on the *Catalogue* in 1998 was connected with the urgent need of collecting the materials. Thus the Editor arranged a quick expedition to Belarus and Lithuania in cooperation with our Lithuanian and Belarussian friends. During this expedition, executed within few weeks in summer 1998, several important discoveries were made. We have got a general view, for example, of the situation, condition and importance of the Tatar cemeteries. In fact a new field for the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars studies was opened.

The material that we collected owing to this expedition was very extended, and enough not for one but for two volumes. The first one was published in 1999 and was devoted to the mosques, minbars and cemeteries. All mosques and minbars known from the nature or iconography were presented, some tens of inscriptions were subsequently published and almost 30 cemeteries were described. The second volume was devoted to the Tatars' religious writing, manuscripts and art of devotional panels called *muhirs* (< Tur. *mühür* < Ar. *muhr* 'seal'). (Drozd et al. 1999, 2000)

In the following three years (1999, 2000 2001), together with Prof. Henryk Jankowski (Poznań University) and Dr. Romualdas Makaveckas (the intellectual leader of the Tatars community in Kaunas) we carried out field works in Belarus and Lithuania. I continued it in Podlasie and Lithuania within 2000–2008, with assistance of my wife, and last summer (2008), together with Prof. Henryk Jankowski again.

The results are presented below. We can point the epigraphical activity of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars in the four major areas:

- a) decoration of minbars and mihrabs,
- b) devotional panels (*muhirs*),
- c) textiles (predominantly funerary ones),
- d) gravestones.

Decoration of minbars and mihrabs

Unfortunately, only few minbars survived the 20th century (in the mosques of: Rejże, Niemież, Sorok Tatory, Iwie, Bohoniki, Kruszyńiany; few other are known from the iconography), but only one of them is older than from the 19th century – it is in Rejże (Lithuania). In this minbar an exceptional calligraphic decoration from 1686 has been preserved. It was revealed during the first expedition in 1998. Due to this object we can draw a conclusion that Tatars occasionally could have decorated some elements of their mosques before the 19th century, particularly minbars and mihrabs, with painted inscriptions. The Rejże minbar has been (in its almost all visible surfaces) decorated with rich painted calligraphic compositions of relatively high artistic level and, what is particularly important, undoubtedly made by hand of the Tatars (since the minbar itself probably was a work of a local craftsman). Apart from the inscriptions, paintings with tulips in vases decorate some panels of the minbar as well. They, together with some elements of the *tulı* style, represent moderately the Ottoman influences, which is not surprising since, particularly, the affiliations of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars with the Ottoman Turks in the turn of 17th and 18th centuries, following the rebellion of the Lipkas' troops in the 1672 in Podole. But still the calligraphic decorations are mostly in peculiar style, probably reflecting the individual sense of oriental art of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. We have managed to decipher most of the texts. They consist of popular pious formulas, as *šahāda*, *ḥamdala*, *takbir*, *sabḥala*, Arabic invocations to the God, Muḥammad, the four Caliphs, formula *bi-rabbi dā'imīn karīmīn*, talismanic-calligraphic figure *šakl-i 'ayn-i 'Ali*

composed of names *Allāh* 'Alī inscribed in letter 'ayn (painted on the bottom surface of the canopy). The dating formula is remarkable due to its bilinguality – the Arabic-Persian colophon: *ta'riḥ sanat sābi' tis<'>īn wa-alf fi šahr ramadān 'iṣrīn wa-arba' yawm be-ruz* [?] *čharšenbe*, is followed by Polish-Latin one (in Latin script): *A.º 1686 M: Augusta 14 dnia* ('Anno 1686, in the month of August, the 14th day') (Drozd et al. 1999: 37, il. 65–67). Such coexistence of oriental and local components will appear to be one of the most significant and specific features of the Polish-Lithuanian epigraphy (and all their cultural activity in fact). We should add that the local component of the epigraphy (and of the all Tatar culture) represents the Polish "noblemen's folklore" typical for that time in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, remaining vital in "The Eastern Borders" (Pol. *Kresy*) until the beginning of the 20th century.

There are two panels in the Rejze minbar which are still not deciphered. One is a long prayer in Turkish and it is written in very neat *nashī*, the other one is probably an Arabic prayer. Both require the use of infra-red photography which may allow to read more of their text and complete the research on this extraordinary monument.

The Rejze minbar is not the only example of decorative inscriptions in the Tatar mosques. We know a pre-War photo of the interior of a non-existing (since the 1990s) mosque in Dowbuciszki (Belarus). This 18th-century building was well known due to its exceptional wooden architecture, combining the style of small noble houses of that region with the style of wooden Orthodox churches with a large dome, intended to resemble the Byzantine-Ottoman shrines. In the photo of its interior, unfortunately of bad newspaper quality, a minbar and mihrab are visible. Both are decorated with pious Arabic formulas: the invocation *yā Allāh yā Muḥammad* on the minbar and *šahāda* around the mihrab are readable.

Another inscription on minbar had been reported before the 2nd WW in Łowczyce (near Nowogródek). It was probably from the 18th century and was to commemorate (in Turkish) the founder of the minbar: *Aga Józefowicz bu minbar*.

Devotional panels (muhirs)

The interiors of the mosques, as well as the minbars, have been decorated regularly since the 19th century in most of the Tatar communities with devotional or talismanic panels, called *muhirs*. This word corresponds to the most probably magic origin of this category of objects – *mūhiir* as a talismanic figure composed of a circle, star or rosette combined with prayers or invocations inscribed, referring to the Prophet Muhammad and his companions or prophets, was popular in the Ottoman Turks' devotion (known also as *hilye-i šerif*). Probably, the muhirs, as panels to be hung on the walls inside of houses or mosques, appeared among the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars in the 19th century. Soon they became patterned after, the so called, *šamā'ils* – panels with images of the Muslim sanctuaries or calligraphic-symbolic compositions, printed by the Kazan Tatars and spread among the Muslims in the Russian Empire before the 1st WW. We should state that the

patterns from the *šamā'īls* occurred not only on the Polish-Lithuanian *muhirs* but also on the gravestones made for our Tatars by local professional stone-cutters. Generally, due to the complexity of forms (purely ornamental, symbolic or more or less realistic, often naive), contents (extended from sole texts of prayers to architectural images without any inscription), materials and techniques (from ink on paper to oil on wood or embroidery), the *muhirs* should be considered not only as epigraphic (which they are to some extent only) or writing works but as a peculiar kind of devotional religious art of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. Most of the material collected in 1998–1999 (over 60 samples) was published and described in the *Catalogue of the Tatar Monuments* (Drozd et al. 2000). Not much of new material has been revealed since that time. What we should extend in the future is the search for the oriental sources and parallels for the Polish-Lithuanian *muhirs* in the Ottoman and the Kazan Tatar popular devotional art. Of course we should not exclude coming across unknown important objects in private hands in the future.

Textiles

The epigraphic pieces of textiles are divided generally into two categories. The only feature common for them is that they both express the attitude to Islam. The first category, historically of great importance but represented very narrowly, are the military flags. Few of the flags of the Polish-Lithuanian troops from the 17th century (or their exact images in inventories) had the luck of being preserved in the Swedish collections after being captured during the Polish-Swedish wars (Gutowski 1997: il. 93). They represent – again – coexistence of the local and oriental components, but this time on symbolic – not only on sociolinguistic – level. There can appear even the symbols of both religions: the Cross and the Zulfikar. There are two flags known (one preserved, one as an image only) with Arabic inscriptions. They both contain the text of *šahāda*. They were not unique samples of inscriptions on the flags, since we know about one more example: there had been preserved in the mosque of Studzianka a flag of the 6th Regiment of *Straż Przednia* ['the Vanguard Cavalry'], formed by the Tatars in the last decades of the 18th century in the Polish-Lithuanian army. There were inscriptions in Arabic and Latin script on it. The flag burnt with the mosque in 1915.

The second category of epigraphic textiles are the contemporary funerary covers (called from the Belarussian *pokrywało*). These objects have been used to cover the corpse during the funeral ceremonies before laying the it down to the grave. The custom was to offer the *pokrywało* for the mosque as a floor cover for the *ṣalāt*. This corresponds to the tradition of funerary kilims spread among Turks in Anatolia and the Central Asia. The oldest samples of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars' *pokrywałos*, always made of cloth, date back to 1918. There are over 60 objects of this kind preserved, and most of them are kept in Rejze mosque. They contain embroidered typical Arabic formulas to confirm the confession of the dead – *basmala*, *ta'awwud*, invocations *yā Allāh yā Muḥammad*, and the information about the deceased's name and date of death. Sometimes a simple

ornament or, more often, a crescent (*hilāl*) is also embroidered. Apart from funeral covers, textiles used for other purposes, with embroidered or painted pious Arabic formulas, can be occasionally found in some Tatar mosques.

The textiles with samples of epigraphy have not been included in the *Catalogue of the Tatar Monuments*. I have outlined this matter recently in my study on the Arabic components of the Tatar epigraphy (Drozd 2007). I should mention here other minor epigraphic samples detected so far among the objects of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatar material culture, mostly also described in that study. They are:

- inscriptions (on memorial plates, cut in stones or in graffiti type) on buildings,
- inscriptions on the gates of the cemeteries (painted contemporarily in Belarus),
- inscriptions on magic objects,
- inscriptions on seals (few are known from the 16th–19th centuries).

Gravestones

One of the most important component of the culture of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars are cemeteries and grave inscriptions. The inscriptions have been found in about half of over one hundred cemeteries existing before 1945 in the territory of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. (To be more precise, apart from a few mentioned in sources from before the 20th century, we have registered 107 cemeteries, of which we have visited 74; there is no information what happened with 17 of them after the 1945 – that means that probably they disappeared from the memory of the Tatar community. We have found that 26 cemeteries were destructed after the 2nd WW. Apart from them we should add two cemeteries of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars community in New York, which date back to the 1st half of the 20th century.)

The grave inscriptions can be dated back to the 17th century – the oldest (dated at 1626, which I had luck to come across during the first expedition, in 1998) is located in the village of Sorok Tatory, a famous centre of 14th/15th century Tatar settlement near Vilnius. This inscription is situated in one of four cemeteries of Sorok Tatory, the *Drozdowska Zireć*, and it belonged to ‘Ayšā daughter of Ibn Allāhberdī, whose family was mentioned in the Kierdej’s *Rewizja* [‘register’] of Tatar land properties in 1631. In another cemetery of that village, the *Wielka Zireć* [‘Grand Cemetery’], which was heavily destructed during the German occupation and after it (most of the stones were removed for building roads), we found in 1999 and 2008 ten gravestones with inscriptions. Although they have no dates indicated, we can assume that they are from the 17th century. The names of the deceased, as: *Jandawleć* (ين داوالت) < Tat. *Yan davlet*, *Kulziman* (قل زمان) < Tat. *Qul zamān*, *Churem* (حرم) < Per./Ar. *Hurram*, *Szahid* (شاهد) < Ar. *Šahid*, Pol. Bibl. *Urjasz* (اوريش), considering the homogenous contents of the inscriptions and situating the stones in two compact quarters, are clear indications of such dating – since they could co-occur only in that period, i.e. the 17th century. There is a regular structure of name indication within this group of inscriptions, which reveals

probably corrupted knowledge of Turkish among the Tatars (the same is evidenced in the Tatar documents signed with Arabic script): the first is the name of a parent (father or mother), then the word *oğl* – Tur. ‘son’ (or, in Kozaklary cemetery, close to Sorok Tatar, *qız* – Tur. ‘daughter’), and at the end the name of the deceased. We should underline the presence of two short rhymed epitaphs written in Turkish in Wielka Zireć (i.e. *oqūyānī bū yaṭānī rahmetiñle yarlığa ğıl yā ğanī*), which has no continuation in the rest of the material collected in the Tatar cemeteries. Of course, we should not exclude that more epitaphs like those two existed but have not been preserved.

I assume that there are 19 inscriptions discovered so far which can be dated back to the 17th century. Sorok Tatar forms the biggest group of them. There are other grave inscriptions from the same period in the area of settlement in and around Rejże and Bazary villages (which is some 80 km west to Vilnius and 20 km before the town of Alytus, Lithuania). The list of smaller or bigger cemeteries located in this compact area consists of 15 places. That shows that probably all burial places, owing to unbroken settlement tradition since 15/16th century, survived in the memory of the Tatar community. This does not concern, unfortunately, the village of Punie (lit. Puniai), close to Rejże, in which one out of two dynastic Tatar families was settled in similar time – the *Puńskis carewicz*, who remained the local Tatar leaders until the 1st half of the 17th century. Thereafter they disappeared from history and the Punie Tatar settlement as well, so we don't have any traces of the cemetery, which must have existed. The remarkable number of cemeteries in or around Rejże reflects a custom quite typical among the Turks in rural areas, i.e. founding cemeteries for particular families or groups of families, or maybe just “diversification” of burial places for one village.

We came across three inscriptions from the 17th century in one of the Rejże cemeteries, called *Kamienica*. One of them belonged to imam of Rejże, Yusūf ibn ‘Abdu llāh, mentioned in archival sources in 1643–1663. Close to him probably his brother, Sulaymān, was buried and the grave inscription put.

In the cemetery of Bazary village (next to Rejże) another two inscriptions from the 17th century have been discovered, with quite developed Turkish formulas.

In the territory of the present day Poland the oldest grave inscription I have found was in the well-known cemetery of Kruszyniany near Białystok. It is dated at 1699 and contains invocation to God and Muhammad, and the Hiğra date written in Turkish (apart from this also a Christian date “1699”): *1699| Allāh bir Muḥammad hiğretiniñ | tārihiñ biñ | yüz on <...> yılında | mubarek | ğumāda ‘l-aḥiriñ | on birinçe günüñde mevt | oldı.*

We can assume, that probably it was in the beginning of the 17th century when the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars started putting the inscriptions on their gravestones. This custom became more popular in the 2nd half of the 18th century – we have recorded about 120 inscriptions from that century (what is striking is that almost 85, abt. 70%, of them are grouped in only five cemeteries, of Lipka settlement in Podlasie: Kruszyniany, Bohoniki, Studzianka, Lebedziew, and, not of Lipka but of also 17th century origin, located close to Polish ethnic territories, Winksznupie near Suwałki). Making the inscriptions became

In the following century Polish components of the tombstone inscriptions were rendered with the use of both Latin or Arabic script. The latter remained, in the 19th century, the way of manifesting the attitude to one's own tradition and religion, the use of the first became a way to manifest the higher social position of the deceased and his relatives, close to the Polish noble class. It was not exceptional that both scripts were used, as on general Mustafa Baranowski's gravestones, d. 1800, buried in Winksznupie. The inscription is cut on both, the western and the eastern, stones; on the first one there is mixed Arabic-Polish text rendered exclusively with the Arabic script: *la ilaha illa 'llahu! Muḥammad rasūlu <'>llāhil Mustafa Murza| Baran<o>wski jenerat* (موستافا مرزا بارانوصك ينرال); on the second the text is in Polish and written in the Latin script: *Roku | 1800 mar(ca). 6. d(nia). | Mustafa | Murza | Baranowski | Gen(erat):* *mal[jor]*. Another Tatar general, Józef Bielak, d. 1794, the most famous commander of the Tatar cavalry in the Kościuszko's insurrection, was buried in his family parish (*dżemiat*) cemetery, Studzianka. On his gravestone (which remained undiscovered until 2002) the text is written mostly in the Arabic script: *lā ilāha | illa 'llāhu | Muḥammad rasūlu 'llāhi | Yūsuf Bielak | jenerat* (يوسف بلق ينرال) – only the date is in Latin script: *R[oku] 1794 | R.*

As we can see, the grave inscriptions reflected the complexity of the cultural, historical, linguistic and political situation of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatar community.

Several languages have occurred in the Tatar inscriptions, such as Polish, Turkish, Arabic, Russian, presently also Lithuanian (in Lithuania) and English (in the New York mizars), written with the use of three scripts: Arabic (used also to render Polish-Byelorussian texts), Latin, Cyrillic. The contents of the inscription was still close to the Islamic tradition, according to which all men are equal in respect of death. So the main reason for writing any text on a grave was to confirm the confession of the deceased – the Islam. Usually the inscriptions were composed of two parts: confessional and informational. The first one was to confirm or declare the religion of the deceased. The second informed about their name, date of the death, sometimes about age, family relations or social position. The texts in Arabic form the most frequent content of the confessional part. Apart from *šahāda*, which was the most frequent and popular formula, and sometimes was the only text on a grave, the invocations to God, the Prophet, to the four Caliphs and the four Angels occur. The devotional formulas such as *basmala*, *ta'awwud* and *šalawāt* have been carved on the gravestones since the 19th century. Another type of Arabic text were quotations from the Qur'an, such as ayats 3:182, 3:37, 2:156, 36:58. In case of several cemeteries other Arabic prayers taken from Tatar handwritten prayerbooks (*hamā'ilis*) occur. Within the informational part, which was predominantly in Polish (or, later, in Russian), the Arabic language was represented in personal names, names of the months, and other descriptive elements, as *ibn*, *bint*, *šahr*, *sanat* etc. What seems to be interesting is that the prayers or appeals begging for the deceased were usually in Turkish. Apart from that, Turkish was used in the informational part of the inscriptions: in the 17th century, as mentioned above, for dating, but mostly – at that time and later – for naming the deceased (with the patronymic forms *oğlu/qızı*). In some cemeteries (e.g. in Słonim) the Turkish patronymic formulas were used until the end of the 19th century. What seems to be a direct influence of the Turkish epitaphs tradition, is the use of the form of the 1st person singular when presenting the name of the deceased (Pol./Belaruss. pronoun *ja* – “I/me”, which corresponds to Tur. *ben* and to the personal structure of communication (“me, the deceased, left this world” etc.), quite frequent in the rural Turkish epitaphs.

Generally speaking, we can outline the major trends of the Tatar grave epigraphy. They reflect the two general processes present in the culture and history of this community. One trend is adapting the local, non-Muslim, patterns and, subsequently, replacing the original elements with them. For example, the Latin abbreviation D.O.M. (Deo Optimo Maximo) which the Tatars rendered with Arabic script as *دوم* in accordance with the folk interpretation of this abbreviation common among the Poles and Belarussians (DOM = Home), based on the idea of a grave as an eternal home of the deceased. Often it was extended to *Dom wieczny* (Pol. ‘Eternal home of...’) – *دوم وچنی*. Another example is introducing abbreviations (in Latin script) of name and the military rank to the inscription – patterned on the local noblemen's practice, e.g. *J K R I K M* on a gravestone dated at 1775 in Kruszyniany, where “J K” are the initials of the name and surname of the deceased (probably *K r z e c z o w s k i* or *K r y c z y ń s k i*) and “R I K M” is “Rotmistrz Ięgo Królewskiej Mości” [‘Cavalry-Captain of His Royal Majesty’]; this inscription is completed with *šahāda* below.

Replacement of oriental elements is apparent in case of indication of the date of the death. Quite typical is combining two calendars: the year is indicated according to the Christian calendar, the month and the day – according to the Hiġra calendar. Less frequent was expressing the date in both ways simultaneously.

The second trend is adaptation of new elements from the Islamic (Turkic/Ottoman) cultural environment. It can be seen frequently within the 19th century when new patterns or Arabic or Turkish formulas appeared on certain cemeteries. We can assume that local communities of Tatars adapted peculiar oriental patterns in this period and continued using them more or less consequently, often spreading on neighboring parishes. For example, there appeared about the middle of the 19th century in Miadzioł (town in Belarus) a regularly cut inscription composed of, as a central element, a circle with a word *ṣaḥīḥ* three times repeated inside; this element was later adapted in Widze, Karolin, Ambrosowicze cemeteries. In Osmołowo cemetery (near the town of Kleck, Belarus) the eschatological ayat 3:182 (*kullu nafsīn dā'iḡatu āl-mawti*) became very frequent in the last decades of the 19th century. In this cemetery a Turkish formula *Allāh raḡmet eyle ġennet firdevs* or another *Ey ġennet müyessir eyle* became popular. They appeared also in a close community of Kopyl. In Słonim cemetery (Belarus), founded in the beginning of the 19th century by Tatar re-emigrants from Ottoman provinces, a classic for Turkish epitaphs formula *Huwa 'l- ḡallāq wa-'l-bāqī* appeared in the middle of this century in a corrupted version *Huwa ḡallāq fī 'l-bāqī*. Such examples can be multiplied.

Those two above presented trends co-existed permanently and resulted in very interesting combinations of Polish and oriental motifs.

Perspectives

While, in fact, for other kinds of epigraphy we need only minor works in the future (as deciphering the rest of the Rejze minbar inscriptions, or compact publication of the complete of textiles revealed so far), there is still a vast research to be done about the cemeteries and gravestone epigraphy. Generally, there are two aims for further works in this field.

The first is to discover the cemeteries which we have not managed to search. There are three groups (or rather three kinds of sources of our knowledge about them):

- a) those which have been registered by the Muftiat of the Polish Republic before 1939 and to which we have not had access – mostly in the territory of Belarus, particularly in Dowbuciszki parish (*dżemiat*), where we managed to explore only 8 out of 24 mizars recorded before 1939 (the main reason for that is dispersion of the local community after the 2nd WW and disappearing of the memory about old burial places); we should not exclude a possibility of finding gravestones even when a cemetery has been destructed, as it happened in a village of Maluszyce (Belarus), where we found in 2001 a stone with the inscription of lieutenant “of His Royal Majesty” Józef Ułan from 1757, used as a threshold of a kennel. Recently probably some gravestones

from the Vilnius mizar in Łukiszki (destroyed in the 1960s) have been revealed in Vilnius Rossa cemetery;

- b) those which are known from other sources, as archival documents or publications – firstly in Ukraine (Ostróg and Juwkwce in Wolhynia, Kowalówka-Niemirów in Podole – of them the first one exists while there is no information on the others), secondly in the oldest places of settlement in Lithuania (as in Kiena near Vilnius, Punie etc.); this direction of exploring can be surprisingly effective as shows the above mentioned gravestone from Ponary from 1646; but certainly it will require the use of archeological methods if the site of a cemetery is not known for the local inhabitants;
- c) those which can be discovered with the use of archeological methods only; we should not disregard the registers of archeological sites – they can reveal even new places of the Tatar settlements unknown so far, as it happened near the castle of Miedniki (Medininkai, Lithuania) where in 1996 Mr. Gintaras Abaravičius, presently the Director of National Cultural Park in Trakai (Troki), excavated several Tatar graves and revealed one gravestone with calligraphic inscription (considered by us as coming from the 17th century): *yā Allāh | lā ilāha illā 'llāhu| Muḥammad rasūlu 'llāhi| Ibrāhīm.*

The second aim is to complete the collecting of epigraphic material on the cemeteries which have already been explored. Among them there are only few of which the inscriptions have been registered completely. In most of the cemeteries the elaborated material, although covering usually all the important inscriptions, could not be collected in entirety. There are at least several cemeteries which still require more detailed exploration on surface. Apart from that it can be considered to undertake a further search with the use of special equipment such as geo-radar, since it became obvious for us that in some cemeteries older gravestones could be hidden under the surface of the ground. Possibly it will effect the clarification of origins of certain cemeteries and enrich the oldest epigraphic material. Of course, all such works must be done with respect for the special character of burial places and relics crucial for the Tatar culture.

Nevertheless the material collected up to now is remarkable enough to start publishing it, which is a serious task standing before us.

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Photo 1. The oldest grave inscription found in Podlasie mizars: an unknown deceased, 1699, the mizar of Kruszyniany (Poland)



Photo 2. The gravestone of “JK”, d. 1775 (the mizar of Kruszyniany); “R I K M” stands for “Rotmistrz Jego Królewskiej Mości” (‘Cavalry-Captain of His Royal Majesty’)



Photo 3. The mizar of Studzianka (Poland) – the pictures were taken after putting the General Bielak’s gravestone up by the team of Istanbul TV Broadcasting and Prof. Henryk Jankowski



Photo 4. The gravestone of General Józef Bielak, d. 1794,
the mizar of Sudzianka (Poland)