

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTELLECTUAL
HISTORY OF POLISH-LITHUANIAN TATARS –
ALI ISMAIL WORONOWICZ (1902 – 1941)
AND HIS WORK

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This article is devoted to an eminent Polish-Tatar Orientalist, writer and activist of the first part of the 20th century, Ali Ismail Woronowicz. From 1937 he was an imam of the Muslim community of the city of Warsaw, and from 1938 he looked after Muslims in the Polish army. From 1933, he was a member of the editorial staff of the scholarly journal *Rocznik Tatarski* [Tatar Yearbook]. In 1941 he was accused of espionage and arrested by the NKVD. The subsequent fate of Woronowicz is unknown; he was probably killed by the Soviet army. Woronowicz published in Polish and foreign scholarly and popular periodicals. He focused mainly on the study of the Tatar region in the Polish-Lithuanian territories. In 1936, in Cairo, he published a brochure in Arabic *Al-Islām fī Būlūnyā* [Islam in Poland], which was probably the first publication about Poland in Arabic in the Middle East. While still studying in Cairo, he began working on the monograph “The Life of the Prophet Muhammad and the Dawn of Islam”.

Keywords: Ali Woronowicz, Poland, Islam, Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, Politics, Interwar Period

1. Introduction

Ali Ismail Woronowicz is one of the most eminent figures in the history of Islam in Poland. Although because of the historical circumstances he was unable to pursue all his interests and despite some of his achievements being either lost or surviving only as projects, he belonged, alongside Leon, Olgierd and Stanisław Kryczyński, Jakub Szynekiewicz and Mustafa Aleksandrowicz, to the tight-knit group of activists, writers and scholars of Tatar origin who formed the Polish

Tatar intellectual elite in the interwar period.¹ And although Polish research on the history of Islam in Poland describes his activities rather well, there are no monographs in English devoted to his work, the available material consisting only of a few lines in publications devoted to wider subjects. The primary aim of this article is, therefore, to present the life and the written works of Ali Woronowicz to an international audience. The first section of this paper provides a short description of Polish Islam up to the middle of the 20th century, a phenomenon unlike any other in the Islamic religious and cultural sphere.

2. Islam in Poland up until the Second World War²

Islam is today represented in Poland by approximately 20,000 believers, among whom about 5000 are descendants of the so-called Polish (or more precisely Polish-Lithuanian) Tatars, known today also as “Tatars of the Great Duchy of Lithuania”. There is also a fluctuating group of emigrants from Muslim countries.

There are currently 5 Muslim communities in Poland: Warsaw, Białystok, Bohoniki, Kruszyńsk and Gdańsk. The Muslims have four mosques:

¹ See for example MIŚKIEWICZ, A. *Tatarzy polscy 1918 – 1939. Życie społeczno-kulturalne i religijne* [Polish Tatars 1918 – 1939. Socio-cultural and Religious Life]; DZIEKAN, M. M. Polnische Orientalisten tatarischer Herkunft in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts. In *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 2013, Vol. LXVI, Fasc. 2, pp. 5–13; WENDLAND, W. „Trzy czoła proroków z matki obcej”. *Myśl historyczna Tatarów polskich w II Rzeczypospolitej* [“Three Foreheads of Prophets from a Foreign Mother”. The Historical Thinking of Polish Tatars in the Second Polish Republic].

² Many important works in Polish have been published on the subject of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars history and culture (see *References*). There are also some works in English: GAWĘCKI, M. Ethno-Cultural Status of the Polish Tatars. In *Central Asian Survey*, 1989, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 53–60; BOHDANOWICZ, L. The Polish Tatars. In BOHDANOWICZ, L., CHAZBIJEWICZ, S., TYSZKIEWICZ, J. *Tatarzy muzułmanie w Polsce* [Muslim Tatars in Poland], pp. 94–101; NALBORCZYK, A. Islam in Poland. The Past and the Present. In *Islamochristiana*, 2006, Vol. XXXII, pp. 225–238; JAKULYTE-VASIL, M. Tatars’ Assimilation/Integration in the Social Fabric of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In *Orientas Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštijos Visuomenės Tradicijoje: Totoriai ir Karaimai / The Orient in the Social Tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Tatars and Karaims / Orient w tradycji społeczeństwa Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego: Tatarzy i Karaimi / Ориент в общественной традиции Великого княжества Литовского: татары и карaimы* – special issue of *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 2008, Vol. VI, pp. 23–36; NORRIS, H. *Islam in the Baltic. Europe’s Early Muslim Community*; DZIEKAN, M. M. History and Culture of Polish Tatars. In GÓRAK-SOSNOWSKA, K. *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse of Islam*, pp. 27–39.

Kruszyniany (18th century) and Bohoniki (mid-19th century) in the Białystok region, both wooden, historic buildings, as well as a modern building in Gdańsk (1990) and Białystok (2021). There exist also some prayer houses in several cities.

The first Tatar Muslims to appear in Poland-Lithuania were Muslim captives, soldiers of the Golden Horde who founded several settlements in Lithuania in the 14th century. The first Tatar captives were then joined by emigrants from different regions of the Golden Horde, and later the Great Horde, as well as from the Crimea, Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Anatolia. The largest wave of Muslim immigration to Polish territory took place in the 16th and 17th centuries. Since the 15th century the Tatars have played a role in Poland's public life, and this is shown particularly in the military history of Poland. From the Middle Ages until the Second World War, Polish Tatars had their own units in the Polish army. Military service became their main occupation. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the Uhlan military tradition in Poland has Tatar origins.

Muslims who came to Poland brought their own languages and culture, their specific habits and social customs. However, as a consequence of acclimatising to the culture and later assimilation processes, they lost the knowledge of their native languages and switched to Polish or the Polish-Belarusian dialect with elements of the Turkish and Arabic lexis. The Muslims who inhabited Polish territory were Sunnites, adherents of the legal school of Abu Hanifa. An institution of the "qadi of all the Tatars of the Great Duchy of Lithuania" existed for some time in the 16th century, but later they fell within the jurisdiction of the Turkish *mufti*, and later the *mufti* of Crimea, until Poland regained independence in 1918.

An extraordinarily interesting and original phenomenon is the religious literature of the Polish Tatars, which existed approximately from the 17th century till the first part of the 20th century. It can be divided into a number of genres: *tefsir* – Qur'anic texts with translations into Polish or Belarusian provided with explanations and comments; *tedjwid* – handbooks on Qur'anic recitation; *kitab* – including texts on different subjects: *hadith*, prayers, ritual regulations, legends etc.; *khamail* – practical Muslim handbooks, prayer books of a less official character than the *kitab*; and *dalavar* – paper scrolls with prayers which were laid under a deceased's shroud; and *hramotka* – a kind of talisman protecting against bad luck. The religious literature of the Polish Tatars, which was a unique phenomenon on a global scale, was written mainly in the local languages, although it included Arabic, Ottoman-Turkish and Tatar elements as well. However, Arabic letters adapted to Polish or Belarusian sounds were used in writing. The reason is that the Arabic alphabet is one of the most sacred symbols of Islam, even more sacred than the Arabic language. The Arabic alphabet was used above all to record the words of God and to transmit the Prophet

Muhammad's tradition (*Sunna*). In preserving the holy alphabet, these books preserved at least some of the Muslim religion.³

Muslims in Poland have maintained contacts with Muslims in other countries. Due to their knowledge of Oriental languages they have made a great contribution to the Polish state as diplomats and interpreters in the East. Nevertheless, Muslims living on Polish territory had no religious organization of their own for several hundred years. They were very active in this field in the period between the two World Wars. The Muslim Association of the Capital City of Warsaw (Związek Muzułmański Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy), made official in 1923, was the first religious organization of Polish Muslims. Two years later an All-Poland Muslim Convention was organized in Vilnius, where the autocephalous status of Polish Islam was declared. The Convention established the Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Poland (Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej). The Convention, transformed into a Congress, also established a separate *muftiate* for Polish Muslims with its seat in Vilnius (currently in Lithuania); Jakub Szynkiewicz then became the *mufti*. At that time the construction of a mosque in Warsaw was also planned, but it has still not materialized.

Polish Muslims in the 1920s and 30s could choose between three periodicals, each with a different style. The "Muslim Review" [Przegląd Islamski] was the first, published from 1930 to 1932 and from 1934 to 1937 by the Warsaw Muslim community, and covering Muslim affairs in general. Thanks to the efforts of the Culture and Education Association, the first volume of the "Tatar Yearbook" [Rocznik Tatarski] was published in 1932, a periodical with a scholarly profile edited by Leon Kryczyński. The periodical lasted until 1938. The third magazine of the Polish Muslims between the wars was "Tatar Life" [Życie Tatarskie], edited by Stefan Tuhan-Baranowski. It had a popular and confessional character. The interwar period was a time of extraordinarily active development in the social, cultural and political life of Polish and Lithuanian Tatars,⁴ who through

³ See further: DZIEKAN, M. M. Einige Bemerkungen über die islamische Literatur der polnisch-litauischen Tataren. In LEDER, S. et al. (ed.). *Studies in Arabic and Islam*, pp. 185–191; SUTER, P. *Alfurkan Tatarski. Der litauisch-tatarische Koran-Tefsir*; AKINER, Sh. *Religious Language of a Belarusian Tatar Kitab: A Cultural Monument of Islam in Europe*.

⁴ MIŚKIEWICZ, A. *Tatarzy polscy 1918 – 1939. Życie społeczno-kulturalne i religijne* [Polish Tatars 1918 – 1939. Socio-cultural and Religious Life]; BOHDANOWICZ, A. Cultural Movements of Muslims in Poland. In *The Islamic Review*, 1942, Vol. XXX, No. 11, pp. 372–381; CHAZBIJEWICZ, S. Ideologie Muzułmanów – Tatarów Polskich 1918 – 1939 [Muslim Ideologies – Polish Tatars 1918 – 1939]. In *Rocznik Tatarów Polskich*, 1993, Vol. I, pp. 15–42.

their connection to the Crimea and the Black Sea region were in tune with the idea of the Black Sea border, popularised by circles around Józef Piłsudski, the Marshal of Poland, or the attempts to recreate Poland as a state stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. These concepts will be referred to again later in this article.

The history of Polish Tatars is an excellent example of the coexistence of two different cultures. They have interpenetrated each other, taking over certain elements while retaining others. Assimilation affected the language of the Tatars, as knowledge of it was not necessary for the community's survival, whereas ignorance of the local language would have impeded contacts with the rest of society. The folk customs were blended, perhaps because not all fitted well into the new life. What remained untouched was the religion as the most durable determinant of self-identification of the Tatars as Poles of the Muslim denomination.

3. Ali Ismail Woronowicz

Ali Ismail Woronowicz was born on 1st April 1902 in Lyakhavichy (Pol.: Lachowicze, currently in Belarus), the son of Ismail and Amina, née Szynekiewicz.⁵ The Woronowicz family, as Stanisław Dziadulewicz, the authority

⁵ Biographical data mainly from: SZCZĘSNOWICZ, T. Woronowicz Ali Ismail. In MIŚKIEWICZ, A. (ed.). *Słownik biograficzny tatarów Polskich XX wieku* [Biographical Dictionary of the Polish Tatars of the 20th Century], pp. 193–196.; WORONOWICZ, E. Wspomnienie o Imamie m-sta Stołecznego Warszawy [Recollection of the Imam of the Capital City of Warsaw]. In *Życie Muzułmańskie*, 1988, No. 8, pp. 26–28.; TYSZKIEWICZ, J. Imam Ali Ismail Woronowicz w Warszawie i Klecku: 1937 – 1941 [Imam Ali Ismail Woronowicz in Warsaw and Kleck: 1937 – 1941]. In *Rocznik Tatarów Polskich*, 1995, Vol. III, pp. 7–15; CZERWIŃSKI, G. (ed.). *Podróże do serca islamu. Antologia międzywojennego reportażu polskich Tatarów* [Travels to the Heart of Islam. Anthology of the Polish Tatars' Interwar Reportage]; CZERWIŃSKI, G., MAKSIMOWICZ, E. (eds.). *Ali Woronowicz i Mustafa Aleksandrowicz w Egipcie. Materiały źródłowe i publicystyka z lat 1934 – 1938* [Ali Woronowicz and Mustafa Aleksandrowicz in Egypt. Source Materials and Journalistic Writing from 1934 – 1938]; CZACHOROWSKI D. St. (ed. and transl.). *Tragedia warszawskiego imama* [The Tragedy of the Warsaw Imam]. In *Rocznik Tatarów Polskich, seria 2*, 2019, Vol. VI (XX), pp. 175–223; KANAPACKI, I., LASHKEVYCH, A. (ed.). *Nevedomy los varshavskaga imama. Dakumenty i materiały* [The Unknown Fate of the Warsaw Imam. Documents and Materials]. In *Bayram* 1996, No. 3, pp. 28–32; 1996, No. 4, pp. 17–23; 1997, No. 1, pp. 35–45; 1997, No. 3, pp. 41–49; 1997, No. 4, pp. 40–46; 1998, No. 1, pp. 33–41; 1999, No. 3, pp. 10–22; 2000, Nos. 3–4, pp. 19–23.

in histories of Tatar families, says, came from the Nogai tribes. It is known that Ali's great-grandfather, also Ali, in 1832 was a nobleman and used the *Lis* (Fox) coat of arms⁶. Ali grew up in a traditionally religious environment: his uncle, Jakub Szynekiewicz, was the *mufti* of Poland, and his stepfather, Kamber Smolski, was the community imam in Slonim (Pol.: Słonim, currently in Belarus). He began his education in Navahrudak (Pol: Nowogródek, now in Lithuania), but then the family moved to Crimea. He completed his secondary education in Simferopol (final secondary school examination: 21.08.1920), and afterwards he commenced his agricultural science studies there (1920 – 1922), at the Tavrida National University, which he did not complete. After returning to Poland (1922), he studied law in Vilnius for a while and later travelled to Lviv, where he completed his Arabic studies (1926 – 1932) under Prof. Zygmunt Smogorzewski (d. 1931), one of the most eminent Polish scholars of the Orient of that time (he took his Master's exam on 24 January 1932).⁷

In 1933, Woronowicz received a scholarship from the Eastern Institute,⁸ an institute closely connected to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and left for Cairo to study theology at the most famous Muslim religious university, the Al-Azhar university. The connections to the Eastern Institute, which was one of the main propaganda centres which spread the idea of Prometheanism in the interwar Polish politics, later turned out to be one of the main reasons for A. Woronowicz's tragic death.⁹

Woronowicz stayed in Egypt until 1936.¹⁰ His studies there helped him deepen his knowledge of the literary Arabic language and dialect. He also had extensive contact with Muslim scholars from Egypt and many other Muslim countries, which, apart from his studies, was one of the main tasks he was entrusted with by

⁶ DZIADULEWICZ S. *Herbarz rodzin tatarskich w Polsce* [Armorial of the Tatar Families in Poland], p. 356; coat of arms description: DUMIN, S. *Herbarz rodzin tatarskich Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego* [Armorial of the Tatar Families of the Great Duchy of Lithuania], p. 84.

⁷ On the diploma see KANAPACKI, I., LASHKEVYCH, A. (eds.). *Nevedomy los varshavskaga imama* [The Unknown Fate of the Warsaw Imam]. In *Bayram*, 1997, No. 1, p. 39.

⁸ On the Institute see TYSZKIEWICZ, J. The School of Oriental Studies in Warsaw 1929 – 1938. In *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 2007, Vol. LX, Fasc. 1, pp. 61–74.

⁹ On the concept of Prometheanism, striving to free the Turkic peoples from the Soviet regime, see for example MIKULICZ, S. *Prometeizm w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej* [Prometheanism in the Politics of the Second Republic]; WOYTAK, R. The Promethean Movement in Interwar Poland. In *East European Quarterly*, 1984, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, pp. 273–278.

¹⁰ For details and archival documentation, see CZERWIŃSKI, G., MAKSIMOWICZ, E. (eds.). *Ali Woronowicz i Mustafa Aleksandrowicz w Egipcie*, pp. 165–191.

the institutions funding his stay. Another task was promoting Poland in Egypt and publishing articles about Poland and Polish Muslims. Woronowicz did this with conviction, but he was also fully aware that these activities were planned by Polish political actors as a tool for gaining the favour of Muslim countries and – potentially – the Arab and Muslim general public for joint efforts against the Soviet Union. Woronowicz published in Arabic in such periodicals as *Al-Iḥwān al-Muslimūn* [Muslim Brothers], *Al-Balāḡ* [Communication], *Kawkab aš-Šarq* [Planet of the East], and *Mağallat al-Azhar* [Journal of Al-Azhar].

As part of his activities, the most important work was the brochure published in 1936, in Cairo, in Arabic, titled “Islam in Poland” (*Al-Islām fī Būlūnyā*), which was co-authored by Muḥammad al-Ḥamawī, who in 1934 was working as a trainee at a bank in Poland. This was probably the first publication devoted to Poland to be published in Arabic in the Arab world. The brochure is 64 pages long and includes 20 illustrations depicting Tatar historic sites and monuments in Poland and the eminent figures in the history of the Muslim community. It is divided into an introduction, conclusion, and 7 chapters: “The History of Polish Muslims, from Vytautas to the Partitions of Poland at the end of the 18th Century”; “Polish Muslims under Russia Rule”; “The History of Muslims in Independent Poland”; “The General Condition of Polish Muslims”; “Religious Life”; “Organisations of Polish Muslims”; “The Warsaw Mosque Construction Project”. In the documentation of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the book is described as follows: “The main objective of the brochure is to prove that the position and circumstances of Muslims in Pre-Partition Poland and Independent Poland since 1918 merit the attention of Muslim peoples some of whom are in a much worse situation and in their own lands. The brochure emphasises the close and harmonious coexistence within the Polish state of the Christian and Muslim elements and thus will prompt the reader to learn about Poland [...] in areas within the reach of Arabic. [...] The contents of the brochure are based on sources and facts, and illustrated with numerous photographs, written by a Polish Muslim and an Egyptian Muslim, and thus will be considered credible. [...] It could also help in collecting part of the funds necessary for the construction of a mosque in Warsaw.”¹¹

While still in Cairo, he began working on the monograph titled “The Life of the Prophet Muhammad and the Dawn of Islam”. In 1939 the book was ready for press. Woronowicz took this work with him to an interrogation after being arrested by the NKVD in 1941 and since then the book has been lost. Quite possibly it may still be somewhere in the archives of the Russian secret service.

¹¹ CZERWIŃSKI, G., MAKSIMOWICZ, E. (eds.). *Ali Woronowicz i Mustafa Aleksandrowicz w Egipcie*, p. 182.

In 1937, A. Woronowicz was elected as the imam of the Muslim community in Warsaw, and in the same year he married Ewa Jakubowska (1917 – 2012), who at that time was a student at the Warsaw Technical University. However, soon after the marriage, Ewa quit university, and in 1940 they had a daughter, Tahira (married name, Szczęsnowicz). There are signs that he was supposed to take up the position of *mufti*, after Jakub Szynkiewicz.¹² From 1938, he was also an auxiliary cleric (Muslim chaplain) in the Polish Army, where, since 1936, there was a Tatar Squadron with the 13th Regiment of the Vilnius Uhlans, and it operated until WWII. Between 1919 and 1936, there was a Tatar Regiment, but due to insufficient personnel it was disbanded. Attempts to revive it after 1989 failed. In the same year, at the First All-Poland Muslim Congress, Woronowicz was elected a member of the Supreme Muslim Council. From 1933, A. Woronowicz was a member of the editorial team of *Rocznik Tatarski*. These functions were, of course, connected with his specialist, Muslim and Orientalist education.

When performing these functions, which meant that Woronowicz could be regarded as the most important representative of the Muslim minority, if not in Poland then definitely in Warsaw, he would meet many political activists, both local as well as Tatar immigrants, the majority of whom were Crimean Tatars. He also established connections with diplomatic representatives of Muslim countries in Poland. The Polish activist connected with the Crimean movement was Woronowicz's cousin, Edige Kırimal Szynkiewicz, while Cafer Seydamet Kırimer who came from Crimea lived for some time in Warsaw. Other Muslim political activists who temporarily resided in Poland during the interwar period included Abdullah Zihni Soysal, Wassan Girej-Dżabagi, and Ayaz Ishaki. The last one of these activists was also a very active member of the anti-Soviet organisation, Idel-Ural, which was operating in Poland during that time. Woronowicz's connections with this organisation were very loose and he attended their meetings primarily as the religious leader of the Warsaw Muslim community (it must be noted that, back then, officially, the centre of Polish Muslim life and the seat of the *mufti* seat were in Vilnius). It seems that Woronowicz was involved in politics only in the context of his formal duties as a religious leader and did not speak officially on political matters in any official forum. Moreover, politics does not appear in any of his publications. Establishing and maintaining such contacts was also obviously related to his activities as imam concerning the construction of a mosque in Warsaw. He strove to obtain funds by many methods, including travelling with a delegation of Polish Muslims to

¹² TYSZKIEWICZ, J. *Imam Ali Ismail Woronowicz w Warszawie i Klecku: 1937 – 1941* [Imam Ali Ismail Woronowicz in Warsaw and Kleck: 1937 – 1941]. In *Rocznik Tatarów Polskich*, 1995, Vol. III, p. 8.

Muslim countries between 1939 and 1940.¹³ He was well aware that the Polish authorities were far more interested in creating a “buzz around the erection of the mosque” rather than in actually realising this investment.¹⁴ Woronowicz was also very particular about the social position of the Polish Tatar people, and in his publications as well as in public speeches he would emphasise the need to take steps to improve the circumstances of the Polish Tatars who, in majority, were very poor and poorly educated.

As was mentioned previously in this paper, Woronowicz was one of the few Polish Tatars living in the interwar period who had received a theological education and was fluent in the language of the Qur’an. That knowledge bore fruit in the form of his research and popularisation of knowledge about Islam, the Near East, and Tatars. He published in Polish Tatar periodicals and other scholarly and popular magazines. His research included a variety of genres and subjects. This diversity of output stemmed from the various roles Woronowicz played in the life of the interwar Muslim community.

Rocznik Tatarski was a scholarly periodical and there, in volume II (1935) Woronowicz published two articles. The first one was *Szcątki językowe Tatarów litewskich* [Remnants of the Lithuanian Tatar Language].¹⁵ The study belongs to both cultural studies and linguistics. It provides a brief description of the characteristics of writings produced by Polish-Lithuanian Tatars and a glossary of Arabic and Turkish words in Polish, used by the Tatar minority. In this study Woronowicz exhibits his extensive Orientalist knowledge, primarily related to Arab studies, Turcology and Islamic studies. It is likely that the article was part of a doctoral dissertation Woronowicz was writing. Its defence was planned for some time between 1939 and 1940 and its supervisor was to be Prof. Tadeusz Kowalski, a world-famous Arabic scholar, Turcologist and Iranian studies specialist. The doctoral dissertation was in linguistics and concerned precisely the borrowings from Arabic and Turkish into Polish. No fragments of this dissertation have survived.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁴ KANAPACKI, I., LASHKEVYCH, A. (eds.). *Nevedomy los varshavskaga imama* [The Unknown Fate of the Warsaw Imam]. In *Bayram*, 1999, No. 3, p. 13.

¹⁵ WORONOWICZ, A. *Szcątki językowe Tatarów litewskich* [Remnants of the Lithuanian Tatar Language]. In *Rocznik Tatarski*, 1935, Vol. II, pp. 351–367. For the complete bibliography of works by A. Woronowicz see *Bibliografia literatury tatarsko-polskiej po 1918 roku* [A Bibliography of Tatar-Polish Literature after 1918] [online] [cit. 28 February 2022]. Available from <http://wschodzachod.uwb.edu.pl/bibliografia-literatury-polsko-tatarskiej/>.

The other unequivocally scholarly study is the article titled *Kitab Tatarów litewskich i jego zawartość* [The Lithuanian Tatars' Kitab and its Content].¹⁶ The subject of the discussion is the *kitab* by Mustafa Shegidevich (Szegidewicz, Szahidewicz) from 1852, although the author refers also to his own knowledge of other texts of this type.¹⁷ The article does not just present the contents of the *kitab*, but includes commentaries and annotations explaining the Muslim terminology used in this work. It was definitely the first such detailed and well-informed paper devoted to Tatar literature and Ali Woronowicz could be regarded as the pioneer of *kitab* studies which finally came into being several decades later. It would be interesting to review the transcription of the *kitab* text used by Woronowicz in the manuscript sent to the editor. For technical reasons the printed version could not present it to the readers and such information was included in a footnote.

Among the works published outside *Rocznik Tatarski*, of a more scholarly and definitely more comprehensive nature, was the article devoted to Maimonides.¹⁸ The article is analysed in detail by Wojciech Wendland in the context of history as depicted by Polish Tatar historians in the interwar period. "The sense of the time," writes Wendland, "regardless of the forms of its exposition by individual historians, according to Tatar historiography, was defined in the Noahide or Nuhid myth. It signifies the 'one place', the deepest and indivisible nature of all people, descendants of the 'Second Adam'".¹⁹ It was this oneness and unity that Woronowicz sought in Maimonides' legacy: "Once you weigh the importance of Arab and Jewish philosophers for the development of the European Middle Ages, one cannot deny the impact of Muslim and Jewish philosophy – a bridge between the classical Greco-Roman and the Christian-European worlds – on the later development of European philosophy".²⁰ Muslim thinkers, such as Averroes,

¹⁶ WORONOWICZ, A. *Kitab Tatarów litewskich i jego zawartość* [The Lithuanian Tatars' Kitab and its Content]. In *Rocznik Tatarski*, 1935, Vol. II, pp. 377–394.

¹⁷ This copy most likely did not survive, although other *kitabs* by this scribe are well known, comp. DROZD, A., DZIEKAN, M. M., MAJDA, T. *Piśmiennictwo i muhiry tatarów polsko-litewskich* [Writings and Muhirs of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars], p. 54.

¹⁸ WORONOWICZ, A. *Musa Bnu Majmun (Mojżesz Majmonides) (1135 – 1395)* [Musa Bnu Majmun (Moses Maimonides) (1135 – 1395)]. In *Przegląd Islamski*, 1935, No. 4, pp. 8–11.

¹⁹ WENDLAND, W. „Trzy czola poroków z matki obcej”. *Myśl historyczna Tatarów polskich w II Rzeczypospolitej* [“Three Foreheads of Prophets from a Foreign Mother”. The Historical Thinking of Polish Tatars in the Second Polish Republic], p. 180.

²⁰ WORONOWICZ, A. *Musa Bnu Majmun (Mojżesz Majmonides) (1135 – 1395)* [Musa Bnu Majmun (Moses Maimonides) (1135 – 1395)]. In *Przegląd Islamski*, 1935, No. 4, p. 10.

“influenced the greatest 13th century philosophers, including, most of all, St Thomas Aquinas, which the philosopher himself mentions”.²¹

The remaining works by Woronowicz have been classified by the researcher Grzegorz Czerwiński as essays and reportage. As mentioned above, these were devoted to various subjects which could be interesting primarily to a Tatar reader, but also to a wider readership. Sample titles include: *Uniwersytet Al-Azhar* [Al-Azhar University], *Istota Islamu* [The Nature of Islam], *Arabowie i emigracja Żydów do Palestyny* [Arabs and the Emigration of Jews to Palestine], *Islam a kobieta* [Islam and the Woman], *Wnętrze świątyni muzułmańskiej* [The Interior of the Muslim Temple], *Sunnici i szyici* [The Sunni and the Shia], *Islam na Dalekim Wschodzie* [Islam in the Far East].

Woronowicz’s reportage output is described by G. Czerwiński in the following words: “Woronowicz’s reportage is characterized by an interesting compositional structure, which is typical more of novellas than of travel reports. We need to point also to the innovative method of constructing the narrator – a passer-by, embedded in a crowd, with a clearly defined ethical attitude. Moreover, Woronowicz’s works have some of the characteristics of nineteenth-century images: primarily they involve genre scenes saturated with observations of a socio-moral character; they show the characteristic reality of a given group (in our case a group of Egyptian Muslims)”.²²

A “collection of 52 sermons in Polish with corresponding liturgy in Arabic, which were to be published in Sarajevo as aid in the pastoral work of the imam” show a purely “religious-educational” character.²³ Overall, apart from the scientific papers in *Rocznik Tatarski* he published, in Poland and abroad, 33 articles in Polish, 2 in French, and 15 in Arabic.²⁴

After the outbreak of WWII, he left for Kletsk (Pol.: Kleck, now in Belarus), leaving behind his entire library in Warsaw, which burned during the Warsaw Uprising. The German authorities stripped him of his title of imam and appointed another Muslim, who was not a descendant of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars.²⁵ In Kletsk, Woronowicz worked at a Belarusian secondary school, teaching Russian and German. Because of his university education he became the deputy head of the school. On 20th January 1941, accused, among other charges, of espionage,

²¹ WORONOWICZ, A. Musa Bnu Majmun (Mojżesz Majmonides) (1135 – 1395) [Musa Bnu Majmun (Moses Maimonides) (1135 – 1395)]. In *Przegląd Islamski*, 1935, No. 4, p. 10.

²² CZERWIŃSKI, G. Polish Tatar Travel Writing in the Interwar Period (1918 – 1939): Subject Area and Research Perspectives. In *Slavistika*, 2016, Vol. XX, pp. 135–136.

²³ SZCZĘSNOWICZ, T. Woronowicz Ali Ismail, p. 194.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ MOTADEL, D. *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, p. 170.

he was arrested by the NKVD and imprisoned in the gaol in Baranowicze. The archives still hold transcripts from the interrogations of Ali Woronowicz, which were published in Russian in the Belarusian periodical *Bayram*,²⁶ and recently they have been published in part in Polish translation.²⁷

In the statement made by Woronowicz, it is clear to see which elements of his activity became the reason for his arrest. The basis was, of course, just the foreign education of the imam, but the interrogation statements include the extensive contacts between Woronowicz and immigrants from Crimea and Idel-Ural, and the Polish Prometheanism movement. These contacts were labelled as “counter-revolutionary activity”. It made no difference at all – even though it was the truth and the imam stated that repeatedly – that he had nothing to do directly with any political activities. A kinship with Edige Szykiewicz and the religious nature of his attendance of the Idel-Ural organisation meetings were enough (this organisation was depicted as “counter revolutionary” by Soviet authorities). The statements show Woronowicz’s deep awareness of the motives that guided the Polish authorities in supporting the various forms of public activity of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. The political interest of the Second Republic was of paramount importance, not the fate simply of the Tatars. As was mentioned previously, several periodicals were published that were financed by the state, but which, in reality, were not read outside of the close circles of the Tatar intelligentsia.²⁸

Ali Woronowicz’s fate after the interrogations is not known. Despite the best efforts of his wife, nobody managed to contact Woronowicz after his arrest. Ewa Woronowicz was never allowed to see her husband nor could she pass on a package to him. He was, most likely, executed by a Russian army firing squad, although there were rumours that he was killed on the road by a shot from a German tank. However, his body was never recovered and the rumours were never confirmed. In her memoirs, the imam’s wife said, in 1988: “After the war I returned with my closest family to our home country. I continued my search via domestic institutions as well as the International Red Cross. Unfortunately, my hopes of finding him alive were extinguished”.²⁹

²⁶ KANAPACKI, I., LASHKEVYCH, A. (eds.). Nevedomy los varshavskaga imama [The Unknown Fate of the Warsaw Imam]. In *Bayram*, 1999, No. 3.

²⁷ CZACHOROWSKI D. St. (ed. and transl.). Tragedia warszawskiego imama [The Tragedy of the Warsaw Imam]. In *Rocznik Tatarów Polskich, Seria 2*, 2019, Vol. VI (XX), pp. 175–223.

²⁸ KANAPACKI, I., LASHKEVYCH, A. (eds.). Nevedomy los varshavskaga imama [The Unknown Fate of the Warsaw Imam]. In *Bayram*, 1999, No. 3, p.12–13.

²⁹ WORONOWICZ, E. Wspomnienie o Imamie m-sta Stołecznego Warszawy [Recollection of the Imam of the Capital City of Warsaw]. In *Życie Muzułmańskie*, 1988, No. 8, pp. 26–28.

In September 1987, the family founded a symbolic headstone of Ali Woronowicz at the Muslim cemetery in Warsaw. After the change of political system in 1989, a tablet was added bearing the inscription that Woronowicz was arrested by NKVD and was a victim of repression. In a letter dated 25.04.1996, the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus that in 1964, Ali Woronowicz was found innocent.³⁰ By decision of the President of the Republic of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski, on 15th March 2011, he was posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta "for the merits in acting for the Muslim community in Poland and the dialogue between religions and cultures" (Monitor Polski – Official Gazette of the Republic of Poland, no. 47, item 530). This justification could serve as a fit summary for this short description of the life and work of the Warsaw imam.

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³⁰ See the document: *Nevedomy los varshavskaga imama* [The Unknown Fate of the Warsaw Imam]. In *Bayram*, 1997, No. 1, p. 46.

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