

OVEZOV MAKSAT



2016



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# MINSK CATHEDRAL MOSQUE

*from ancient times to modern times*

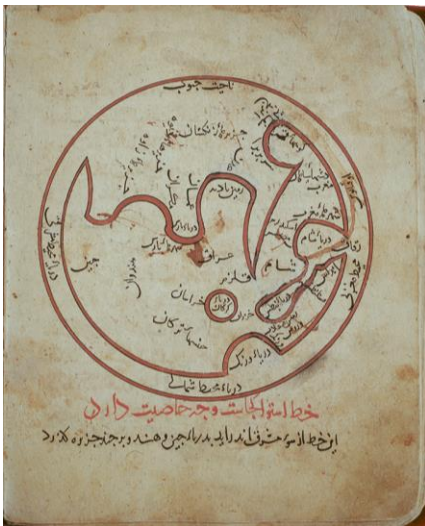
## The Minsk Cathedral Mosque

No one disputes the dominant role of scientific literature in the history of humankind. However, along with its irreplaceable role, not every time its dry style allows the reader seeking knowledge to penetrate the theme of the object under study. It is impossible to imagine genuine immersion in the topic under study without a certain amount of sympathy for the object being studied. In this case, a grain of human heartfelt experiences, subjective emotional sensations in the subsequent text will allow the reader to understand the topic presented on the human conceptual construct - to obtain facts through philosophical comprehension and emotional experience.

During the High Middle Ages, when the European continent experienced scientific and educational degradation, called the “Dark Ages,” the Islamic region witnessed the dawn of science, enlightenment accessible to all social strata and humanism, which the world had never seen before. In today's 21st century, this is hard to believe. However, the manuscripts are still preserved.

Muslim thought gave civilization everything, and let us emphasize once again - all the basic, fundamental principles of this and that science. Insofar that a Muslim researcher easily notices them in modern European books. The discoveries proclaimed by European scientific minds were discovered three hundred, and sometimes five hundred years ago, or more, in the countries of the Islamic world. Again, manuscripts are preserved.

At just the beginning of the High Middle



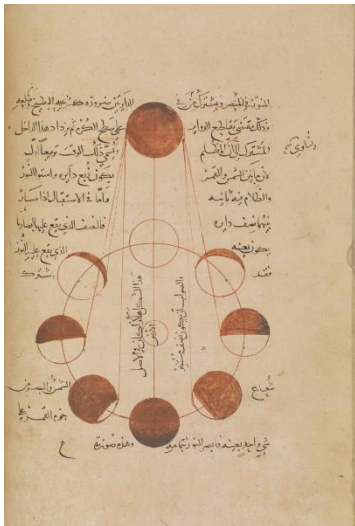
The map of Europe and Asia in one of Biruni's manuscript

Ages<sup>1</sup>, the Muslim world proclaimed the sphericity of the Earth, calculating the length of its circumference, with an accuracy of only 16.8 kilometers, and creating a globe with continents, which we see today in school.

This was done by the outstanding Central Asian scientist

<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century

Abu Reyhan al-Biruni, who discovered a new method for this in Spherical trigonometry, which is still called the “Biruni method”<sup>2</sup>. It was then that, 400 years before Columbus, that al-Biruni, according to his calculations, suggested the existence of another continent - America<sup>3</sup>.



Scheme of lunar phases from the works of Biruni. Heliocentrism is clearly represented

In the same century, scientists of Central Asia proclaimed the concept of heliocentrism, in which the Earth was recognized as revolving around the Sun, and it was a large spherical planet of fiery nature.

Stars are the same planets, but only at a greater distance from the Earth and at the same time, all the planets rotate around their axis.

<sup>2</sup> Абу Райхан Беруни. «Избранные произведения», гл. 4 География. Академия наук УССР. 1957 г.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Frederick Starr, J. Hopkins unv. «So who did discover America»? «History today», vol. 63. 12, 2013.

All this 600 years before Galileo. They suggested the existence of gravity six centuries before Newton<sup>4</sup>.

The five-volume encyclopedia on medicine of



Abu Ali Hussein ibn Abdullah ibn Sina, better known as Avicenna – القانون في الطب – “The Law in Medicine,” written in the eleventh century, remained for another 600 years the main textbook on this science in European universities and, in terms of the number of copies, in the era of discovery printing,

Latin translation of Ibn Sina's "Law". 1530

successfully competed with the Bible. The scientist was the first in history to suggest the existence of microbes as the causes of the spread of diseases, and what is more made many other discoveries<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Умарова Р.Ш. «Натурфилософия Абу Райхана Бируни», журнал «Вестник науки и образования», 2020 г.

<sup>5</sup> Проф. Ильинский И.И., проф. Атабаев Ш.Т., док. мед. наук. Бабаходжаев Н.К., «Гигиенические взгляды Абу Али ибн Сины», журнал «Гигиена и санитария», 1979 г.

Probably one of the main scientific interests



Catalogue of stars from  
«Zeej»

of muslims was astronomy. In the 15th century in Central Asia, Sultan Ulugbek, in his fundamental work – زیج سلطانی “Gurgan Zij”, calculated the length of the sidereal year as 365 days, 6 hours, 10 minutes, 8 seconds, giving an accuracy of only + 58 seconds. The tilt of the Earth's axis was calculated, giving 23.52 degrees, with an error of

only + 8 minutes! A map of the starry sky was compiled with a description of 1018 stars. And still most of the star names are Arabic.

A Abu Abdillah Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi made great contributions to mathematics in such a way that modern mathematics cannot be imagined without him. His main treatise on classical algebra is الجبر والمقابلة – “Al-Jabr wa al-Muqabala” and gave the name to this science: algebra = al+jabr. Europe became acquainted with this science thanks to this book,

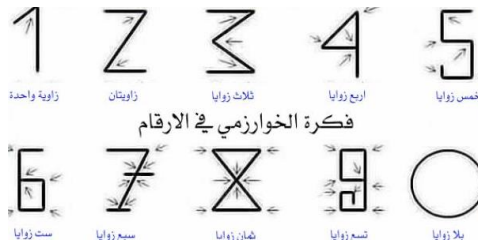


«Al-jabr» frontpage

which is why this science forever remained associated with his name. His surname - Al- Khwarizmi - turned into a familiar term for us - “algorithm”, since the Latin text of his books began with the words: «dixit **Algorizmi**» (said Khwarizmi) which is why his surname soon began to personify any calculation

according to strictly defined rules.

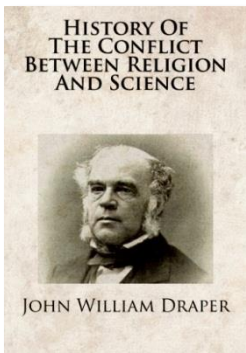
He invented the very numbers that we use now. The basis of his concept of graphic display of numbers was the principle of the number of angles in a number.



Alchemy and the Philosopher's Stone. Until now, these phrases can excite minds, but the mysterious idea of transforming lead into gold lies the Muslim scientific concept of the evolutionary development of substances, set out, for example, by the “father of sociology” - Abdurahman ibn Khaldun in his book *المقدمة* -



*Manuscript containing the works of Ibn Khaldun*

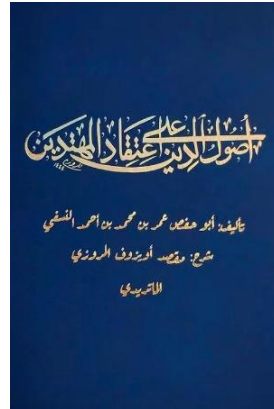


“Al-Muqaddimah” (Introduction). Darwin picked up this concept 500 years later and presented it in the form of the “Theory of the Origin of Species.” His closest friend, Sir John William Draper, speaks of his direct borrowing from Arabic books<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> John William Draper, «History of the conflict between religion and science», New York, 1896. 178 p.

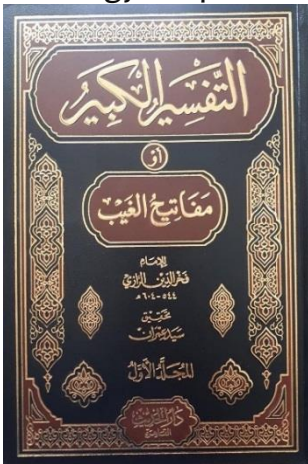


The fundamental principles of quantum physics are the fundamental principles of Muslim scholastic theology. The concept of the fundamental particles of matter - quarks, is clearly stated in the basic theological treatises of medieval scientists, such as, for example – العقائد النسفية «Al-Aqid an-Nasafiyya»,



“Nasafiya” published in Minsk in 2023

written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. So, no study of Islamic theology is possible without going through the topics of fundamental, elementary particles of matter from quantum physics. Moreover, the works of Islamic theologians set out the principle of the space-time continuum.



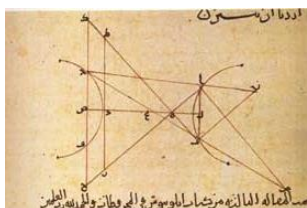
Interpretation of the Quran by Razi

“Keys of the Hidden”, outlined the idea

Interpreters of the Quran, such as the scientist Fakhr ad-Din Muhammad ibn Umar al-Razi, in his interpretation of the Quran –

of the existence of millions of extraterrestrial civilizations, which can be much larger than ours are and contain everything that exists on the ground. He proclaimed this idea of exoplanets in the 12<sup>th</sup> century!

It is impossible to ignore such thinkers as the



Drawings from the works of Ibn al-Haytham

“father of optics” Abu Ali ibn al-Haytham, the first scientist in history, who in the 11<sup>th</sup> century explained the principle of operation of the camera obscura, based on the principle of the rectilinearity of light and, in fact, became the first theorist of the creation of photographs and video cameras<sup>7</sup>.

Ammar ibn Ali al-Mosuli was one of the first to invent the successful principle of lens extraction for cataracts and mass-produced this operation in the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>. He described 48 eye diseases, proposed six options for cataract operations and introduced into scientific use such terms as “eyeball”, “conjunctiva”, “retina”, “cornea”, etc.

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<sup>7</sup> «Кто изобрел фотокамеру?» Журнал Новая наука. 2020 г.

<sup>8</sup> «Медицина средних веков и эпохи Возрождения». К. Зудгоф. 1999 г.

According to the testimony of the modern Egyptologist W. Dali, the Arab scientist of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Abu Bakr ibn Ahmad al-Wahshiya in his treatise “The Lover’s Interest in the Knowledge of Written Signs” - شوق المستهام في معرفة رموز الأرقام - was the first<sup>9</sup> in history scientist who managed to decipher a group of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs<sup>10</sup>, and also point out the connection between Coptic and ancient Egyptian languages. His book was used by European pioneers of Egyptology like Sylvester de Sacy<sup>11</sup> and others.

Muslims were the first to penetrate the Cheops pyramid in the 9th century. By order of the Abbasid caliph Abdullah al-Mamun, an attempt was made to penetrate the pyramid. After studying ancient materials, the expected entrance was calculated, and after several weeks of hard work, a passage was made in the thickness of the pyramid, ending up in a descending corridor. It is this

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<sup>9</sup> Robin McKie, «Arab scholar cracked Rosetta code 800 years before the West». The Observer. Guardian news & media Ltd 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Которые на момент его жизни были уже как 700 лет мертвым языком.

<sup>11</sup> Гультянов И. А. «Revelations de Wachchiyyeh». Essai sur les hieroglyphes dHорapollon et quelques mots sur la Cabale, стр. 39.

passage, called the “entrance of al-Mamun”, that visitors to the pyramid still use.

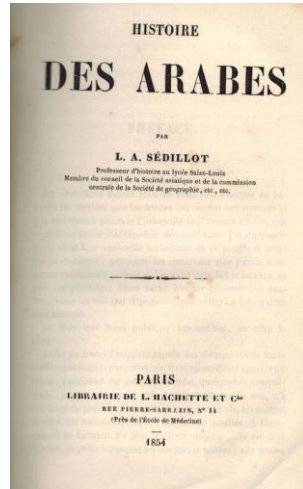
Muslim minds were absorbed in science to such an extent that even on their deathbeds they continued to seek answers to certain questions. Dying and fully conscious, Abu Reyhan al-Biruni, having already said goodbye to his family, suddenly asked one of those present about the account of incorrect profits. To which the person asked was surprised that in the moments of death a scientist can think about this? To which al-Biruni replied: “I think dying knowing the answer to this question is better than dying ignorant.”

The entire culture of the Muslim world was permeated with the cult of science. In the ancient Central Asian scientific and theological center - the city of Merv, among the rich classes of the nobility there was a custom at dinner parties, as a delight during the celebration, to invite to the stage not singers and dancers, but scientists who recited their theories, or to open scientific debates between supporters opposing theories. It was considered the best way to spend time.

Oddly enough, we, living in modern civilization, actually live in a Muslim society of the High Middle Ages. It is no secret that primarily the

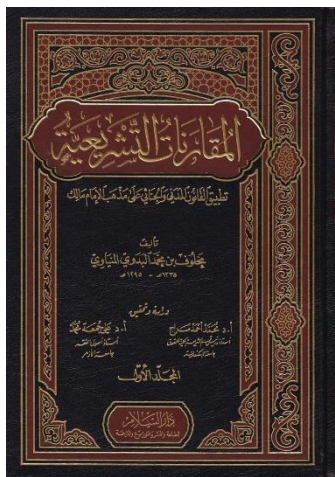
Napoleon Constitution, which became the first progressive collection of laws in history, generated modern European civilization, with its humanism and the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity.

According to modern researchers, one of Napoleon's contemporaries – Jean Jacques Emmanuel Sedillot in his book – “History of the Arabs” (Histoire des Arabes, Paris 1854) points out that in his compilation of the legal standard of the French Empire Napoleon relied on the Islamic legal system, also citing the names of key treatises, such as the fundamental work on Maliki law – مختصر خليل – Mukhtasar Khalil.



One could consider this a mistake or populism, because where is the direct evidence of borrowing? However, the truthfulness of Sediyo's words is supported by the fact that Napoleon's Constitution coincides with the Islamic Sharia. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian theologian Makhlof al-Meniaoui (مخلوف المنياوي) in his two-

المقارنات “Legislative Comparisons” (المقارنات التشريعية) found that the provisions of the



"Legislative comparisons"

M. Meniaoui

Napoleonic law coincided with the provisions of the Sharia of the Maliki school of law on more than 75%. These studies were continued by other theologians such as Abdullah ibn Husayn al-Teedee (عبد الله بن حسين التيدي) in his four-volume book with the same title “Legislative Comparisons”, and theologian Abdulaziz

Benabdallah (عبد العزيز بن عبد الله) who came to the conclusion that Sharia legal Abu Hanifa's school complies with more than 85% of Napoleon's law.

It would seem that even such a simple thing, which is associated only with European enlightenment and subtle European culture as musical notes, according to some European scientists were also taken from the Muslim world<sup>12</sup>.

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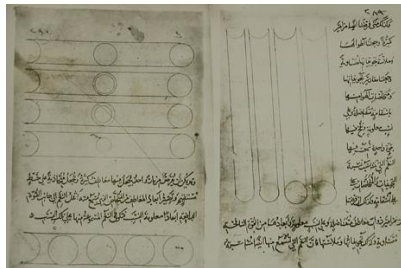
<sup>12</sup> Laborde «Essai sur la musique ancienne et modern», 1780, p.8-9; p.22. А также см.: Villoteau «Description des instruments de musique des orientaux» p. 858-859.

And in fact, anyone who has mastered at least the Arabic alphabet will notice a direct connection between the sound of notes and the letters of the Arabic language, arranged according to tonality: from low to high. In this case, the C (musical note Do) corresponds to the Arabic letter DAAD – ض, the D (Re) corresponds to RAA – ر, the E (Mi) corresponds to MIIM – م, the F (Fa) corresponds to FAA – ف, the G (Sol) corresponds to SAAD – ص, the A (La) corresponds to LAM – ل, the B (Ti) corresponds to SIIN – س. Again, anyone familiar with the Arabic alphabet and the correct sounds of letters will confirm the clear and direct connection and correspondence between the notes and Arabic letters.

<i>Musical Note</i>	<i>Solfège scale</i>	<i>Arabic letter</i>
C	do	ض (daad)
D	re	ر (raa)
E	mi	م (miim)
F	fa	ف (faa)
G	sol	ص (saad)
A	la	ل (lam)
B	ti	س (siin)

And this is not something surprising, since in Muslim culture the most important role was played by the correct recitation of the Quran, which became a separate extensive science called Tajweed, one of the branches of which is the science of melodies and tonality – Maqama, designed to harmoniously build a melody in the reading of the Quran.

Back in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, al-Farabi had a theory of constructing an ideal musical mode, in which his main principle was the idea



Schemes from al-Farabi's works of constructing a mathematical proportion of harmony, such as, for example, according to the Fibonacci number, according to which notes lined up according to this proportion, would be an ideal piece of music<sup>13</sup>.

How many more names of Muslim science representatives' are worth mentioning! But, in our attempt to understand Muslims, we have gone far

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<sup>13</sup> Ошанова Н. «Математические основы музыки по аль-Фараби». Вестник «Физико-математические науки», 71, 2020 г. Стр. 24-30.



from the topic at hand. After all, we do not set the task of presenting all the discoveries of Muslim science on these pages, since this would take up all the pages, leaving no room for our topic...

Many centuries ago, when the light of science and progress shone from the Arab East, in the farthest north, almost on the edge of the land before the Baltic Sea, lived scattered tribes desperately fighting for the right to exist. Constant raids by crusaders from the European west devastated their lands: families lost fathers, mothers and children. Everything that was acquired through hard work was confiscated and taken away by European invaders. The situation was such that they were not even able to found and develop a state.

One of their princes, whose name was Vytautas, who lived in 1350-1430, realizing his weakness in front of the formidable Western European enemy, invited Muslim military leaders to help. Genghisid, a contender for the khan's throne who lived in Central Asia – Tokhtamysh<sup>14</sup>, responded to his invitation. He stopped with his

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<sup>14</sup> «Полное собрание русских летописей», т. 32 «Хроника литовская, жмойтская. Хроника Быховца. Беркулабовская летопись. Летопись Панцырного и Аверки», стр. 75.

army in the city of Lida, where a residence was organized for him at the Lida Castle<sup>15</sup>.

Muslim invitations<sup>16</sup> continued until the Crusaders' raids reached their climax in 1410. That year, one of the largest battles of medieval Europe took place – the Battle of



*The residence of Toktamish.  
Lida city*

Grunwald or Tannenberg, in which a detachment of Muslims led by one of the sons of the mentioned Tokhtamysh – Jalal ad-Din was able to defeat the master of the Teutonic Order – Ulrich von

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<sup>15</sup> Киркор А.Р. «Живописная Россия», Города и поселения в Литве. Репринт 1882 г. Минск, 1993 г., стр. 170.

<sup>16</sup> They began to invite Muslims much earlier than Vytautas. Princes Gediminas and Algirdas invited them and entered into an alliance with them. (q.v. Tyszkiewicz J. Tatarzy na Litwie I w Polsce. Studia z dziejow XIII-XVIII w. Warszawa, 1989. S. 125). In the chronicle of Luke Wading Annales ordinis minorum, which, from the words of eyewitnesses who arrived in the lands of Belarus in 1324, reports that even then in this country there were: “**aliens from the country of some khan, who use the Asian language in their prayers.**”

Jungingen<sup>17,18</sup> and strike, after which the order has never been able to recover from<sup>19</sup>.

History says that after such a clear victory, Vytautas endowed Muslims with privileges, noble status, issuing land plots in the western provinces of the state. It was from this period that the birth of Islam began in the lands of Belarus.



*Jungingen's  
place of  
death*

Contrary to the stereotype sown, partly by late medieval Polish historians<sup>20</sup>, the Muslims who settled in Belarus at that time were not captives. There is a logical objection to this stereotype made by the author of the treatise “Risale Tatar-i-Leh”, which tells about the Muslims of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and dated 1557, which states the following: **“if they were really**

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<sup>17</sup> Kryczynski S. «Kronika wojenna tatarow litewskih, opracowal, wstepem I przypisami opatrzył Jan Tyszkiewicz». Gdansk, 1997. S. 20.

<sup>18</sup> A. F. von Kotzebue, «Preussens a ltere geschichte», Riga, 1808.

<sup>19</sup> Teutonic chronics like «Scriptores rerum prussicarum» v.3, p. 724, in order to justify their defeat from the Muslims, they exaggerate their numbers and attribute barbaric habits to them, such as eating human flesh and so on.

<sup>20</sup> Like Jan Długosz, for example.

**captives, they would already have become infidels<sup>21</sup>. However, the Tatars still remain Muslims<sup>22</sup>.”**

Digging a little from the topic, it is still worth noting that Muslims may have appeared on these lands much earlier. It is likely that some Muslim merchants could have been in these lands, and if, nevertheless, they were not, then Muslim money, famous for its quality and high standard of precious metal – dirhams, were left in very large quantities on this land.

One of the largest treasures of Arab coins – the Koz’jankovskij treasure, discovered in the Vitebsk region, near the ancient city of Polotsk in 1973, contains 7663 Arab dirhams, weighing a total of about twenty kilograms of 960 silver. In addition to it, other treasures were found, such as the Brilevskij treasure with 290 dirhams and others. Every year such coins are still found in the fields of Belarus, which is why they are informally called the “medieval dollar.”

Speaking about Minsk, it should be noted that in many places familiar to Minsk residents,

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<sup>21</sup> Since captives of war were always forcibly converted to the faith of the winner.

<sup>22</sup> «Risale-i tatar-i leh», 2021 г., 315 с. перевод с турецкого – Овезов М. М., стр. 119.

Arab dirhams of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries were also found: near the Komarovskiy Bridge, on the banks of the Svisloch, on the Rosa Luxemburg street, on the Oktyabrskaya street, and in other places of the city. In total, dirhams were found in more than 198 settlements in our country<sup>23</sup>.

The oldest known Arabic dirhams were found on the banks of the Dnieper in the suburbs of Mogilev. The dirham was minted in 80 AH (702 AD), that is, during the period when the disciples of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless and greet him, were still alive in different cities of the Arab Caliphate, such as Damascus<sup>24</sup>, Basra<sup>25</sup>, Mecca<sup>26</sup>, Medina<sup>27</sup>, Kufa<sup>28</sup>. And these coins contain quotations from the Quran, such as one of the main suras (chapters) of the Quran – al-Ikhlās, the text of

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<sup>23</sup> В. Рябцевич. «Монетные депозиты западных земель Древней Руси», 2006 г.

<sup>24</sup> The last disciple of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, died in Damascus – Wasil ibn al-Asqa' 86 AH

<sup>25</sup> The last disciple of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, died in Basra – Anas ibn Malik 93 AH

<sup>26</sup> The last disciple of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, died in Mecca – Abu Tufayl 101 AH

<sup>27</sup> The last disciple of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, died in Medina – Mahmud ibn Rabia 99 AH

<sup>28</sup> The last disciple of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, died in Kufa – Abdullah ibn Abi Awf 86 AH

which is the “symbol of faith” in Islam: «**He is Allah – the One and Only<sup>29</sup>. Allah – the Eternal, Absolute<sup>30</sup>. He begetteth not, nor is He begotten<sup>31</sup>. And there is none like unto Him**»<sup>32</sup>. Our land has preserved one of the main chapters of the Quran, minted on a dirham during the lifetime of the disciples of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Such an artifact can safely be considered a relic.

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<sup>29</sup> **He does not consist of other gods or persons, and there are no other gods along with Him.**

<sup>30</sup> **He has no boundaries or limits.**

<sup>31</sup> **He has no parent, begotten or spouse. Figuratively speaking: He is one “subject”.**

<sup>32</sup> **There is nothing similar to Him, neither in general similarity, nor in particular similarity in detail, and there is nothing identical to Him: He has no form/shape, image, organs, parts, and is not located in space.**



*Dirham, minted in the city of Istakhr, in 92 AH. (714 AD) with Surah al-Ikhlās, minted when the last of the disciples of the prophet, peace be upon him, lived. Found near Polotsk in 2023.*

But still, returning directly to our topic, it is worth starting a conversation about the permanent residence of Muslims in Minsk with a mention of the Minsk Muslim mayor, a prince named Urustai, who was in the retinue of Prince Svidrigailo in 1408<sup>33</sup>. Chronologically, the next mention is the meeting of the Tatars living in Minsk and the

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<sup>33</sup> Акты издаваемые Виленской Археографической Комиссией для разбора древних актов. Вильно, 1906 г. т. 31, стр. 128.

surrounding area with Vytautas in 1428<sup>34</sup>. The next historical mention of the residence of Muslims in Minsk is the archives of the Radziwills from 1586<sup>35</sup>.

Thus, some of the Minsk Muslims lived on the lands of the Radziwill princes. This group of Tatars belonged to the Doinarovsky court<sup>36</sup> as part of the Koydanovsky estate<sup>37</sup>, had relatively small vegetable gardens, for which they paid chinsh<sup>38</sup>, and their duties included courier service and fieldwork<sup>39</sup>. In the inventory of the Koydanovo region in 1588, Muslims are called “meshanin”<sup>40</sup> “philistine subjects of His Majesty”<sup>41</sup>.



Muslim coin  
“Dang” with  
the  
countermark of  
the coat of arms  
of Vytautas  
Kolyumna

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<sup>34</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004 г.

<sup>35</sup> Previous provenance.

<sup>36</sup> As of 1588, the documents contain the text: “philistine subjects of His Princely Majesty.”

<sup>37</sup> AWAK t. 31, nr 145

<sup>38</sup> in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a quitrent paid from land or a house given into someone else's long-term possession.

<sup>39</sup> AWAK t. 31, nr 93, s. 140, 141; nr 96, s. 144, 145; nr 167, s. 269

<sup>40</sup> Meaning "citizens".

<sup>41</sup> AGAD AR dz. XXV nr. 1696



The Radziwill Tatars in Minsk had self-government with the Christians, headed by a voyt, that is, a headman, who headed the magistrate of the village, which had Magdeburg Law. In 1592, during the reign of Krzysztof Radziwill, this position was occupied by the Muslim Khaley Oleevich (Khalecki)<sup>42</sup>.

Until 1592, the town of Zasulle, Minsk region, belonged to the Assanchuk family. In Zasulla lived the nobles Bogushevichs, Oleshkeviches, Bogdanovichs Ilyashevichs, Seinovichs and others. These were Muslim families, since in Zasulla lived a mullah, who was allocated 2 tracts of land<sup>43</sup>.

In 1593, several Minsk Muslims were mentioned in the lawsuit of Jan Kurosh against Selim Isupovich, Miska Shabanovich, Khaley Soltyshevich for beating him near the church<sup>44</sup>. In 1599, the Minsk Tatars were accused of non-payment of duty for 12 carts of goods that they were transporting to the fair in Kopyl<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> AWAK t. 31, nr 78, s. 114;

<sup>43</sup> Skzic historyczny o tatarach litewskich w Minsku Litewskim i jego okolicach, Tadeusz Korzon, стр. 2

<sup>44</sup> AWAK t. 31, nr 96, s. 145

<sup>45</sup> AWAK t. 31, nr 181, s. 280—287

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, among the Minsk Tatars there were also owners of land plots who received them for military service for Boguslav Radziwill. These are Jacek and Roman Blych, Khasen Krukovich, Ibrahim Paksevich, Bogdan and Elyash Rylcewicz<sup>46</sup>.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on Radziwill Law<sup>47</sup> in Minsk lived about 2 dozen Muslim families<sup>48</sup>, mainly on the Tatar Street<sup>49</sup>.

In addition to the Radziwill lands, the Tatars of Minsk also lived on Chinsheva land in the domain of the Catholic Church. In 1636 and 1638, they attempted to purchase the land as their own, but were refused<sup>50</sup>. In 1649, the case of the Tatars' non-payment of chinsha was considered by the

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<sup>46</sup> T. Strykiewicz-Korzon, Szkiec historyczny o Tatarach litewskich, s. 179

<sup>47</sup> Administratively independent, separate parts of cities and suburbs in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which were not subject to the administrative and judicial powers of local self-government

<sup>48</sup> Among them, Samuil Zhdanovich, Shaban Raetsky, Alyun Poltorzhitsky, Tamerlan Adamovich and Elyash Adamovich were mentioned in 1775

<sup>49</sup> AGAD, AR dz. XVIII, nr 340: inwentarze i spisy płatników czynszu z lat 1791—1811.

<sup>50</sup> J. Kurczewski, Kościół zamkowy, czyli katedra wileńska, cz. III: Streszczenia aktów kapituły wileńskiej, Wilno 1916, s. 131.

leadership of the church<sup>51</sup>. After this, this group of Minsk Tatars is not mentioned. She probably assimilated or mixed with the Radziwill Tatar community.

Two Muslim families play a special role in the history of Minsk: Zetskevich-Suleimanovich and Fursy. The ancestor of the Zetskevich family is considered to be the Mstislav Tatar Mangut, who lived around 1500, from whom the Gorodetsky family also descended. He was the owner of the Town, which he lost due to wars with Moscow, in exchange for which he received from King Alexander the village of Sergeevshchina, located in the Minsk district<sup>52</sup>.

His sons Aidar and Letsko<sup>53</sup>, ruled Sergeevshchina in 1516. Zetsko had a son, Aidar, and grandsons, Oraz and Suleiman. Princes Oraz and Suleiman Zetskevich sell their estate Sergeevshchizna to landowner Alexei Vasilevich and his wife Anna Yanovna Zadorovskaya in 1598<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Там же.

<sup>52</sup> Skzic historyczny o tatarach litewskich w Minsku Litewskim i jego okolicach, Tadeusz Korzon, стр. 6

<sup>53</sup> Apparently, Zetsko, because the sons are called Zetskevichs. There was probably a confusion between the initial Z being similar to L.

<sup>54</sup> Akta Wilenskiej komisji, т. 31, стр. 272.

Most likely, having sold his estate, Suleiman Zetskevich moved to Minsk, where in 1617 he appeared as a tradesman of the city of Minsk and the elder of all Minsk Tatars<sup>55</sup>. The privilege of King Sigismund III of 1606, which allowed only these Tatars to trade on an equal basis with other burghers subject to Magdeburg law<sup>56</sup>, forced the Zetskevich family to join the Minsk burghers. Since then, the Zetskevich family has ceased to use the princely title. The Suleymanovich family achieved significant wealth: they owned several districts in the city of Minsk, as well as meadows and fields outside the city. Suleiman's sons Samuel and Alexander bore the surname Sulimanovich, and Samuel had two sons, Suliman and Mustafa<sup>57</sup>.

As for the religious life of Minsk Muslims, its center was a mosque built at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The very first mention of its existence are historical documents indicating that the future site for the mosque was bequeathed for the church in the 1590s after his death by the Minsk tradesman

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<sup>55</sup> Skzic historyczny o tatarach litewskich w Minsku Litewskim i jego okolicach, Tadeusz Korzon, стр. 6

<sup>56</sup> Собрание древних грамот и актов. 1848 г. стр. 168.

<sup>57</sup> Skzic historyczny o tatarach litewskich w Minsku Litewskim i jego okolicach, Tadeusz Korzon, стр. 7

Shatila<sup>58</sup>. It was directly adjacent to the boundaries of Muslim land plots in the possessions of Radziwill, which determined the further choice of the site for the mosque.



3 groshes of  
GDL 1590

The minister of the Church of the Resurrection, Stefan, borrowed 2 kopecks<sup>59</sup> of money from one of the Minsk Tatars, Orekhovsky, on the security of land. In 1598, the rector of the church, Zakhar, sold the mentioned plot<sup>60</sup>. Apparently, the Tatars received a plot of land as payment of a debt. This evidence allows us to clarify the time of acquisition of land for the mosque - between 1598 and 1599, and the name of the Muslim who stood at the source of the acquisition of land for the mosque - Orekhovsky - also becomes known.

The next documentary mention of the mosque is contained in a letter dated December 9, 1604, written by the Uniate Metropolitan of Kyiv

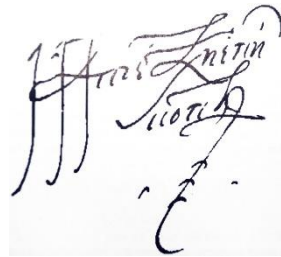
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<sup>58</sup> T. Strykiewicz-Korzon, *Szkic historyczny o Tatarach litewskich*, s. 170; J. Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy na Litwie i w Polsce*, s. 296.

<sup>59</sup> 120 groshes. To compare: a bull cost 40 groschen.

<sup>60</sup> AGAD, AR dz. XVIII, nr 339, s. 7—10

Hypatiy Potey addressed to the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Lev Sapieha. It mentions several important details that reveal many of the dark places of those days. This document was published in Archivum domu Sapiehow, in Lvov, in 1892 in volume I, on pp. 438-441 and has not yet been put into circulation in relation to the history of the construction of the Minsk mosque, and we are publishing it with translation for the first time. In many ways it allows us to restore the picture of those days.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to I. Potey. The signature is written in dark ink on a light background. It features large, flowing letters and a prominent flourish at the end.

I. Potey autograph

From the document, first of all, I would like to note that I. Potey indicates that by 1604 the mosque was already built and functioning. And also that responsibility for the act of selling the land for the mosque lies with the wealthy “three brothers” named Filipovich. In historical documents and chronicles of Minsk for the period of the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries bailiff Filipovich is mentioned.

In particular, one of the Filipovichs appears in the purchase by Prince Bogdan of Solomoretsky in 1510 of three houses in Minsk for significant sums

(200 - 300 kopecks) from wealthy townspeople - mayor Filipovich, merchants Fedorovich and Maslyanka<sup>61</sup>. In those years, the bailiff performed the highest leadership of the city, which had Magdeburg law, was a representative of the city magistrate, a representative of the city administration, and functionally performed the duties of the mayor. In this case, the Filipovichs could represent the ruling elite of Minsk, whose legal decision Potey is trying to challenge:

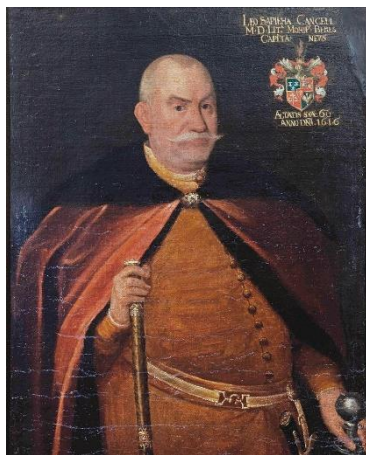


*I. Potey*

**«Jakoż i ówdzie w Mińsku, teźże ordy Naliwajkowskiej, niejacy Pilipowiczowie trzej bracia, chłopy możni i wielce bogaci, co uczynili, przed wielkim żalem i wypisać ledwie mogą. Narzekając na utrapienie nasze, gdzieśmy się spodziewali pod obroną katolicką polepszenia, tu co dalej gorzej. [...] Ci to Pilipowiczowie przedali**

<sup>61</sup> «Социально-политическое развитие городов Белоруссии в XVI - первой половине XVII в.», Копыцкий З.Ю., «Наука и техника», 1975., стр. 34.

Tatarom, miejsce albo plac, gdzie była nie dawno cerkiew krześcijańska, cmintarz gdzie ciała krześcijańskie leżą pochowane, miejsce ołtarza świętego, gdzie się ofiara święta odprawowała, na którym to cerkowiisku starodawnym, ci przekłęci chwalcy Mahometowi, swój przekłety meczyt zbudowali, z wielką żałością wszytkiego sam krześcijaństwa. O co nie mało pobożniejszych mieszczan wzięło się było za to i mandatami Tatarów tutejszych byli pozwali. Ale mnie nie tak żałośna na Tatarów, a któżby sobie dobrego nie życzył, ale na tych złych ludzi, którzy to miejsce święte tym psom pogańskim zawiedli, nie mając żadnego na to prawa, gdyż to tam była starodawna z wieków cerkiew założenia narodzenia pana Chrystusowego, pod obroną J. kr. Mci. Dziwna rzecz, prosili snąć ci Tatarowie sławnej pamięci niedawno zmarłego Mci pana wojewody Wileńskiego o plac pusty na meczyt; o to ten cny pan, chociaż był niekatolik, niepozwolił im tego żadną miarą. Na koniec i tegom jeszcze nie słychał, aby w którym



*L. Sapega*



mieście J. kr. Mci mieli być meczyty Tatarskie, a to między naszą przekłętą Rusią należeli się tacy, co i Mahometowi miejsce uczynili. [...] ach niestetyż nie Turcy ale sami krześcianie na meczyty obracają, sprzedają miejsca poświęcone; chodziłem tam umyślnie patrzeć, widzę że u nas i cerkwi tak cudnej w Mińsku nie masz, jako tam Mahometowi plugawemu meczyt zbudowano. Prosiłem abym mógł oglądać miejsce i cmentarz, ale mnie ze wzgardą odprawili ci pohańcy i gwałtu był jeden zawołał, teraz biegają proszą, powiadając, żeśmy niewinni, wasiż nam to miejsce cerkiewne przedali».

“Just like in Minsk, the same Nalivaikovo crowd<sup>62</sup>, some Filipovichs - three brothers, influential people and big rich people did something that I can hardly describe in great sadness. Complaining about our misfortune, when under Catholic protection, we hoped for improvement, but then it only got worse! [...] These Filipovichs sold to the Tatars a place or plot

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<sup>62</sup> The Nalivaiko crowds are a trend that entered among the pro-Polish feudal strata of society in relation to the common people, who in 1595-1596 raised an anti-Polish revolutionary movement, headed by Severin Nalivaiko. q.v. «Белоруссия в эпоху феодализма», 1959 г. т. I, стр. 16.

where a Christian church had recently stood, a cemetery where Christian bodies lay buried, the place of a saint's altar where a holy sacrifice was performed. Where there was this ancient church, these damned admirers of Mohammad built their damned mosque, unfortunately, of all Christianity. What many pious townspeople took up and sued the local Tatars. However, I am not so much offended by the Tatars, who do things in their own favor, as by those evil people who gave that sacred place to these filthy dogs, without having any right to do so. After all, there was a church there, founded several centuries ago, of the Birth of the Lord Christ, under the protection of His Royal Grace. An amazing thing: after all, these Tatars asked the now deceased governor of Vilna, of glorious memory, to give them a vacant lot for a mosque. To which that glorious person, although he was not a Catholic, did not give them consent to this in any form. In the end, I have not yet heard that there were Tatar mosques in any place [city] in the possession of His Royal Grace<sup>63</sup>. While in our [neighboring] damned Russia, there are those who gave place to Mohammad. [...] Ah, unfortunately,

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<sup>63</sup> That is, on the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

**it is not the Turks, but the Christians themselves who give and sell consecrated places at mosques. I went specifically to look, and I see that we do not have a single church in Minsk as wonderful as that mosque built in honor of the despicable Mohammad. I asked that I could inspect the place and the cemetery, but those bastards drove me away with contempt, and one even threatened me. Now they themselves are running around, asking, saying that they have nothing to do with it: after all, yours sold that church place to us.”**

This letter is quite long and extensive; we have cited directly those places that directly relate to the issue that interests us. A number of facts should be noted. The first thing is that, judging by Potey's words, Minsk Muslims had already tried, law-abidingly and on an equal footing, to acquire a city vacant lot for a mosque from the governor of Vilnius, that is, from Krzysztof Radziwill, who died a year before this letter - in 1603, who, like this noted in the letter, he was neither a Catholic nor a Uniate, but a Calvinist. Having not received any right, the Minsk city Tatars, in view of the legal status of Minsk as the holder of Magdeburg Law, began, apparently, to look for any opportunity to purchase a plot for their temple. And that situation with the

debt replacement of Orekhovsky, apparently, gave the Tatars the long-awaited opportunity to purchase the site.

From Potey's words it is clear that at the time of the purchase of the land it was an empty plot on which there was no longer a church, as indicated by the words from the letter – «**miejsce albo plac**» – «**место или участок**». “**place or site**”. Thus, it is not possible today to talk about rebuilding the purchased church into a mosque.

Also dubious are the words of I. Potey regarding the former Christian cemetery on which the mosque was built. As was seen earlier, this plot was transferred for the church in the will of the Minsk resident Shatila, and based on this, it seems very doubtful that the public Christian cemetery was located on someone's private land property. This opinion is also strengthened by the fact that according to Islam, it is strictly forbidden to build a mosque on graves, no matter what denomination they belong to.<sup>64</sup>

The situation itself, described in the letter, demonstrates the deep crisis processes in the

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<sup>64</sup> Based on the direct prohibition of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, q.v.: Сахих Муслим, хадис №532, и др.

Grand Duchy of Lithuania that were taking place at that time. The recent transfer of Orthodox churches to the subordination of the Vatican (under the Union) led the people to open confrontation, which Potey “presses” on, frightening Sapieha with the Nalivaiko crowds. The mention of peasants among those who sold the mosque, together with the rich Filipovics, may indicate a people’s militia against the union and actions according to the principle “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Ultimately, this is precisely what can at least somehow explain such a general opposition to the Uniate metropolitan, who himself notes this: “under Catholic protection they hoped for improvement, but then it only got worse.”

This consideration is emphasized; I. Potey’s positioning of “damned Russia” among those who favor Muslims, in opposition to the King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, “whitening” him by the fact that there are no mosques on his lands<sup>65</sup>.

The following historical document, telling about the events that unfolded next, was in «Собраниі древнихъ грамотъ и актовъ

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<sup>65</sup> Although the most ancient mosques were built in the western regions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

городовъ минской губерніи, православныхъ монастырей, церквей и по разнымъ предметамъ» (Collections of ancient charters and acts of the cities of the Minsk province, Orthodox monasteries, churches and on various subjects), published in Minsk in 1848 by the Provincial Printing House. This collection is the result of painstaking work on typing text from all the ancient acts and charters of the Minsk province that survived by 1840.

Case number 93, on pages 168-169, previously, before our publication, presented the earliest known legal document indicating the purchase of land in Minsk and the construction of a mosque on this site. The text of the charter in the “Collection” is a letter-by-letter copy of the original ancient text of 1617 without translation into Russian of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The document is bilingual: the introduction and end are in Old Belarusian, and the letter itself is in Old Polish. A complete translation of the document into modern Russian is provided for the first time. The document reads as follows<sup>66</sup>:

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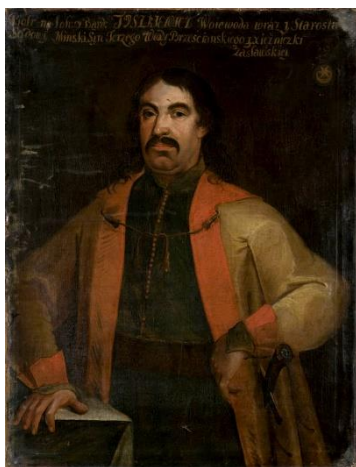
<sup>66</sup> We present the original text in the form in which it is presented in the “Collection”

«ВИДНМУС ОКНИГ КГРОДСКИХ ЗАМКУ ГРСКОГО  
МЕНСКОГО

ЛЕТА ОТАРОЖЕНЯ СЫНА БОЖОГО ТИГЕЧА ШЕСТСОТ  
СЕМНАДЦАТОГО МЦА СЕНТЕБРА ОСТОГО ДНЯ.

НАВРАДЕ КГРОДСКОМ ВЗАМКУ ГРСКОМ МЕНСКОМЪ,  
ПЕРЕДОМНОЮ НИКОЛАЕМЪ РЕКУТЕМ ПОДСТАРОСТИМ МЕНСКИМЪ  
ПОСТАНОВИВШЫДЕ ОЧЕВИСТО НАВРАДЕ ТАТАРЫН МЕСТА  
ГРСКОГО МЕНСКОГО СУЛИМАН ЗЕЦКЕВИЧ ПОКЛАДАА ЛИСТ  
ВЕЛМОЖНОГО ПНА ЕГО МЛАСТИ ПНА ПЕТРА ТЫШКЕВИЧА  
НАЛОГОИСКУ КАШТЕЛЯНА МЕНСКОГО ВРЕЧЫ НИЖЕИ ВТОМ  
ЛИСТЕ МЕНОВАНОЕ ПРОСЕЧЫ АБЫ ТОТ ЛИСТ ДОКНИГ КГРОДСКИХ  
МЕНСКИХ АКТЫКОВАН ИУПИСАН БЫЛ АТАКЪ Я ПОДСТАРОСТИИ  
ТОГО ЛИСТУ ОГЛЕДАВШЫ КАЗАА ЕСМИ ДОКНИГ СЛОВО ОТСЛОВА  
ВПИГАТ, КОТОРЫН ТАКЖЕ ВГОБЕ МАЕТ, *Piotr Tyszkiewicz*  
*Natohoysku Kasztelan Minski etc: czynię wiadomo*  
*tem moim listem yżwroku teraznieyszym Tysiąc*  
*szescset Siedmnastym odprawuiąc mnie*  
*zaroskazaniem Jego Kro: msci Pana naszego*  
*miłosciwego Inquisitią dali mi sprawe nie ktore*  
*osoby yż tatarowie minskie plac miescki Cerkwie*  
*Woskresienskiey iakoby niestusznie posiagszy*  
*naniem mieczyt Swoy pobudowali, Oczym Ja chcąc*  
*pewną wiadomosc wziąc pytałemsię otym spilnością,*  
*ktorzy tatarowie daiąc mi otym sprawe yż oni ten*  
*plac mianowancy Cerkwie Woskresienskiey zamianą*  
*dobrą odswieszczennika woskresienskiego Stephana*  
*nabyli, Naco prawo swoje tak też potwierdzenia*

listowne zeszytych metropolitow oyca michała Rahozy  
 Joyca Jpacieia Pocieia Jteraz nieyszego oyca  
 metropolitą yosiphą wielamina Ruckiego maiąc,  
 przedemną pokładali, Naco Ja widząc ich prawa  
 słuszne, zaprozba ich Dałem ym ten moy list  
 potwierdzony podmoią pieczęcią yspodpisem ręki  
 mey, Pisan wminsku Roku  
 Tysiąc Szescset  
 Siedmnastego Msca  
 Januaryi dwudziestego  
 szostego dnia, УТОГО ЛИСТУ  
 ПЕЧАТЬ ЕГО МЛАСТИ ПНА ПЕТРА  
 ТЫШКЕВИЧА ИПОДПИС РУКИ  
 ТЫМИ СЛОВЫ, **Piotr**  
**Tyszkiewicz** Casztelan  
**Minski** ręką КТОРЫИ ТОТ  
 ЛИСТЪ ЗАПРОЗБОУ СОЛИМАНА  
 ТАТАРЫНА ДОКНИГ КГРОДСКИХ  
 МЕНСКИХ ЕСТЬ УПИСАН  
 СКТОРЫХ КНИГ ИДЕС ВИДИМУЕ ПОДПЕЧАТЮ МОЕЮ МЕНЕ ЮРЯ  
 ШПЕНКГАДСКОГО ПОДСТАРОСТЕГО СППОДПИСОМ РУКИ ПИГАРСКОЕ  
 МЕНЕ ЮРОША ИВАНОВСКОГО ВРОКУ ТЕПЕРЕШНЕМЪ ТИГЕЧА ШЕСТ  
 СОТ ТРЫДЦАТ ВТОРОМ МЦА ЯВГУСТА ЧЕТВЕРТОГО ДНЯ ИХ  
 МЛАСТИ ОНЦОМ ВИЛЕНСКОГО БРАЦТВА СВЕТОГО ДУХА ЕСТЬ  
 ВЪДАН ПИГАНЪ УМЕНСКУ ЮРОШЪ ИВАНОВСКИЙ ПИГАР  
 СКОРЫКГОВАЛЪ ОНИКЕЕВИЧЬ».



*Minsk kasztelan  
 Piotr Tyszkiewicz*



“Extract from the town books of the Mensk town castle.

The year from the birth of the Son of God is one thousand six hundred and seventeen, the eighth day of the month of September.

At the city council in the Mensk castle, in front of me, Mikolai Rekut, the under-elder of the Mensky, having personally appeared, the Tatar of the place of the Grodsky Mensky, Suliman Zeckevich, presented a letter of the noble lord to his grace, Pan (i.e. Sir) Pyotr Tyszkiewicz<sup>67</sup> in Logoisk, the castellan of the Mensky, stated the following in this letter, asking, so that this letter is entered and entered into the town's men's books. And so I, the elder, having examined this letter, said to write its text into the books word for word:

[*Polish part (author's note)*]: “Piotr Tyszkiewicz, in Logoisk, castellan of Mensky and others, I bring to your attention with this letter of mine that in the current year one thousand six hundred and seventeen, when I was conducting an investigation, by order of His Royal Grace, our gracious Pan<sup>68</sup>, some persons turned to me, that

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<sup>67</sup> Count on Logoisk

<sup>68</sup> i.e. King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Sigismund III Vasa.

the Minsk Tatars, allegedly incorrectly acquiring the city site of the Resurrection Church, built their mosque on it. I, wanting to get full information about this, diligently asked about it. The Tatars told me that they bought this site, called the site of the Resurrection Church, from the priest Stefan at a good price. They also provided me with written confirmation of their rights from former metropolitans: Father Mikhail Rogoza, Father Hypatius Potey, and the current Father Metropolitan Joseph Velyamin of Rut. I, seeing that their rights were true, at their request, gave them the document of mine, certified by my seal and my own signature. Written in Minsk in one thousand six hundred and seventeen, on the twenty-sixth day of January.”

[*Belorussian part (author's note)*]: This document bears the seal of His Grace Pan Piotr Tyshkevich and is hand-signed with the following words: “Piotr Tyszkiewicz, castellan of Minsk, by hand.” This letter, at the request of the Tatar Soliman, was inscribed in the city books, from which books this extract is under the seal of my, Yuri Shpenkgavsky, sub-elder, and with the signature of the hand of my clerk Yarosh Ivanovsky in the current year one thousand six

hundred and thirty-two, the month of August, the fourth day of their mercy to the fathers of the Vilna brotherhood The Holy Spirit has been issued. Written to Mensku. Yarosh Ivanovsky. Clerk. Corrected by Onikeevich.”

As can be seen from this historical evidence, events unfolded as follows: even during the metropolitan period of Metropolitan Mikhail Rogoza, that is, between 1589 and 1599, the Minsk Tatars acquired land from the mentioned Resurrection<sup>69</sup> Church. The purchase was confirmed by Metropolitan Mikhail Rogoza himself, issuing his letter, as evidenced by the testimony of P. Tyszkiewicz.



*King Sigismund III*

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<sup>69</sup> Here the names are different, I. Potey calls the site of the Church of the Nativity, and P. Tyszhkiewicz calls the Church of the Resurrection. Perhaps, after the construction of the mosque, a new church was erected nearby – the Resurrection Church, which stood until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and is mentioned below.

Thus, it can be unequivocally stated that it was in this decade that such a faith-based institution as the Minsk Mosque was founded<sup>70</sup>. However, taking into account the data given earlier, we can confidently adjust the date to 1598-1599.

After the death of M. Rogoza in 1599, the aforementioned Ipatiy Potey, who held the rank from 1599 to 1613, was appointed metropolitan, who also issued his charter confirming the legitimacy of the construction of a mosque in Minsk.

It should be noted here that in 1605 the right to acquire the plot by the Tatars was approved by the king himself – Sigismund III Vasa<sup>71</sup>.

Afterwards, Minsk Muslims, after the death of I. Potey, applied for a charter to the new metropolitan, Joseph of Rutsky, who was ordained from 1614 to 1637, who also, in turn, confirmed the legality of the construction of the mosque in Minsk.

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<sup>70</sup> Researcher T. Korzon agrees with this, q.v.: Skzic historyczny o tatarach litewskich w Minsku Litewskim i jego okolicach, Tadeusz Korzon, ctp. 7

<sup>71</sup> P. Borawski Tatarzy w miastach I jurydykach Radziwiłłów // Przegląd Historyczny 1992, V. 83 N.1, s. 65 – 81.

Probably, the evil tongues, which have now become known thanks to the letter of I. Potey, constantly tried to incite a religious conflict on this basis, which is indirectly evidenced by the frequency of appeals of Minsk Muslims to the metropolitans for confirmation of their rights. Moreover, this is directly confirmed by P. Tyszkiewicz's letter itself, which directly states that "certain persons" stated that the mosque was built illegally.

The slander, as it is assumed from the letter, was again<sup>72</sup> brought by evil "persons" to the king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – Sigismund III Vasa. By order, the Kashtalian of Minsk, Piotr Tyszkiewicz, carried out a thorough investigation. His testimony as an eyewitness is especially important today - he personally saw the letters issued by three metropolitans. He also interviewed the Tatars, who outlined the chronology of events. After such exhaustive evidence, he personally issued a confirmation letter to the Tatars of Minsk, certifying it with his seal.

However, as you can see, the Muslims, who experienced certain attacks from those evil

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<sup>72</sup> Since he had already confirmed the right to the mosque in 1605

“persons,” did not stop at simply receiving a letter from the kashtalan, but in the same year, since P. Tyszkiewicz issued the letter on January 26, 1617, then already on September 8, 1617 year, a representative of the Minsk Tatars, Suleiman Zetskevich, himself came to the Minsk castle<sup>73</sup> to the sub-elder of Minsk, Mikolay Rekut, and asked him to enter the text of the letter into the Minsk city books, thereby preventing subsequent slander.

And already from this record of the Minsk city books, the new sub-elder, Yuri Shpenkgavsky, on August 4, 1632, made an extract to the fathers of the Vilna Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit, which was included in the mentioned “Collection of Ancient Letters” in the 1840s.

This document is the most valuable evidence of the founding of a Muslim religious and spiritual center - the Minsk Mosque - in the 1590s. To avoid mistakes, it is customary to consider the year of the end of the metropolitanate of M. Rogoza to be 1599 as the date of foundation of the mosque.

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<sup>73</sup> The Minsk city castle was then located on the territory of the Minsk castle. The presence of buildings on its territory is mentioned in acts of the late 16<sup>th</sup> - early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. q.v.: Археалогія Беларусі, 2011. т.2 стр. 84.

However, despite the established legal right of the Tatars to their land for a mosque, attacks continued further<sup>74</sup>, until 1837<sup>75</sup>.

It should be noted that, apparently, there were some irresistible forces behind the Muslims, since I. Potey, despite his damning complaints, was still forced to issue a certificate of approval for the mosque. Also, the confirmation of the rights to the mosque of King Sigismund in its entirety indicates that the ruling elite of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth did not want problems with Muslims and those who supported them.

Nevertheless, these facts indicate that, despite everything, the law in the then state worked, and that a significant part of the population had good relations with Muslims, which allowed freedom of religion in practice.

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<sup>74</sup> „Pójdź do Mińska i spytaj — wołał demagogicznie w 1644 r. Euzebiusz Pomen, mnich kijowski — na jakim placu tatarski meczet stoi? Dowiesz się, że na tym, gdzie cerkiew była Narodzenia Pana naszego”

Translation: **“Go to Minsk and ask,” the Kiev monk Eusebius Pomen demagogically ordered in 1644, “on what site does the Tatar mosque stand?” You will find out that where our Church of the Nativity of the Lord was.** - W. Syrokomla, Mińsk, „Teki Wileńska”, 1857, nr 2, s. 151—153

<sup>75</sup> Raport administratora kojanowskiego z 1837 r. AGAD, AR dz. XVIII, nr 339, s. 12, 13, 15, 42.

The translation we provided of Shpenkgavsky's extract also clarified the issue of "Sergeant Major Soliman," mentioned by Pavel Shpilevsky in 1854, as a person who bought a plot of land and built a mosque. This document shows that Suleiman Zetskevich was only an intercessor before the sub-elder of Minsk to include the text of the charter in the Minsk city books. The only person known for his participation in the acquisition of land for the mosque was the mentioned Orekhovsky.

Another Tatar clan, the Furs, who were mentioned above, also became famous in this century. In 1639, while a juror of the city of Minsk, the Muslim Ulas Ambrozhevich Furs lent the town hall 410 kopecks of groschen, in exchange for which the city gave him a large amount of land and forest under restrictions, with the proviso that he did not have the right to sell this land to persons from the nobility, on pain loss of rights to land with buildings. It follows that Furs should have been listed as a tradesman at that time.

This Ulas Furs founded a farmstead on the land given to him and called it Vesninka<sup>76,77</sup>. His son

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<sup>76</sup> APDA. Ks.nr. 12273, str. 412



Jan is present on the political scene, holding various positions in the Minsk mayor's office. Where he was elected mayor<sup>78</sup> until 1661 and began to own lands near the Krupitsa River<sup>79</sup>. And in 1668 he purchased haylofts on the river Svisloch and other places<sup>80</sup>. He proved himself to be a good mayor, as evidenced by the fact that he was elected to that position until his death.

His son, Jerzy Furs, did not take part in the work of the Minsk City Hall, being mainly involved in the development of Vesninka. He bought a hayloft, ponds and next to them, on the Krupitsa River, a paper factory from the Benedictine nuns. He donated two fields at the Tartar end to the Jesuit monks, where the Jesuits established a farm which they called Ludamont<sup>81</sup>. Vesninka then passed on to Jerzy's son, Gabriel Furs<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Further it will be noted about the existence of the first Muslim cemetery on Vesninka, which was probably founded on the lands of Furs.

<sup>78</sup> i.e. Minsk mayor.

<sup>79</sup> Skzic historyczny o tatarach litewskich w Minsku Litewskim i jego okolicach, Tadeusz Korzon, стр. 8

<sup>80</sup> ib.

<sup>81</sup> The area where the WWII Museum is now located, st. Gvardeiskaya and others.

<sup>82</sup> ib.

The next chronological mention concerning the Minsk mosque is the earliest mention of the name of the imam of the mosque - Ibrahim, noted in documents from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, most likely in 1664<sup>83</sup>. Also, there are references to the mosque in 1679, and in 1695 the Radziwills allocated 21 plots of land for the mosque, which is equal to 336 m2. Modern researcher Alena Lyubaya, during a meeting with the author of these lines, noted that the Radziwills' archival documents indicate the existence of a second mosque in Minsk, and probably the allocated 336 m2 was the site for the construction of the second mosque, which was carefully stated by I.B. Kanapatsky<sup>84</sup>. The location of the second mosque is still unclear<sup>85</sup>.

In a study of the Tatars of the Minsk region by Tadeusz Korzon, it is noted that in the early historical period the Muslim presence in the fate of Minsk was noticeably large, which began to decrease by the end of the 17th century due to the

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<sup>83</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004 г.

<sup>84</sup> Previous provenance.

<sup>85</sup> Most likely, a site was only allocated for construction, which did not begin. Most likely, this could be a belated measure of foundation for the mosque, which Krzysztof Radziwill did not do in his time.

mass immigration of Muslims of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to Muslim countries such as Crimea and Turkey<sup>86</sup>.



*Minsk Tafsir 1686*

One of the significant events of that century was the result of the spiritual and scientific work of, perhaps, the next imam of Minsk - Uryash ibn Ismail (Shlemovsky?)<sup>87</sup>, who compiled<sup>88</sup> an epoch-making work - the so-called. “Minsk Tafsir”, a translation of the meanings of the Quran into the then Belarusian language, which was a mixture of Belarusian-Polish vocabulary. The original manuscript has survived to

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<sup>86</sup> Skzic historyczny o tatarach litewskich w Minsku Litewskim i jego okolicach, Tadeusz Korzon, стр. 12 and on.

<sup>87</sup> Variation of reading of the surname from the second colophon on l. 514 b.

<sup>88</sup> As indicated by the word تاليف in the text of the second colophon of the manuscript on fol. 514 b.

this day, and is contained in the Y. Kolas Central Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus, under the code P16-18/Cp2 (P214)

The colophon of the manuscript in Turkic reads:

مينسك إمام  
ترجما أورياش ابن إسماعيل  
[...]  
تاريخ بكنده طقسان سكرنجي يلنده، مبارك محرم اينده تمام  
أولدي، مينسك شهرنده

**Imam of Minsk**  
**Translator Uryash ibn Ismail**  
[...]

**Date: one thousand ninety-eight, completed  
in the blessed month of Muharram. In the city of  
Minsk.**

The date 1098 is a date according to the Islamic calendar, as evidenced by the name of the month - Muharram. In this case, it was November 1686 according to the Gregorian calendar. According to the opinion of the Belarusian researcher Mikhail Tarelko, who studied the

manuscript, the author of this translation is the mentioned imam of Minsk - Uryash ibn Ismail<sup>89</sup>.

The language of the manuscript is saturated with substratum Belarusian elements, however, on the other hand, it bears a strong influence of the Arabic language. As for the substrates of the Belarusian language, as an example we can give examples of the use of Belarusian words instead of Polish ones, such as: “halup/hulup” instead of Polish - chlop; the Belarusian word knize instead of the Polish – ksiegie; Belarusian “murashek/murashka” instead of Polish – mrowka, etc.<sup>90</sup>.

One of the important features of the language of this translation is the influence of Arabic syntax. An example is the copying of the Arabic auxiliary verb-linking “to be” - كان in phrases like: «былі яны жартуючымі» instead of «жартавалі яны»; also the phrase «ты не чытаў» in tafsir looks like «не быў чытаючым»; the phrase «яны служылі» looks like «былі яны служашчымі»<sup>91</sup>. There are also

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<sup>89</sup> Михаїл Тарэлка «Мінскі тафсір 1686 г. Вынікі апошніх даследаванняў», журнал «Poznanskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Jezykoznaўca, 24 (2), 163-176. 2018 г.

<sup>90</sup> Previous provenance.

<sup>91</sup> Previous provenance.

a number of other examples, which together may indicate that the author of the tafsir, Uryash ibn Ismail, translated directly from the original language – Arabic.

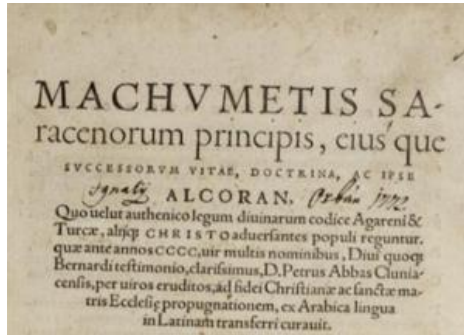
In addition, it should be noted that along with the knowledge of Arabic, he also spoke Turkic, since the first half of the Quran was translated into the Turkic dialect, and only starting from the 19th sura there is a Slavic text.

Researcher M. Tarelko suggests considering this manuscript a copy of an earlier text, copied from it. At the same time, during a meeting with the author of these lines, M. Tarelko indicated that it is likely that this translation could have been made much earlier, since the mentioned substrate Belarusianisms are from the category of religious terminology, stable phrases that have already entered the religious lexicon. In this case, the supposed original source of the tafsir should have been compiled in the purer Old Belarusian language with the least Polish influence, which grew in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and later.

Be that as it may, the presence in Minsk of a surviving manuscript of a translation of the meanings of the Koran, made, as it appears, from the original language, and dated 1686, makes this

manuscript unique in the history of translations of the Quran. Since this translation is the third in the history of translations of the Quran from the original language into European languages.

The first translation was made in 1143 by Robert of Ketton into Latin, published in 1543 by Theodore Bibliander under the title *Lex*



*Edition by T. Bibliander*

Mahumet pseudoprophete (Law of the False Prophet Muhammad). This translation, of course, was polemical in nature and was extremely inaccurate<sup>92</sup>. The second was the translation into Italian by Andrea Arribavene in 1547, who took as a basis the Latin version of Ketton. The third translation was a translation into German from Arribavene's Italian translation, published by Solomon Schweiger in 1616 in Nuremberg, the German version becoming the basis for the Dutch

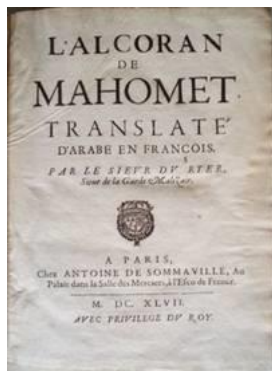
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<sup>92</sup> The inaccuracy of R. Ketton's work reached the point that in his translation he generated many new chapters in the Quran: 124 instead of 114!



version published in 1641 in Hamburg. Thus, these translations were made from one another, exacerbating the errors.

The second translation from the original language was the translation into French by André du Ryer in 1647 – L’Alcoran de Mahomet, but it contained a large number of errors<sup>93</sup>. It was translated into English by Alexander Ross in 1649. André du Ryer by Pyotr Vasilievich Postnikov in St. Petersburg made the first translation into Russian from an inaccurate translation in 1716, and the first translation into Russian from the original was made



*Edition by du Ryer*

only in 1871 by Dmitry Nikolaevich Boguslavsky.

Our “Minsk Tafsir” becomes the third translation from the original language in the history of European languages. It also gains great significance from the fact that it was not executed in a polemical manner, which deprives the translation of objectivity, and as a result, truthfulness, but was prepared by a Muslim

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<sup>93</sup> Густерин П. В. «Коран как объект изучения». 2014 г., стр. 11, 61.

himself, moreover, by an imam, who, judging by his command of languages, had a good religious education.

In this case, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the first accurate translation in history into European languages was made by the imam of the Minsk mosque. As some studies show, Imam Uryash ibn Ismail in his translation relied on classical Arabic interpretations of the Quran, among which we can highlight the tafsir of Muhammad ibn Yaqub al-Fairuzabadi - تنوير المقباس من - تفسير ابن عباس - “Illumination of quotes from the tafsir of Ibn Abbas”, it also contains noticeable influences from Tafsir ibn Jarir at-Tabari – جامع البيان – “Collection of explanations in the interpretation of the Quran”, one of the most authoritative interpreters of the Quran in classical Islam – Abu Jafar Ibn Jarir At-Tabari<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> С. Ю. Темчин, «Арабский «Танвир аль-микбас мин тафсир ибн Аббас» как источник польского перевода Корана по рукописям литовских татар XVII-XX вв.: суры 1-ая (Аль-Фатиха) и 36-я (Йа-Син)». Издано в «Swiete ksiegi judaizmu, chrzescijanstwa I islamu w slowianskim kregu kulturowym». Torun, 2016. S, 95-119.

The nuances of the translation of the Minsk tafsir were discussed by the author of these lines



Sheikh al-Baghdadi

with modern Muslim theologians. Thus, when discussing the translation of the word استوى as well as the word ضالاً from Surah ad-Duha and some other complex passages, a specialist in Quranic sciences, Doctor of Islamic Sciences, Sheikh Anwar ibn Ahmad al-Baghdadi noted that the translation variations are quite successful and show the translator as a skilled representative classical Sunni Islam.

Considering these facts, the translation of the imam of the Minsk mosque is also the first theological translation into European languages.

The combination of these aspects makes this work relevant to this day, since the problems of Slavic translations, like, in principle, other European translations, bear the burden of errors of previous “polemical” translations. And each new translator was forced in his translation to always look back at the work done before him in order to familiarize himself with the options for translating complex passages of the Arabic text of the Quran. It is in this

way that gross theological errors continue to roam to this day, and are present in a number of modern author's Russian-language translations, published even in the 1990s.

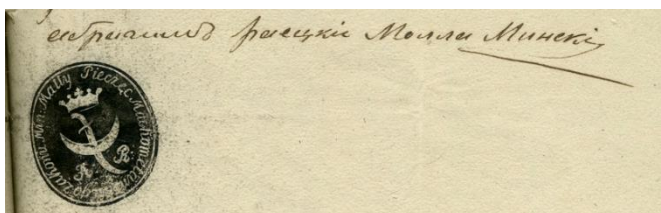
The new edition of the "Minsk Tafsir" will allow you to look at the pure and primary translation of the Quran into the Slavic language, not spoiled by the translator's glances at the mistakes of early polemicist translators. The presence of such religious work in the history of Minsk makes not only Minsk, but also Belarus the owner of a unique monument of world material and spiritual culture, which can safely take its rightful place among the shrines of the Belarusian people.

After such a significant growth of religious and scientific work in the Minsk mosque, various persons worked in the post of imam, among whom the names of Mustafa Poltorzhitsky, mentioned in the metrics by the imam of Minsk in 1774, are preserved, after him Mustafa Davydovich Lominsky, born in 1745, is mentioned, he occupied post of imam in 1796-1817<sup>95</sup>; Yakub Aleksandrovich

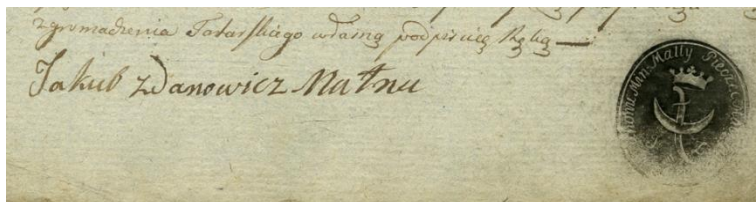
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<sup>95</sup> Born in Khotim, Ottoman Empire, he was an imam-chaplain in the Tatar regiment of Russian Emp. from July 1, 1797, he had no citizenship, only an oath.

Zhdanovich (1774-1834), who served as imam in 1814-1819<sup>96</sup>; Suleiman Mustafovich Bitsyutko (b. 1790), mentioned by the imam in 1830; Ibrahim Shabanovich Raetsky, born in 1793, and served as imam from 1833-1855<sup>97</sup>.



Autograph and seal of the imam Raetsky



Autograph and seal of the Minsk mosque imam Zhdanovich

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<sup>96</sup> He was a candidate for the post of imam in Dovbutishki in 1810. In 1812 he received approval for the post of imam from Samuil Belyak. Owned f. Pochekovka near Minsk, 4 portages in 1824.

<sup>97</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004 г.

During the period of imamship of Ibrahim Raetsky, the Belarusian ethnographer Pavel Mikhailovich Shpilevsky visited the Muslim Tatar community in Minsk and left a detailed description of the Tatar settlement of Minsk and the mosque. Ethnographic notes by P. M. Shpilevsky under the title “Travel through Polesie and the Belarusian Territory” appeared in the St. Petersburg magazine “Sovremennik” in 1853–1855.



*P. Shpilevsky*

In 1854, in the 48<sup>th</sup> volume of *Sovremennik*, on pages 18-20, the inventory “Minsk Belarusian. Tatar end, Tatars and their mosque, Church of the Resurrection, remains of a Franciscan church, ancient ramparts and trenches.” At the very beginning of the essay, Shpilevsky notes the beginning of the Tatar district immediately behind the Catherine Church<sup>98</sup> and

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<sup>98</sup> Nowadays it again bears the name St. Peter and Paul Cathedral. Located at st. Rakovskaya 4. Received the name of the Catherine Church in 1795. While the original Peter and Paul Cathedral was transferred in the same 1795 to the building of the former Uniate Minsk Holy Spirit Cathedral, which now also continues to be called.

notes that the area is inhabited “exclusively by Tatars.” Next, he gives a lengthy discussion about the etymology of “end” in early Slavic toponymy, and then returns to the description of the Tatar region itself:

“The number of Minsk Tatars reaches 400 souls. They lead a rather hard-working life, like their fellow tribesmen, the Kletsk Tatars: everything that is said about the latter also applies to the Minsk Tatars. The only difference is that the Minsk ones are much richer than the dumplings. The main subject of their industry is garden vegetables, which they sow and grow in large quantities in gardens and fields near the Rakovskaya road. In addition, some of them are engaged in horse breeding and therefore have huge meadows on the banks of the Svisloch for making hay: part of these meadows once belonged to the Holy Spirit Monastery, but was later bought by the Tatar foreman Soliman. At the request of this Soliman, in 1617, a Tatar chapel or mosque was built on the ground of the Church of the Resurrection; In exchange for the taken soil, the Voskresensky clergy was given the same plot in another place. The mosque has

survived to this day: it is wooden, small, and consists of two sections, male and female, separated from each other by a lattice. There are no decorations inside, except for a canopy for the mullah in the men's section, in which the floor is covered with green cloth, and benches for visitors are placed near one wall. In addition to these two sections or rooms, there is also something like a hallway in which the Tatars leave their shoes: it is known that, according to Muslim law, they cannot enter the prayer house in boots.

A few steps from the mosque, at the Tatar End, on a small hill, stands the wooden Resurrection Church, which not so long ago was Uniate and only in 1839 was reunited with Orthodoxy, in memory of which every year on June 7 a religious procession is held from this church to Catherine's<sup>99</sup> and then to Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral<sup>100</sup>. This church, being quite ancient at that time, is mentioned in the Minsk

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<sup>99</sup> i.e. to the modern Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral on Rakovskaya 4.

<sup>100</sup> To the modern Holy Spirit Cathedral, at Cyril and Methodius Str., 3.



acts of 1617 and 1626. Near the Church of the Resurrection, on the corner of Rakovskaya Street, a rather ancient stone building of the former Franciscan church has been preserved: now, due to its dilapidation, this building has been turned into a warehouse feed store; Its outer walls are not painted, red brick is exposed on all sides.

Speaking about the Tatar Konetz, it is impossible not to mention one feature of it, which, no less than the name itself (the end), serves as proof that ancient Minsk, in addition to the Low Market, also included the current Tatar suburb. This feature consists of trenches or ramparts on the left side of the Svisloch, in view of the Lyudymont farm, which formed the fortification of ancient Minsk. These trenches stretch around the Tatar End from Svisloch to Rakovskaya Street; here they are interrupted and then again meet in parts here and there towards the Koidanovskaya road. The trenches near the Tatar End are so overgrown with grass, bushes and even large trees that the residents of Minsk consider them ordinary mountains.

Meanwhile, these are not simple, natural mountains, but artificial embankments of an ancient city, which usually replaced fortresses and defensive walls among the Slavs. Gvagnin preserved information about these Minsk embankments or trenches for us; he says that in his time Minsk was a large, fortified city, surrounded by high trenches. Traces of these trenches can also be seen behind Trinity Mountain, between Komarovka and Perespa; but here they are least preserved; Most of the ramparts have been razed and leveled with the smooth surface of the earth.”

Several important aspects can be highlighted from this ethnographic note. First: Shpilevsky’s testimony about the existence of the ancient wooden Ascension Church “a few steps from the mosque” confirms that this particular mosque appears in the case of P. Tyszkiewicz, thereby eliminating the possibility that this is the “second” mosque erected on lands donated by the Radziwills. In this case, everything that we know about the Minsk mosque from the case of P. Tyszkiewicz and the letter of I. Potey refers to this building.

The second aspect, and it indirectly follows from the first, is Shpilevsky's words "the mosque has survived to this day." These words indicate that the building that P. Shpilevsky is talking about is the original construction of the 1590s. Researcher Tadeusz Korzon also believes that the original mosque has been preserved since the 1590s<sup>101</sup>.

The fact that the mosque was made of wood cannot be confusing in its originality due to the fragility of wood. Belarusian wooden architecture knows examples of the preservation of ancient temples over many centuries. As an example, we can cite the mosque from the village of Dovbutishki, built in 1735 and preserved until 1989<sup>102</sup>, at the time of destruction it was 254 years old. At the time of P. Shpilevsky's visit to the Minsk mosque, she was 255 years old.



*Mosque in the  
Doubutishki village*

From this, it becomes clear that the mosque described by Shpilevsky bears rare archaic

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<sup>101</sup> Skicz historyczny o tatarach litewskich w Minsku Litewskim i jego okolicach, Tadeusz Korzon, стр. 14

<sup>102</sup> With renovations

architectural features of Muslim wooden architecture of Belarus. The author of these lines discovered a photograph of this mosque in the collection of the Museum of Anthropology and



*Photo of the mosque by V. A. Moshkov, 1894*

Ethnography. Peter the Great (Kunstkamera), made in 1894 by artillery colonel, ethnographer and anthropologist Valentin Aleksandrovich Moshkov.

His photograph shows a Gothic-type building with a high hipped roof, truncated at the top, covered with shingles. The proportional ratio of the



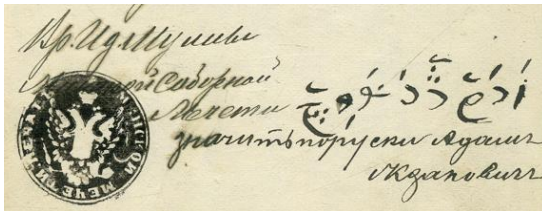
Church in the village of Ishkold, 15th century.

mass of the roof to the mass of the walls, as well as the general design, resembles similar proportions and features in the early late Gothic churches of Belarus, such as the Trinity Church in the village of

Ishkold, built in the 15th century, or the Church of St. Michael in Synkovichi, built in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

It is tempting to think that this building is the place where Imam Uryash ibn Ismail prayed and comprehended his translation of the Koran. This is the building for which Suleiman Zetskevich, already familiar to us, went to intercede, and which was inspected by the Kashtalian P. Tyszkiewicz.

After Imam Ibrahim Shabanovich Raetsky, Suleiman Aleksandrovich Bitsyutko, who was born



Autograph and seal of the imam A. Zhdanovich

in 1812, served in the mosque, had state awards

and served as imam in 1855-1896. After him, Adam Aleyevich Zhdanovich<sup>103</sup> performed the duties of imam for a short period in 1897-1898<sup>104</sup>.

Under the next imam, Mustafa Aleksandrovich Smaykevich, who took office in 1898<sup>105</sup> the already dilapidated wooden building was reconstructed into a stone metropolitan mosque, which would be called the first stone mosque in Europe.



*Imam M. Smaykevich*

At the time of his assumption of office as imam of the Minsk mosque, Imam Smaykevich already had experience leading another no less important parish – the

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<sup>103</sup> In 1893 it was mentioned by the imam in the wedding ceremony of Bekir Zhdanovich and Azyma.

<sup>104</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004 г.

<sup>105</sup> Previous provenance.

Dovbutishskaya <sup>106</sup>. In addition, he was a hereditary clergyman <sup>107</sup>.

The author of these lines, during a visit to the National Historical Archive of the Republic of Belarus, had the honor of holding in his hands a historical document – “On the approval of the project for the construction of a new Mohammedan mosque in Minsk.” The text of the document looks like this:

**«Protocol  
of the Construction Department of the  
Minsk Provincial Board**

**April 18, 1900.**

**On approval of the project for the  
construction of a new Muhammedan mosque in  
Minsk**

**The Committee for the construction of a  
new Muhammedan mosque in Minsk, with a  
petition dated March 31 of this year, submitted  
to the Construction Department for  
consideration with a copy for the construction of**

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<sup>106</sup> С. Міскевіч Даўбуцішкі, Мінск, 2021.

<sup>107</sup> Życie Tatarskie, 1937, N.12

a new stone Muhammedan mosque in Minsk; At the same time, the notice of the Minsk Provincial Board dated May 31, 1897, No. 2603, which followed in the name of the Mullah of the Cathedral Mosque about permission to renew the old mosque at the expense of a voluntary cash deposit, and the verdict of the parishioners of the Cathedral Mosque, approved by the Provincial Board, was presented.

Law: Article 260 Bld.

Opinion: The project /2/ presented by the Committee for the construction of a new stone Muhammedan mosque, examined from a technical point of view, was found to be drawn up satisfactorily; In view of this, the Construction Department of the Provincial Board believes: to approve such a project, make an inscription on it and send a copy of it, together with the above-mentioned attachments, to the First Department of this Board to discuss the issue of allowing the construction of a new mosque. The case for the Construction

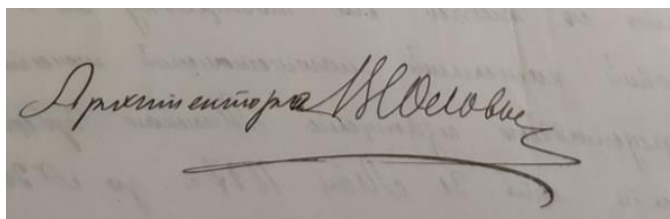


Department should be entered into [...] and submitted to the archives in a timely manner.

Provincial Engineer (*signature*)

Provincial Architect (*signature*  
“Solovyov”?)

Senior Clerk (*signature*)»<sup>108</sup>.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. It begins with a large, stylized initial 'S' and ends with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish that extends to the right. The background shows faint, illegible text from the document.

Architector Solovyov's signature

The architect Solovyov mentioned in this document for a long time remained a little-studied personality associated with the history of the Minsk mosque. His name appears only on the above document and in the lines of the newspaper “Minsky Listok” dated October 27, 1902, telling about the grand opening of the new mosque: “built in the Byzantine style according to the plan of the engineer-architect Solovyov, distinguished by the grace and modesty of architecture, in its appearance in appearance it

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<sup>108</sup> № Фонда 299, опись 1, ед. хр. 872.

is one of the best buildings in Minsk.” Thus, until recently, even the name of this architect was not known.

Thanks to the research of MSU graduate student Olga Yurievna Tortsova<sup>109</sup> documents were discovered in the Russian State Historical Archive, which contain a request from Vladimir Konstantinovich Solovyov for a transfer from service from the Irkutsk Construction and Road Administration to the vacant position of the Lublin provincial engineer-architect<sup>110</sup>. This file lists the positions held by V.K. Solovyov. In particular, his petition dated June 2, 1907 states that in 1897–1905, he worked as a junior architect for the Minsk provincial government. In this case, it can be argued that this Vladimir Konstantinovich Solovyov is the author of the Minsk mosque project.

Apparently, his request was granted, and the following information about him is already found in the Lublin archive. According to the

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<sup>109</sup> Торцова О. Ю. «Архитектура Минской соборной мечети 1901 г.», журнал Архитектон, №4, декабрь 2020.

<sup>110</sup> The case of the appointment of collegiate assessor Solovyov as Lublin Provincial Engineer. РГИА. Ф. 1284. Оп. 47. Разд. 1907, д. 109.

documents located there, the Minsk mosque is listed as his authorship<sup>111</sup>.

In this case, we can confidently consider him the author of this architectural project. Thanks to this information, his biography can be studied in more detail. He was born in 1870 into a family of St. Petersburg nobles. He graduated from the Institute of Civil Engineers in St. Petersburg, after which he worked in Minsk, then, in 1905, he was transferred to Irkutsk, and in 1907 he submitted the aforementioned petition to Lublin.

In the course of the analysis carried out by the mentioned researcher O. Tortsova, V.K. Solovyov, in designing the Minsk mosque, worked with the standard design of Mohammedan mosques, approved in 1831 as an exemplary one, which was customary to adhere to in the development of mosque projects. Thus, according to the approved law of December 23, 1831, the construction of all new mosques on the territory of the Russian Empire had to be carried out in

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<sup>111</sup> Wojewódzkie Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie, RGL (1867-1914), osob. 1663. Прочитировано по: Bieniaszkiewicz H. Architektura secesyjna w Lublinie// Rozprawa Doktorska. Lublin, 2005. S. 25.

accordance with established models<sup>112</sup>. This provision was canceled already in 1862<sup>113</sup>. Based on this, the general layout and exterior design of the mosque mostly repeats the drawings of standard mosque designs from 1843.

However, the interior design of the prayer rooms was made in accordance with the typical design of traditional mosques in Belarus. This is evidenced by the drawings of the Minsk Mosque received by the author of these lines from the Belarusian State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation.

The information received is new pages in the history of the Minsk Cathedral Mosque. The reason for such an organic synthesis of traditionally Islamic architectural elements such as lancet windows and horseshoe-shaped entrances and European

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<sup>112</sup> Law 2902. Decree on the construction of mosques in Tatar villages according to the attached model facade and plan. «Полное собрание законов Российской империи», Собрание (1825 - 1881), том 4, с. 378–380.

<sup>113</sup> Law 39044. About permission to build mosques not according to the highest approved model plans and facades, but also according to others, which the parishioners will find convenient. «Полное собрание законов Российской империи», собрание (1825–1881), ч. 2, т. 37, с. 507–508.

elements of classicism in the architecture of this mosque becomes clear and understandable.

As mentioned above, these big changes fell on the imamship of Mustafa Aleksandrovich Smaykevich. The fact that the above document mentions the notice of the Minsk Provincial Board dated May 31, 1897 indicates that the process of renovation of the Minsk mosque was launched earlier, even before M. Smaykevich was invited to this position in 1898. In this case, the previous imams, S. Bitsyutko and A. Zhdanovich, can be considered the initiators of these transformations.



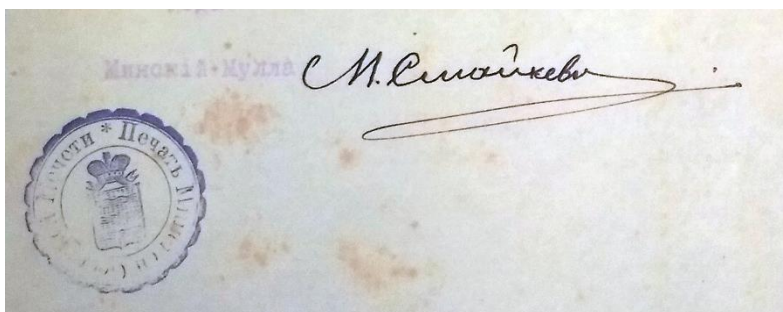
One of the last photographs of the Minsk mosque before reconstruction

The need for expansion was dictated by two factors: the dilapidation of the wooden frame of the mosque of the 1590s, and, perhaps, the decisive factor was the increasing status of Minsk as the administrative center of the Minsk province. Minsk was becoming a major railway junction. This, in turn, led to the mass resettlement of Tatars from other settlements to Minsk<sup>114</sup>, as well as the settlement of Muslims of foreign origin, such as

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<sup>114</sup> The largest number are from Novogrudok, Lyakhovich, Slonim.

Caucasians, Turkestanis<sup>115</sup> and Turks<sup>116</sup>. According to rough estimates, more than two thousand Muslims of different classes lived in Minsk at that time: from civil servants to farmers and tanners. The previous building could no longer cope with such a number of worshipers, and therefore a renovation and expansion project was started.



Autograph of M. Smaykevich and seal of the new mosque

Imam Mustafa Smaykevich was born in 1854 and came from Lyakhovichi, Slutsk povet. Born into the family of Alexander Suleymanovich Smaykevich and Roza Voronovich, he was one of six children in the family. Unfortunately, there is no information about his religious education, but in 1887 he was elected imam of one of the most important and

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<sup>115</sup> Served as military cavalry.

<sup>116</sup> As captives after wars with the Ottoman Empire and as confectionery entrepreneurs.

populous communities in the Western Region, with the ancient mosque mentioned above – Dovbutishkaya, replacing the former imam of Dovbutishek – Selim Lebed. Mustafa managed to create a large family and become the father of six sons and four daughters. One of Mustafa's brothers – Ibrahim Smaykevich, married the imam's daughter in Lukishki, where he later became an imam<sup>117</sup>.

As mentioned above, in 1898 he moved to Minsk to become the new imam of the Minsk mosque. According to his son, Yakub Mustafovich Smaykevich, their family had a large handwritten tafsir with a translation into the Belarusian-Polish language, which was then about 250 years old. With a greater degree of probability, it can be considered one of the early copies of the tafsir of Uryash ibn Ismail. This tafsir, unfortunately, was taken to the USA by one of Mustafa's children – Aley, where he disappeared<sup>118</sup>.

*3D reconstruction of the appearance of the first mosque, made by the author:*

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<sup>117</sup> С. Мискевич. «Смайкевичи», журнал Байрам, №45, 2019, стр. 44-50.

<sup>118</sup> Previous provenance.





МИНСКАЯ СОБОРНАЯ МЕСЕЦЬ 1599



МИНСКАЯ ГОБОРНАЯ МЕЦЕТЬ 1599



МИНСКАЯ СОБОРНАЯ МЕЧЕТЬ 1599



МИНСКАЯ СОБОРНАЯ МЕЧЕТЬ 1599

In 1900, as appears from the minutes of the Construction Department of the Minsk Provincial Board, the construction of a new stone mosque was approved. In just a year, a new building was erected. Unfortunately, the original drawings of the mosque, made according to the design of V.K. Solovyov, have not been preserved in Minsk, however, the author of these lines was asked by specialists from the National Historical Archive of the Republic of Belarus to contact the archives of St. Petersburg to search for duplicates. The presence of duplicates of the project is clearly indicated by the text of the above protocol: “and a copy of it, together with the above-mentioned attachments, should be sent to the First Department of this Board.”

Wherefore, the author of these lines was directed by the Russian Muslim historian A. Makarov to search for duplicates in the Russian State Historical Archive, among the documents of the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Denominations in Fund 821. The search for drawings of the mosque is still ongoing.

The grand opening, to which clergy from Crimea were invited, as well as guests from abroad, took place on October 25, 1902 at 12 noon. The

previously mentioned newspaper “Minsky Listok” reports about the opening of the mosque:

“After the solemn prayer for the health of the Sovereign Emperor, one of the parishioners – A. S. Bitsyutko<sup>119</sup> – addressed those gathered with the following words: “Muslims! It is my rare good fortune to congratulate you on today’s joyful event. By the will of the Great Allah, after so much expectation and material sacrifice, you see the temple of God in front of you. What could be more gratifying for each of us to realize that we now have a shrine where we will glorify the name of the Great Creator of the Universe, revere His providence and draw from the inexhaustible source of His mercy. Let our mosque testify that in our hearts we firmly keep the covenants of our ancestors: boundless devotion and love for God, the Fatherland and the Throne - let these holy covenants be the foundation of all our endeavors and all our activities; in such a mood, a handful of us can

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<sup>119</sup> Most likely Adam Syuleimanovich Bitsyutko, at that time a state councilor, a judicial investigator. Or Alexander Syuleimanovich, titular councilor, land surveyor, owner. Pilatovichi near Baranovichi.

recognize themselves as morally strong and pleasing to God.”<sup>120</sup>.



*Minsk mosque on a postcard from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*3D reconstruction of the appearance of the new mosque, made by the author:*

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<sup>120</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004 г.



Минская соборная мечеть 1901





Минская соборная мечеть 1901



Минская соборная мечеть 1901



Минская соборная мечеть 1901

Mustafa Smaykevich served as imam until the end of the First World War. In 1917 he was mentioned as an imam and a member of the anti-tuberculosis committee in Minsk<sup>121</sup>. The date of his death is unknown, but it is believed to have been in the 1920s. He was buried in the Minsk Muslim cemetery, now called “Tatar Square” located at the intersection of Griboyedov and Ignatenko streets.

During the First World War, along with M.

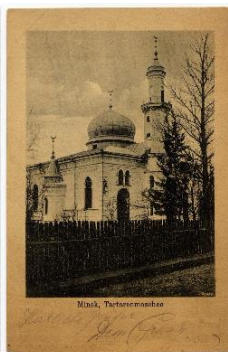


Smaykevich, the imam of the Minsk mosque was, judging by his last name, an imam of non-Belarusian origin – Safarov. He was probably a military imam-chaplain, and Smaykevich was a civilian.

*Photo of the mosque, 1914*

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<sup>121</sup> Memorial book of the Minsk province for 1917.



Probably one of the earliest photographs of the new mosque

During the period of atheistic repressions of the young Soviet government, the Minsk mosque was closed, and from 1936 to 1941. transferred to the food supply of the Belarusian office “Gastronom”<sup>122</sup>.

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<sup>122</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004 г.

During this period of militant atheism, the Smaykevich family was persecuted: his son Suleiman was shot in 1938<sup>123</sup>, his second son – Khasen, who lived in Vilna during the interwar period<sup>124</sup>, was arrested in 1940, was deported, then returned, married again and lived until 1971, died in Minsk. The third son, Alei, was also arrested in 1938<sup>125</sup>.

During the period of the German occupation, the mufti of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, who was also a native of Lyakhovich, moved to Minsk – Yakub Suleimanovich Shinkevich, who collaborated with the occupation authorities. At his request, the German authorities returned the mosque to Muslims and the above-mentioned Alei Smaykevich was appointed deputy mufti Shinkevich and responsible for education at the Minsk mosque until June 1944<sup>126</sup>.

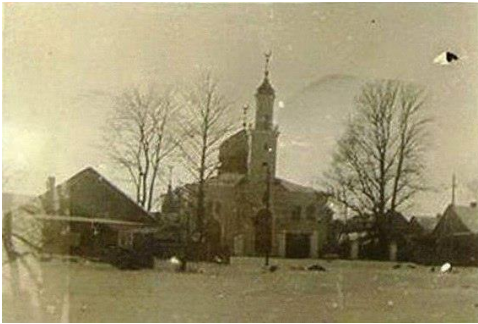
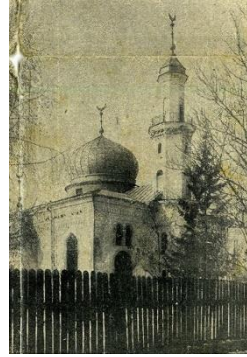
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<sup>123</sup> Two of his original photographs are exhibited in the Museum of Islam of the Minsk Mosque.

<sup>124</sup> Wedding in 1927 in the Lukishki Mosque, Vilna. Collaborated with Mufti Shinkevich.

<sup>125</sup> С. Мискевич. «Смайкевичи», журнал Байрам, №45, 2019, стр. 44-50.

<sup>126</sup> Since the summer of 1941, also deputy head of the Minsk sanitation station.



Closer to the liberation of Minsk from the German occupiers, three of Smaykevich's four surviving<sup>127</sup> sons decide to leave for the west. Three brothers: Aley, Yakub and Yahya, through Austria and England, ultimately settled in the United States in the 1950s in the city of Worcester – the second most populous city in Massachusetts. Almost cut

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<sup>127</sup> Smaykevich's sixth son, Ibrahim, died at an early age.

off from the religious life of the American Tatars<sup>128</sup> they died there and now rest in the Hope Cemetery<sup>129</sup>. The son of Yakub Smaykevich, Alexander, in 2016, sent the only photo of the interior of the Minsk mosque during a



The only photo of the interior of the mosque received from the

Friday sermon to the researcher of the Belarusian Tatars Sergei Miskevich, which, apparently, depicted his great-grandfather, the imam of the Minsk mosque, Mustafa Smaykevich.

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<sup>128</sup> Yahya joined the community in December 1951, Alei - in June 1955.

<sup>129</sup> Previous provenance.





Beginning in 1944, Ibrahim Mustafovich Yakubovsky, born in 1892, became the imam of the mosque, but

soon, in 1945, he was arrested and executed.



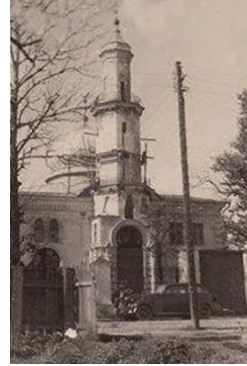
The last imam of the Minsk mosque was a native of Smilovich, the son of the Smilovich imam – Mustafa Ibrahimovich Khasenevich<sup>130</sup>. In March 1945, the Muslim community of Minsk was re-

registered, where he served as imam until the final closure of the mosque in 1947. He lived with his family in a wooden house next to the mosque.



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<sup>130</sup> He was the brother of Ibrahim Kanapatsky's grandmother.

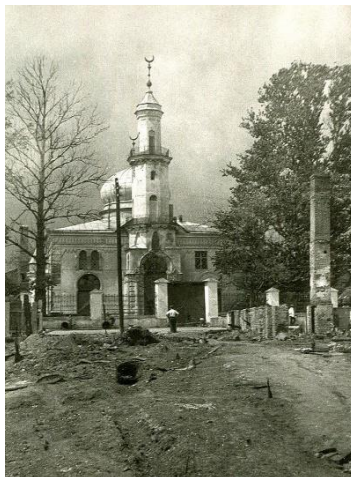


It is obvious that the events of those fateful years largely took place under the pressure of the atheistic authorities, and the documents left in those years, which will be given below, cannot claim reliability due to the fact that the persons who wrote them were more likely to act under coercion.

However, there is also an oral history of those events. According to the testimony of an elderly Minsk resident, Raisa Bronislavovna Yakubovskaya, born in 1949, who was interviewed in the Minsk mosque by the author of these lines, her father, who was an activist in the Minsk community, told her that the Soviet government was trying to find a formal reason to close all religious institutions. As a pretext, the land tax was raised, and payment of the tax was required to continue the functioning of the mosque. Individuals from the active Minsk community organized the collection of funds, including from other republics of the USSR. Soon, as the amount was collected, it was transferred to the Minsk imam, who, apparently, was Mustafa Khasenevich, for subsequent payment of the tax. However, according to the interviewee, the imam kept this money for himself, which caused a wide public outcry among the Tatars of Minsk.

Similar information is provided by an old-timer from Minsk, who visited the mosque as a child – Leonid Mikhailovich Shymanets, born in 1936; in his interview he indicates that the mentioned Imam Khasenevich personally visited all

Tatar houses with a request to sign a document on the liquidation of the mosque.



According to official documents, the events unfolded as follows. On March 5, 1949, the imam of the mosque, Mustafa Khasenevich, wrote a

statement addressed to the authorized council for religious affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the BSSR K. Ulasevich about his refusal to fulfill his religious duties, indicating the reasons:

“I have the honor to inform you that I have no means of further existence: the Mohammedans do not want to perform religious rites. By this time, on October 1, 1948, I invited believers to a meeting, where I explained to them about my financial situation, their apostasy from religious rituals, to which they answered me that they would perform religious rituals and promised to pay me 300 rubles monthly. But I still haven't seen 300 kopecks from the society of believers and they don't perform religious rituals, and therefore I ask you from this date to release me from the executive committee of this society. Moreover, I have a round mosque seal and stamp, which I don't know who to hand over to, and therefore I ask you, tell me who to

hand them over to. If for some reason you cannot release me, then I ask you to file a petition with higher authorities for my release, because under such conditions, as a family member, I cannot exist in any way. Moreover, I am a worker and I hope that I can be of great benefit to the Motherland at the machine. Petitioner Khasenevich M.I. 03/5/I949.”<sup>131</sup>

A few months later, on July 26 of the same year, the chairman of the Minsk community, Lebed Adam Mustafovich, wrote a similar document, in which he also expressed complete non-involvement:

“...no longer consider me the chairman of the mosque council, and the signature that signed the agreement is considered invalid, since in the future I do not want to be responsible for the safety of the mosque. By this Lebed Adam

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<sup>131</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004 г.

Mustafovich. Minsk, Kanatny lane,  
16. July 26, 1949.”<sup>132</sup>

Two days after A.M. Lebed’s statement, the Minsk City Executive Committee liquidates the Minsk Muslim community, and transfers the mosque building to the society of VSAF<sup>133</sup>. On August 30, 1949, the Council for Religious Affairs



approved this decision of the city authorities, and on September 13-14, 1949, an act was drawn up on the transfer of the building to the mentioned society.

Below is the full text of that fateful document on the dissolution of the Muslim community in Minsk and the closure of the mosque:

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<sup>132</sup> Previous provenance.

<sup>133</sup> Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Fleet

## Conclusion

On the dissolution of the Muslim religious society in Minsk, the closure of the mosque and its transfer to the Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Fleet (VSAF)

I. The religious Muslim community in Minsk was registered on March 26, 1945 with a community size of 200 believers.

By December 1948, when the community was re-registered, the number of believers had decreased to 49 people, of which 41 were old people over 50 years of age.

2. In April 1949, the mullah of the Minsk mosque KHASENEVICH Mustafa Ibrahimovich submitted to the Republican Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the BSSR an application dated March 5, 1949, for his release from the duties of the mullah due to the refusal



of believers to perform religious rites and inability communities of believers support the mullah at their own expense, and therefore the mullah has no means of subsistence.

KHASENEVICH's petition was granted. The registration certificate was returned to them.

On April 6, 1949, the chairman of the council of the community of believers, Lebed A. M., was warned about finding a new minister of worship within 3 months, and otherwise, that the community would be dissolved, as well as about the replenishment of the founding members of the community (twenty ) to replace those who left and died.

To date, for almost 4 months, a new mullah has not been found, but instead of replenishing the members of the founding twenty, the chairman of the community, A. M. Swan, on July 26, 1949,

submitted a written statement to renounce the chairmanship of the community and to relieve himself of responsibility for the safety of the mosque building, in connection with which, on the basis of clause 4 of the directive of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR No. 46 dated November 22, 1945, the Muslim religious community of Minsk is subject to dissolution.

3. The Muslim community in Minsk used the mosque building located on the street to fulfill religious needs. Dimitrova 4I. The mosque building is stone, one-story with choirs, with an internal usable area of 4I2.I5 m<sup>2</sup>, building volume - 8296 m<sup>3</sup>. Valuation of the building according to the technical certificate of the Minsk City Inventory Bureau dated November 30, 1948 - I9I,49I rubles.

The building of the Minsk mosque is not on the list of architectural monuments of the BSSR taken under state protection.

The Minsk mosque was built in 1900 at the expense of believers and was used as a mosque until 1936. From 1936 to 1941 the mosque was transferred to the warehouse of Minsk grocery stores. Since 1941, under the German occupation, the mosque again began to function as a Muslim house of prayer.

In 1949, the mosque was virtually inactive, since due to the mullah's refusal to perform the duties of a clergyman, from 5 to 20 believing old men and women periodically gathered in the mosque very irregularly to perform prayers.

4. Due to the fact that a petition was filed before the Minsk City Council of Workers' Deputies by the Republican

Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Fleet (VSAF) to transfer to it the building of the Minsk mosque for the organization of a training center in it, taking into account, based on the above, that the Muslim religious society has actually collapsed as a small one and not providing themselves with a minister of worship for more than 3 months, and also taking into account the acute situation with the housing stock in Minsk as a result of the last war and the temporary German occupation, I consider it necessary to dissolve the Muslim religious community in Minsk, close the mosque and satisfy VSAF's request to transfer the mosque building to it for the above purpose with the right to re-equip it.

Deputy Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the BSSR

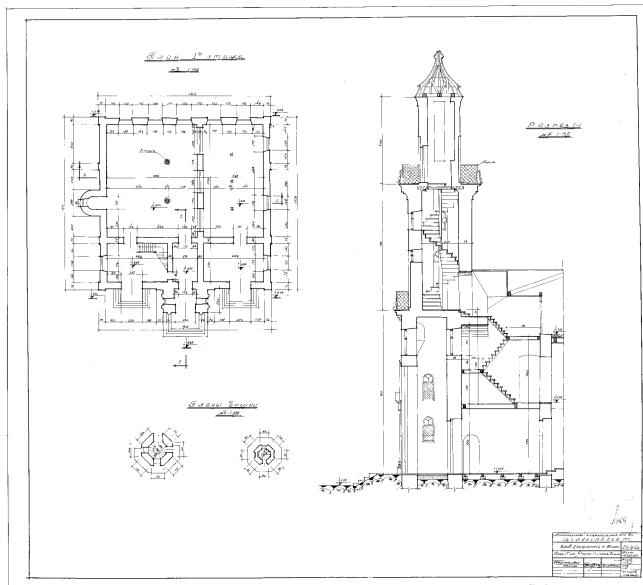
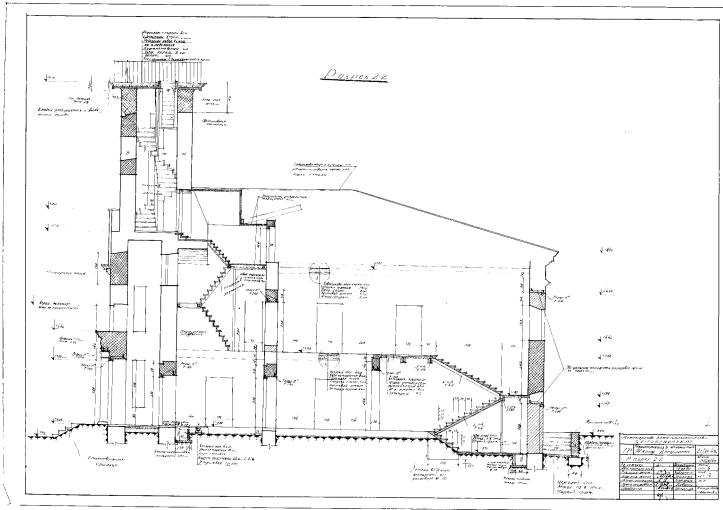
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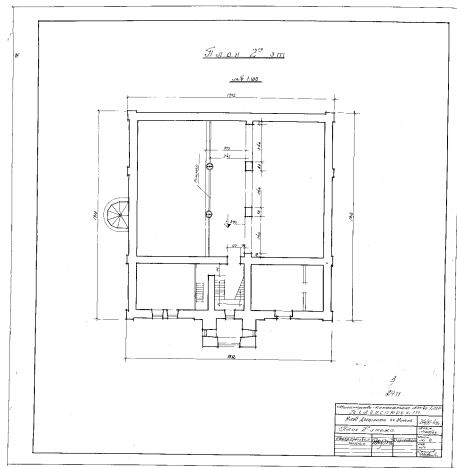
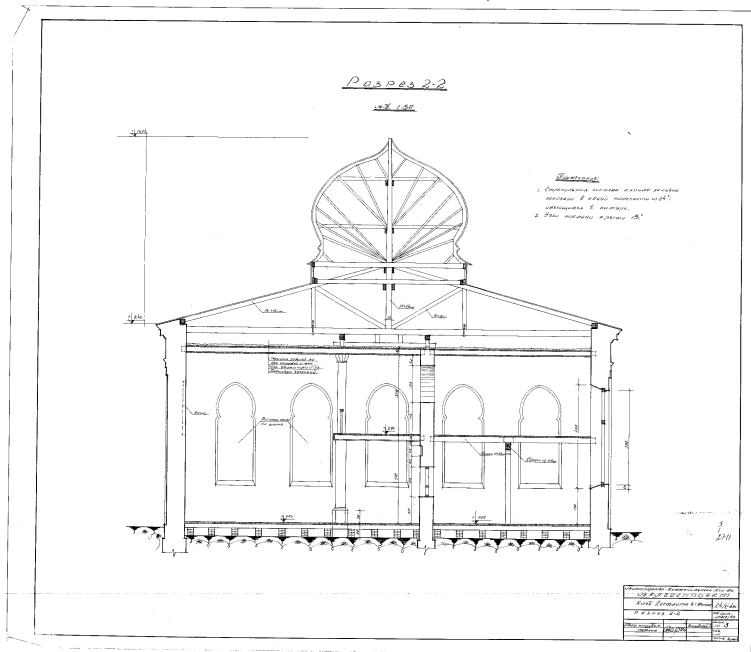
July 26, 1949 Minsk»<sup>134</sup>.

The author of these lines received the only drawings of the Minsk mosque at the moment, made in 1949 to rebuild the building for the purposes of VSAF. These drawings allow you to get acquainted with the internal layout of the mosque, thanks to which the author voiced the idea above that V.K. Solovyov nevertheless conducted a study of the typical layout of the interiors of traditional Muslim mosques in Belarus and took this into account in his project. The folder contains a project for rebuilding the mosque building.

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<sup>134</sup> National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, Ф. 952, оп. 1, д. 17, лл. 223 – 225.





However, the appeal of Minsk Muslims to I.V. Stalin, made in November of the same fateful 1949, showed that the community, among 163 signatures, does not confirm the statements of Imam M. Khasenevich, and declares that the mosque was selected without the consent of the mosque council and population of the Tatars of Minsk. The text of the appeal is as follows:

TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL  
OF MINISTERS OF THE USSR  
Joseph Vissarionovich STALIN  
From the Tatar population of  
Minsk, Belarusian SSR

Dear Joseph Vissarionovich!

The Tatar population of Minsk convincingly asks you to accept our petition and asks for a fair solution to the following issue:

On September 13, 1949, for us — the Tatars of Minsk — it suddenly became known that our church-mosque was being closed and transferred to the Voluntary Society for the Assistance of the Navy as a club. A



few days later the emblem of the Mohammedan Church was removed and property was removed. The installation of partitions and other minor repairs to the building have now begun.

The mosque was transferred to VSAF and formalized by an act dated September 13, 1949 and certified by the signatures of the rector of the mosque — Mullah KHASENEVICH Mustafa Ibrahimovich, BABUZ Khasen on the one hand, captain-lieutenant of DOSFLOT GONCHARUK I.K., MALEVANCHUK — on the other hand, without any agreement with the Tatar population and our elected Council at the mosque. This act, signed by two persons from our society, caused us deep offense. We ask you to resolve this issue and give an order to return the mosque and the taken away property to the Committee of the Mohammedan Cathedral Church in Minsk.

We pledge to preserve, as a state property, the mosque,

equipment and property, as throughout the past, and not have any debts to our state.

We sign our letter and our big request for the return of the Minsk Cathedral Mohammedan Church to the Tatar population:

(163 signatures of Minsk residents)<sup>135</sup>.

This appeal did not reach I.V. Stalin, and in December of the same year the community received a refusal from the Council for Religious Affairs to return the building:

“...the mosque cannot be returned to believers”<sup>136</sup>.

According to the project for converting the mosque building into the VSAF building, the mosque lost all signs of religious affiliation: dismantling the dome, dismantling most of the minaret, converting the windows from lancet to

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<sup>135</sup> National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, Ф. 952, оп. 1, д. 18, лл. 243, 244.

<sup>136</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004 г.

rectangular. Ultimately, the building took on the appearance of a typical two-story building of the era of I.V. Stalin, lined with tuff. The rest of the minaret was decorated as a ship's mast:

#### BELARUSIAN STATE PROJECT

Tonnage plan of the mosque for  
its conversion into the VASF club.

1949

The design building and the explanatory note to it, signed by the director of the Belstateproject KONDRATOVICH and others and agreed with the head of the naval school, captain-lieutenant MALEVANCHUK, formulate the requirements for the refurbishment of the mosque:

- I. Change the architectural image of an existing building with elements and details of Islamic architecture.
2. The minaret will be converted into a tower on which a ship-type mast will be installed.
3. Design the windows along the facade of the building to be

rectangular (instead of lancet).

4. Remove the tower on the facade, leaving the bridge, and install a ship-type mast.

5. Cancel the dome on the roof.

The main task in the architectural composition of the entire building is to eliminate the architecture of the mosque and create an image of a marine type<sup>137</sup>.



Latest photographs of the remains of the mosque

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<sup>137</sup> Belarusian State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation, комплекс 3, опись 1, ед. хр. 2709-2711, 2713.



*Photograph of the remains of the mosque in early 1968*

It is generally accepted that the mosque, or what remained of it, was demolished in 1962. However, thanks to a random photograph of the Yubileynaya Hotel, taken and published in the spring of 1968 in the Vecherny Minsk newspaper, it becomes clear that the mosque building was still standing at the beginning of 1968. This is also confirmed by photographs taken by American reconnaissance satellites in 1968. According to a resident of Fruktovalaya Street. Khasen Gembitsky, the demolition took place “during school exams,” i.e. in the month of June. Thus, at the moment it is generally accepted that the date of demolition of the building is June 1968. Thus, the glorious centuries-old history of this ancient temple, which gave high scientific and sacred benefit, which we mentioned above, was interrupted.

As part of this narrative, several interesting aspects related to the history of the mosque should also be touched upon. The first is the fact that according to a map of the city of Minsk at the end of the 19th century, which was shown to the author of these lines in the National Historical Archive of the Republic of Belarus, there were two Muslim

cemeteries in Minsk<sup>138</sup>. This map shows new railway tracks from Minsk to Molodechno<sup>139</sup>, during the construction of which the “former Tatar cemetery” marked on the map was demolished. This cemetery was probably donated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. by the previously mentioned W. Furs. It becomes clear that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. this Tatar cemetery was no longer in use. This suggests that the ancient persons we mentioned, such as Orekhovsky, S. Zetskevich, U. ibn Ismail and M. Potorzhitsky, M. Lominsky and others, could probably have been buried in this cemetery.



*Location of the mosque site on a modern map*

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<sup>138</sup> Referred to as mizaar.

<sup>139</sup> Section of the Libava-Romenskaya Railway, built in 1873.

The author of these lines made an attempt to inspect the proposed cemetery site<sup>140</sup>, during which he interviewed the workers who were digging pits in this place to lay pipes. To which the workers reported that all the land in this place was new, since panel multi-storey residential buildings<sup>141</sup> were erected here in the 1960s, during the construction of which everything turned out to be dug up. If gravestones and slabs<sup>142</sup>, were encountered, it was only by the first builders of the 1960s.



*The only photograph of  
the second mizaar.  
Discovered by the  
author in the private  
collection of N. Ibraimov*

The second cemetery and, as it appears, a newer one, was located in a field on a low hill; since the 1960s, after the expansion of the city, it ended up at the intersection of modern Timiryazev, Ignatenko, Griboedov, and Vilenskaya (now Tatarskaya) streets. As

<sup>140</sup> Located in the area of M. Lynkov Street 117.

<sup>141</sup> Already present in satellite images from 1964.

<sup>142</sup> An analysis of existing burials before the 19<sup>th</sup> century in other mizars of Belarus, Lithuania and Poland shows that they were decorated mainly with unprocessed stones without inscriptions.



already mentioned, today it is called “Tatar Square”. After the demolition of the mosque, believers gathered at the cemetery for prayers. Eyewitness Raisa Bronislavovna tells how adults asked children to stand on guard and warn about the sudden approach of police or eyewitnesses. Men always came to the cemetery in white clothes and said prayers, she says.

For some time, a small wooden house that belonged to the community stood at the cemetery, and, notably, a canal was dug from the Svisloch River to the cemetery itself. It is visible in some old aerial photographs. The caretaker of the mizaar lived in this house<sup>143</sup>, and after that – strangers. According to the statement of the Tatar Milkamanovich F. Ya., the mentioned community house was transferred to unknown persons for occupancy:

**“...who raised poultry and pigs, created unsanitary conditions that contradicted our cult. In addition, unauthorized cutting down**

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<sup>143</sup> According to oral data from Amini Mustafovna Murzich, her grandfather, Joseph Lebed, lived there after moving from Lovchitsy.

of trees in the cemetery, planting potatoes there, etc. continue.”<sup>144</sup>

However, in 1978 this cemetery was also demolished. The author of these lines, communicating with the hereditary Minsk Tatar Alexander Bekirovich Smolsky, received from him detailed information about the process of liquidating the cemetery. The demolition process took place in several stages, the most extensive and final stage being in 1978. Many families whose relatives were buried in this cemetery received notices that within a certain period the cemetery would be demolished for further park purposes,

with a request to independently carry out the exhumation and reburial of their deceased relatives in other cemeteries in Minsk.



*Photo of the Smolskys at the mizaar*

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<sup>144</sup> Канапацкий И. Б. «К 110-летию второй минской мечети: печальный юбилей», 2004г.

A. B. Smolsky and his family exhumed their relatives and reburied them in other cemeteries in the city<sup>145</sup>. A photograph of the Smolsky family dismantling the gravestone has been preserved. The procedure itself, it is believed, differed from the exhumation of the deceased of other faiths, since Muslims are buried without a coffin, and the bodies are wrapped in a simple white blanket – kafan (i.e. a shroud). In this case, the relatives were forced to collect their ancestors in the ground from the bones.

According to Smolsky, few did this: about 20% of the bodies were exhumed, the remaining



*Cervical. Author's photo*

80% of the bodies remained lying in this ground to this day. The author of these lines, during the construction of a new mosque, personally collected human cervical vertebrae exposed from the ground and reburied them.

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<sup>145</sup> Mainly Northern and Chizhovskoe cemeteries

Smolsky reported that all the grave mounds were leveled by a bulldozer. The slabs were either rolled into the ground or taken away. All exposed remains were bulldozed into the center of the cemetery, where a stone-fenced flower bed was subsequently erected over them, which is still distinguished by fertilized dense vegetation.

Also in 1982, the famous historian, heraldist and publicist Stanislav Dumin visited the destroyed Minsk mizar. In his notes, he noted that “gravestones lay on the outskirts of the cemetery awaiting removal.” He copied the names from the slabs, of which he counted about 2 dozen.

Already during the construction of the new building of the Minsk Cathedral Mosque, several dozen gravestones and stones were removed during excavation work on the territory of the former mizaar. S. Miskevich carried out their census in 2013 and 2016.

A study was also conducted of the burial places of Minsk Muslims after the closure in the mid-1960s and reburials after the demolition of the Minsk mizaar<sup>146</sup>.

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<sup>146</sup> С. Мискевич. Захоронения мусульман г. Минска. Байрам, 2023.

As it becomes clear from the marked geographical location of the Muslim cemetery, the territory of the historical compact settlement of Muslims in Minsk was large. Taking into account Shpilevsky's words that the Tatar district began from the modern Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral and ended at the above-mentioned cemetery on Griboedov Street, the approximate size of this area becomes clear. Both Shpilevsky and R.B. Yakubovskaya, as well as the cadastral registers of Minsk real estate for 1910, seen by the author of these lines, clearly indicate that Muslim Tatars densely and homogeneously populated this area of Minsk.



*Borders of the former mazaar on a modern map*

R.B. Yakubovskaya, who grew up in this area in the post-war period, says that almost all the houses were Tatar, only occasionally there were families of Belarusians and Jews. The mentioned cadastral register shows real estate on the streets of Zaslavskaya, Tatarskaya, Malaya Tatarskaya and others, where the owners of houses and land plots are typical surnames of Muslims in Minsk: Smolsky, Poltorzhitsky, Yakubovsky, Khasenevichi, Bitsyutki, Aleksandrovich and many others.

This area was a quiet and safe place in Minsk: according to the First General Census of the Russian Empire in 1897, not a single resident of the Tatar settlement of Minsk had a criminal record or was involved in prostitution<sup>147</sup>.

Taking together all the material from archival documents and eyewitness accounts who grew up in the former Minsk Tatar Settlement, such modern streets as Pobediteley Avenue, Oboynaya Str., Melnikaite Str., Zaslavskaya Str., Maxim Tank Str., Timiryazev Str., Masherova Ave., Ignatenko Str.,

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<sup>147</sup> «Первая всеобщая перепись населения Российской империи 1897 г.», под редакцией Н. А. Тройницкого, СПб, из-во Центральный статистический комитет Министерства внутренних дел, 1899-1905. «Минская губерния», 1904 г., XVI, 243 с.

Gvardeyskaya Str., Griboedova Str. and others are streets where Muslims of Minsk lived compactly for many centuries.

It should be noted here that the excavations of V.R. Tarasenko noted the presence of a cultural layer in this territory already in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>148</sup>. Directly, Tatarskaya (Dimitrova), Zamkovaya and Osvobozhdeniye streets themselves were inhabited in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Excavations revealed numerous fragments of pottery from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as metal knives and other remains of household utensils. The finds are stored at the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus<sup>149</sup>.

In the 1980s, this entire area underwent massive construction with panel houses; only a small section of the remains of the private buildings of the Tatar settlement, now visible near the Korona shopping center between Timiryazev and Tankova streets, remained.

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<sup>148</sup> Археалогія Беларусі, 2011. т.2 стр. 87.

<sup>149</sup> Археалогія Беларусі, 2011. т.2 стр. 88.



*Approximate boundaries of the Muslim district of Minsk*

It is impossible not to touch upon such an important aspect, which only recently became known, as attempts to introduce systematic Islamic education at the Minsk mosque. During the meeting of the author of these lines with the mentioned researcher A. Lyuba, she, referring to archival documents of the National Historical Archive of the Republic of Belarus, said that according to some historical records, at the Minsk mosque in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a “madrasa” - a religious school of Muslims, in which teaching the basics of religion. The data of A. Luba correlates



with the oral testimony of R.B. Yakubovskaya, who reported that there was a religious school at the Minsk mosque, also mentioning the fact that there was a similar school in the urban village of Smilovichi.

A researcher of the Belarusian Tatars, Zorina Ibragimovna Kanapatskaya, in her article<sup>150</sup> also notes attempts to introduce centralized and systematic secular education. After the revolution of 1917, school No. 26 on the street was transferred to the Minsk Tatars. Liberation, which had the official name “Tatar”, however, during the occupation it was taken away. And in the spring of 1928, a Tatar reading room was opened in the Tatar settlement. However, the work of this organization was rather subversive in nature:

**“The first Tatar reading room in the BSSR has been operating in Minsk for more than two months now. The need for its organization has been felt for a long time, because until this time no cultural, political and**

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<sup>150</sup> Минские татары в 20-30-е годы XX столетия (национально-культурное и хозяйственное строительство). Litteraria Copernicana, 1 (33) 2020, стр. 117-136.

educational work had been carried out among the Tatar population of Minsk... The Tatar hut-reading room faces a huge amount of work, especially since out of 1283 Tatars in Minsk, about 40% are illiterate. The main work of the hut-reading room should go along the lines of combating illiteracy and religion - liberating the Tatar population from the influence of the mosque."<sup>151</sup>

According to the last sentence from the above article published in the *Rabochiy* newspaper in 1929, it becomes clear that this hut was supposed to carry out anti-religious work, in which case its activities can hardly be called creative and useful, aimed at preserving the subethnos of the Belarusian Tatars.

It is also impossible not to note the sad fact that the mentioned number of illiterate people represented almost half of the Muslim population of Minsk. This sad state of affairs, in fact, was the

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<sup>151</sup> Национальный архив Республики Беларусь, собрание 701, каталог 1, дело 97, с. 8.

main catalyst for the disappearance of both the mosque and the settlement.

The story we cited above showed that even under difficult socio-political conditions, the Minsk community was able to defend its legal rights, but as soon as religious education fell among them, they disappeared. This, perhaps, is one of the main conclusions of our history, all the more acutely it is felt when the spirit of Islam is imbued with a passion for enlightenment, knowledge and sciences.

Thus, the centuries-old history of Minsk Muslims was tragically interrupted. The old people in their stories dropped a few living words about the lush fruit plantings of the Tatar settlement, once quiet, one-story, with the aroma of apples. The names of the disappeared streets speak so eloquently about this: Fruktovalaya Str. (Fruit Street – *translator's note*), Zelionyy Lane (Green Lane – *translator's note*), Zamechetny Str. (Behind the mosque Street– *translator's note*), Kustarnaya Str. (Fruiticose Street – *translator's note*), Big and Small Tatar Streets, and others.

So this serene pre-war Minsk stands before your eyes, with thickets of trees swaying from the weight of ripe apples against the backdrop of a warm evening blue sky. And only in the distance a white minaret can be seen.



**P.S.** Within the framework of this small work, first of all, the task was to acquaint the reader with the ancient origins of the Minsk mosque, since this fact has remained little known to Minsk residents for many years.

Based on this, we are not able to present in detail the further development of events due to the many surviving documents and living eyewitnesses. The presence of such a colossal layer of information in its entirety requires the creation of a separate independent work devoted to the modern history of Islam in Minsk.

But nevertheless, we are obliged to mention the main turning points in modern times, since they are a consequence of the centuries-old processes we have already described.

The events described above in the last decades of the twentieth century, in which the last traces of the centuries-old existence of the Muslim region of Minsk, headed by its religious center - the Minsk Mosque, were destroyed, were the end of the organic existence of this unique phenomenon, an analogue of which is difficult to find in the history of the Eurasian continent.

However, subsequent history unfolded contrary to the aspirations of the adherents of

atheism: atheism died, but religion remained. This is perhaps the main lesson of history, which says that it is impossible to destroy the intangible – faith.



*A.-B. Shabanovich*

Already in the last years of the existence of the USSR, there were significant changes in the return of people to their nature – religious life. In 1991, the cultural association of Belarusian Tatars “Zikr ul-kitab” was organized; the initiator of the creation of this association was the Belarusian Tatar, a native of the city of Iveye, Abu-Bekir Yukhyanovich Shabanovich. This was the first official step in the revival of the ethno-confessional phenomenon we are considering.

Of the name of the ethnocultural activities of the association, the first steps towards the revival of religion began to be taken among the surviving Tatars and representatives of other Muslim nations living in Minsk.

The progressive development of these processes led after the fall of the USSR, namely, in December 1994, to the creation of the first official Muslim republican religious organization in the



*I. M. Aleksandrovich*

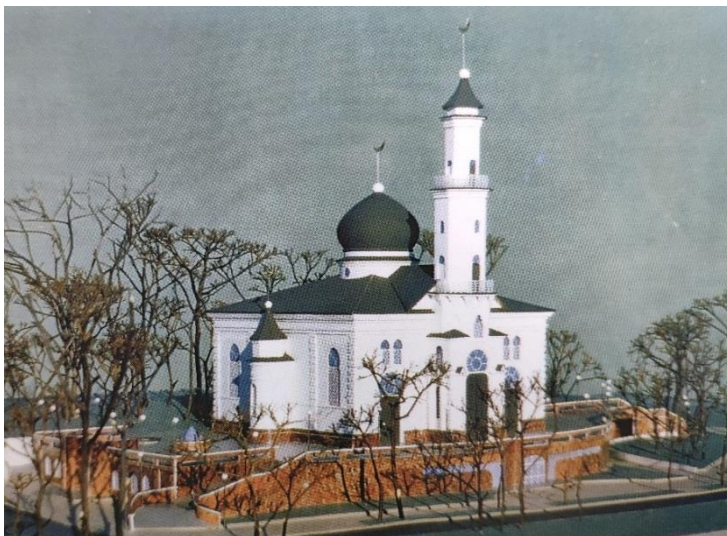
Republic of  
Belarus in modern  
times – the  
“Muslim Religious  
Association in the  
Republic of  
Belarus”. The first  
head – the mufti –  
was a native of  
the city of Kletsk  
– Ismail

Mustafovich Aleksandrovich, who began to serve  
as chairman of the association. Izmail  
Muharremovich Voronovich became his deputy.  
Ibrahim Borisovich  
Kanapatsky became  
the chairman of the  
Minsk community.  
They, together with  
the leader of Zikr ul-  
Kitab, formed the  
administrative core of  
the reviving Islam in  
Belarus.



*I. B. Kanapatzkiy*

In the 90-s, which were open to everything new, our country began to be actively visited by people from various Muslim regions, who, to the best of their strength and capabilities, made efforts to revive Islam on the lands of Belarus. Mosques in other cities of the country began to be reconstructed and returned to believers. This process began to affect the capital as well.



In 1997, a project for a revived mosque in Minsk was developed, completed by architects Boris Alexandrov and Vladimir Taratsevsky. And all the technical documentation of the project was



completed in the workshop of Zhanna Sakharova and Vyacheslav Konovalov.



*Empty plot for a mosque. Apr 24, 2003*

Through the efforts of the Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Belarus, all the required documents for the construction of the mosque were received from the Minsk City Executive Committee. A historical plot of land was issued at the intersection of Griboyedov and Ignatenko streets, adjacent to the Minsk Muslim cemetery, demolished in 1978.



*Laying the stone of the mosque. Feb 23, 1997*

On February 23, 1997, the ceremonial laying of the first stone of the mosque took place in the presence of international representatives of the embassies of Muslim countries. Then, the MRA in the Republic of Belarus reached an agreement with the League of the Islamic World (Rabita al-Alam al-Islami, KSA) on the construction of a mosque in Minsk, and with the financial assistance of Rabita, the construction of the Minsk Cathedral Mosque began in 2003.



Signing a contract for the construction of a mosque.

From left to right: Mufti of the MRA in Belarus Aleksandrovich. I.M.  
representative of "Rabita" Ahmed al-Yussef,  
Contractor Musin R.R. (JV "Promex")

30 Apr 2003

In 2005, Abu-Bekir Shabanovich became the new mufti of the MRA in the Republic of Belarus, replacing the previous one, and continued construction. The construction carried out by Rabita proceeded intermittently, at different periods there were pauses in financing the construction of the mosque, which led to dire consequences: the masonry of the mosque remained open for the entire autumn-winter period and was subject to the harmful and destructive



effects of rain, snow and frost, which by spring made the top layers of the masonry crumble.

*Mufti of MRA in Belarus*  
*Shabanovich Abu-Bekir*



*Construction of a mosque April 2005*



In total, the construction process dragged on for 10 years. By 2014, thanks to the construction of the mosque started by Rabita, as well as with the help of many private and other foreign sponsors, it was possible to complete the mosque building, erect a metal roof and a dome. Finishing work remained.

In this situation, the Turkish Department of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) responded to help, and completed the construction of the mosque. From the end of 2014 to 2016, Turkish developer Akın Ozay carried out finishing work intensively.



Construction of a mosque 11 Sep, 2014

On November 11, 2016, in a solemn ceremony, in the presence of the Presidents of the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Turkey, the newly revived Minsk Cathedral Mosque was opened. Many Muslim leaders from near and far abroad, as well as a wide diplomatic corps, were invited to the event.



Start of installation of Turkish scaffolding. 04 Oct 2014



The speech of the President of Belarus at the opening ceremony is a reflection of the vector of Belarus' policy towards religious citizens.

**“Since ancient times, Belarus has been famous for its traditions of religious tolerance and mutual respect between people of different faiths and nationalities. This is our pride, our strength, this is the key to our vitality.”**

**“Belarus is a country with a peaceful character. We value peace and tranquility, so we build churches for all faiths. We adhere to one slogan: any citizen of our country has the right to find his own way to his temple, and no one has the right and should not force him to do otherwise. Therefore, today we are opening this great temple, which will not just be a home for Muslims, but will make a huge contribution to the development of the culture of our Belarus.”**<sup>152</sup> At the opening ceremony of the mosque, President Lukashenko kissed the Quran presented to him.

It should be noted that the President of Belarus has repeatedly noted the importance of the presence of Muslims on the lands of Belarus. Thus,

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<sup>152</sup> <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-belarus-slavitsja-traditsijami-veroterpimosti-i-uvazhenija-mezhdu-ljudmi-raznyh-218771-2016/>



at a meeting in 2019 with the President of the Republic of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, who visited Belarus, the President of Belarus said, **“These people<sup>153</sup> are gold. They have never let me down. Never.”** At the same time, he added, **“we don’t offend Muslims!”<sup>154</sup>** Interfax reports.



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<sup>153</sup> i.e. muslims

<sup>154</sup> <https://easaily.com/ru/news/2019/12/12/lukashenko-musulmane-zoloto-oni-nikogda-menya-ne-podvodili>



*Imam Zarif ZUDIN*

In the new, revived building of the Minsk Cathedral Mosque, the duties of imam were performed by the Volga Tatar Zarif Zudin. On October 21, 2020, the previous imam was replaced by a Belarusian Tatar, a native of the city of Oshmyany, Dmitry

(Daud) Radkevich, who continued the work begun by the previous imam. And from November 26, 2021, the author of these lines became the imam of the Minsk Cathedral Mosque.



*Imam D. RADKEVICH*

Today, the Minsk Cathedral Mosque, without exaggeration, is the center of Islam in our country, it revives the centuries-old culture of Islam in Belarus, and this year it, as a faith-based institution, turns 425 years old.



Today, the main goal of the mosque is the revival of Islam as it was in the Middle Ages, which the reader has already briefly become familiar with at the beginning. We believe that religiosity should be scientifically substantiated, proven, meaningful, and rational. Each postulate must be studied and only then applied in practice. This is the main focus in the activities of the Minsk Cathedral Mosque today. Religion should be a stimulus for progress.



At least on a local scale, at the level of our country, we intend to raise Muslims of a qualitatively new formation. Muslims who in spirit will be like Abu Reyhan al Biruni, like Abu Abdillah al-Khorezmi of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For this purpose, there are a number of developed Islamic education projects, the implementation of which is currently underway. The author of these lines is actively moving in this direction and is himself the first doctoral student of Islamic sciences in the history of Belarus.

The Minsk mosque today successfully conducts research in the field of Islamic scholastic

theology. The author of these lines made an original translation of the classic treatise on Islamic doctrine - al-Aqida at-Tahawiya, recorded a series of video lessons available on the Internet to everyone, and successfully completed a remarkable two-year course of lectures on it for everyone.

A scientific study was carried out, during which the earliest manuscript of one of the main doctrinal treatises in Islam, al-Aqid an-Nasafiya, was discovered in Uzbekistan, copied from a manuscript dictated by Imam an-Nasafi himself 4 years before his death. The manuscript was examined by the author of these lines and supplemented with comments in Arabic, thereby becoming the first book of the Minsk mosque compiled in the language of Muslim science. The commentaries emphasize the logical proof of all provisions of faith.

Nowadays this book, like al-Aqida at-Tahawiyya, is a textbook on theology in the Minsk mosque. Thus, this book by al-Aqid al-Nasafiya, mentioned by us at the very beginning, which examines the concept of elementary particles - quarks within the framework of scholasticism, now serves as a guide in enlightenment in Minsk.

Along with this, there is an active study of the spiritual heritage of Muslims in Belarus, conducted by Imam Dmitry Radkevich. Books have been published that reflect the religious thought of Belarusian Muslims and the most valuable treatises of Muslim thinkers of our country, such as Yusuf Sobolevsky and others, have been published. These steps are indispensable in preserving the unique subethnic group of the Belarusian Tatars.

Educational projects and publications of the mosque are fundamentally free, making our education accessible to the public. It is planned to create a journal of the State Commission for Academic Degrees and Titles, which could collect the latest scientific thought, which should not be limited only to religious research. Along with the religious direction, priority is given to the medical direction, IT, history, sociology, Islamic economics, etc.

At the mosque there is the first and only museum of Islam in Belarus, which displays the seven-hundred-year history of Islam in these lands. On the basis of the museum, digitization and research of ancient manuscripts of Muslims of Belarus is carried out, ethnographic research of Muslim subethnic groups of the Republic of Belarus

and other projects of a scientific and educational nature are being carried out.



The author of these lines has been trying to launch a project to research and put into circulation the “Minsk Tafsir” (tafsir – explanation, exegesis) since 2014, to no avail. However, nine years later, in 2023, thanks to a whole series of opportunities that appeared one after another, he was finally able to initiate a project of researching the “Minsk Tafsir” and translating it into modern Belarusian and Russian languages: at the time of writing these lines, 1/5 of the volume has already been translated books.

The mosque provides educational programs for children, teenagers and adults. There is a

cultural and educational club for women, activities are widely represented on the Internet: a website and accounts on all widely used social networks, video lessons are recorded. A newspaper and the annual popular science magazine “Bayram” are published, scientific conferences and public meetings are held, and about 30 titles of original books have been published.

The Mosque staff have published virtual and augmented reality applications for IOS and Android, which reconstruct the 3D appearance of the Tatarskaja Sloboda of Minsk at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the appearance of the shrines of Mecca and Medina during the life of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

Educational projects are already using artificial intelligence to create religious lessons. Expanding material opportunities would make it possible to realize as widely as possible the full potential of ideas for introducing progress into our society.

It is worth especially emphasizing that behind all good initiatives there is the wise support of Mufti Abu-Bekir Shabanovich, who always provides comprehensive assistance to any good deed. His gentle and talented management allowed



MRA in the Republic of Belarus to achieve today's results.

We sincerely hope to become successors to the progress of High Middle Ages Muslims on the lands of Belarus and make a positive contribution to the development of the country. It is no secret that wealth lies in diversity, and we, being a different part of Belarusians, thereby intend to bring many new and useful things to society.

It is gratifying that the Belarusian society, remaining true to its nature of peace and mutual respect, also meets Muslims halfway and always supports our initiatives. One of these kind and symbolic steps forward can be noted in the decision of June 3, 2022, No. 395 of the Minsk City Council of Deputies on the return of the historical name of the territory of centuries-old residence of Muslims in Minsk – “Tatarskaja Sloboda”. This step became a symbol of everything returning to its place.

Today, the Belarusian people have seven hundred years of experience of successful peaceful coexistence with Muslims. Over these centuries, strong mutual enrichment has occurred in many spheres of life, thereby confirming the Quranic wisdom of the creation of different nations in their

mutual assistance and mutual enrichment<sup>155</sup>. This experience that Belarus now has is the key to successful development in the future. In the future of a multipolar world, which leading analysts and political leaders of our time are already openly talking about.

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<sup>155</sup> Quran, 49:13.







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Informational sign with text in multiple languages, including Turkish and English.



