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Galina Miškinienė. **The Kitab of Ivan Lutskevich: A Monument of Lithuanian Tatar Culture.** Vilnius: Institute of the Lithuanian Language, 2021. 668 p. ISBN 978-609-411-301-7

When giving lectures and public talks abroad on Islam and the Muslim presence in Lithuania, I inevitably have to talk about a historical Muslim community of the area, the Lipka Tatars. To most outsiders, it comes as a surprise that this part of Europe, comprising today's nation-states of Lithuania, Belarus and Poland, has a long history of Muslim presence, spanning almost 700 years. Some people are astonished when they learn that the first Muslims came to settle permanently on the territory of what was then the, still pagan, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, at a time when Muslims still inhabited and ruled over parts of the Iberian Peninsula, and the Ottoman expansion into southeast Europe had only recently begun. And although the history of the Lipka Tatars has already been extensively researched regionally (mostly by Polish but also Lithuanian and Belarusian scholars), there are arguably still far too few academic publications, let alone primary source texts, in English, on different aspects of the Muslim presence in the historical lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

As might be expected, such a long presence of, although one has to admit, a relatively small, Muslim community, must have produced its own material culture, the surviving part of which today would constitute part of the land's heritage. And indeed, over the course of centuries, the Lipka Tatars built and rebuilt dozens of mosques, some of which have survived to the present day. There were also numerous Tatar cemeteries, many of which, although often neglected, have also survived as historical

monuments. In addition to these heritage sites attesting to the long-term presence of Muslim communities in the area, which are very visible in the landscape, there are some that are almost invisible (and incomprehensible) to the general public, i.e. the written heritage.

Locally produced handwritten religious texts are believed to have started circulating among the Lipka Tatars as early as the 15th century, and comprised a variety of genres, from hefty multipage commentaries on Islam's holy book, the Quran, to spiritual guides replete with stories of the prophets and moral injunctions to short prayer books. Early manuscripts, unfortunately, are not known to have survived, but a number of those dating from the 17th to the early 20th centuries have, and are currently held in various public institutions around the region, and also in private collections. This written heritage is a treasure trove for those who want to familiarise themselves with how the Lipka Tatars in premodern times perceived their religion, and also their place in and relation to the non-Muslim (Christian) environment they lived in.

But here comes what many would say is a formidable obstacle: the language(s) and the script in which the Tatar manuscripts were traditionally written. I am not a linguist, therefore I cannot ascertain what particular language dominates in these texts; some insist it is a Polish dialect, others argue that it is a Byelorussian dialect, but in any case it is an old version of a Slavic language written in ... Arabic script! The two together render the texts virtually inaccessible to those who do not know the Arabic alphabet and/or the Slavic languages of the region. Consequently, even if many of the manuscripts are physically accessible to readers, very few people would be able to make use of them. To unlock these texts for the general public,

we need the fully fledged effort of a comprehensive specialist translation.

In 2009, Galina Miškinienė, who by then was already an established scholar in the field of Tatar manuscript studies, together with a group of colleagues, undertook the colossal task of preparing for publication (Miškinienė 2009) one of the hefty handwritten manuscripts from the 18th century, which for the last half-century has been kept in one of Vilnius' libraries. What she then did was to have not only transliterations but also translations into the Lithuanian and Russian languages published, next to a facsimile of the original text. The manuscript is coded as 'The Kitab of Ivan Lutskevich', named after a local researcher who discovered the manuscript in the early 20th century. Although a translation of the manuscript into Lithuanian, and even more so Russian, is to be appreciated, I personally always felt that a translation into English would be even more worth the effort. At least I could then refer to it in my English lectures and talks on the history of Islam and Muslims in and around Lithuania.

And, finally, this has happened: an English translation of the same manuscript saw the light in 2021. Having quietly waited for this to happen, I can naturally only be positive about it: the world can now read, in a contemporary *lingua franca*, a significant piece of the written heritage of the Lipka Tatars. I am tempted to see this as one of the greatest achievements of the Lithuanian (and indeed regional, if not global) guild of scholars engaged in Tatar studies in general, and their literary heritage in particular.

Besides the translation and the transliteration in the Latin script (the 2009 publication had a transliteration in the Cyrillic script), the publication contains an introductory 40-something-page-long chapter, which introduces succinctly the

literary heritage of the Lipka Tatars, the manuscript, and the methods employed in transliterating the text into the Latin script and translating it into English. In the introductory chapter, most attention is paid to the linguistic side of the manuscript, while the religious side, which is arguably the most important in terms of the content of the manuscript, both to the writers and the originally intended readers of it, is virtually neglected. The absence of insights into the framework of religious studies may be read as a shortcoming of the publication, but also as a deliberate choice not to spoil the pleasure of reading this source text for those who come from the field of religious studies, who are the bulk of the expected readership.

The publication also contains two helpful indexes, one called 'terms' and 'oriental words', meaning chiefly Islamic (Arabic) terms, and one of 'personal and geographical names', mainly, though not exclusively, containing Biblical and Quranic personal and place names.

Admittedly, the publication with an English translation of the text is less illustrious than the 2009 one, as it does not contain a facsimile, except for a glimpse (two pages) at the end of the publication (pp. 648–649). A number of reasons may have led to this decision, but having a facsimile in the publication would have served not only aesthetic purposes, it would have allowed specialist readers to compare the translation with both the transliteration and the original text. After all, this is a publication of a source text, thus having a facsimile of the original would certainly fit in.

While the 2009 publication provides, on one of the prefatory pages, a list of people involved in the publication project, the 2021 publication bears only Galina Miškinienė's name on the cover. We may, then, mistakenly assume that she was the translator herself, but that is not the case.

The actual work of translating it is credited to Oleg Volkov, whose academic credentials or affiliation, unfortunately, are not indicated. Curious to learn a bit more about the translator, I did a light Google search, which, disappointingly, did not yield many results. The best I could find was that a person by this name in the mid-2010s was a student (of translation studies?) at Vilnius University. My curiosity and interest in the personality of the translator stemmed from a desire to verify my expectation that the translation of a such 'heavy' text should be undertaken by a specialist who is very familiar with the field, in this case Islamic studies in general, and Lipka Tatar studies in particular. Moreover, as there is no information from what language the translation was conducted (or I could not find it), I expected that the translator would have been able to do the translation from the original language(s). Although I failed to locate information on this, I have chosen to believe that the translation was done directly from the original, and not Lithuanian or Russian. This would be a drawback.

Although I also did not find the name of a native English speaker who would also be a specialist in the field, and who would have contributed to ensuring the quality of the English, I have to admit that

the quality of the English is up to international standards, something that makes the resulting translation even more accessible and appealing to international, and particularly native or near native, English speakers.

The publication under review is not an ordinary addition to the shelf of books on Islam in general, or the Lipka Tatars in particular. It is a major contribution to the field, as it introduces a source text hitherto virtually inaccessible to those interested in the history of Islam in Eastern Europe. This publication, although easily readable by the general public, is certainly most valuable for what it has to offer specialists in Islamic studies, particularly those researching Islamic knowledge and guidance among Muslim diasporas in Europe. In conclusion, we can only wish that this publication indeed becomes accessible to readers, either at an affordable price through e-bookstores, or through online open access. Selling it locally at a physical bookshop or two in Lithuania would be an academic crime.

### References

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