

Catholic and Muslim Intellectual Perspectives on the Qur'an in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth

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ABSTRACT:

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The article examines contrasting perspectives on the Qur'an in the First Polish Republic (1569–1795), where Muslim Tatars coexisted with predominantly Christian populations. A comparative textological method was employed in the analysis. It explores two approaches: the apologetic *tefsir*, a Polish Qur'an translation from the late 16th to early 17th century, and a 17th-century polemical treatise, *The Life of Muhammad and Description of the Qur'an* by Michel Baudier, translated into Polish by an anonymous nobleman. While the *tefsir* aimed to preserve Tatar Islamic identity using local languages and Islamic exegetical sources, Baudier's treatise criticized the Qur'an as false and deceptive. This study highlights different approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'an, shaped by social and religious contexts as well as the cultural background of the European Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Our findings indicate that the Reformation period fostered a climate of multiculturalism, allowing the Polish Tatars to translate the Qur'an for their fellow Muslims without significant obstacles. In contrast, the Counter-Reformation era, marked by the growing influence of the Ottoman Empire in contemporary Europe, triggered apologetic reactions among local Catholics, who subjected the Qur'an to severe and unjust criticism.

KEYWORDS: Qur'an translation, First Polish Republic, Christian-Muslim relations, Polish Tatars, Michel Baudier, Anti-Islamic literature, *Tefsir*.

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1. Introduction

The First Polish Republic (formally known as the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) was a federative real union between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, existing from 1569 to 1795. This state, which today encompasses the territories of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and part of Ukraine, was a remarkable phenomenon in terms of its differing attitudes and sentiments towards Islam. On the one hand, it was inhabited by Muslim Tatars, who arrived in the 14th century in the lands of the Slavs, and on the other by indigenous Christians, who in the 17th century, i.e. during the expansion of Ottoman Turkey in Europe, took a particular interest in Islam and its followers as threatening dissenters.

From the late 15th to the 17th century, the territorial and cultural identity of Europe faced a tangible threat from the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. This period witnessed a clash of two cultures: the European, rooted in Christian universalism, and the Turkish, founded on orthodox Islam. One form of defense against the threat of Islamization in Europe was the creation of anti-Islamic literature. While the focal point of historical polemics and debates was in Western European countries, similar sentiments and polemical attempts against Islam also emerged in Poland starting from the the 17th century. Initially, these were directed against Islam practiced within the Tatar community and later against Ottoman Turks. Such anti-Turkish texts were called 'turcyki' (Turkish-themed writings). Their most significant development occurred in the 17th century, during the Counter-Reformation, with their decline in the second half of the 18th century.

The polemical and anti-Islamic literature of the Middle Polish period encompasses Polish writings or translations of Western European works from this or earlier periods. In 1626, a treatise by the French historian Michel Baudier, titled *Histoire générale de la religion des Turcs avec la vie de leur prophète Mahomet*, was published in Paris. This treatise was translated into Polish and disseminated in Poland from the second half of the 17th century in the form of numerous copies. It combines the characteristics of an anti-Turkish pamphlet with a critical analysis of Islamic doctrine as found in the Qur'an and traditions.

2. Methodology

This article employs a comparative textological method by juxtaposing two culturally significant texts: the first known translation of the Qur'an into Polish, produced by Polish Tatars at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries

and commonly referred to in scholarship as a *tefsir*,¹ which includes an extensive exegetical exposition, and a 17th-century polemical anti-Islamic treatise, *The Life of Muhammad and the Description of the Qur'an*, originally written by Michel Baudier and translated from French by an anonymous member of the Polish nobility. One chapter of the latter is devoted to the Qur'an and its interpretation. The purpose of this comparison is to identify similarities and differences between the two works and to contribute to the reconstruction of the reception of the Qur'an in 16th- and 17th-century Europe.

3. Exegetical Sources of the Polish Tatars

The Tatars professed Sunni Islam in a Christian setting. However, they did not actively speak the liturgical Arabic language. Thus, in order to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness and cultural identity, which was already identified by Islam alone in the 16th century, educated Tatars, most often in contact with the Muslim East, began to produce literature of a religious nature in the local, Slavonic languages, written in the Arabic alphabet. It was so-called *Aljamiado* literature. They created their texts on their own, either adapting fragments of Old Polish literature and adapting them to Islamic canons and dogmas, or translating religious texts imported from Crimea and the Middle East, especially the Ottoman Empire, into Polish and/or Belarusian.

The most representative *Aljamiado* text in Central and Eastern Europe is the Tatar *tefsir*. It is a voluminous manuscript of around 1,000 pages. It contains the continuous text of the original Arabic Qur'an, with its commentary-cum-exegetical translation into the north-eastern borderland variety of Polish placed beneath the line (interlinearly). It was created at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. However, no protograph of the text has survived, only copies, the earliest of which dates from the 2nd half of the 17th century.² At the same time, it should be emphasised, that there was only one *tefsir* into Polish made by the Tatars of the First Polish Republic, and its copies, identified by the name of the place of copying, the place of storage or the name of the copyist or the owner of the book, differ slightly among themselves.

1- Here and throughout the article, the term *tefsir* is used to denote the specific Tatar-Slavic exegetical tradition, rather than the classical Arabic *tafsir* genre.

2- 1682: in the form of glosses to the Qur'an, held at Pskov Museum (reference number KII 34054) and 1686: The Minsk *Tefsir*, held at the Yakub Kolas Central Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus in Minsk (reference number П116-18/Cp2 (P 214)0).

An important recent development has been the critical edition of the tefsir of the Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the first fully preserved Qur'an translation into a Slavic language, namely Polish, accompanied by an exegetical-commentary layer (Kulwicka-Kamińska & Łapicz 2022).¹ The basis of the edition was the 1723 *Alytus Tefsir* (hereafter TAL), one of the oldest complete copies of the manuscript tradition. As mentioned above, the critical edition identifies exegetical sources – Muslim and Christian.

Knowledge of the Qur'an and its exegesis among the Tatars was linked above all with the Ḥanafī legal school and the Māturīdī theological approach, both of which were widely disseminated in Central Asia and Anatolia from the twelfth–thirteenth centuries onwards. Despite the small number of permanent centres of religious instruction in this region, local religious literature contains references to Central Asian sources such as *Khulāṣat al-fatāwā* by the Ḥanafī scholar al-Ṭāhir al-Bukhārī (d.1147), *Jawāhir al-Islām* by Kadızade Mehmed Efendi (d.1635), *Enfesü'l-Cevāhir* by El-İzniķī, and others.

We will show them through selected examples. We point out the similarities between TAL and the Turkic tefsirs (according to Jankowski's research 2022a, 1: 501–542). The translations of the Qur'an into Turkish originated later than the eastern ones; they were made from the 13th to the mid-15th century, i.e. in the Old Turkic period. The Polish Tatars probably relied on them. Thus, selected western translations provided us as comparative texts: *Cevāhirü'l-Esdāf* (hereafter CEZ) (Zajaczkowski 1937), the *Tefsir of Muhammed bin Hamza* (held at the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum in Istanbul), as well as the *Turkish Tefsir from Bursa* (see Küçük 2014) of 1401, the *Turkish Tefsir from Damascus* (see Toker 2011–2012),

1 - The critical edition, together with a reliable historical and philological commentary, was undertaken as part of the international *Tefsir* project (<http://www.tefsir.umk.pl/>), in which most scholars of Tatar literature from 12 research centres in 5 countries (Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Turkey) participated. The basis of the edition, was the oldest copy of the manuscript, known amongst scholars in as the 1723 *Alytus Tefsir* (TAL) (held in a private collection in Lithuania). However, only part of the text has its genesis in the 18th century. The passages that have been corrected, supplemented or added by users, date from 1836. The manuscript has two identified scribes: Mustafa's son Izmael Jabłoński, and Ibrahim Januszewski, an imam from Vinkšnupių mečetė (mosque). The critical edition of the Tatar manuscript contains: 1. the commentary volume (in it: an instruction for editing the tefsir; a transliteration table; a metric of the manuscript; an analysis of the paper watermarks; an identification of exegetical sources – Muslim and Christian, and articles by scholars in several fields), 2. Facsimile, 3. Selected fragments of the Oriental layer in ISO transliteration and the full text of the tefsir, i.e. the Slavonic layer in the author's transliteration developed by Czesław Łapicz and Joanna Kulwicka-Kamińska, taking into account the historical achievements of Slavists in the reading of Tatar manuscripts. The idea was to make the transliteration as close as possible to the phonetic transcription, preserving and saving the historical features of borderland Polish and East Slavic languages/dialects, and thus attempting to reconstruct the ethnolect of the Tatars of the First Polish Republic. Missing or difficult-to-identify fragments were filled in on the basis of the *Józefów Tefsir* (1890) stored in the Lithuanian National Museum (reference number HMJI R-13.012).

and the *Turkish Tefsir from Manisa* (see Karabacak 1994–1999).

When considering the aforementioned translations, it is CEZ that bears the closest resemblance to the TAL amplification. Thus, it can be inferred that the translator, who translated the Qur'an into Polish, used one of the copies of the Turkic translation of CEZ, by an unknown author, penned during the reign of Isfendiyar (1392–1440). According to Ananiasz Zajączkowski (1937, XV), CEZ originated in the late 14th or the early 15th century, between 1385 or 1392 and 1440, or between 1392 and 1439, as claimed by *Tarama Sözlüğü* dictionary (1963–1972). The dictionary points to manuscript No. 278 from the Nuruosmaniye Library. The text features 1499 as the date of the copy, and contains the first 18 surahs, including surah 18. It combines interlinear (often literal) translation with the tefsir translation, i.e. the translation in which a verse of the Arabic Qur'an is followed with the Turkic, exegetical, translation.

The amplification found in verse 81¹ can serve to demonstrate that CEZ was the source of expansions for TAL: *tenže bōg ūčinił dla was s tego cō stworil cen ōd drew i ūčinił dla was z gōr i skal dōmi pečōri i wēinił dla was ōžeže ze lnū i z welni stregōŋ was ōd goronca i ōžeže z želaza stregōŋ was pōdčas wojni ōtō tak spelna pōžitki swoje nad wami azalibišce bilī mušulmanmi dōbre* (this god has made for you from what he has created shade from trees and has made for you from mountains and rocks houses caves and has made for you garments from flax and wool guard you from the heat and garments of iron guard you during war so gives his provision over you that you may be good Muslims) – cf. *ōd drew – aḡaclar gibi* 'like trees'; *dōmi pečōri – evler maḡāralar gibi* 'like houses and caves'; *lnū i z welni – ketenden yūnden* 'made of linen.' Another essential addition, which could not be found in any other translation, is the marginal note next to verse 92 *ime jej bilō rejxa* (mistake – rather than *rejta*) [the name of this woman was *Rejxa*]. The only passage in which this woman's name is spelled correctly is *adı bu 'avratuŋ Reyta idiz* in CEZ. This conclusively demonstrates the connection between TAL and CEZ.

With regard to CEZ, it is worth recalling the findings of Ananiasz Zajączkowski (1937, 108), who demonstrated that the commentarial material in CEZ ultimately derives from al-Bayḏāwī's *tafsīr* and al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*. The existence of a common source is confirmed by the examples adduced by Zajączkowski, whose wording, in the same interpretative variant as in al-Bayḏāwī and al-Zamakhsharī, also appears in the Tatar translation:

1- The result of the exegetical translation in the TAL are textual shifts relative to the Qur'an in terms of the numbering of verses, among other things.

For Q. 9:74, the Tatar text reads, in paraphrase, *proroku zwalczaj niewiernych szabłą a obłudników językiem* (O Prophet, fight the unbelievers with the sabre and the hypocrites with the tongue), which corresponds to the interpretation given by al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī (fight the unbelievers with the sword, and fight the hypocrites with the sword of the tongue) with the Tatar translator employing the culture-specific term *szabla* (sabre).

For Q. 38:52 and Q. 56:36, the Tatar *tefsir* explains the term *'atrāb* (of the same age) by describing the companions of Paradise as brides, *i dla nich będą towarzyszkami rajskie panny młode piersi wielkich niemające* (whose breasts are not yet pendulous) and *tylko co zaznaczone piersi* (with breasts only just marked), which parallels al-Bayḍāwī's gloss: *Among them there is neither an old woman nor a little girl.*

For Q. 81:7, a marginal gloss states that *wierzący z aniołami a niewierni/niewierzący z szatanami* (the believers [will be joined] with the angels and the unbelievers with the devils), corresponding to al-Bayḍāwī's explanation: *that is, the souls of the believers will be joined with the houris, and the souls of the unbelievers with the devils.*

Finally, in Q. 85:3 the Tatar text is rendered as *i dla święta piątku i ramazan bajramu* (and by the feast of Friday and the Ramadan bayram), which may be compared with al-Bayḍāwī's series of *ta'wīls*, including, among others, *the Day of Sacrifice (yawm al-naḥr)* and *the Day of 'Arafāt together with the pilgrims and the Friday and those gathered for the Friday prayer.*

We analysed the so-called virtues of the surahs as well, according to Jankowski's research (2022b, 1: 543–566). Enumerating the virtues of the surahs, notes were added in the margins of some Turkic *tefsirs*, at the beginning of the surahs. In the literature, they are known as *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* (virtues of the Qur'an) or Tur., *Surelerin Faziletleri* (virtues of the surahs). An example of this can be found in the *Tefsir of Muhammed bin Hamza*, in which such notes were made next to each surah, albeit in Arabic. It can therefore be concluded that such notes were featured in Arabic *tafsirs*, used by Turkish translators. However, the comparison of many manuscripts of CEZ leads to the conjecture that the virtues were provided by the copyists as they vary in number, place, and content. In TAL, Turkic entries extolling the virtues of the Qur'anic chapters, and indicating their practical application, e.g. for the prevention of disease, misfortune, crop failure, hostile acts, or the arbitrariness of the ruler, are found in the first lines of the following surahs: 37–42, 49–60, 64–67, 69–71. An example of the virtues of surah 53 is: TAL {*marg-l sūretü'n-necm <ykrm> bir kez okıyalar murād*

hāşıl ola } from Tur., Sūretü'n-Necm: *Yigirmi bir kez okıyalar murād hāşıl ola* ([If] twenty [one] times they read, the wish will come true). However, they are not present in surahs: 1–36, 49 43–48, 57, 61–63, 68, 72–114. For reasons unknown, the copyist of TAL listed the virtues of the surahs in specific sequences, i.e. certain subsequent surahs have their virtues described, while other sequences of surahs do not. It is likely that the translator, or the copyist, did not find the virtues in other sources, but copied them from the manuscript that served him as the basis for the translation or the copy. Turkish translators did this as well.

With regard to indicating the relationship between TAL and Arabic tafsirs, several sources are identified, e.g. al-Ṭabari, al-Khāzin, al-Baghawī, al-Jalālayn, al-Samarqandī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Juzayy. However, some of the commentaries present in TAL can only be identified in al-Khāzin or al-Samarqandī. They are not repeated in any other tafsir, a fundamental conclusion. Examples include:

wa-şbir wa mā şabruka illā bi-llāh wa lā taḥzan `alayhim wa lā taku fı dayq mimmā yamkurūn (Q. 16:127).

TAL: *cerpliwe znōşe za xamżejanejstwo cerpliwośc twoja tilkō pōmōcōŋ bōżōŋ i ne frasūj še na newerenstwo jix i ne cişni serce swoje ferasūnkem ōd tegō cō ōnī zlōşci činōŋ* (be patient! as did Ḥamzah – your patience is only through God's help; do not grieve over their unbelief, and let not your heart be constricted with sorrow over what they devise). In the margin appears an explanation related to the neologism *xamżejanejstwo* (literally, Ḥamza-like endurance): *bō prorōk xcal za xamżeja trizestū zgūbic kafirōw* (for the Prophet, thirty unbelievers were to be killed in revenge for Ḥamzah). This refers to the figure of Ḥamzah Ibn `Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the uncle of the Prophet Muḥammad, who was killed during the Battle of Uḥud in 625 CE. However, traditional Arabic tafsir literature links the story of Ḥamzah to verse 126, rather than 127. The marginal note, clarifying the coined term *xamżejanejstwo*, makes reference to the thirty unbelievers to be killed in retaliation for Ḥamzah's death. This is one of two transmitted versions of the post-battle narrative. Among classical tafsir works, only that of al-Samarqandī (1993, 2: 256) incorporates this particular account.

Wa lā taqūlū li-mā taşifu alsinatukum al-kadhiba hādhā ḥalāl wa hādhā ḥarām li-taftarū `alā allāh al-kadhib (Q. 16: 116).

TAL: *i ne mōwce i m{m}ekkejske lūze cō wislawace jenzikem waşim klamstwo tō xelal menżōm a tō xeram newjestam wiwozōnc pōtwar na bōga klamstwo pewne* (and do not say – O people of Mecca – which with your tongues you proclaim a lie: *This is ḥalāl for men, and this is ḥarām for*

women, casting slander upon God—a manifest falsehood). The amplification: *tō xelal menžōm a tō xeram newjestam* (this is *ḥalāl* for men, and this is *ḥarām* for women) appears exclusively in the tafsir works of al-Khāzin (2004, 3: 104) and al-Samarqandī (1993, 2: 254).

In TAL *Sūrah al-Isrā'* (Q. 17), it is written in red ink in Arabic that the surah contains 110 verses (*āyāt*); however, an addition in black ink includes the word *iḥdā* (one), bringing the total to 111 verses, which aligns with the verse count in almost all classical Arabic commentaries. Only al-Khāzin reports that there are sources indicating the number of verses is 110 (2004, 3: 109). The description of Surah 17 in TAL thus corresponds exclusively with the remarks found in al-Khāzin's commentary.

Thus, a comparison of the salient features of the Polish text with the Islamic exegetical tradition reveals above all the influence of relatively early Sunni works, such as those of Abū Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 983) and Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī (d.1035), as mediated in their later form by Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Baghawī (d.1122). The Tatars probably also drew on *Tafsīr al-Khāzin* (full title: *Lubāb al-ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-tanzīl*), compiled by 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī al-Shāfi'ī (d.1340), known as al-Khāzin. *Tafsīr al-Khāzin* is a compilation of earlier commentaries, primarily those of al-Baghawī (*Ma'ālim al-tanzīl*) and al-Wāḥidī (especially *al-Wajīz*). The author also adds his own explanations, particularly in matters of law (*al-fiqh*). Some of these tafsirs, such as the commentary of al-Samarqandī (later known under the title *Baḥr al-'ulūm*, were translated into Turki. (cf. Dziekan 2022, 1: 475–488).

The *tefsir* also contains numerous proper names and religious terms derived from commentary sources, including figures associated with Islamic history and culture, place names, religious concepts, and biblical figures, e.g.:

- *'Abdullah ibn ṣalam* (TAL 3: 106; 4: 159; 5: 70; 11: 20; 13: 43; 46: 9 and marg-l 3: 68; marg-r 13: 36) from Ar. 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām (the Jew who converted to Islam);
- *'Ebbas, Abu Talib* (TAL marg-r 93: 6 – 2x; marg-l 109: 1) from Ar. 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Muḥammad's uncle);
- *Chebibe Nedzdzar* (TAL 36: 19) from Ar. Ḥabīb al-Najjār (the pious man from Antioch);
- *Farsija, Fersija* (TAL 30: 2 and 30: 3) from Ar. Fāris (Persia);
- *Mosil* (TAL 11: 46) from Ar. al-Mawṣil (Mosul);

- *Me'radž* (TAL 32: 23) from Ar. al-Mi'rāj (night, on which the Prophet was summoned by God to see heaven, celebrated By Muslims as a festival on the 27th night of the month of Rajab);
- *Munkir* (TAL marg-r 16: 24) from Ar. Munkar wa-Nakīr (two angels who ask the deceased in the grave);
- *Jehuda* (TAL 12: 10 and 12: 96) from Ar. Yahūdā (Judah, son of Jacob);
- *Refajel* (TAL 30: 24) from Ar. Rāfā'īl (archangel Raphael).

The incorporation of specific Christian sources into the TAL reflects the views of the Tatars at the time of the Reformation. The religious beliefs of antitrinitarians, relating to extreme monotheism, were especially close to them (cf. Tazbir 1999, on The Lutherans, Calvinists and Arians, who rejected tradition, namely the Catholic interpretation of certain passages in the OT and NT, and relied only on the text of the Bible). Extreme monotheism is also a feature of Islam, as well as of Judaism (cf. Karaites), hence the views of Arians are cited in Tatar literature, and one may perceive in such works particularly the influence of Szymon Budny, a radical antitrinitarian. This can be attested by the presence of specific lexical and phraseological borrowings: *trōjčane* and *trōječnik'i* (Trinitarians), *jedinōstwo* (oneness), *spōlenčnik* (companion), *kaplan* (priest), *ōfferōwnik* and *ōffernik* (offerer) from the Budny Bible (BN). In addition, in one passage from the Tatar translation the forms of the names of the three young men in the Book of Daniel are also taken from the BN, namely *Shadrach*, *Mieszach* and *Hawed*: *a tō bili krōlōwe bōlwaxwalci cō palili šedra amešaxa haweda* (and it was the idolatrous kings who were burning) *šedr amešax hawed* (Biblia nieświeska 1572; Kulwicka-Kamińska & Łapicz 2022).

As far as the adaptation of Old Polish literature to the Islamic beliefs of the Tatars is concerned, one example is an extratextual gloss that records extracts from chapter 29 of Bielski's Chronicle (1564): *Cyrusowie potomki stryiwowie prorockie z Bielskie Xegia Rozdz 27 Cyrus pierwszy monarcha Perski mal cyrus oýca książe Perskie s pokolenia semowe[g]o matka iego była corka Astiaza krola medskiego i sniło sie Astýasowi že ž żywota corki iego która iuž była w persie wyrosła rozga A ta rozga swemý galęziami zasłoniła wszystką Assýą wykładacze tego snu powiedzieli mu Iż corka iego ma urodzić syna który wszystką Azyią Posiądzie Posłał krol do persyieý nie obiewiając tego nikomu y pryjechała do oýca Bremienną i zrodziła syna dano mu ymie Cyrus ktorego żydzi zowią kuresz.*

The Tatars referred to chapter 27, but in fact it is chapter 29 'On Croesus.' The Tatars omitted the passage about Daniel and added a passage that corresponded to their beliefs: *He was given the name of Cyrus, whom*

the Jews call Quraysh.

The Tatar tefsir is therefore a text intended for the preservation and transmission of the religion of Islam among the Muslim ummah living in the First Republic. It could have come into being thanks to the Reformation currents prevailing in Europe at the time, which favoured religious tolerance and the translation of sacred books into vernacular languages. However, in the seventeenth century, as a result of the conquests of Europe by the Ottoman Empire and the spreading Counter-Reformation currents, attitudes towards dissenters, including Muslims, changed.

4. Poison in words: the Anti-Islamic Rhetoric of a Seventeenth-Century Treatise

As previously established, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire from the late fifteenth to the seventeenth century constituted a profound challenge to the territorial integrity and cultural coherence of Europe. This perception of threat, far from being unfounded, was substantiated by the tangible reality of Ottoman conquests, which by the fifteenth century had encompassed all of Asia Minor and a significant portion of the Balkan Peninsula. However, Ottoman geopolitical aspirations reached well beyond these initial dominions, extending to further incursions into the European continent. In response, Christian polities endeavoured to coordinate their military and political resources in a collective effort to resist what was perceived not merely as a territorial aggressor but also as an existential and religious adversary.

One of the most consequential initiatives undertaken to counter the Ottoman threat was the conclusion of the Union of Florence on 6 July 1439. Intended to heal the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches, the agreement also sought to facilitate mutual support against the expanding Ottoman Empire. However, despite its far-reaching aspirations, the union proved short-lived, effectively dissolving by 1484, thereby limiting its long-term impact. Concurrently, states in Central Europe and the Balkans pursued the formation of a broader anti-Ottoman coalition. A central role in this endeavor was played by the Kingdom of Hungary, under the rule of Ladislaus I, known in Poland as Władysław III of the Jagiellonian dynasty, which assumed leadership of the league formed to confront the Ottoman advance. In this geopolitical context, Poland's role as a symbolic 'bulwark of Christianity' gained prominence, enhancing its international standing and strategic significance.

Despite these efforts, Constantinople was captured by Ottoman forces in

1453, paving the way for further expansion in the Balkans and, ultimately, the partition of Hungary. The capture of the Byzantine capital became a watershed moment, demonstrating both the determination of the Ottoman Empire and the limitations of the actions taken by the Christian coalitions against the growing Turkish power (Reychman 1973).

It was not only the first siege of Vienna that caused unrest in Europe, but also the Turkish incursions into Styria. The notion of a 'Turkish threat' was then well established in Central Europe. However, instead of uniting in the face of a common enemy, European states often welcomed Habsburg defeats. The reigning sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, was quick to enlist allies in the fight against the Habsburgs, with Christian powers themselves willing to enter into agreements with him. In 1535, King Francis I of France signed an act of alliance (*ahdname*) with Suleiman. This agreement met with widespread condemnation because the king had allied himself with a 'pagan' and a 'worshipper of Mohammed'. The conclusion of this pact symbolically ended the myth of a unified Christian Europe (Reychman 1973).

The reign of Suleiman the Magnificent was a watershed moment for Turkey, which became a key player in European politics. The importance of the Ottoman Empire on the international arena increased significantly, and European states began to seek the Sultan's favour. There was an atmosphere of friendliness in Polish-Turkish relations at the time. Moreover, Turkey supported the anti-Habsburg candidacies of Henryk Walesa and later Stefan Batory for the throne of Poland. Despite this support, Batory planned to organise an anti-Turkish military expedition, which, however, he ultimately failed to carry out (Reychman 1973).

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, Turkish power began to weaken noticeably. The Ottoman army could not keep up with the new warfare technologies being developed in Europe, leading to numerous defeats. In addition, the growing strength of European states limited the Ottoman Empire's possibilities for expansion. Europe gained the upper hand not only through military and political consolidation, but also through scientific and industrial achievements. From the end of the sixteenth century, Turkey gradually ceased to be an equal rival to Europe in many aspects. The truces with the Ottoman Empire concluded during this period did not yield the expected results, and European-Turkish relations remained strained. The situation in Hungary was further complicated by the ambiguous attitude of the population towards Habsburg rule. A large part of the population was critical of the dynasty and supported Ottoman ambitions. In other parts of the Ottoman Empire's border with Europe, there were also disturbing developments.

In the Polish territories, tensions were exacerbated by the actions of the Cossacks, who were used by Polish magnates to organise expeditions to Moldavia and Turkey in order to divert attention from internal problems. Meanwhile, Turkey closely followed the situation in Poland, and after the death of Sigismund Augustus supported the candidacy of Henry of Valois for the throne. However, the newly elected king quickly left Poland. Fearing the election of an Austrian archduke, Turkey put forward a number of candidates, eventually supporting Stefan Batory, who was a Turkish vassal. However, contrary to expectations, Polish-Turkish relations deteriorated during his reign due to Cossack incursions into Ottoman territories, Tatar incursions into Polish lands, and the poor treatment of Polish deputies in Turkey (Reychman 1973).

Of greatest importance for Poland were the events related to the reign of Sultan Osman II. In response to Poland's constant interference in the affairs of Moldavia and the expeditions of the Cossacks along the Ottoman coasts, Osman II decided to launch an armed expedition against Poland. The Turks were victorious over the Poles at the Battle of Cecora in 1620, but they failed to make the most of this success, exhausting their forces during the siege of the fortress at Chocim. The war attracted the attention of all Europe. In October 1621, the Chocim Pacts were concluded, establishing peaceful Polish-Turkish relations for the next fifty years. Turkish expansion came to an end with the relief of Vienna in 1683, a watershed moment that definitively weakened the power of the Ottoman Empire. Thereafter, Ottoman power never regained its former strength. The historical and political background of the confrontation between European Christianity and Islam includes armed clashes, diplomatic correspondences, messages, and peace treaties, all of which are reflected in the writings of the period.

Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe was on the verge of losing its integrity and identity, confronting two distinct cultures: the Christian, based on religious universalism, and the Turkish, rooted in orthodox Islam. One form of resistance to the Islamisation of Europe was the production of anti-Islamic literature. Although anti-Islamic texts had appeared earlier, their most significant development occurred precisely between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. These works attacked the pillars of Islam, such as the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, and the followers of the religion. Although the main center of historical polemics was located in the countries of Western Europe, Poland also witnessed the emergence, from the second half of the sixteenth century onward, of polemical and controversial texts against Islam, professed first by the Tatars and later by the Ottoman Turks. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, this confrontation was both political and religious in nature, which was

largely reflected in Polish-Turkish relations.

This period saw the development of various forms of anti-Turkish writing, known as 'Turkicisms'. Their peak development occurred in the seventeenth century, the era of the Counter-Reformation, while their decline began in the second half of the eighteenth century. Anti-Islamic literature produced in the Republic can be divided into the following categories: historical-geographical descriptions and travel memoirs; preachy-patriotic and political works; pamphlets; elegies of a patriotic-religious nature; general and specialized catechisms; theological-apologetic manuals; and detailed analyses of Qur'anic doctrine. Some of these texts were translations of works by foreign authors, while others were original Polish compositions.

One example of polemical writing from the seventeenth century is the manuscript treatise *The Life of Mohammed and the Description of Alcoran by Michel Baudier, a French Nobleman*. It is difficult to classify this work definitively within a single category, as it combines elements of the second, third, and fourth categories. The second group includes works of a clearly propagandistic nature, which focus on the socio-moral effects of Islamic religious doctrine on the Muslim community. The third category concerns texts that undertake a polemic against Islam from a doctrinal perspective. The fourth, on the other hand, comprises analytical doctrinal studies relating directly to the Qur'an, characterized by the highest degree of polemicism (Nosowski 1974).

Michel Baudier's *Life of Muhammad* combines the characteristics of an anti-Islamic (anti-Turkish) pamphlet with a critical analysis of the content of Islamic doctrine as contained in the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. Information about the author is fragmentary. Michel Baudier was born in 1589 in Languedoc, in southern France. He was a historian and historiographer at the court of Louis XIII. His works include *Histoire de la guerre de Flandre 1559–1609* (1615), *Histoire de l'administration du cardinal d'Amboise, grand ministre d'état en France* (1634), and *Histoire de l'administration de l'abbé Suger* (1645). He had a special interest in the Ottoman Empire and the Turks. It is not known whether he travelled to the countries he described or whether he relied on the accounts of other travellers. The fruits of this interest included *Inventaire général de l'histoire des Turcs* (1619), *Histoire générale de la religion des Turcs avec la vie de leur prophète Mahomet* (1626), and *Histoire générale du sérail et de la cour du grand Turc* (1626) (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1911).

Polish translations of Michel Baudier's treatise circulated in Poland in the second half of the seventeenth century in the form of numerous copies. Currently, three copies of this work are known to exist. The creation of the

Polish translation can be dated to 1671, as the author of the manuscript states in the introduction to the work: 'I have taken up this repeated work and translated the second author called Baudier, who described the life of this champion and the beginnings of the Turkish faith before the year forty-six, that is, in the year of our Lord 1625'. Unfortunately, little is known about the author of the translation, as none of the extant texts mention his name, apart from indicating that he was a Polish nobleman.

The treatise is composed of six books, each subdivided into chapters addressing a wide range of subjects. As indicated by its title, the original author intended to produce a didactic text aimed at informing the broader public about the Turks and the foundational tenets of Islam. Yet, within the context of the prevailing socio-political conditions, the work assumed a distinctly polemical character, serving primarily as a vehicle for criticism of both Islam and the Ottoman Empire. This shift in tone was shaped not only by Michel Baudier, the original author, but also by the likely contributors to the Polish translation—figures associated with the Jesuit order, one of the most influential intellectual and theological institutions of the early modern period.

As an order founded in response to the Reformation, the Jesuits played a key role in defending the Christian faith and countering the influence of other faiths and religions. Their activities were not limited to theological polemics; they also conducted evangelization missions and founded colleges and universities that became centers of religious education and formation. They were likewise the authors of numerous apologetic treatises in which they engaged in polemics both with Protestantism and with other religions, including Islam. The association of the author and translators of the treatise with the Jesuit milieu indicates the strategy, characteristic of that order, of defending and promoting Christianity through intellectual, educational, and literary activities (cf. O'Malley 1993).

This study focuses particularly on the sections of the treatise devoted to the analysis of the Qur'an. These passages are crucial, as they provide a starting point for both theological and critical reflections on Islam. Their content reflects not only the author's level of knowledge of Islam, but also the rhetorical strategies employed in polemical works of the period. An analysis of these sections allows for a better understanding of the aims pursued by the authors of the treatise, as well as of the broader cultural, political, and religious context in which the work was written.

At this point, Baudier's argument should be understood not as a set of scattered critical remarks, but as a coherent polemical project. I critically interpret his line of reasoning as consistently subordinated to a single

fundamental aim: the denial of the Qur'an's divine origin and the undermining of its miraculous nature. Baudier systematically shifts the focus of the discussion from the theology of revelation to a historical-rhetorical framework, presenting the Qur'an as a text shaped within a specific cultural and linguistic context. As a consequence, the stylistic excellence of the Qur'an is reduced to the category of human rhetorical skill and literary borrowing rather than, as maintained in the Islamic tradition, a sign of *i'jāz*. This approach enables him to challenge the very foundation of the Qur'an's revelatory authority.

The author begins his discussion of the Holy Book of Islam in the first chapter of Book II, entitled 'About the Alcoran'. He opens with a reference to the ancient myth of Dejanira, who inadvertently caused the death of Heracles through a poison concealed in a tunic soaked in the blood of the centaur Nessos. Through this mythological allusion, the author constructs a metaphor suggesting that humanity has long sought the most effective and dangerous poisons capable of operating destructively while remaining concealed. Within this framework, he refers to Muhammad, whom he describes as a false prophet. He compares him to the inventor of such a poison, implying that his teachings, rather than leading to spiritual renewal, were intended to bring chaos and harm to humanity. The reference to the myth and the metaphor of poison are thus employed to emphasize the negative influence that the author attributes to Muhammad and to Islam as a religion: *Muhammad the false Turkish Prophet, having invented a malignant poison with which he infected countless human souls in Asia, Africa and Europe, poured it into a Book of bawdy and bestial teaching...*

The excerpt cited above, taken from the opening pages of the chapter, already reveals the critical and polemical stance adopted by both Michel Baudier and the translator toward the Qur'an and the Islamic faith. This antagonistic perspective continues as the author proceeds to narrate the origins of Islam's Holy Book. Throughout the treatise, the Prophet Muhammad is consistently portrayed as a false prophet, while the Qur'an is presented as a text filled with alleged falsehoods. Such rhetoric directly challenges the foundational Islamic belief in the divine origin of the Qur'an, understood by Muslims as the revealed Word of God. Beyond questioning its authenticity, the author attributes to the Qur'an a manipulative function, suggesting that it was designed to deceive a credulous audience. He characterizes its contents as consisting merely of jests and fables, appealing, in his view, to individuals lacking rationality and spiritual depth. Within this interpretative framework, the followers of Islam are depicted as being concerned primarily with the corporeal pleasures promised in the Qur'anic text. This perspective underscores the author's profoundly negative

assessment of the Qur'an, an attitude that permeates both the Polish translation and the original French version of the work.

In his reflections, the author also points out that the Qur'an, in his view, is devoid of valuable content and requires external embellishment. He refers here to Muhammad's use of verbal embellishments, such as beautiful words and striking titles, which are intended to give the book an apparent value. In contrast, the author, presenting Christianity in opposition to Islam, points out that Christians are characterized by modesty and that the content of the Bible stands on its own without the need for such rhetorical devices. He also argues that Muhammad was forced to further embellish the Qur'an in order to deceive people and to give the book a meaning which, in his view, is only apparent.

It is worth noting that the author of the treatise also comments on the formal structure of the Qur'an, indicating that it consists of 124 chapters. However, this information is erroneous and is repeated both in the original French text and in its Polish translation. This factual error may suggest that the authors of the text are not thoroughly acquainted with the content of the Holy Book of Islam and that their knowledge is based on hearsay and possibly biased information. The authors are selective in their use of terminology concerning the structure of the Qur'an and place more emphasis on the appropriate expression of the treatise than on its substantive content.

The treatise expresses the author's extremely critical attitude towards the Qur'an and Islam, which he reveals from the very beginning of the text. Using the metaphor of poison, he presents Muhammad's teachings as destructive and devoid of spiritual value, describing him as a false prophet. The Qur'an, according to the author, is a book full of lies, created to deceive people who are driven by promises of pleasure. The author also criticizes the form of the Qur'an, accusing it of lacking valuable content, which is allegedly replaced by ornate linguistic devices designed to hide its emptiness. In his reflections, he cites misinformation about the structure of the Qur'an, which suggests that his knowledge of the Holy Book of Islam is superficial and based on biased accounts. The text is characterized by a strong bias and unambiguously negative rhetoric towards Islam, reflecting the unrest of the time over the expansion of the Ottoman Empire.

5. Conclusion

We attempted to reconstruct descriptions of the Holy Book of Islam and of socio-religious relations during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation as presented by different confessions, using the example of

Catholic and Muslim intellectual elites. Thus, we presented two different currents: an apologetic one, illustrated by the example of the Tatar tefsir from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, and a polemical one toward Islam, exemplified by a seventeenth-century treatise. In both currents, we focused on the Holy Book of Islam, i.e. the Qur'an.

We found that the Reformation era was conducive to multiculturalism, allowing the Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to translate the Qur'an into the language they used in their new homeland without obstacles. In contrast, the Counter-Reformation period, along with the significant influence of the Ottoman Empire in Europe at the time, triggered polemical reactions among local Catholics, who subjected the Qur'an to harsh and unjust criticism.

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