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The Only Muslim Community That Survived Under Catholic Rule in Europe:

Explaining the Religious Toleration of Lithuanian Tatars

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Abstract

Historians have paid relatively little attention to Lithuanian Tatars, and few noticed their unique status as Europe's only Muslim community that survived under Catholic rule from the late Middle Ages to the present. While Muslims in medieval and early modern Portugal, Spain, France, Hungary, and Italy were eradicated through a mix of mass expulsions, forced conversions, and massacres, Lithuanian Tatars survived and occasionally even thrived over six centuries despite periods of relative persecution. The examination of this unique historical case promises to shed light on the more general dynamics of religious persecution and toleration across medieval and early modern Europe. We argue that interstate and domestic balance of powers explain Lithuanian Tatars' survival. The two dynamics - interstate and domestic - are organically linked in that Lithuanian rulers successfully resisted forced conversion and eventually adopted Christianity on their own terms, which then allowed for the preservation and perpetuation of religious sectarian diversity, backed up by multiple political stakeholders. In the domestic struggle between monarchs, Papal allies, the Catholic nobility, and non-Catholics, none of the religious sectarian factions could achieve a hegemonic majority let alone monopolistic control of political and military power necessary for imposing religious sectarian homogenization.

Keywords: Tatars, Islam, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, religious toleration

The survival of Lithuanian Tatars¹ as a Muslim community under Catholic rule in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) and later in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (PLC) for over six hundred years² is a social scientific puzzle of world historical significance. Addressing this puzzle contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of religious persecution and toleration in late medieval and early modern Europe. Lithuanian Tatars are the only, and thus the oldest, Muslim community that survived under Catholic rule in Europe from the late Middle Ages to the present. As Benjamin Kaplan observed in his study of religious sectarian conflict and diversity in Europe, “this population [Tatars of Lithuania] had no counterpart in central or western Europe, where in the early modern period there were only two types of Muslim community; slaves and, until their expulsion, Moriscos [Muslim-origin converts to Catholic Christianity].”³ Nowhere else in Catholic-ruled Europe did any Muslim community, certainly none the size of Lithuanian Tatars, continued to exist uninterruptedly since the Middle Ages. Everywhere else in Catholic Europe, including France,⁴ Hungary,⁵ Italy,⁶ Portugal,⁷ and Spain,⁸ sizeable Muslim communities were eventually eradicated through conversion, expulsion, and/or mass killing.

Given the unique history of the community, it is surprising that the causes of the survival of Lithuanian Tatars have not been systematically examined. Studies of religious persecution, toleration and accommodation in early modern Europe often focus on Catholic and Protestant

¹ This community is also known as Polish or Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, since the Grand Duchy of Lithuania became part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and most of the local Tatar population adopted the Polish language. They are also known as *Lipka* Tatars, *Lipka* being a Turkic-Tatar name for Lithuania.

² Muslim Tatars have been settled in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at least by 1397, which is the date that is now widely accepted as the beginning of their existence in Lithuania, and thus their 600th anniversary was publicly celebrated in 1997.

³ Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 307-308.

⁴ Manfred W. Wenner, “The Arab/Muslim Presence in Medieval Central Europe,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (1980): 59-79.

⁵ Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary, C. 1000-C. 1300* (Cambridge, England, 2001).

⁶ Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh, 2009).

⁷ François Soyler, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal: King Manuel I and the End of Religious Tolerance (1496-7)* (Leiden, 2007).

⁸ Matthew Carr, *Blood and Faith: The purging of Muslim Spain* (New York, NY, 2009).

polities in Western and Central Europe.⁹ When there is an effort at a broader comparative analysis, non-Christian polities, such as the Ottoman Empire, are compared and contrasted with Western Christian polities.¹⁰ To the best of our knowledge, Lithuanian Tatars do not appear as a case study in any comparative work on religious toleration and persecution in early modern Europe. We regard this as a major empirical lacuna with significant theoretical ramifications, which we address in this article. By studying a historically marginalized and very much understudied group, Tatar Muslims of Poland-Lithuania, located at the very periphery of what has been called “Western Christendom,” as a critical case for understanding dynamics of religious persecution and toleration, we hope that this article will also contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of religious persecution and toleration in the core countries of “the West.”

We attempt to provide a comparative historical analysis¹¹ of the causes of Lithuanian Tatars’ survival in the GDL and PLC. This study resembles a “deviant case study,” where “[t]he most general kind of finding from a deviant case is the specification of a new concept, variable, or theory regarding a causal mechanism that affects more than one type of case and possibly even all instances of a phenomenon.”¹² Moreover, “[w]hen a deviant case leads to the specification of a new theory, the researcher may be able to generalize about how the newly identified mechanism may play out in different contexts, or he or she may only be able to suggest that it should be widely relevant.”¹³ In the case of Lithuanian Tatars, multiple and persisting intra-

⁹ Benjamin J. Kaplan, “Fictions of privacy: House chapels and the spatial accommodation of religious dissent in early modern Europe,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (2002): 1031-1064.

¹⁰ Charles H. Parker, “Paying for the privilege: The management of public order and religious pluralism in two early modern societies,” *Journal of World History* 17, no. 3 (2006): 267-296.

¹¹ James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, UK, 2007).

¹² Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 114.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

Christian sectarian cleavages and the absence of concentration of political power arguably created a political environment uniquely conducive for the toleration of Muslim Tatars in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The existence of major intra-Christian cleavages, compounded by political and institutional divisions, seems to have helped the survival of Lithuanian Tatars as a non-Christian minority, and this finding may have broader applicability beyond the deviant case of the GDL/PLC.¹⁴

Using sources in English, Belarusian, Polish, Russian, and Turkish, first, we briefly summarize the history of Lithuanian Tatars focusing on the chronological, geographical, demographic, and legal aspects of their existence that may be of significance in explaining their survival. We then state our argument regarding the exceptional survival of Lithuanian Tatars as the only Muslim community under Catholic rule throughout the late medieval and early modern era. Next, we critically evaluate four different alternative explanations that we developed, based on chronological, demographic, religious ideational and geopolitical factors. Finally, we explicate our argument in detail by reviewing major periods in Polish-Lithuanian history and focusing on several critical junctures¹⁵ when groups advocating mass conversion or eradication of Muslim Tatars had a realistic chance of success. What some scholars identify as the period of persecution of Muslim Tatars during the 17th century, which includes multiple instances of popular, political, and legal discrimination and intolerance, is the longest and the most important demonstration of our argument, as well as of the role of major actors and factors responsible for the rise, and eventually the decline, of such persecution.

¹⁴ In a similar vein, a recent work in international relations emphasized the centrality of domestic cleavages as barriers to ethnic cleansing in the 20th century Europe: Zeynep Bulutgil, *The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe* (New York, NY, 2016).

¹⁵ Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, "The study of critical junctures: Theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism," *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (2007): 341-369.

Polish-Lithuanian Tatars make up a single historical community, united by religious, cultural and family ties,¹⁶ despite the fact that currently they reside on the territory of three separate independent states – Lithuania, Belarus and Poland. For most of their history, Tatar settlements remained within the borders of a single political entity: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania until 1569, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between 1569 and 1795, and the Russian Empire after 1795. Until 1939 the majority of Tatar settlements remained within the borders of interwar Poland. After World War II only about 10% of the traditional Tatar settlements remained on the territory of the Polish People's Republic, whereas the rest were in the Soviet Union's Lithuanian and Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republics.¹⁷ Based on the data from the most recent censuses,¹⁸ there are up to 12 000 Tatars residing in the region - 2793 in Lithuania,¹⁹ 7316 in Belarus²⁰ and 1916 in Poland.²¹

The exact timing of Tatars' arrival in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is not well-documented in historical sources. Maciej Strykowski's²² chronicle mentions that Grand Duke Gediminas²³ used Tatar military against Teutonic knights as early as in 1319.²⁴ This record, however, is not cross-referenced by other chronicles. The earliest historical record that indicates Tatars'

¹⁶ Danis Garaiev and Gulnaz Badretdin, "Muftiy Belarusi: So stroitelstvom mechetei problem net," *Islam News* (2011), available at <https://islamnews.ru/news-muftij-belarusi-so-stroitelstvom-mechetej-problem-net>.

¹⁷ Konrad Pedziwiatr, "The Established and Newcomers' in Islam in Poland or the inter-group relations within the Polish Muslim community," in Katarzyna Gorak-Sosnowska, ed., *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse on Islam*. (Warsaw, 2011), 169-182, here 172.

¹⁸ The censuses do not distinguish between local Tatars and more recent Tatar migrants from the territory of the Russian Federation. Therefore, the actual number of Polish-Lithuanian (Lipka) Tatars is most certainly lower.

¹⁹ *Results of the 2011 Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Lithuania: Population by ethnicity* (Vilnius, 2013), available at http://statistics.bookdesign.lt/table_044.htm?lang=en.

²⁰ *Perepis naseleniia 2009. Natsionalnyi sostav Respubliki Belarus. Tom 3* (Minsk 2011), available at http://www.belstat.gov.by/informatsiya-dlya-respondenta/perepis-naseleniia/perepis-naseleniia-2009-goda/statisticheskie-publikatsii/statisticheskie-sborniki_2/index_535/.

²¹ *Ludnosc. Stan i struktura demograficzno-spoleczna. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludnosc i Mieszkan 2011* (Warsaw, 2013), available at <https://danepubliczne.gov.pl/dataset/161e7328-d3aa-4e8e-992a-fbdf57754569/resource/ff2cd8bc-7fbe-40ad-bf12-e5abfb098c9d/download/ludnoscstanistrukturademograficznansp2011.pdf>.

²² All personal names are provided in their original spellings with diacritic marks omitted. Sentences in languages that use non-Latin alphabets are romanized according to ALA-LC Romanization guide.

²³ Names of Lithuanian dukes are provided in their Lithuanian spelling with diacritic marks omitted, unless part of a direct quotation.

²⁴ Krzysztof Grygajtis, "Rozwoj Osadnictwa Tatarskiego w Wielkim Ksiestwie Litewskim do Konca XV Wieku," *Piotrkowskie Zeszyty Historyczne* 5 (2003): 95-151, here 107.

presence in the GDL dates back to 1324. The Annals of Franciscans mention the presence of Scythian fire worshippers, speaking an Asiatic language, on the territory of the Grand Duchy.

²⁵ Most likely those were the pagan Tatars that had escaped from the Islamization of the Golden Horde.²⁶ Some alternative dates include 1380,²⁷ 1391,²⁸ and 1395.²⁹ 1397 – the year of Grand Duke Vytautas's military expedition to the Golden Horde - is the most widely accepted year of the beginning of the permanent Tatar settlement in Lithuania,³⁰ which is also used as a symbolic starting point in the history of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars.³¹ The earliest Tatar settlers were either captives or political refugees and mercenaries that willingly joined Grand Duke Vytautas during his expedition.³²

Tatars fought on Lithuania's side against the Teutonic Order in the Battle of Grunwald in 1410.³³ German chronicles suggest that the number of Tatar troops was as high as 40,000, while Jan Dlugosz's chronicle provides the number of 300.³⁴ The Burgundian knight Gilbert de Lannoy's description of a journey to Trakai in 1414 mentions Tatars in great numbers in the city and surrounding villages, which indicates that by that time Tatars had already established themselves in the GDL.³⁵ The number of Tatars that arrived at the end of the 14th century is estimated to be not higher than 7000.³⁶ It significantly increased throughout the 15th and 16th

²⁵ Piotr Borawski, "Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: 16th to 18th Century," *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs Journal* 9, no. 1 (1988): 119-133, here 119.

²⁶ Gyorgy Lederer, "Islam in Lithuania," *Central Asian Survey* 14, no. 3 (1995): 425-448, here 429.

²⁷ Grygajtis, "Rozwoj Osadnictwa Tatarskiego w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim," 106.

²⁸ Leon Bohdanowicz, "The Polish Tatars," *Man* 44 (1944): 116-121, here 116.

²⁹ Grygajtis, "Rozwoj Osadnictwa Tatarskiego w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim," 106.

³⁰ Artur Konopacki, *Zycie religijne Tatarow na ziemiach Wielkiego Ksiestwa Litewskiego w XVI-XIX wieku* (Warsaw 2010), 26.

³¹ Marek M. Dziekan, "History and Culture of Polish Tatars," in Katarzyna Gorak-Sosnowska, ed., *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse on Islam*. (Warsaw, 2011), 27-39, here 27.

³² Dziekan, "History and Culture of Polish Tatars," 27; Ibrahim Kanapatski, "Belaruskiia tatory. Histarychny lios narody i kultury," *Bibliiateka histarychnykh artykulau Zhyve Belarus* (2007), available at

<http://jivebelarus.net/culture/belarusian-tatar.html>; Borawski, "Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania," 120; Egdunas Raciunas, "Islam in Lithuania: Changing Patterns of Religious and Social Life of Lithuanian Muslims," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2002): 177-184, here 178.

³³ Kanapatski, "Belaruskiia tatory."

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Borawski, "Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania," 120.

³⁶ Katarzyna Warminska, "Polish Tartars: Ethnic Ideology and State Policy," in Cora Govers and Hans Vermeulen, eds., *The Politics of Ethnic Consciousness* (New York, NY, 1997), 343-366, here 344.

centuries due to continuing migration. According to various estimates, Tatar population reached 25 000³⁷, or was as high as 100 000³⁸ in the 16th and 17th centuries. Emigration during the periods of relative repression and economic difficulties (the 17th and 18th centuries), high mortality rates in conflicts and high rates of assimilation all contributed to a subsequent decrease in Tatar population in the following centuries. The number of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars on the eve of World War I is estimated to be 25 000³⁹ or 14 000.⁴⁰

Initially, Tatars were settled in the Lithuanian-Teutonic borderland, around the capital, next to major castles and river crossings, and at borders between the Baltic and Slavic lands of the Duchy. Those include such cities and towns as Vilnius,⁴¹ Trakai, Minsk, Lutsk, Kletsk, Lida, Pinsk, Kreva, Ashmiany, Hrodna, Merkinė, Tykocin, Navahrudak, Eisiskes, Nacha, Radun among others.⁴² Some historical destinations for Tatar settlers are indicated on the map (Figure 1). The map also depicts the locations of Tatar cemeteries in the region, as well as mosques that are currently open.

³⁷ Agata S. Nalborczyk and Paweł Borecki, "Relations between Islam and the State in Poland: The Legal Position of Polish Muslims," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22, no. 3 (2011): 343-359, here 344.

³⁸ Warminska, "Polish Tartars," 344.

³⁹ Bohdanowicz, "The Polish Tatars," 118.

⁴⁰ Kanapatski, "Belaruskii tatar'y."

⁴¹ Names of geographic locations are provided in their modern variants unless part of a direct quotation.

⁴² Jan Tyszkiewicz, "Tatar Conveyors - Vectores et Aurigae - in the Polish-Lithuanian State, the 16th - the First Half of the 17th Century," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 82 (2000): 37-48, here 38; Grygajtis, "Rozwoj Osadnictwa Tatarskiego w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim," 146; Kanapatski, "Belaruskii tatar'y."

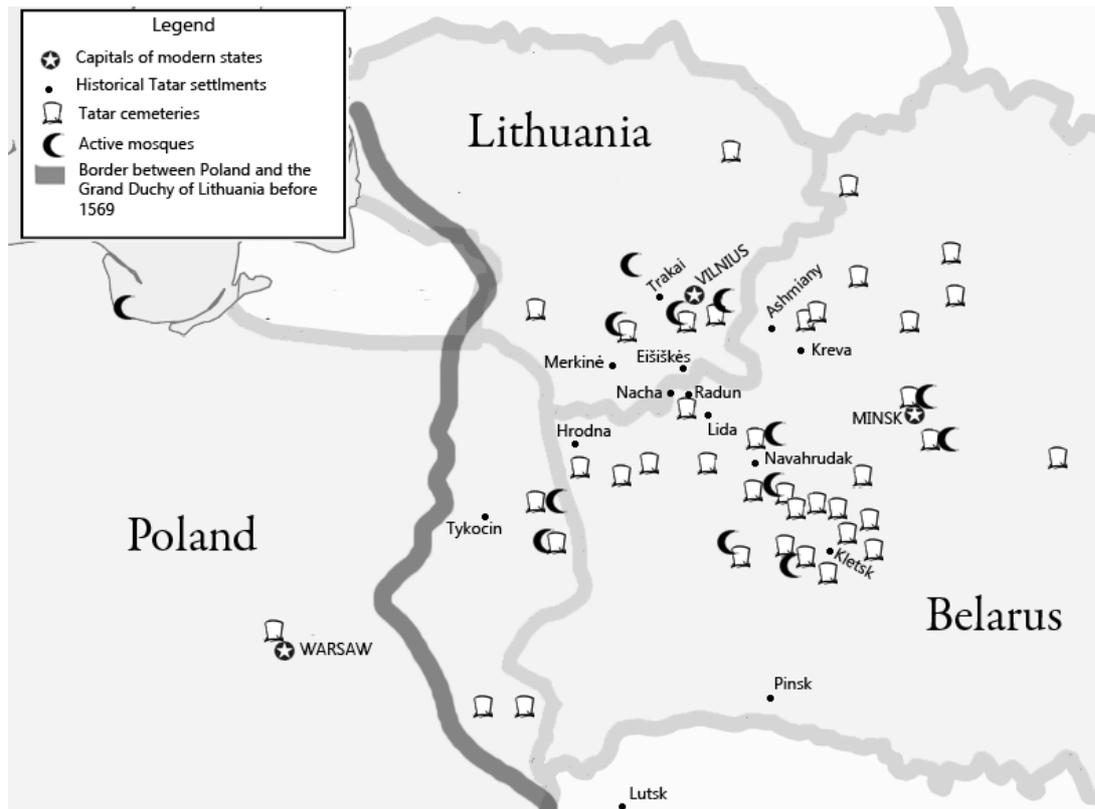


Figure 1: Map of Tatar Settlements.⁴³

Grand Duke Vytautas granted lands to Tatar settlers in exchange for their military service, allowing them to maintain their religion and marry local women.⁴⁴ The rights and obligations of Tatar settlers were to be regulated directly by grand dukes and later by Polish-Lithuanian kings. In the royal army, Tatars formed separate military units headed by commanders from

⁴³ The map is created by the authors based on various sources, including Ibrahim Kanapatski, “Belaruskii tatar. Historychny lios narodu i kultury,” *Bibliiateka historychnykh artykulau Zhyve Belarus* (2007), available at <http://jivebelarus.net/culture/belarusian-tatar.html>; Jan Tyszkiewicz, “Tartar Conveyors - Vectores et Aurigae - in the Polish-Lithuanian State, the 16th - the First Half of the 17th Century,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 82 (2000): 37-48; Krzysztof Grygajtis, “Rozwoj Osadnictwa Tatarskiego w Wielkim Ksiestwie Litewskim do Konca XV Wieku,” *Piotrkowskie Zeszyty Historyczne* 5 (2003): 95-151; Egdunas Racius, “Islam in Lithuania: Changing Patterns of Religious and Social Life of Lithuanian Muslims,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2002): 177-184; Harry Norris, *Islam in the Baltic: Europe’s Early Muslim Community* (London, 2009); Department Of Cultural Heritage Under The Ministry Of Culture, *Historical Lithuanian Cemeteries*, available at http://www.kpd.lt/uploads/EN/Heritage%20in%20Lithuania/Heritage%20in%20Lithuania/12_HISTORICAL_LITHUANIAN_CEMETERIES.pdf; Globus Belarusi, *Klabbishcha Tatarskie*, available at http://globus.tut.by/type_in_graves_tat.htm; Agata S. Nalborczyk, “Mosques in Poland. Past and Present,” in Katarzyna Gorak-Sosnowska, ed., *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse on Islam* (Warsaw, 2011), 183-193.

⁴⁴ Lederer, “Islam in Lithuania,” 430.

within their own ranks,⁴⁵ which did not fall under the jurisdiction of the general administration of the territories in which they resided.⁴⁶

Despite multiple legal guarantees and privileges, Tatars did not possess political rights and could not take part in elections to the General Diet, or to the Provincial Diets.⁴⁷ Only the constitution of 1791 provided a full equalization of the rights of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars with the rights of Christian nobility.⁴⁸ After the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the legal status of the local Tatars was also recognized in the Russian Empire and Catherine the Great confirmed in 1794 all the privileges that Tatar nobility had acquired by that time.⁴⁹

Tatars were allowed to construct wooden mosques in the areas of their settlements from the moment of their arrival. The only documented case of the destruction of a Tatar mosque took place in 1609, when a Catholic mob ruined one in the town of Trakai.⁵⁰ In 1668, a legal constraint on the construction of new mosques in the areas where there had previously been none was introduced.⁵¹ The restriction was not always implemented, since two new mosques were built in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki in 1679.⁵² There were up to two dozen mosques in the region in 16th-18th centuries⁵³ and 23 mosques before 1795.⁵⁴ 17 mosques survived into the 19th century while ten new mosques were constructed in that period.⁵⁵

Up until Poland's partition, local Tatars did not have a separate institution of spiritual leadership. In the 19th century, they fell under the jurisdiction of the Taurida Muftiate with a center in Simferopol, Crimea.⁵⁶ In 1925, the city of Vilnius, which at that time was part of inter-

⁴⁵ Borawski, "Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population," 120.

⁴⁶ Nalborczyk and Borecki, "Relations between Islam and the state in Poland," 344.

⁴⁷ Borawski, "Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population," 120.

⁴⁸ Nalborczyk and Borecki, "Relations between Islam and the state in Poland," 345.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Borawski. "Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population," 123.

⁵¹ Agata S. Nalborczyk, "Mosques in Poland. Past and Present," in Katarzyna Gorak-Sosnowska, ed., *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe: Widening the European Discourse on Islam* (Warsaw, 2011), 183-193, here 184.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Raciński, "Islam in Lithuania," 179.

⁵⁴ Nalborczyk, "Mosques in Poland," 184.

⁵⁵ Harry Norris, *Islam in the Baltic: Europe's Early Muslim Community* (London, 2009), 50.

⁵⁶ Nalborczyk and Borecki. "Relations between Islam and the State in Poland," 345.

war Poland, became the seat of the mufti of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars.⁵⁷ Currently, there are three separate muftiates in Poland (in Białystok), Lithuania (in Vilnius) and Belarus (in Minsk).

We argue that Lithuanian Tatars' exceptional (indeed unique) survival under Catholic rule was based on two distinct dynamics of balance of power pertaining to interstate⁵⁸ and domestic politics. Whereas interstate balance of power was later eclipsed by the domestic one as the main explanatory variable for the preservation of religious diversity, the two maintain an organic link. The fact that Lithuanian rulers successfully resisted forced conversion and eventually adopted Christianity on their own terms allowed for the preservation and perpetuation of religious sectarian diversity, backed up by multiple political stakeholders. These developments contributed to the survival of the Tatar community even at times of increased intolerance.

At the interstate level, Papacy could not prevail over the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the ways that it could over many other European polities.⁵⁹ Besides, Lithuania, unlike many Western and Central European states, was not socialized in a competitive Catholic Christian geopolitical neighborhood,⁶⁰ due to Lithuania's Orthodox (Muscovy), Muslim (Tatar Khanates, Ottoman Empire), and later also Protestant (Sweden) neighbors. Interstate power dynamics

⁵⁷ Nalborczyk and Borecki. "Relations between Islam and the State in Poland," 347.

⁵⁸ We consciously avoid the anachronistic terminology of "international" system, since the polities in the period under investigation did not self-identify as nation-states, and no international system as such to speak of existed.

⁵⁹ The Papacy enjoyed direct/primary, indirect/secondary, and socializing/tertiary powers that it used to discipline and punish monarchs across Europe. It had much less success in exerting these three forms of power and influence against the GDL since it was a geographically remote and relatively powerful polity (GDL was much bigger and more powerful than many other European polities at the time), which was the last in Europe to convert to Catholic Christianity, almost at the end of the 14th century, after a period of precipitous decline in papal power.

⁶⁰ For example, Western European monarchs, besides being pressured by the Papacy to eradicate their Muslim populations, were also pressuring each other to eradicate their Muslim populations, and taking pride vis-à-vis their constituencies and the Papacy as being champions of (Catholic) Christianity as such. In an intriguing example of this competitive "peer pressure," François Soyer demonstrates that the Portuguese king Manuel I, in a public letter to the Pope, claimed credit for convincing the monarch of the neighboring kingdom of Castile to end the toleration of Muslims. François Soyer, "Manuel I of Portugal and the end of the toleration of Islam in Castile: marriage diplomacy, propaganda, and Portuguese imperialism in Renaissance Europe, 1495-1505," *Journal of Early Modern History* 18, no. 4 (2014): 331-356.

alone could probably not suffice for the long-term survival of such a large Muslim community as the Lithuanian Tatars, but it certainly contributed to favorable initial conditions for the preservation of religious diversity.

Equally importantly, in the domestic struggle between the monarch, papal allies, Catholic nobility, and non-Catholics, none of the religious sectarian factions could achieve a hegemonic majority let alone monopolistic control of political and military power. The existence of non-Catholic stakeholders with political and military power (including Tatars) served as a brake against efforts at creating a religiously homogenous polity. This second claim is not a tautological assertion that religious diversity begets religious diversity, but rather, religious diversity represented in political and military power-sharing sustains demographic religious diversity at the mass/societal level. Counterfactually, if Catholics alone monopolized political and military power in the GDL/PLC, such a religiously homogenous elite could have successfully eradicated Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim populations.

These multiple intra-Christian cleavages and increasing decentralization of power created a favorable political environment for the toleration and the survival of Catholic Europe's largest and in the long-term its *only* Muslim minority. Political cleavages between Catholic and Orthodox nobility, between the adherents of Latin rite and Uniates, between Catholics and Protestants, and perhaps most importantly, between the monarch and the parliament, as well as between different factions in the parliament, were crucial for the domestic balance of powers, which religious toleration hinged on.

In short, both domestic/internal and interstate/external balance of power favored the perpetuation of religious diversity and toleration of minorities first in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and later in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which conditioned the survival of Lithuanian Tatars.

Many treatises on religion in Lithuania emphasize that it was the last pagan polity (or “nation” as some anachronistically suggest) in Europe. One might expect that such a late conversion to Christianity alone is sufficient to explain an exceptional case of the largest Muslim community that survived in Catholic Christendom. However, this hypothesis is theoretically and empirically unsubstantiated.

Imperial Russia, the Orthodox Christian neighbor of the PLC, that is justifiably regarded as being more religiously tolerant compared to most Catholic European states,⁶¹ nonetheless resorted to violent mass conversion of the Volga peoples, which included Muslim Volga Tatars, as late as in 1740-55.⁶² Thus, even 18th century was not too late for violent mass conversion in Europe, as it was practiced by the PLC’s eastern neighbor, and targeted ethnic kin of Lithuanian Tatars.⁶³ The GDL/PLC itself persecuted and expelled some religious minorities, such as Jews⁶⁴ and Protestant Arians,⁶⁵ but never to the point of their total eradication. Nonetheless, neither Jews nor Protestants were completely eradicated, which is a theoretically significant empirical observation. In short, the only or primary reason for religious toleration cannot be Lithuania’s “late” conversion to Catholicism.

Related to the relatively late conversion of Lithuanians, there was also most likely a non-Catholic majority in Lithuania as late as 16th century. At the time of Vytautas’s reign (1392-1430), “[t]he state’s ethnic ‘Catholic’ nucleus covered just 10% of the territory and

⁶¹ Robert Crews, “Empire and the confessional state: Islam and religious politics in nineteenth-century Russia,” *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 1 (2003): 50-83.

⁶² Paul W. Werth, “Coercion and Conversion: Violence and the Mass Baptism of the Volga Peoples, 1740-55,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no. 3 (2003): 543-569.

⁶³ In fact, Russia’s forced conversion of Muslim Tatars in the Volga region led to the emergence of a new ethno-religious identity, “baptized [Christian] Tatars, or Kräshens.” See Paul W. Werth, “From “Pagan” Muslims to “Baptized” Communists: Religious Conversion and Ethnic Particularity in Russia’s Eastern Provinces,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (2000): 497-523.

⁶⁴ According to Zigmas Kiaupa, “[t]here was a shortage of money and so in 1495 [Grand Duke] Alexander drove the Jews out of Lithuania and confiscated their property. It was hoped that this wealth would help solve the state’s financial problems but the financial turnover was badly affected and in 1503 Alexander had to allow the Jews to return.” Zigmas Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania* (Vilnius, 2002), 118.

⁶⁵ Konrad Gorski, “Some Aspects of the Polish Reformation: Unitarian Thought in 16th and 17th Century Poland,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 9, no. 27 (1931): 598-611, here 602.

encompassed only 20% of the population.”⁶⁶ The GDL had remained majority non-Catholic until it united with Poland in 1569.⁶⁷ Could it be that Lithuania was not sufficiently Catholic to implement a coercive conversion and religious persecution of its Tatar Muslim minority? This religious demographic hypothesis suffers from problems of endogeneity if not tautology since the outcome we are seeking to explain is also religious demography. Many European polities began with a non-Christian and non-Catholic majority, but those that came under Catholic rule eventually achieved very high levels of religious sectarian homogeneity, and all the Catholic polities eradicated their Muslim minorities, except for the GDL/PLC. Moreover, “[b]y the mid-eighteenth century, about five-sixths of the [Polish-Lithuanian] Commonwealth’s population, the vast majority of the noble citizenry, and the entire legislature were Catholic.”⁶⁸ The religious composition of the Commonwealth is estimated to be 43% Roman Catholic, 33% Uniate, 10% Orthodox, and 9% Jewish in 1772, at the time of the PLC’s first partition by Austria, Prussia, and Russia.⁶⁹ Therefore, Roman Catholics and Uniates combined made up as much as 76% of population. Thus, if demography was the primary obstacle preventing the persecution of Muslim Tatars, that obstacle was certainly removed by the 18th century when the PLC became overwhelmingly Catholic, and yet Tatars survived for centuries afterwards.

Polish toleration towards religious minorities is often taken as an empirical fact. Multiple authors who wrote on the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars highlight the lack of persecution or forced conversion. Indeed, tolerance towards religious minorities was included into the arguments of the Polish delegation during the Council of Constance, held from 1414 to 1418 that ended the Western Schism. The Polish delegation, together with prominent bishops,

⁶⁶ Alfonsas Eidintas, Alfredas Bumblauskas, Antanas Kulakauskas and Mindaugas Tamosaitis, *The History of Lithuania* (Vilnius, 2013), p. 49.

⁶⁷ Tomasz Kempa, “Religious Relations and the Issue of Religious Tolerance in Poland and Lithuania in the 16th And 17th Century”. *Sarmatia Europaea - Polish Review of Early Modern History* 1 (2010): 31-66, here 32.

⁶⁸ Richard Butterwick, “How Catholic Was the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Later Eighteenth Century?” *Central Europe* 8, no. 2 (2010): 123-145, here 123.

⁶⁹ Norman Davies, *God’s Playground. A History of Poland. Volume 1: The Origins to 1795* (New York, NY, 2005), 127.

included Wlodkowic, King Jogaila's personal envoy, who was a trained canon lawyer. The main cause of the Polish delegation was the criticism of the actions of the Teutonic Order, such as its cruelty and brutal attitude towards pagans, incompatible with the mission of spreading Christianity. Wlodkowicz presented his treatises to the council, in which he not only attacked the Order but also addressed church policies towards non-Christian communities, such as Jews and Muslims.⁷⁰

Although we agree with toleration being the default position in some abstract sense,⁷¹ in medieval and early modern Catholic Europe, religious persecution, or the “persecuting society” as R. I. Moore famously argued,⁷² became the prevailing norm.⁷³ If the GDL/PLC remained permanently isolated from this phenomenon, the hypothesis of a distinctive Polish-Lithuanian religious toleration could have been more convincing. However, the most important empirical challenges to the proposition of a distinctive Polish-Lithuanian toleration are the multiple episodes of religious sectarian persecution against various religious groups.⁷⁴ These also include episodes of intolerance/persecution against Tatars, such as the destruction of a mosque in Trakai by a Catholic mob in 1609, and the calls for the eradication of Muslims (“the Spanish model”) advocated in an infamous anti-Tatar pamphlet published in 1617.⁷⁵ Such episodes are not evenly distributed across time but rather clearly concentrated in particular periods such as

⁷⁰ According to Robert Frost, “[he] first considered the legal position of Jews and Muslims living in Christian states, citing the Bible and a range of authorities and legal precedents to support his argument that Christian princes were not permitted to molest or expel infidels if they were peaceable and accepted the laws of the Christian community among whom they lived. Since infidels were rational beings created by God himself, a prince could not despoil them of their possessions or expel them from his dominions without good cause. It was wrong to use force to compel infidels to convert to Christianity: created as rational beings by God, they had freedom of conscience, and the right to choose.” Robert Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania Volume I: The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569* (Oxford, New York, 2015), 124.

⁷¹ We consider that avoiding persecution would be in the pragmatic interest of a rational ruler.

⁷² Robert I. Moore, *The formation of a persecuting society: authority and deviance in Western Europe 950-1250*, (Malden, Mass, 2008).

⁷³ For a recent reappraisal of Moore's thesis, see John H. Arnold, "Persecution and Power in Medieval Europe: The Formation of a Persecuting Society, by R I Moore," *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 1 (2018): 165-174.

⁷⁴ Despite the fact that most communities were tolerated most of the time, instances of intolerance, even the expulsion of whole communities such as Jews and Arians were present throughout history as mentioned earlier.

⁷⁵ David A. Frick, *Kith, Kin, and Neighbors: Communities and Confessions in Seventeenth-Century Wilno* (Ithaca, 2013), 104-105.

the reign of Sigismund III Vasa (1587-1632). This evidence goes against “constant cause” explanations such as a distinct type or tradition of Polish-Lithuanian religious toleration.

Episodes of religious sectarian persecution in medieval and early modern Europe were often accompanied by public discourses of religious sectarian chosenness or uniqueness.⁷⁶ Some scholars also argue that such religious sectarian exclusions are at the origins of modern Western European nationalism.⁷⁷ Did Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lack such discourses of religious sectarian statehood, peoplehood, or nationhood? On the contrary, Poland had discourses of Christian nationhood such as being the “bastion/fortress of Christianity” or “the last outpost Christendom.”⁷⁸ In 1633, Jerzy Ossolinski, Emissary of King Wladyslaw IV Vasa, during his visit to the Holy See, boasted “that for centuries Poland had protected Europe against ‘wild and terrible enemies of Christ’,” including Ottomans, Muscovites, and Tatars.⁷⁹ Polish king Jan Sobieski’s letter to Pope Innocent XI likewise emphasized his “unextinguished zeal in propagating the Christian faith.”⁸⁰ Sobieski “viewed himself as the savior of Christianity, and rightfully so,” according to the papal legate Buonvisi.⁸¹ In sum, the depictions of Poland as the savior and the outpost of Catholic Christendom were in no short supply at least in the 17th century, and yet such popular discourses did not lead to a successful campaign of religious sectarian homogenization at the societal level.

⁷⁶ Philip S. Gorski, “The mosaic moment: An early modernist critique of modernist theories of nationalism,” *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 5 (2000): 1428-1468.

⁷⁷ Anthony W. Marx, “The Nation-State and Its Exclusions,” *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (2002): 103-126.

⁷⁸ According to Norman Davies, “[a]t any point between AD 1000 and 1939, quotations can be found to illustrate the conviction that Poland was, is, and always will be, the last outpost of western civilization. In the earliest centuries it was seen to be holding the line against the Prussian and Lithuanian pagans; in the modern period against Islam and the Muscovite schismatics; in the twentieth century, against militant communism.” Davies. *God's Playground*, 125.

⁷⁹ Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Catholic Church in Polish History. From 966 to the Present* (New York, NY, 2017), 25.

⁸⁰ Ludwik Krzyzanowski (translator), “Sobieski's Letter to Pope Innocent XI,” *The Polish Review* 28, no. 3 (1983): 3.

⁸¹ Joachim T. Baer, “Sobieski in the Eyes of His Contemporaries,” *The Polish Review* 28, no. 3 (1983): 7-8, here 8.

Could it be the case that the primary reasons for the survival of Lithuanian Tatars are related to their unique qualities and characteristics, such as their status as military allies, their exceptional loyalty or close link to local monarchs? Muslim Tatars were very much instrumental in GDL's wars against (Orthodox) Muscovy and (Catholic) Teutons, and later against (Protestant) Sweden. Therefore, the argument can be made that their survival and alliance with Lithuanian rulers was geopolitical at its core, and was enduring if the GDL/PLC always fought non-Muslim enemies.⁸² However, it is simply not true that the GDL/PLC always fought non-Muslim enemies; on the contrary, the GDL/PLC fought against Muslim polities on numerous occasions. Even the initial Tatar settlers were allies of the GDL in an otherwise intra-Muslim war between Tatar khans, Toktamish and another Muslim (Timurid) khanate. Numerous military conflicts that pitted the GDL/PLC against Muslim enemies include the Battle of the Vorskla River against the Golden Horde in 1399,⁸³ Tatar warriors' devastating raids on southern and central Lithuanian lands, such as ravaging Kiev in 1482,⁸⁴ Siege of Slutsk in 1505, the Battle of Kletsk in 1506,⁸⁵ and a Tatar invasion and the Battle of Olshanica in 1527.⁸⁶ Military hostilities between other Muslim Tatars and the GDL were so frequent and intense that, "[b]etween 1505 and 1522 extra fortifications were built around Vilnius to ward off Tatar attacks."⁸⁷

The Golden Horde and the Crimean Khanate were not the only Muslim foes that the GDL/PLC fought either. Many military hostilities between the GDL/PLC and the Ottoman Empire include, but are not limited to, the following: Battle of Varna in 1444;⁸⁸ Polish-Ottoman conflict over Moldova in 1497;⁸⁹ military aid to Hungary in its war against the Ottomans in

⁸² Bohdanowicz, "The Muslims in Poland," 164-165.

⁸³ Albinas Kuncevicus, Zigmantas Kiaupa and Jurate Kiaupiene, *The History of Lithuania before 1795* (Vilnius, 2000), 135.

⁸⁴ Kiaupa. *The History of Lithuania*, 115.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁷ Norris, *Islam in the Baltic*, 29.

⁸⁸ Frost. *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 184.

⁸⁹ Daniel Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386–1795* (Seattle, 2001), 33.

1521;⁹⁰ Khotym (Chocim) campaign in 1621;⁹¹ and multiple battles between 1672 and 1699,⁹² the most famous of which is the Battle of Vienna, where the Polish king Jan Sobieski saved Vienna and arguably the Western Christendom from the Ottomans, in part thanks to the Polish-Lithuanian Tatar cavalry.⁹³

It is still theoretically possible that even if the GDL/PLC frequently fought against Muslim adversaries, Tatars may have never “betrayed” the GDL/PLC by rebelling, and hence could never be portrayed as a “fifth column”, which was a very common accusation used for demonizing and eradicating ethno-religious minorities elsewhere. However, this is also not true as there are accounts of instances when some Tatars rebelled against or “betrayed” the GDL/PLC, and could have been construed and eradicated as a “fifth column.”⁹⁴ Yet such “betrayals” did not culminate in their mass expulsion or forced conversion as it happened in Aragon, Castile, Navarre, or Portugal.

Could the initial recruitment of Lithuanian Tatars as mercenaries explain the exceptional toleration extended to this Muslim community? Could their sheer instrumental value and dependence on their hosts have been the reason for religious toleration? This hypothesis has an

⁹⁰ Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 281.

⁹¹ Stone. *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 135.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 237-238.

⁹³ Timothy Snyder, “Toleration and the Future of Europe,” *The New York Review of Books Blog*, (August 10, 2011) available at <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2011/08/10/anders-breiviks-historical-delusions/>.

⁹⁴ The most obvious example is the major Tatar rebellion of 1672, when many Tatar soldiers not only rebelled but also sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire, an immediate Muslim neighbor that the GDL-PLC often fought against. See Borawski, “Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population,” 126. When the Swedish invasion in 1702 led to a civil war among the PLC nobility, many Tatars fought on the side of Stanislaus Leszczyński, who was supported by Sweden and who eventually lost the civil war. This led to the destruction of many Tatar settlements in retaliation, and the proposal of a resolution seeking far more severe punishment of Tatars in the Polish parliament, Sejm, but that resolution was not passed. According to Borawski, “[t]he Swedish invasion of Karol the 12th in 1702 and the election of Stanislaus Leszczyński divided the nobility. During the civil war Tatar troops fought on both sides. Therefore both armies burnt Tatar villages and settlements. In return Tatars devastated the estates of the nobility and the clergy. After Stanislaus Leszczyński's defeat the persecution of those Tatars who had fought with the Swede started. The plague of 1710 in Lithuania caused a great religious abomination. The nobility demanded a severe punishment for Tatars who: ‘together with Swedes invaded and robbed houses and estates of the nobility’. The deputies from the Kowno district to the General Sejm of 1710 in Warsaw suggested: ‘Tatars who many times fought against the Republic and the noble class, who dared to ruin and devastate estates should pay big sum for the army or maintain some tens of cavalry troops, without having any constitution from the Republic and they should not be allowed to go home after campaigns.’ That resolution was not however passed by the General Sejm.” Borawski, “Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population,” 127.

affinity with the geopolitical hypothesis discussed earlier. However, Muslim soldiers have been employed by many Catholic rulers across Europe, both as long-term mercenaries⁹⁵ and also as tactical allies.⁹⁶ Yet, the fact that Muslim mercenaries were used by Catholic rulers in present-day Spain, Italy, and elsewhere did not lead to the establishment and survival of permanent Muslim communities. Thus, this hypothesis, too, suffers from an empirical mismatch. However, being armed mercenaries closely identified with the monarch⁹⁷ in highly competitive (or inconclusive) domestic political disputes may have had a salutary effect on the Lithuanian Tatars' survival in the face of potential and actual persecution.

Since Lithuania's first, and failed, conversion to Catholicism in the mid-13th century, and the arrival of Lithuanian Tatars in the late 14th century, we identify four periods (prior to 1397, 1397-1569, 1569-1795, and after 1795) where different configurations of the balance of power between proponents of religious sectarian (i.e., Catholic) homogenization and the opponents of such a policy allowed Lithuanian Tatars to survive in a non-Muslim majority polity for over six centuries. The proponents of a Catholic monopoly attempted but failed to achieve their goal in each period, but for different reasons. As such, the survival of Lithuanian Tatars in particular was related to, but not synonymous with, the levels of religious sectarian diversity matched with multiplicity of power centers that prevailed in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

⁹⁵ Brian A. Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050–1614* (Cambridge, UK, 2014); Julie Anne Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy: The Colony at Lucera* (Lanham, Md., 2003).

⁹⁶ Ian Almond, *Two faiths, one banner: when Muslims marched with Christians across Europe's battlegrounds*. (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

⁹⁷ Notably, Ottoman historian Ibrahim Pecevi (of Pecs, eastern Hungary) states that the Christian monarch of Poland-Lithuania trusted Muslim Tatars even more than his Christian subjects: "Kral kendi soydasilari olan kafirlerden cok bu Tatarlara guvenirmis." [The king trusts these Tatars more than the infidels [Christians] who are of his race]. Ibrahim Efendi Pecevi, *Pecevi Tarihi*, Volume 1 (Ankara, 1981), 333.

We argue that, first, the external proponents of Catholic homogeneity, mainly the Papacy and the Teutonic Order, failed to conquer and convert pagan Lithuania by military force. Instead, Lithuanian monarchs converted much later through marriage on their own terms, allowing for the preservation and perpetuation of Lithuania's non-Catholic nobility. Second, following the monarch's conversion, certain domestic constituencies gradually emerged as proponents of Catholic homogeneity, such as the Catholic nobility and the Jesuits, but they were successfully countered in every historical period by a variety of opponents of Catholic homogeneity, such as Orthodox and Protestant nobility, and most of the monarchs. In sum, prior to and during Lithuania's conversion, the interstate balance of power, and following its conversion, the domestic balance of power did not favor a forceful and total conversion of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars to Catholicism, hence allowing for their existence as the only Muslim community that survived under Catholic rule in Europe since the late 14th century.

In the first period, corresponding to the 13th and 14th centuries, papally endorsed Teutonic Knights' numerous crusades to convert Lithuania by force failed, which made Lithuania particularly hospitable and welcoming for the adherents of non-Catholic and non-Christian religions, while discrediting the notion of violently imposed religious sectarian homogeneity and creating a historical suspicion between the Papacy and the Lithuanian monarchy.

Lithuania was the last "pagan" polity (or the last pagan "nation" as some anachronistically suggest) to convert to Christianity in Europe. Although the explanation for the failure of the Papacy and its agents to defeat and convert Lithuania are beyond the scope of this paper, two structural reasons facilitating this outcome may have been Lithuania's size (it was once the largest polity in Europe) and its distance from Rome/Vatican and the Catholic centers of power in Western Europe. Moreover, Lithuanian Grand Duke Mindaugas was baptized in 1251 and crowned as the King of Lithuania in 1253, and yet he may have reverted to paganism in 1261,⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*, 35.

or at least grand dukes that succeeded him after his assassination in 1263 certainly reverted to paganism. As such, Lithuania became arguably even more consciously and systematically pagan, while successfully resisting crusades by Teutonic Knights, who can be identified as the primary agent of Catholic religious homogenization in this period. It is important to note that this was also the period of the GDL's eastward expansion and incorporation of multiple Orthodox principalities through military conquests, political alliances and dynastic unions. Thus, the GDL successfully resisted forced conversion while simultaneously increasing its political and religious heterogeneity. The consequence of Lithuania's very late conversion to Catholic Christianity has been the formation of a religiously diverse polity *prior to* the conversion of the Lithuanian monarchs to Catholicism.

The second period extends from Lithuanian grand duke Jogaila's conversion to Catholicism through royal marriage with the Polish queen Jadwiga (1385) and the arrival of Tatars (1397) to the unification of Lithuania and Poland into the Commonwealth (1569). Lithuania's conversion took place through royal marriage and personal union with Poland, not as a result of forced conversion through military conquest as it happened in neighbouring Estonia, Livonia, Kurland or Prussia.⁹⁹ Thus, the conversion took place on Lithuanian terms, and at a time of weak Papacy compared to the preceding 13th century when the Papacy was arguably at the zenith of its power. Moreover, Orthodox subjects were exempt from conversion and remained more numerous than Catholics. More importantly, non-Catholic (mostly Orthodox) nobility was not only tolerated as part of Lithuania's political elite but also gained in political significance throughout the 15th century.

In this second period, the last major assault by Teutonic Knights was decisively defeated in the Battle of Grunwald (1410), and Lithuania prevailed over its more homogeneously Catholic neighbours to the west and north. This was a period of relatively strong monarchs,

⁹⁹ Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*, 33.

who could and did influence the local Catholic Church, including prevailing over the Papacy in making critical religious appointments such as that of the bishops. Muslim Tatars were strongly identified with the Lithuanian monarchs throughout, allegedly even more than Christians.¹⁰⁰ Both external (e.g., Papacy, Teutonic Knights) and internal (Catholic nobility and clergy) actual and potential proponents of religious sectarian homogenization were successfully countered by opponents of homogenization in this period.

Third period corresponds to the two centuries between the Union of Lublin that merged Lithuania and Poland into a Commonwealth (1569) and the three partitions of the Commonwealth starting in 1772 and ending in the disappearance of this polity in 1795. What characterizes this period for our purposes is that the external proponents of Catholic homogenization almost completely waned in importance, while domestic proponents of Catholic homogenization such as the Catholic nobility (*szlachta*) and the Jesuits in particular peaked in their importance. As a symptom of the partial success of efforts at religious homogenization, the most important episodes of persecution against Tatars occurred in this period, particularly in the 17th century, although Protestants were by far the more common targets of religious persecution.

Fourth period corresponds to the transfer of all the Polish-Lithuanian regions with Tatar settlements to Russian rule with the final partition of the Commonwealth in 1795. Tatars became the subjects of the Russian Empire and of Russia's management of religious heterogeneity by extension. Russia already had a very elaborate multiconfessional arrangement that included millions of Muslims as part of its contiguous polity, unlike any Catholic or Protestant polity in Europe. Moreover, since Russia recognized the noble privileges of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, this included the recognition of Tatar nobility. Therefore, the survival of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars under the Russian rule throughout the 19th and early

¹⁰⁰ Pecevi, *Pecevi Tarihi*, 333.

20th century is not much puzzling or unique given the plethora of Muslim communities Russia tolerated and ruled for centuries. This period is one where an external dynamic, in this case Russia's multiconfessional establishment¹⁰¹ can be considered to be the primary cause of the toleration of Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. The remainder of the article discusses the first three periods in the history of the GDL/PLC in detail.

The first historical period accounts only for the emergence of the conditions that would later favor the unique toleration of Lithuanian Tatars, since the community itself was not yet present on the territory of the GDL. The primary proponents of religious homogeneity in that period, most importantly the Papacy and the Teutonic Knights, were external, and it was the strength of the Lithuanian state and its successful resistance to the Catholic crusaders that ensured the growth and perpetuation of religious diversity on its territory.

Lithuania remained the last European state ruled by a pagan dynasty. Therefore, it became a natural target for the northern crusades, endorsed by the Papacy in 1236.¹⁰² In the 13th century, the biggest threat to Lithuania came from the Livonian Order, established on the territory of modern Latvia. Duke Mindaugas accepted Christianity in 1251, but Christianization was short-lived. Mindaugas made a military alliance with the pagan tribes of Zemaitija (or Samogitia – modern-day North Western Lithuania) and resumed the war with the Livonian Order. By the beginning of the 14th century, the Teutonic Order emerged as a major foreign threat to the Lithuanian state.¹⁰³ In its virtually annual campaigns, the Order received military aid by the knighthood from all over Catholic Europe.¹⁰⁴ Since then Teutonic knights became the main

¹⁰¹ Paul Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 2014).

¹⁰² Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania*, 34.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

agents of Catholic Christian religious homogeneity, but they could not achieve military success and finally lost most of their ideological and theological support after Lithuania's adoption of Catholicism through marriage in 1387.¹⁰⁵ The only remaining "pagan" territory was the disputed Zemaitija (Samogitia),¹⁰⁶ which was to be baptized separately in 1413.¹⁰⁷

At the same period, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was expanding its rule over multiple Orthodox principalities in the east. By 1385, the territory of present-day Belarus, northern and central Ukraine and westernmost parts of Russia all fell under the control of the GDL.¹⁰⁸ This process led to the increasing fusion of pagan and Orthodox cultures in the Grand Duchy, including in its capital. Lithuanian rulers also tolerated and in fact favored the migration of Catholic merchants and peasants from Western and Central Europe to their territory, as letters by Grand Duke Gediminas indicate.¹⁰⁹ In short, unlike its Baltic neighbors to the west and north, Lithuania did manage to resist forced Christianization through military conquest by external powers. Not only its pagan nucleus was preserved up until willful conversion in 1387 but also its overall religious and political heterogeneity increased in that period.

Lithuania's acceptance of Catholicism through marriage had a number of important implications. First, it significantly weakened the justification for the Teutonic Order's military conquest of the country. Second, it allowed for the preservation of religious heterogeneity through exemption from baptism of the Orthodox population and later through the toleration of new minority communities, such as Jews and Muslim Tatars. Third, it diminished the overall advantage of the Papacy and Church in disputes with monarchs.

¹⁰⁵ Dziekan, "History and Culture of Polish Tatars", 27.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier 1100-1525* (London, 1980), 169-70.

¹⁰⁷ Kiaupa. *The History of Lithuania*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁸ Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Darius Baronas, "Christians in Late Pagan, and Pagans in Early Christian Lithuania: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 19 (2014): 51-81, here 60.

Despite Lithuania's baptism, the Teutonic Order was reluctant to accept its recognition by Pope Urban VI and give up on the cause of the military conquest of Lithuania.¹¹⁰ It was not until 1403 that Pope Boniface IX explicitly forbade the Teutonic Order fighting Lithuania.¹¹¹ The Order eventually suffered a decisive defeat in the Battle of Grunwald in 1410 against the joined Polish-Lithuanian army that also included Muslim Tatars. The Order explicitly used the existence of Muslim Tatar military units in their anti-Lithuanian propaganda.¹¹² In short, Lithuania managed to resist military pressure by external forces both prior to and following its conversion to Catholicism. Whereas the conversion did not immediately eliminate external military threat by the Teutonic Order, it significantly diminished its appeal to religious justifications for military conquest.

Orthodox population was exempt from conversion into Catholicism during the baptism of 1387. This exemption was advocated and re-affirmed by the Lithuanian rulers in 1417 during the Council of Constance.¹¹³ Nevertheless, Catholic nobility was granted major political and legal privileges compared to their Orthodox counterparts.¹¹⁴ The Union Act of Horodlo of 1413 imposed political restrictions on non-Catholic subjects and limitations on the activities of the Orthodox Church such as bans on interconfessional marriages and construction of new churches in previously pagan territories of the Duchy, but such restrictions and limitations had been progressively loosened throughout the 15th century.¹¹⁵ The marriage, in 1494, of Grand Duke Alexander with Helena, the daughter of the Moscow Prince Ivan, who was also a pious adherent of the Orthodox Church, is a vivid example of the lack of enforcement of such restrictions.¹¹⁶ Orthodox nobility never remained completely excluded from the local political power dynamics

¹¹⁰ Kiaupa. *The History of Lithuania*, 75.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹² Dziekan. "History and Culture of Polish Tatars", 28.

¹¹³ Stephen Christopher Rowell, "Whatever Kind Of Pagan The Bearer Might Be, The Letter Is Valid. A Sketch of Catholic-Orthodox Relations in the Late-Medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania," *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 18 (2013): 47-65, here 51.

¹¹⁴ Kiaupa. *The History of Lithuania*, 78.

¹¹⁵ Kempa "Religious Relations and the Issue of Religious Tolerance, 34.

¹¹⁶ Frost. *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 309-10.

and proved to be an important political force to be reckoned with during the Lithuanian civil war and struggle for the throne in 1432-40.¹¹⁷ The percentage of Orthodox Christians among the highest strata of political elites was increasing during that period from 3.4 to 37 per cent.¹¹⁸ The political role of Lithuanian nobility as a whole had also been growing throughout the 15th century.

Finally, the mode of conversion to Catholicism seems to have affected the subsequent relative institutional weakness of the local Catholic Church, which allowed for monarchs' greater influence in domestic ecclesiastic matters and provided them with advantages in negotiations with the papal authority. The church's reach to the wider masses of peasantry, and even to parts of gentry was still limited and Catholicism remained predominantly an urban religion for a long period after formal Christianization.¹¹⁹

A major conflict between the Papacy and Casimir IV, Lithuania's Grand Duke (1440-1492) and Polish King (1447-1492), took place in the middle of the 15th century over the desire of the latter to maintain control over matters of ecclesiastical appointments, and the monarch won this struggle and appointed his own bishops.¹²⁰ Casimir IV also achieved major success in moving

¹¹⁷ Kiaupa. *The History of Lithuania*, 101-102.

¹¹⁸ According to Frost, "[o]ver the century, the percentage of Orthodox Ruthenians among the elite of princes and lords <...> grew from two families out of fifty-nine (3.4 per cent) between 1387 and 1413, to eleven out of fifty- six (19.6 per cent) between 1413 and 1447, to twenty out of fifty-four (37 per cent)." Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 316.

¹¹⁹ William Urban, "The Conversion of Lithuania 1387," *LITUANUS - Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 33, no. 4 (1987), available at http://www.lituanus.org/1987/87_4_03.htm.

¹²⁰ Daniel Stone discusses this struggle in greater details. "Like 'new monarchs' further west, Kazimierz [Casimir IV, Grand Duke of Lithuania 1440-92 and King of Poland 1446-1492] secured the independence of his realm against papal and imperial claims. Kazimierz IV demanded the right to control all benefices in Poland and Lithuania and appoint bishops rather than leave the choice to the local church chapter, which had previously appointed bishops, or to the pope. No decision was ever made in principle and each case was fought out separately, but in general King Kazimierz gained control over these valuable appointments. The most celebrated case came in 1460, when the king banished the papal candidate for bishop of Cracow, Jacob of Sienna, along with some of his Polish supporters, and took control of Church lands. Pius II retaliated by excommunicating Jacob's rivals, but in time the pope removed his ban and let the king appoint his own bishops. [So, the monarch won against the Pope, again]. The papacy took revenge by supporting the Teutonic Order in disputes with the Polish-Lithuanian state [observation that supports the claim that the Teutonic Order is one of the more pro-Papal local agents, even after GDL's conversion] and by encouraging Matthias Corvinus (son of Janos Hunyadi) in his contest against the Jagiellonian Prince Wladyslaw for the Czech crown." Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 26-27.

the local Catholic Church outside of the Papacy's extraterritorial continental jurisdiction.¹²¹ Thus, the second period in the history of GDL was characterized by a pragmatic approach to ecclesiastic matters and management of religious diversity, as well as by the relative weakness of potential advocates for religious homogeneity vis-à-vis monarchs. Even the infamous temporary expulsion of Lithuanian Jews by Grand Duke Alexander seems to be primarily driven by the political and economic (mis)calculations of the grand duke, as the non-violent character and quick reversal of the expulsion suggests.

The beginning of the third historical period coincided with the height of the Reformation and the spread of Protestantism both in Poland and in Lithuania, later followed by counter-Reformation, which set a background for the political developments of the 17th century that affected the conditions of religious minorities, including Muslim Tatars. In 1569, the Union of Lublin essentially merged the Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into a single polity with a common parliament and common elected king, while reserving substantial autonomy for the two entities over their respective domestic matters. The transformation of the political system according to the Polish example enabled the growing role of local nobility (*szlachta*) in politics as a whole, but not as a united, singular actor. Catholic-Protestant, Catholic-Uniate,¹²² and Catholic-Orthodox cleavages (on the territory of Ukraine) all persisted throughout this period.

The *szlachta* was becoming increasingly Catholic especially since Counter-Reformation, but this development went hand in hand with the increasing decentralization of the state and diminishing state capacities. Multiple instances of intolerance towards various groups (including some against Tatars) never transformed into state-coordinated and systematically

¹²¹ According to Frost, "Casimir had won a significant victory, which did much to secure the principle of royal control of episcopal nominations. He was helped by the strength of conciliarist feeling in the Polish church, with influential clerics happy to look to the monarchy to protect them against papal encroachments. Casimir was able to ban appeals to Rome, and the implementation in Poland of judgements by the papal courts or summonses before them without a squeak of protest from his bishops." Frost. *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 273.

¹²² Since the Union of Brest in 1596.

implemented policies. Domestic political conditions and multiple prominent social cleavages all prevented the rise of a strong and powerful force of homogenization in general. Tatars' relative numerical insignificance, compared to other sectarian and religious groups, and their continuing attachment to the monarch played an additional shielding role in this process.

The ideas of Reformation flourished in the country since 1520s and found powerful supporters and patrons among the richest magnates. The Lithuanian grand dukes Sigismund the Old and Sigismund August did not convert to Protestantism themselves, but followed moderate policies on this issue and employed Protestants as important state officials.¹²³ While there were legal restrictions on activities of Protestant denominations, they were rarely enforced in practice.¹²⁴ Despite the concerns of the Catholic clergy, proponents of religious toleration seem to be winning politically in this period when “[a]t the election Diet of Warsaw in 1573, a resolution was carried to the effect that no one should be injured or persecuted on account of religion.”¹²⁵ The principles of religious toleration were incorporated in the Third Lithuanian Statute - the main legal code of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania - in 1588.¹²⁶ It was under those circumstances when the Jesuits were invited to Poland and Lithuania in 1564 to help combat the spread of Reformation and religious dissent.¹²⁷ The focus on the Jesuit Society as potential perpetrator of intolerance in the Polish-Lithuanian context is fully justified by its numerical strength and disproportionate role in religious, social, and political developments in the country in the following centuries.¹²⁸

The Jesuits' prominence varied depending on the Society's relations with the monarch beginning with the reign of Stephan Bathory (1576-1586). Bathory, originally a Protestant from

¹²³ Kuncevicus, Kiaupa and Kiaupiene, *The History of Lithuania before 1795*, 184-186.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Albert Frederick Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland. The Lothian Essay* (Oxford, 1892), 23.

¹²⁶ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 216.

¹²⁷ Ramet, *The Catholic Church in Polish History*, 31.

¹²⁸ The number of Jesuits increased from 466 in 1600 to more than seventeen hundred by the end of Sobieski's reign. Arguably, this number and the unprecedentedly high ratio of Jesuits to the general population explain their disproportionate influence on the social, religious and political life of the country, as suggested by Albert Pollard in *The Jesuits in Poland*, 89.

Transylvania, was elected king in 1576 and converted to Catholicism. He was described as “a great patron of the Jesuits.”¹²⁹ Under Bathory’s rule, the Society established itself in numerous locations in the GDL¹³⁰ and rapidly increased its numbers to over 360.¹³¹ The activities of Jesuits in education were accompanied by proselytizing that targeted non-Catholic populations, including Lithuanian Tatars.¹³²

King Stephan Bathory, while encouraging educational activities of the Society was able to check its attempts at the persecution of religious minorities. However, the situation changed with Sigismund III Vasa,¹³³ who is mentioned in the records as “king of the Jesuits,”¹³⁴ and who was strongly influenced by the Society in his politics and “did everything according to their counsel, and the hopes and cares of courtiers had no weight except by their favour.”¹³⁵ Sigismund’s long reign was characterized by the rapid expansion of Jesuits’ activities,¹³⁶ the spread of Counter-Reformation, decline in power of Protestant nobility, and multiple instances of religious intolerance.¹³⁷ In that period, the Jesuits took over education and obtained great influence over local nobility.¹³⁸

Sigismund’s toleration of intolerance contributed to the outbreak of Zebrzydowski rebellion of 1606-1607. An armed confederation was formed in 1607 in opposition to the king.

¹²⁹ Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 26.

¹³⁰ According to Pollard, “[t]o Batory's liberality, which 'they can never sufficiently praise' the Jesuits owed their establishments at Riga, Dorpat, and Polock, the University at Wilna, besides residences at Waradin, Alba Julia, and Claudiopolis where a University was established.” Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 26.

¹³¹ Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 27.

¹³² According to Borawski, “[i]n one of his letters sent from Vilna in 1579 he [a Pope legate, Jesuit Antonio Possevino] wrote that apart from numerous heretics and schismatics the Vilna diocese was inhabited by Tatars who had their mosques and sent their sons to Arabia to study Arabian language. In a letter in 1581 Possevino suggested the introduction of missionary activity among the Tatars and he himself soon started their Christianization. But when Possevino saw that his efforts were fruitless he gave his work up.” Borawski, “Religious Tolerance and the Tatar Population”, 123.

¹³³ Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 30.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ During Sigismund’s rule “[t]he number of Jesuit priests increased from 500 in 1608 to 1,000 in 1626. There were twenty-five Jesuit colleges in 1608 and forty-two in 1634.” Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, p. 137.

¹³⁷ Sigismund “tolerated mob attacks on Protestant minorities in royal cities such as Cracow (1591), Poznan (1606 and 1616), Lublin (1627), and Vilnius (at several different times), which destroyed Protestant churches, prevented religious services in private homes, and desecrated cemeteries.” Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 137.

¹³⁸ Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 33.

It included “a large number of petty nobles fearful of their privileges, of Protestants alarmed by mounting Catholic oppression, and of Orthodox resentful of the recent Church Union.”¹³⁹ The influence of the Jesuits on the king and lack of tolerance for religious dissent¹⁴⁰ were listed among their complaints in the Act of Confederation.¹⁴¹ The king’s forces eventually prevailed in an open military confrontation, although the victory was hardly decisive. Yet Catholic reaction gained the upper hand amidst increasing political decentralization.¹⁴² From then on, the country experienced multiple instance of religious intolerance and occasional discriminatory legislation passed by the Sejm, but none of it turned into a coherent policy.¹⁴³

The severity of interreligious cleavages varied in the following decades, depending on the stance of a particular king. King Wladyslaw (Ladislaus) IV (1632-1648), who succeeded Sigismund III, “was averse to persecution, and refused to tolerate the Jesuits at his court.”¹⁴⁴ He is reported to be following a tolerant approach towards religious diversity both out of personal commitments and out of political necessity, since he relied on the support of Orthodox and Protestant nobles during his election and rule.¹⁴⁵ In contrast, John II Casimir (1649-1668), who himself was a Jesuit cardinal,¹⁴⁶ was much less successful at maintaining interconfessional political alliances, since “[h]is Catholic piety and numerous pilgrimages alienated Protestants and Orthodox nobles.”¹⁴⁷ The reign of Jan (John) III Sobieski (1674-1696) took place against the background of continuing deterioration of general state capacities. Despite his aversion to persecution, he often failed to check the intolerant activities of the Jesuits and to enforce laws

¹³⁹ Davies, *God's Playground*, 261.

¹⁴⁰ Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 40.

¹⁴¹ The following excerpt from the Act of Confederation illustrates this concern on the side of the opposition: “Our ancestors . . . knew that they were born nobles rather than Catholics, that they were not descended from Levi, and that Poland is a political kingdom, not a clerical one.” Davies, *God's Playground*, 261.

¹⁴² Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 73.

¹⁴³ Davies, *God's Playground*, 330.

¹⁴⁴ Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 85.

¹⁴⁵ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 156.

¹⁴⁶ Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 87.

¹⁴⁷ Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 163.

protecting religious freedoms.¹⁴⁸ Sobieski also struggled against Polish nobles who grew suspicious about the possibility of PLC's transformation into an absolutist monarchy.¹⁴⁹

The unprecedented growth in the political power of the parliament was probably the most crucial political development of that period. In mid-sixteenth century, it achieved parity with the king¹⁵⁰ and since then was only gaining relative strength such as exclusive right to pass new legislation.¹⁵¹ However, the growing role of the parliament was coupled with the increasing political power of its individual members. As early as in the middle of the 15th century the Polish parliament developed the principle of unanimity in decision-making,¹⁵² which was later inherited by the PLC parliament. In mid-17th century, this principle evolved into *liberum veto*, a practice meaning that “all the accomplishments of an entire parliamentary session were wiped out by a single protest on a single issue.”¹⁵³ Liberum veto further damaged the decision-making capacities of the parliament, such that “[f]rom 1573 to 1763, approximately one-third (53) of all parliamentary sessions failed to pass a single law, mostly after 1650.”¹⁵⁴ Therefore, although Catholic nobility as a group seems to have grown numerically stronger in the 17th century compared to the 16th century, this process was countered by conditions that prevented unchallenged dominance by any political group, institution or sectarian faction.

The developments of the early 17th century and the rise of the Jesuits had an important impact on the local Tatar community. Jesuits are not only identified as the agent of persecution against Muslims, but also (and perhaps even more so) against the Orthodox and the Protestants,¹⁵⁵ which highlights the significance of religious sectarian cleavages in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose demographic diversity would benefit Tatars by preventing

¹⁴⁸ For example, he was not able to prevent a mob led by Jesuits from attacking a Protestant church in 1682. Pollard, *The Jesuits in Poland*, 88.

¹⁴⁹ Stone. *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 241.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 178-79.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 179.

¹⁵² Ibid., 181.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 183.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Lederer, “Islam in Lithuania,” 430.

the consolidation of a Catholic monopoly. Jesuits explicitly stated local Tatars and Jews to be far less of a concern for them in their struggle with religious dissent, since they are not numerous and do not pose an especially severe threat on doctrinal grounds.¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, in the age of persecution, which coincided with Counter-Reformation, Tatars' certain religious and social rights (to build or repair mosques, to marry Christian women, to have Christian maids and serfs, to proselytize) were step-by-step taken away¹⁵⁷ while other previously existing limitations were more frequently enforced.¹⁵⁸ Some of Tatars' economic rights and privileges, such as trade monopolies, were further restricted in this period.¹⁵⁹

This demonstrates that rising persecution was not a one-time aberration or exception that proves the rule, as in the destruction of the Trakai mosque by a Catholic mob in 1609, but rather a deliberate public campaign as demonstrated by the publication of the infamous anti-Islamic pamphlet *A Real Alfurkan Divided Into Forty Parts* in 1616,¹⁶⁰ eventually culminating in the Tatar cavalry revolt of 1672, “provoked, among other things, by the prohibition to restore old mosques.”¹⁶¹ Monarchs were almost always identified as the supporters and defenders of Lithuanian Tatars' rights against their actual and potential detractors among the Jesuits and among the nobility,¹⁶² which were becoming increasingly Catholic and jealously protective of their special rights and privileges. King Jan Sobieski “actually restored, in 1677, their [Tatars'] earlier rights and privileges, at least those of the soldiers among them, except for the right to marry Christian women... the prohibition to restore old mosques [was] withdrawn a few years

¹⁵⁶ Iosif Khauratovich, “Tut ikh radzima,” *Litaratura I Mastatstva* 16(3686) (1993): 6-7, here 7.

¹⁵⁷ Lederer, “Islam in Lithuania,” 430.

¹⁵⁸ Khauratovich, “Tut ikh radzima,” 7.

¹⁵⁹ Tyszkiewicz, “Tartar Conveyors,” 47-48.

¹⁶⁰ According to Lederer, “[i]n 1616, Piotr Czyzewski [a pseudonym] wrote his anti-Islamic pamphlet entitled *A Real Alfurkan Divided into Forty Parts* accusing Muslims of sorcery and other ignominies. Numerous Tatars chose to emigrate to Turkey or the Crimea in the last decades of the 17th century, while others abandoned their faith and were baptized. This was precisely the aim of the clergy behind Czyzewski: to force the Tatars to accept Catholicism and to pay tithes, to deprive their leaders of their estates and the privileges of the nobility, and to demolish their houses of worship as well.” Lederer, “Islam in Lithuania,” 430.

¹⁶¹ Lederer, “Islam in Lithuania,” 431. However, in line with the general political trends of the period, such restrictions were often remedied by the lack of implementation as discussion on mosque construction in the section about the history of the Tatar community indicates.

¹⁶² Pecevi, *Pecevi Tarihi*, 333.

later by Sobieski.”¹⁶³ The only significant exception to this pattern of monarchical patronage of Tatars is Sigismund III Vasa, who ruled between 1587 and 1632, and who is identified as a religiously fanatical and intolerant monarch.

In sum, the 17th century witnessed multiple instances of interconfessional intolerance and acts of persecution under the conditions of declining central authority, which also affected Tatars. While increasing deterioration of centralized authority allowed for intolerance, such deterioration of central authority made it increasingly difficult to pursue systematic and successful religious persecution and homogenization even against numerically much more visible religious groups.¹⁶⁴ It is reasonable to suggest that the same causal mechanism operated also in the 18th century, when decentralization and deterioration of state capacities continued. Throughout the 18th century, the PLC suffered from its involvement in the Great Northern War between Sweden and Russia and later from successive defeats in wars with the Russian Empire. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth eventually disappeared from the European political maps, swallowed by its neighbors to the east, west and south-west. We have not come across records about acts of discrimination against the local Tatar community during this period.

We argued that interstate and domestic balance of power explain Lithuanian Tatars’ exceptional survival under Catholic rule in Europe since the late 14th century. After the conversion of Lithuania to Catholic Christianity, the domestic balance of power eclipsed interstate balance of power as the main explanatory variable for the preservation of religious diversity. The two

¹⁶³ Lederer, “Islam in Lithuania,” 431.

¹⁶⁴ Norman Davies summarizes this unique situation as follows: “Lastly, it would seem that Toleration, as distinct from tolerance, did prevail. In a state which possessed no strong central executive authority, and where the ecclesiastical courts could not enforce their rulings, religious uniformity could not be imposed. The nobility believed what they wished, and protected whom they liked. <...> The Polish 'Anarchy', and the 'Golden Freedom' of the nobility, proved an obstruction to efficient government and to religious fanaticism alike.” Davies, *God's Playground*, 155.

dynamics, interstate and domestic, are organically linked in that Lithuanian rulers successfully resisted forced conversion and eventually adopted Christianity on their own terms, which then allowed for the preservation and perpetuation of religious sectarian diversity, backed up by multiple political stakeholders. In the domestic struggle between the monarch, papal allies, the Catholic nobility, and non-Catholics, none of the religious sectarian factions could achieve a hegemonic majority let alone monopolistic control of political and military power. The existence of non-Catholic stakeholders with political and military power (including Tatars) served as a brake against efforts at creating a religiously homogenous polity. Political cleavages between Catholic and Orthodox nobility, between the adherents of Latin rite and Uniates, between Catholics and Protestants, and perhaps most importantly, between the monarch and the parliament, as well as between different factions in the parliament, were crucial for the domestic balance of powers, which religious toleration hinged on. These developments contributed to the survival of the Tatar community even at times of increased intolerance over four centuries from their arrival in Lithuania in the late 14th century until the third and final partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the late 18th century, in which the Russian Empire annexed the territories inhabited by the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. Henceforth, they were accommodated along with millions of other Muslims as part of Russia's multiconfessional establishment.