THE TATARS IN LITHUANIA AND THEIR ETHNOHISTORY

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Abstract. This article focuses on the interpretation and re-interpretation of the history of the Tatar community in Lithuania. It is the result of field studies conducted in 2012, 2015 and 2016 and draws the reader's attention to Tatar ethnohistory, understood as a story of the past, tracing its main narratives: the settlement of Tatars in this region of Europe, their past and their family genealogies. The analysis finds that the mythology of the settlement is heroic, the central role in it is played by the great prince Vytautas, and the ancestors are presented as noble and loyal warriors. In its main elements (plot, characters), Tatar mythography follows the trajectory of the dominant national narrative, emphasizing the heroic and dignified participation of Tatars in it.

Keywords: historical memory, interpretation and re-interpretation of history, mythography, ethnohistory, national narrative, Tatars in Lithuania.

Introduction

The Tatar Muslim communities in Poland, Belarus and the Baltics (Lithuania) represent an important part of the historical heritage of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In modern humanities, their cultural specificity is associated with the ideas of the border and of intensive intercultural interaction and

cultural synthesis, especially between the Baltic, East Slavic and West Slavic cultures (Cohen 1994; Sadowski 2001; Norris 2005, 2009). Today, the Tatars in this region of Europe represent a typical historical diaspora preserved in Christian cultural and religious conditions. The Tatar communities living here are not homogeneous in composition and were formed as a result of different settlements at different times. Their existence in independent nation states accounts for some of the differences between them, but they all recognize their common historical heritage, which gives cultural specificity to the whole region. Recent research has shown that their community identification is characterized by 'enhanced' orientation to the past as a value guideline, and since the end of the last century close processes of identification have emerged among them, for which images of the past are evoked and updated (Assmann 2010; Giordano 2015).

This text is part of a broader study on conceptions of the past and interpretations and re-interpretations of history in both the Balkan and Baltic cultural contexts (Burke 2001, 2005; Yankova 2019a, 2019c). It is the result of an individual research project and fieldwork conducted in September 2011 in Poland in the Podlasie region (Bohoniki, Kruszyniany, Sokółka, Białystok) and in 2012, 2015 and 2016 in Lithuania (Vilnius, Kaunas, Trakai, Nemėžis, Raižiai, Keturiasdešimt totorių, Subartonys) (Yankova 2019c: 185-275). The focus of the analysis is on surveys among the Tatars in Lithuania, and comparison with and supplements to these observations are provided with parallels to those recorded in Poland. Later on we will be particularly interested in the issue of so-called ethnohistory, that is, building one's own story about the past (images of the past in the minds of the community, family genealogies, family traditions, etc.) and its correlation with the Lithuanian national narrative, the so-called 'grand narrative', to use the terminology of J.-Fr. Lyotard (Lyotard 1979). The theoretical basis of this research is the concept of *historical memory*, understood as a generalized image of knowledge about the past, built from many interacting ideas, and recognized as information, functions and processes of representation, constructiveness, updating, etc. (Yankova 2019b). In turn, ethnohistory is understood as a specific type of history of the people and communities being studied and their concepts of their own past (Augé 1999: 8-9), which, unlike professional historiography, are often 'multifaceted, controversial and absolutely unstable' in the words of Smith (cf. Smith 1999: 28).

Brief historical notes

Defined as 'early Muslim communities in Europe' (cf. Norris 2009), Tatars have lived for more than six centuries in this part of the world (Lederer 1995; Larsson 2009; Jakubauskas 2012; Potašenko 2002; Davies 2012; Nielsen et al. 2014; Bairašauskaitė and Miškinienė 2014; Svanberg and Westerlund 2016). Their settlement in these lands is associated with a period in the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (late fourteen to early fifteenth century), a federation between Lithuania and Poland. The mass settlement of a compact Tatar population on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is dated to the reign of Prince Vytautas Didysis (Lith.), or Witold Kiejstutowicz (Pol.), who ruled from 1392 to 1430 and who attracted them to his side as a military guard force to strengthen the state border and protect it against external enemies. In exchange for their military duties, Tatars received land and religious freedom.

The Tatars mainly served as soldiers in an independent unit of the light cavalry (Kryczyński 1938: 118; Tyszkiewicz 1989: 19). Until almost the sixteenth century, the Tatar military organization relied on family ties, and by the end of the eighteenth century, they were using *tamgas,* that is, tribal and family symbols on their official seals as a symbolic link with their family tradition and ancestors (Kryczyński 1938: 71). As a military force, they took part in important battles of historical significance to European peoples, such as the battle of Grünwald / Tananberg / Žalgiris against the Teutonic Knights in 1410 and the defence of Vienna against the Ottoman Empire in 1683 (Norris 2005: 120; Pociūnas 2007: 3-13). The Uhlan Tatar Regiment took part in military operations against Napoleon's army in Prussia (1806-1807), Belarus (1812) and Germany (1813-1814). The compact settlement of the Tatars in this region, their religious independence and the long-term preservation of family ties in their military organization are important prerequisites for the formation and preservation of Tatar communities in these lands.

In the period after the 1920s, there was a real cultural and religious efflorescence of the Tatars in the area, defined by experts as an 'ethnic revival' (Bohdanowicz 1942; Norris 2009: 45; Račius 2014, 2016). In 1926, a new Tatar organization was established in Vilnius, the Association of Culture and Education of the Polish Tatars / Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy Tatarów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, which organized a variety of cultural, scientific and publishing activities. They give a particularly important place to the annual publication *Rocznik Tatarski* or *The Tatar Year* (Miśkiewicz 1990: 125; Borawski

1986: 299-300; Tyszkiewicz 1989: 142). At that time, a large-scale programme of historiographical, cultural and ethnographic research was carried out, during which valuable sources for the Tatar past were documented and systematized. The period between the two world wars (1918-1940) was one of significant events, which later had a decisive influence on the formation of their historical memory and ideas about the past.

After the 1990s, along with the democratic changes in the countries of the former socialist bloc, religious freedom was restored, new opportunities for cultural and religious organizations of minority communities were created, and favourable conditions arose for rethinking one's own historical heritage. The ethnic upsurge in the last quarter of the twentieth century also intensified the increase in multifaceted relations with the past in terms of history, memory, tradition and heritage (Hartman 1972; Nagel 1994; Norris 2009: 1-3). Due to the growing mobility and the new information technologies, intensive contacts between Tatar organizations around the world help maintain active cultural exchange, the construction of traditions and the formation of a new Tatar image. Globalization and enhanced mobility should be noted as contemporary trends with global dimensions that affect the dynamics and specifics of these processes among the Tatars in this region, including their historical memory (Norris 2009: 127-30). In this socio-cultural context, one matter of key importance is the community's physical survival, as their genetic reserve is being tested under the influence of mixed marriages and expanded emigration. All this strengthens the sensitivity of European Tatars to what is happening not only at the local and regional levels, but also on the old continent and in the Tatar world in general (Sirutavičius 2013). What follows quite naturally makes problematic the identification and correlation with patterns from the past that convey stability in the rapidly changing world of the present day (Bairašauskaitė 2009; Czerwonnaja 2017).

Legendary history

As early as the middle of the nineteenth century, as a source of information about the past of the Tatars, scholars collected legendary written and oral testimonies. They also studied Ottoman documents and preserved folklore texts (Muhlinskiy 1857; Tuhan-Baranowski 1896; Krycziński 1938; Borawski and Dubiński 1986; Miśkiewicz 1993). But if the professional approach to these sources analyses them through criteria such as truth versus untruth, objectiv-

ity versus fiction, etc., the concept of historical memory makes it possible to approach them as written fixations of their own legendary accounts of the past, which legitimizes significant moments in the history of the community. In this process, researchers may find themselves in the role of registrars and of conductors of fragments of the collective memory. Through the authority of the recorded text, scholars may place a higher value on these fragments, thus engaging themselves in the social construction of memory.

Examining the historicity of the oral tradition, Jan Vansina points out that historical consciousness operates on two levels only: the beginning and the recent past. The temporal scope of memory is directed to different stages in the formation of ideas about the past, in which the topos of the original sources and the experienced recent past stand out, marking the chronotopes of the legendary history (Vansina 1985: 24). This determines the main narratives of Tatar ethnohistory today: stories about the settlement of Tatars in this region of Europe and stories about the past of the family and tribal genealogies.

Mythology of the settlement: images and characters

Stories about the beginning of the Tatars' legendary history follow the invariant model of the mythology of migrations, representing the movement from the starting point of the origin of the migration to the end point of settlement. Due to the remoteness of the events from the Middle Ages, not enough data about the migrations as a process have been preserved, while information about the departure lands is stored in summarized and symbolic forms. This lack of information is compensated by stories about Tatar settlement in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which build a living mythography up to this day.

The migrant stories develop as cosmology, the establishment of a settlement at new place being the creation and arrangement of a new world with its own demiurge and its own centre (Vansina 1985: 22). A variant of the legend about the origin of the Tatar village of Nemėžis in Lithuania and the popular etymology of its name connects Tatar settlement there with the activities of the great Lithuanian Prince Vytautas:

> *Here was the family castle of Vytautas the Great. The most prominent part of the Tatars was settled in Nemėžis to protect the prince. His wife died here. As a sign of gratitude for the devotion of the Tatars, this land was given to them without boundaries, without being measured. The name*

comes from the Polish word niemeżąna, 'take land without measuring it!', 'unmeasured, immeasurable land'. There is a river called Nemėžanka here. Here everything is connected with the Tatars, all the land belongs to the Tatars. (TK, Nemėžis, 2012.03.20)

In the recorded legendary version, the ruler's residence is understood as an archetype of the centre, around which the foundations of the new Tatar community were built. It emphasizes the close connection between the suzerain and the ancestors, the forefathers and the founders, based on their devotional service and their nobility.

For the local topography, the events of the past and the participation of Vytautas the Great in them acquire a paradigmatic and meaningful character. According to a legend about the founding of the village of Studzianka (Poland), Grand Duke Witold passed through this area and especially liked a place with clean and cold spring water, where they had sunk a small well (Pol. studnia, pl.). Because of this, the Tatars who settled here began to call the settlement Studzianka (Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 231-2). The legend of the origin of the village of Forty Tatars (Lithuania) is also associated with the activities of the great ruler and the settlement of Tatar warriors in the area (ibid.: 2323). A legend about the name of Tatar village of Lukishki (Lith., Lukiškės) in the suburbs of Vilnius, which is considered to be one of the oldest Tatar settlements ('neighbourhood'), is associated with a Tatar who served in the army of Grand Duke Witold and ruled these lands, which were probably granted for devotional service. It is known from documentary data that from 1559 to 1567 Lukishki belonged to two Tatar brothers, the name of the village coming from that of their grandfather Luka, who lived around 1500 (Jakubauskas 2009: 16).

Portrait of Vytautas the Great in the Tatar club in the village of Raižiai (Lithuania - 03.2012)

Tatar settlement in these places is related to Prince Vytautas the Great, a cultural hero who regulates the basic principles in the lives of the newcomers (Giordano 2015: 41-6). The preserved legendary narratives contain etiological elements: the common past of the community explains the heterogeneous origin of the Tatar community, and the local loci are conceived as their originally owned places. At the same time, the Tatars build such an idea of the distant past in which they describe themselves in general terms as loyal warriors who received appropriate reception in the new cultural environment, emphasized in the so-called 'Treatise on Lithuanian Tatars' / 'Risale-i Tatar - i Leh': 'We swore on our swords that we would love the Lithuanians, as during the war they respected us as prisoners and, when we settled on this land, they assured us that this sand and this water and these trees will be common to all of us' (cf. Muhlinsky 1857: 14). This interpretation also motivates the processes of adaptation and assimilation of the Tatars in the Baltic- and Slavic-speaking cultural environment, which would be observed in the near future.

Although the recorded legends about the circumstances of the Tatar settlement are fragmentary, they give reason to assume the existence of an unpreserved and unrecorded epic account of the most important event from the past of the Tatars in this part of Europe: their settlement and the development of their community (Muhlinsky 1857: 15-21, 48; Kryczyński 1938: 93-116). It can be assumed that its main plot concerns a devoted warrior and a noble ruler, who are correlated with famous heroes from the medieval knightly epic.
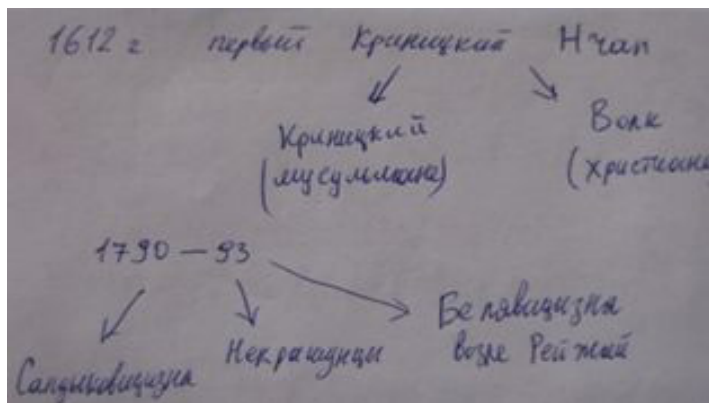

Tatars from the village Keturiasdešimt totorių (Lithuania – 19.03.2012) Photo by V. Yankova

But if the beginning of the settlement is told in condensed form, and the events take place in chronologically indefinite time indicated by 'once', 'long ago', 'six hundred years ago' and in situ, then gradually the legends are historicized, and historical realities appear in them. Some legends refer to specific events and personalities from the seventeenth century and fit into preserved genealogical narratives. This is a version of the legend from the village of Keturiasdešimt totorių (Forty Tatars), according to which the village was founded by four Tatar captains or other officers (Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 233). The legends that connect the Tatar villages of the Podlasie region in Poland with historical events from the seventeenth century are of a similar genealogical nature. According to one of them, in a battle in 1683 a Tatar officer, Samuel Murza Krzeczowski, saved the life of Jan III Sobieski (Polish) / Jonas Sobieskis (Lithuanian) (1629-1696), King of Poland and Prince of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The grateful king promoted him to the rank of colonel and gave him the village of Kruszyniany. In 1688, Jan III Sobieski visited his rescuer, and until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Krzeczowski's descendants showed the chair on which the ruler sat and the old linden tree in the colonel's yard (Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 234). According to another legend from the village of Bohoniki, King Jan III Sobieski endowed his faithful captain with as much land as he could ride around on his horse in one day, a motif popular in etiological legends (ibid.). Thus the preserved traditions connect the past of the community with stories about prestigious origins and shape the fragments of ancestral mythographies.

At the heart of the mythology of settlement and genesis of the Tatar community is the attachment of the Tatar warriors to Prince Vytautas the Great and their loyalty to him (Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016: 30). The figure of the Grand Duke is represented as an ancestor and hero, who plays a fundamental role in their settlement in this European territory (Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 2301; Mickūnaitė 2006: 19496).

Legends about the special attitudes of the Tatars towards the Grand Duke have been preserved since the beginning of the sixteenth century. We know about a request to Sigismund I (1519), in which a religious homage to the death of the Grand Duke is attested (Muhlinsky 1857: 14). Data on the veneration of Vytautas are also found in a treatise by Michalon Litwin (1550), where Vytautas is called 'our hero' and it is pointed out that many places are named after him (Horoshkevich 1994: 80, 91). According to A. Muhlinsky, the Tatars mention Witold with adoration and admiration, tell legends about him and even create their own etymology of his name, associated with the idea of help and support (Muhlinsky 1857: 13).

Genealogy of the genus Krinitsky (by: Eldar Krinitsky- 30. 04. 2016). Photo by V. Yankova

In modern biographical narratives and family memories, Vytautas the Great is presented as an ideal wise statesman, who, with his skilful policy and benevolent attitude towards newcomers, creates favourable conditions for their settlement in a foreign land. In the stories of the beginning, preserved through family memories, Prince Vytautas personifies the earliest period of the Tatar settlement, being a kind of demiurge who lays the foundations of the community in the new cultural environment:

> *In our family there was always a portrait of Prince Vytautas on the wall ... Vytautas was such a wise prince, Lithuanian, Žemaitis; he was the great prince who accepted our ancestors as his own people, and here our ancestors were honoured 600 years ago and up to this day. For our family, Vytautas is the reason for us to be here ... (K. Sh. 22.03.2012)*

Vytautas the Great occupies an important place in the national memory of the peoples who are considered the heirs of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and in today's Lithuania he is regarded as a national hero (Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 2301; Mickūnaitė 2006; Sužiedėlis 2011). Therefore, the Tatars' respect for Witold should also be seen in the context of the Lithuanian national narrative. There is evidence that the myth of him as a hero and as a saint spread as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century (Nikžentaitis 2000: 18 - 19). The era of Vytautas's rule is still considered the 'golden age' of Lithuania. This is the

time when the state reached the apogee of its power and its greatest territorial size, which spread from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. At the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, when the Grand Duchy of Lithuania suffered territorial losses, the images of Witold and other great Lithuanian princes and their role in strengthening statehood were updated as an expression of 'historical nostalgia' for the lost greatness (Mickūnaité 2004).

The basis of the Lithuanian national narrative is the romantic image of Lithuania as the 'land of princes' and the 'land of heroes', and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is presented with mythologized symbols. The growth of the cult of Vytautas in the period between the First and Second World Wars was inspired by the patriotic-nationalist movements for the establishment of an independent Lithuanian Republic (1918). This new beginning sought its ground in antiquity: the myths of the 'golden age', of the 'great princes', of the 'historical battles with the Crusaders' are updated (Čepaitienė 2013). Contemporary researchers add another reason for Witold's heroism – the need for an appropriate historical model to legitimize the authoritarian political regime of President Antanas Smetona (1926-1940) (Vilimas 2004: 516). The culmination of this process came in 1930, when, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the death of the Grand Duke, a nationwide memorial campaign was carried out (Nikžentaitis 2000: 21 – 31; Mickūnaitė 2004; Jankevičiūtė 2010: 158–180). The organizing committee for the celebrations proclaimed the image of Witold as a symbol of a great ruler who united all his possessions in a free and independent state with an ancient historical tradition and his centre (Nikžentaitis 2000: 27-8). It was at this point that 'Great' was added to the name of Vytautas. At the same time, the cult of the Battle of Grundwald from 1410 emerged, the historical memory of this event also becoming part of the homage to the Grand Duke (Vilimas 2004: 517).

In the context of these processes at the beginning of the 21st century, the historical figure of Grand Duke Witold and the state he ruled are perceived as a symbolic element of the historical heritage of the Tatars and are updated in the political uses of the past (Cohen 1985). In post-communist Lithuania, Tatar leaders actively confirmed the idea of their ancestors' loyalty to the Lithuanian state and nation. As an expression of the Tatar community's respect for Vytautas the Great, a monument to the Prince was built in Raizai, the only settlement in Lithuania with a dominant Tatar population and an ancient mosque, called the 'capital of Lithuanian Tatars' (Račius and Bairašauskaitė 2016: 30).

Another historical figure who does not have the magnitude of Witold in the national memory, but for the modern Tatars acquires increasingly prominent symbolic dimensions, is Hadji Giray / Girey, Khan of Crimea (ca. 1428-1456; 1456-1466) and founder of the Crimean Tatar dynasty, the Giray. According to a semi-legendary account by Mihalon Litvin, Hadji Giray was born in Trakai (Horoshkevich 1994: 64). The hypothesis of the Hungarian Turkologist Gyula Németh connects the adoption of the dynastic name Giray to events surrounding the birth of Khan Hadji Giray in historical Lithuania (Ivanics 2012: 479). The oral legend part of this information is supported by arguments from written historical documents about the relations between the Crimean Khanate and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Muhlinsky 1857: 57). Today, the suggestion for the birthplace of the founder of the Tatar dynasty is associated with an emblematic topos in the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: Trakai, where the ruler's castle is located, once guarded by Tatars and Karaites. The image of the dynasty's first creator multiplied his greatness and power and legitimized the Tatars' status and affiliation to this place. By placing a monument to Hadji Giray in Trakai, actions are taken for a symbolic return, a re-mastering of his place, centred around the figure of the mythologized ancestor of the community.

It is necessary to specify that, according to modern sociological research, the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the mass consciousness of Lithuanians occupies a significant place, but not the most important place, and that it is compatible with the ideas of civil society, an independent Lithuanian state and European values (Čepaitienė 2013: 3823). Its outlines for the Tatars in Lithuania are very different. For them, the image of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania has a mobilizing and consolidating character, being complemented by the idea of its integration and of a polyethnic model, sometimes even being claimed as a prototype of the European Union (Strumiłło 2008).

Genealogy and family traditions

Genealogy has many ideological and symbolic dimensions (Rose 1996). It focuses on the diachronic projections of ancestral memory and the role of the genus around which this memory is formed, as well as their possible reconstruction and arrangement. The interest in genealogy has its traditions among certain strata of European Tatars. It is possible to assume that this is a relic of inherited notions of a united community with its own privileged elite (Chazbijewicz 1993).

According to historical research from the beginning of the sixteenth century, among Lithuanian Tatars there was a desire to prove their noble origins, which affirmed their rights as landowners and created a precondition for ascent in the social hierarchy (Dumin 2010: 17-18). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, under the influence of the expanding contacts with Crimea, the addition of the title 'Mirza' to the surname spread among the Tatar aristocracy as a kind of fashion (ibid.: 19). The interest in genealogy became especially active after the accession of the lands inhabited by Lithuanian Tatars to the Russian Empire in 1793–to 1795 (Muhlinsky 1857: 389). Then they, like all other nobles, had to prove their noble origins with documents. In the nineteenth century, as a result of the liberal attitude of the authorities, almost all Lithuanian Tatar clans had noble rights, i.e. about two hundred families. However, these processes stimulated an additional resource for mobilization, which is also aimed at understanding the ancestral past. Then the coats of arms of the Lithuanian Tatars were formed. This 'need for genealogy' leads to the emergence of pseudo-historical legends linking a family with a prestigious Tatar past (Dumin 2010: 19-20). It is significant that, as an echo of the interest in the Orient and the ideology of Sarmatism, in the second half and end of the seventeenth century many Lithuanian, Belarusian and Polish clans linked their origins with the Tatars, justifying this through semi-legendary and imaginary testimonies. It is known that, at the end of the –eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries the 'Tatar titles' or Ulan and Mirza/Murza) and Tatar origins were associated with having a particularly high rank among the Polish aristocracy.

A reflection of the vital public interest in genealogy are the family legends that give reasons for their aristocratic origins and connect them with semi-legendary, imaginary events of the past and with the highly valued Tatar past (Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 2412). In the ancestral legends recorded in the twentieth century, historical facts are mixed with legendary motifs in which the memory of past generations is located between the tangible time horizon of the heirs and the generalized contours of the mythological beginnings. Such is Major Amurat Bielak's story about his great-grandfather Kara Mirza, who fought against Prince Witold, being wounded and captured along with his horde. But the merciful ruler gave him land, called him Bielak (White), unlike the old name Kara (Black), and thus turned him into a faithful warrior (Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 242). The genealogical legend of the Bielak clan is a fragment of the mythology of the settlement and repeats its prototype. The image of Witold

in it also corresponds to the model: he is a merciful ruler, creator of the family name and family foundations. A material testimony to the reality of the past is the bow of Kara Mirza, the 'material memory' of domestic history that was turned into a relic for his descendants. It can be assumed that such legendary stories formed a significant fund in the oral history of many families and clans, being kept alive until the late 1970s.

Genealogical stories are a product of the communicative memory of generations: historical experience functions through them within the framework of the individual biography. It is known that for centuries military service has been a traditional profession among settlers from the east (Muhlinsky 1857: 46-7; Kryczyński 1938: 136-46; Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 27-183). It is not by chance that the motifs for military service and the military genre are too often found in the family legends and biographical stories, and famous commanders with high military ranks are pointed out as role models. In terms of family memory, the Tatar narrative and the participation of ancestors in it are rethought from n the perspective of national and European history. The past, especially the family's heroic military past, is perceived as a value and as a reason for pride. The memories are dominated by heroic patterns, reproduced through popular historical knowledge, printed publications and visual documentation. Such an attitude towards the past plays an important ethno-consolidating role for the Tatar community and contributes to the implementation of policies of recognition by the macro-society. In other words, the consistently constructed legendary Tatar narrative connects the mythologized past of the community with its present in order to legitimize the modern social order (Giordano 2015).

Some tribal studies, published and widely popularized during the so-called 'Tatar Revival' (1920-1930s), have had a serious impact on the interest in Tatar genealogy. The critical scientific approach to them and the revision of their basic concepts and arguments do not significantly affect their prestige in popular opinion. Their reception is a good example of the constructive nature of the images of the past and their updating for modern purposes. For example, in search of information about the distant past of his family in his book *On Lithuanian Muslims* (1896) Maciej Tuhan-Baranowski created the theory of the Caucasian (Dagestani) origin of the Muslim elite (the gentry) in Lithuania, which has long been rethought, despite which it still finds its modern followers (Borawski and Dubiński 1986: 243-4). Analogically, the work on *Emblems of the Tatar clans in Poland* (1929, 1986) by Dziedulewicz has its uncritical successors, who search

it and find within it their necessary identification with prestigious ancestors (Dziedulewicz 1929).

Today, genealogical research among the Tatars is the subject of increased public interest. They include professionals but mostly amateurs; clan genealogies and family coats of arms are created, while biographical memories convey the motif of the family's prestigious and noble origins. In most cases, this activity is preceded by work in the archives and a reference to Dziedulewicz's book. Apart from having a historical and documentary basis, it also rests on uncritical personal interpretation of the sources and the construction of facts and events from the past. The rationale for such an approach is the popular understanding of special origins as an expression of social prestige, a source of pride or other social needs. This necessity for elitism, a noble origin, belonging to a privileged class and distinctiveness can be seen as a reaction against unification and is what motivates the modern world interest in genealogies (Novak 1971).

Conclusion

The main body of historical memory among the Tatars in Lithuania is due to their indirect, assimilated, retransmitted experience and knowledge, acquired through various memory media, and not to the direct life and sensory experiences of those who remember (Assmann and Conrad 2010: 49; Assmann 2011). This largely determines the intensity of the processes of the 'invention' of ideas about the Tatar past today (cf. Hobsbawm 1983). The period of nearly a hundred years during which Tatar ethnohistory was formed constructed an idea of the past as heroic and dignified. In modern ideas of the Tatars about themselves, the past is understood as a heroic story, as 'heroic annals' for 'great men' (Hartog 2002), as a reason for pride, and the ancestors are seen as heroes, warriors and nobles. This attitude to the past as something of value plays an important consolidating role for the Tatar community and supports the policies of recognition by the macro-society.

The mythology of Tatar settlement in the region is one of a heroic 'history of kings and battles' of great men, and in it the history is shown as a 'metaphor of mythical realities' (Hartog 2002). Central to such a narrative of the past is the demiurgic role of Witold, forefather and hero of the ancestors, perceived as a noble and loyal warrior. Toponyms, toponymic sagas and etiological legends point to local versions of this mythological text and outline the topography of Tatar settlement in the region and its various traces in local memory. They

constructed a more complete and harmonious account of the genesis of the Tatar community in these lands. It is obvious that in its main elements (plot, characters) Tatar mythography follows the trajectory of the dominant national narrative while emphasizing the Tatars' heroic and dignified participation in it. The semantics of the heroic notion of Tatar ethnohistory has become a justification for national unity in the present and a guarantor of its common future. This heroic past is the focal idea that unites every nation. As Renan reminds us: 'Heroic past, great personalities, fame (the real one), this is the public capital on which a national idea rests' (cf. Assmann 2004: 174).

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