

## ARCHITECTURE OF POLISH TATARS - LOCAL IDENTITY AND HERITAGE

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### **Abstract**

*Poland has very few historical architectural structures representing the culture of Islam. Islamic influences, especially reflected in the clothing and armament of the 17th century, and the existence of few but very well integrated communities of assimilated Tatars (the Lipka Tatars or the Lipkas) contributed to the creation of unique urban development and sacral development in the east of Poland. The villages of Kruszyń and Bohoniki are places of special importance where works of art and architecture of religious and social values were created. The most important structures were mosques whose form synthesised Islamic architecture, local building traditions and the culture of Poland's Eastern Borderlands. That architecture combined various cultures but retained its identity. Being also well adapted to the local climate, it is considered part of the landscape and, in a broader context, part of the cultural landscape. Houses of worship and mosques erected in Tatar villages were much less noticeable and constructed in a smaller scale than Catholic and Orthodox churches from the same period. However, Tatar architecture constitutes an integral, even if not very well-known, part of the multi-cultural tradition of Poland's old Eastern Borderlands. The article attempts to analyse the role of architecture in shaping and supporting the local identity of Polish Tatars. It also verifies whether elements of that architecture are re-interpreted in present-day projects. Furthermore, the article seeks an answer to the question whether local architecture offers an alternative to dynamic changes transforming both the landscape and the people.*

**Keywords:** Polish Tatars; Architecture; Context; Genius loci; Mapping; Heritage

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### **Introduction**

Modern Poland is almost monoethnic and monoreligious, nevertheless, even casual studies of the history of the country prove that it used to be inhabited by many different nationalities and ethnic groups characterised with a variety of religious practices, which also with the lapse of time were the subject of numerous reformatory changes, nonconformist movements and schisms. Apart from Jews, Armenians, Karaims or Germans, in the territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth we can also find the settlements of the Lithuanian Tatars (the Lipka Tatars), who, despite a relatively small community, marked their presence in the Polish culture [1]. These immigrants of Turkish origin and political refugees from the Golden Horde were most probably the first dissidents from the East to settle on the European

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borderlands. Numerous borrowings (sometimes direct and sometimes indirect) from the art of Islam found in the Polish culture originate from the Tatars, and then from the Turks.

These borrowings were partly connected with the influences of the art and culture of the Ottoman Empire, demonstrated in particular in the armament, clothing, hair styles and interior design, which reached the peak in the second half of the 17th century as a result of the on-going wars and well as intensive diplomatic contacts and trade. Cultural legacy of the Polish Tatars, in particular the architecture of a few still preserved buildings in Poland, was the scope of research presented in this work. The mere fact of Tatar settlements, perceived as Muslims adhering to totally different cultural norms, was an unprecedented phenomenon in the Eastern part of Europe. In figure 1, we have as an example the “Imaginary Portrait of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka (from 1735-1740)”, from the collection of the Museum of the Palace of King Jan III in Wilanów, (Fig. 1). which has a wide range of borrowings typical of Polish culture of the 17th century lea: Eastern kontos (a long robe, usually reaching below the knee, with a set of decorative buttons). down the front with long, wide sleeves) and armament against the background of French furniture and architecture.



**Fig. 1.** Imaginary portrait of Stanisław Antoni Szczuka (of 1735-1740);  
Collections of the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów

For that reason, the analysis of the unique architecture of Polish Tatars [2] and its function in strengthening their identification with the place of residence, with the local community and the country they have been living in for centuries, now seems an important scientific task. The interviews we conducted for the purposes of writing this text show the image of a Tatar who is and feels a Polish national, speaks Polish, reads Arabic, prays in a mosque. Their families, interpersonal and intergenerational relations are very important to them. The present-day Polish Tatar fits in with the modern world.

The Tatar settlements in the old Polish regions have a long and complex history, dating back to the second half of the 13th century when the first Tatar settlements appeared in Halych Ruthenia and Terra Cracoviensis. 1324 is the year in which Tatar villages were mentioned to

exist in Lithuania where Tatar settlement developed the most quickly, also due to activities of the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Vytautas the Great, who invited Tatars to Zadniestrze after accepting homage paid by Khan Mamai's son. Tatars came to Lithuania in family and tribal groups, the so-called 'uluses'. Lithuania also became the place of settlement for some of the Tatar troops fighting for the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Battle of Grunwald (1410). The Tatar settlement peaked in the 1430s due to inflows of both prisoners of war and allies of subsequent rulers of Lithuania.

Those settlements disappeared as a result of later developments, whereas the Tatars in Terra Cracoviensis and Halych Ruthenia underwent assimilation. According to the 1528 census, the Lithuanian population included 3,500 Tatars with families; after half a century, there were approx. 7,000 Tatars in the whole territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth [3]. It reflects a relatively limited scale of the first stage of the Tatar settlement which ended with dramatic developments of the first quarter of the 17th, culminating in the demolition of the mosque in Trakai by a crowd of pilgrim zealots.

The second wave of settlement, resulting from the Polish–Ottoman Wars, was of a military rather than tribal and family nature. Lesser Poland, Volhynia and Podolia became settlement destinations for the whole Tatar troops (mounted companies) with their commanders, granted land from special royal domains (*bona mensae regiae* in Latin), e.g. near Brześć and Grodno in Podlachia, in return for overdue soldier wages (Fig. 2). Colonel Samuel Mirza Krzeczowski and his soldiers received grants of land in the villages of Kruszyniany, Łużany and Białogorce, captains of horse Bogdan Kieński and Gaza Sielecki – in the villages of Bohoniki, Drahle and Malawicze, whereas others settled in Żylice, Grzebień near Odelsk and Kamionka near Sokółka. Based on the privileges received, the Tatars could buy land, build mosques and hire Christian staff.

It gave them certain religious and ethnic autonomy, as reflected in the construction around 1679 of mosques in Bohoniki, Kruszyny and Studzianka and in a gradual increase in the Tatar population, resilient to the subsequent Partitions of Poland (in 1772–1795) or their far-reaching consequences. In 1897, there were 13,000 Tatars in Poland's former [4] territory. The number dropped to around 5,500 [5] due to migrations to countries such as Turkey and the United States and as a result of casualties during World War I followed by the Polish–Soviet War (1919–1921). Between World Wars I and II, in the territory of the Second Polish Republic, Tatars mostly resided in the following voivodships: Wileńskie, Nowogródzkie and Białostockie. After Poland's new borders were determined in the aftermath of World War II, a major share of Tatar settlements was located in the territory of the USSR, in the Lithuanian, Byelorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics, transformed into independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990.

The Tatars settled and lived in the area currently included in several relatively young states, formerly located in the Eastern Borderlands of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the then most unstable and non-formed region of Central and Eastern Europe. The conflicting influences of Turkey, Poland and Russia were reflected in violent changes, liquid frontiers, migrations, displacement waves and the overall instability. Owing to the co-existence, not always peaceful, of various national, religious, language and cultural communities, given the simultaneous 'non-existence' or – at best – weak organisation of the state, the Tatars, like the Jews, were *de facto* left on their own or dependent on the capricious protectorate of magnates (such as the Radziwiłł and Sapieha families), or exposed to various forms of oppression. In extreme cases, such oppression turned into violence, e.g. raids carried out by "local Polish nobles accompanied by crowds of their peasants and servants" on camps of Tatar fugitives near Zambrów and Łomża in April 1656 [6]. According to the sociologist Jan Sowa, whatever was created in the political culture of Poland was anarchical [7].

Poland developed no permanent and well-organised state institutions – in the Eastern Borderlands, the state both existed and did not exist at all [7]. The sign of its presence was not

efficient administration of eastern land; rather, it was brute force solely intended as a tool of predatory exploitation of natural and human resources or ad hoc punitive expeditions against invaders and rebels. Both forms of the state presence were archaic in nature – the settlement of Poland’s eastern frontier regions did not involve scholars or educated civil servant but only military commanders and stewards whose main task was rapid and violent exploitation of the new land, interwoven with continuous wars and raids.



**Fig. 2.** Mosque locations in Poland, Lithuania and Belarus. Outline map of Poland before the Partitions, from the period between World Wars I and II and the current territory, with place names.  
Source: Agnieszka Janowska and Mohammad Mohammadi.

Incorporated into the Kingdom of Poland in 1569, Ukraine neighbored on the Wild Plains and Zaporizhzhia, practically under no administration. Whereas Western Europe developed towards organised, bourgeoisie-based societies, Poland – despite its relationships with Western Europe – remained an agricultural country, politically dominated by nobility and with a marginal role played by bourgeoisie. Thus, the dispersed urban structure of those areas, was mostly formed by villages and settlements, with a shortage of large cities supporting integration with a transport system. As a matter of fact, the Tatars functioned on the periphery of a peripheral society.

### **The architecture of the Polish Tatars and the importance of context**

In this context, the architecture of the Polish Tatars appears as a unique phenomenon and, simultaneously, an integral part of the multi-faceted culture of Poland’s Eastern Borderlands. The issue of local traditions in construction [8] is a multi-faceted topic, especially

the contextuality of space with historical connotations that should be diagnosed and understood with reference to local conditions, created by places, people and structures, whether secular or sacral.

Seeking the nature of context with regard to the architecture of the Polish Tatars, the focus should be on sacral buildings. Continuous interactions between the three religions and different beliefs resulted in the creation of a unique spatial code used by Catholics, Muslims and members of the Orthodox Church. For small, local Tatar communities, such facilities are of special importance – for centuries, mosques and houses of worship bore testimony to the ancestors’ culture and religion while reflecting the times of their creation. If we look at the phenomenon from the present perspective, we may consider its interpretation, taking into account the historical conditions or the concept of *genius loci*.

The place, location and the resulting form become the links between the past culture and the present. Causing that ‘architectural history can be defined as having a multidisciplinary base located at the interstices of architecture [9]’. The quotation explicitly refers to the combination in the architecture of the Polish Tatars of motives rooted in Islam, Polish Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

Remnants of the passing of subsequent historical periods, states and architectural styles include structures, reminiscences and accounts, signs. Each of them may become a sort of artefact, bearing witness to history on the one hand and to its inevitable transient nature, defined in terms of buildings created, on the other hand. The past signs in the architecture of the Polish Tatars can be interpreted on the basis of perceiving the past as a form of memory rather than ballast, difficult to diagnose. The process was aptly diagnosed by Dylan Trigg, who wrote that ‘without the memory of places, memory itself would no longer have a role to play in our conscious lives’ [10].

### The architecture of “muślimi” – the Lipka Tatars

The Tatars came to Lithuania as soldiers and military service – in addition to breeding horses and crafts – was the occupation of most of them until the collapse of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Migrants from the Kipchak steppes and the Crimea brought with them their own culture and customs but – through interactions with the local people and exposed to influences of the Western civilisation – adapted to the new conditions. The original features were maintained in issues directly or indirectly connected with religion. The architecture of Tatar houses was no different from that of local houses; moreover, they were erected by local builders "as sanctified by Polish tradition" [11] using traditional methods and materials. (Fig. 3) shows two traditional houses in Kruszyniany.



Fig. 3. Traditional houses in Kruszyniany. Photograph by Maciej Janowski taken 2020

This is a linear village of high density and well-preserved development consisting of houses and farm buildings with uniform log structures. Their free urban system gives an impression of architecture intertwined with elements of the landscape: household orchards and meadows first and then the surrounding forests linked to the Knyszyn Forest.

As a distinctive feature of a Tartar house were muhirs, or quotations from the Koran, usually hung in the corner of the room where the prayer books and the Koran were kept. In addition, a quote from the Koran was usually hung above the door; that custom, described by Stanisław Kryczyński, prevailed until today [12].

As in the case of residential buildings, mosques (mosze) were also built by non-Tatar craftsmen, including Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish carpenters, who introduced sacral architecture elements of other religions. The already non-existent mosques in Lachowicze, Kleck and Niekraszuńce resembled Catholic churches with a tapering tower in the central part of the façade. The spatial arrangement and the proportions of the mosque in Osmołowo refer to the architecture of synagogues in the Eastern Borderlands, whereas the mosque in Słonim, with its three onion-shaped towers, is almost a faithful copy of an Orthodox church. At the same time, the mosques in Mir (1809), Łukiszki and Ive (Iwie) show distinct influences of the architecture of the 18th-century wooden town halls and granaries with two-storey arcades on the façade. The four-storey minaret of the mosque in Widze (1930–1934), whose form referred directly to the architecture of town hall towers, serves as the most evident example. The smallest mosques resembled peasants' cabins, distinguished by a steep hip roof with a small tower [13].

The forms and sizes of mosques depended on the financial capacities of Muslim communities, the benefactors' wealth and skills of carpenters who in their vernacular, 'folk' understanding interpreted local patterns and copies them to the culture of Lithuanian and Polish Tatars. The Tatars, who traditionally engaged in military professions, lacked architects, carpenters and craftsmen. Having no experience in this type of works, they contracted the services of local builders. (Fig. 4) shows the Mosque of Dowbuciszki (now: Belarus), built in 1735. This is one of the few mosques whose forms show marked influences of Ottoman architecture: a square-shaped floor plan projection, a central dome and a corner minaret.

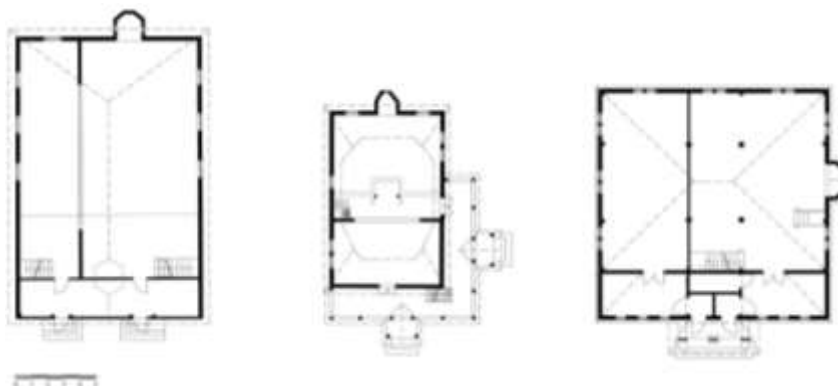


**Fig. 4.** The mosque in Dowbuciszki (at present: Belarus), built in 1735.

Source: <https://smorgon.org/photos/picture.php?292/category/14>, access: 30.12.2021

The construction time span is also important: Catholic churches could be built with no formal obstacles, yet it sometimes took many years to complete them, the construction of new mosques or the renovation of the old ones lasted even longer as restrictions or bans were periodically imposed by secular and religious authorities, i.e. in the 1600-1615. This explains why few mosques were erected in the Counter-Reformation and the following years (Fig. 5).

The process resulted in the emergence of two interesting architectural phenomena: the mosque in Kruszyniany and the development of an original, 'local' form of the Polish Tatars' Mosque. Those are structures with a square-shaped or similar floor plan projection, with an accentuated mihrab, with a hip roof surmounted by a dome-shaped small tower. That form shaping trend also includes the mosques in Sorok Tatory (1815), Nowogródek (1855), Bohoniki (around 1900), Niemież (1903–1909) as well as, partly, in Studzianka and, already mentioned, Widze, where an unknown architect skilfully combined the town-hall style with a central projection structure.



**Fig. 5.** Plans of the mosques in: Rejże, Dowbuciszki and Widze.

Source: the author's own drawing by Maciej Janowski and Mohammad Mohammadi.

Both phenomena synthesise elements of cultures present in the belt from Lithuania to the Wild Plains. The synthesis is characteristic of areas penetrated by various influences, customs, narratives and traditions, including in construction. It is particularly visible in the mosque in Kruszyniany, built in the 18th century (first mentioned in parish sources in 1782), although some form of a house of worship might exist after 1679.

### **The mosque in Kruszyniany. The form and meaning**

The shape of the mosque in Kruszyniany (Fig. 6) resembles that of the two-towered Latin churches shown in (Fig. 7) of the 18th and early 19th centuries, as well as those of the united churches of the same period.

The mosque in Kruszyniany in figure 7, thanks to the restoration work coordinated by the local community, it was possible to preserve the original nature of both the architecture and the environment. Thus, there was a grassy yard surrounded by a stone wall, resembling a mound, and a nearby unpaved road leading to the dump.

The few Islamic elements in the mosque in Kruszyniany include dome-shaped cupolas with a pinnacle, an extended knob and a crescent, surmounting the façade towers and the small tower in the middle of the roof. Their shape suggests both domes of mosques and onion-like cupolas of Orthodox churches. Such a three-tower solution is unique in comparison with other mosques in Poland, only found in the subsequently built mosque in Słonim, destroyed in 1944.

The specific feature of Tatar mosques is the division of the prayer hall (haram) into a larger part intended for men and a smaller one for women. The two parts were separated with a wooden wall with an elongated hole, placed along the longitudinal axis, as in Rejże, or the lateral axis, as in Kruszyniany, Bohoniki and Dowbuciszki. Both parts had separate entrances; the mosque in Kruszyniany has the female entrance on the representative façade. That division, described by the anonymous author of *Risale-i-Tatar-i-Lech* (1558), was attributed by Stanisław Kryczyński to domestic customs of the Kipchak and Ufa Tatars [14].



**Fig. 6.** Kruszyniany: 1 mosque, 2 mizar, 3 the Polish Tatars' Muslim Education and Culture Centre in Kruszyniany.  
Source: the author's own drawing bases on: inventoryzations, by Maciej Janowski, Agnieszka Janowska and Mohammad Mohammadi.



**Fig. 7.** The mosque in Kruszyniany. Photograph by Maciej Janowski taken 2020



Without determining that issue, it must be noted that the division can also be found in synagogues, Orthodox and Uniate churches (Fig. 8a). In a less strict form, the custom of separating women's and men's seats was also practised in Catholic churches (Fig. 8b). Therefore, the Tatars' original customs were consistent with the customs and traditions of the communities living in Poland's Eastern Borderlands.

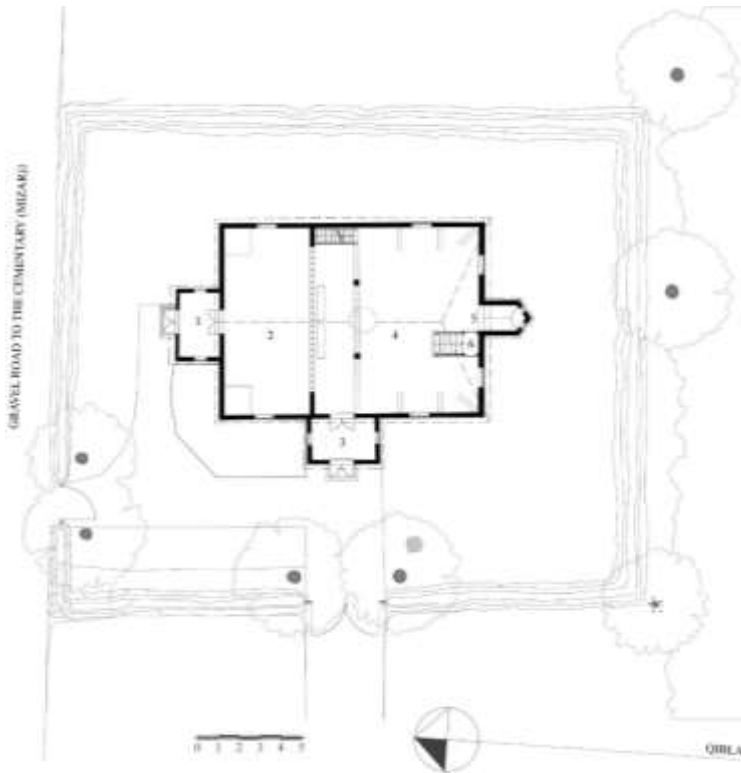


**Fig. 8.** a. Post-Uniate Orthodox church in Dudzicze in Lithuania (1780) and b. catholic church in Mścibów in Lithuania made by Teofil Pycz. Source: Zygmunt Gloger, *Budownictwo drzewne i wyroby z drzewa w dawnej Polsce*, (Warsaw: Druk Wł. Łazarskiego, 1907): 149 and 151

It was also the case with the traditional building methods used in the construction of mosques. That in Kruszyniany was erected as a dovetail log building, on a low field stone foundation. The building method was applied in the architecture of Podlachian houses, but the mosque walls had shuttering on both sides with vertical boards with fine slatting and were surmounted by prominent crowning cornices, as in the case of the quadrilateral towers of the façade. Similar finish was used in the subsequently built Saint Archangel Michael Church in Trześcianka. A more modest cornice closes mihrab, whose oblique walls have square windows, sized and arranged in a manner characteristic of Podlachian houses.

The motif is present in Trześcianka nearby, as is the decoration of corners with shuttering with geometric ornaments. The mosque in Kruszyniany was equipped with a more 'distinguished' wooden imitation of rustication, primarily found in public buildings, e.g. the town hall in Bielsko Podlaskie designed by Jan Sękowski (1776–1780) and the no longer extant town hall in Siemiatycze (1772) designed by Szymon Bogumił Zug. Magnificent rustication also characterised the Branicki Palace in Białystok (extended from 1728 to 1771).

The interior of the mosque in Kruszyniany, equally modest as the exterior, was divided into the female and male parts. The part intended for men, in the south wall, as mentioned before, includes mihrab, next to a six-step minbar, probably dating back to the 19th century (Fig. 9) and (Fig. 10). It is covered by a low, four-slope canopy topped with a crescent on three spheres. On the walls made from horizontal unprocessed boards, there are muhirs – charts or embroidered fabrics with prayers and quotes from the Koran in Arabic language.



**Fig. 9.** The plan of the mosque in Kruszyniany:  
1 - the entrance for women; 2 - the women's hall; 3 - the entrance for men; 4 - the men's hall; 5 – mihrab;  
6 - minbar. Source: the author's own inventory measurements. Drawing by Agnieszka Janowska,  
and Mohammad Mohammadi.



**Fig. 10.** The haram interior of the mosque in Kruszyniany. Mihrab and minbar in the part for men

In addition to minbar and carpets, those are the sole decorative elements of the interior, which was consistent with the tradition in Tatar mosques, as confirmed by the only preserved 18th-century image of haram in the mosque in Vilnius by Franciszek Smuglewicz (1781) and by subsequent photographs (Fig. 11).



**Fig. 11.** Franciszek Smuglewicz, haram in the mosque in Vilnius, 1781  
Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw).

The location of the mosque in Kruszyniany is as modest as it is significant. Surrounded by trees, it is situated in the centre of the village, by the road to Muslim cemetery (mizar) located in the east of Kruszyniany. According to an Islamic requirement – qibla – its main axis points to the Kaaba in Mecca, as those of the other Tatar mosques. It is surrounded by a low, mound-like wall made of field stones, determining the outline of a grass courtyard, equivalent to the traditional sahn but with no place for ritual ablutions (hauz and shardirvan).

The location devoid of all ostentation and the semi-natural lie of the land are unique in comparison with other sacral structures in the region – the mosque premises form an integral part of the landscape, connecting with the nearby forest containing mizar, whereas the mosque itself is no landmark in the village. That nature is carefully cultivated by the local Tatar community, participating in subsequent renovation works [15].

The mosque location cannot be considered irrespective of its specific spatial context. As an example of a harem interior, figure 11 shows a painting by Franciszek Smuglewicz, in which details are given from the interior of the Moscow Harem in Vilnius, 1781 (found in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw). The thickness of the window recess and the mihrab located in a semicircular arched niche suggest that the mosque was made of brick or stone, while accounts claim that it was built as a wooden structure. According to unreliable data, there were mosques built of "enormous stones" at the mouth of the Tiasmyn River flowing into the Dnieper and in Niemirów. No images of these have survived, and later brick/stone mosques were built by 1899 in Minsk and in Kaunas (1930–1932).

The road leading to the mosque, lined with trees, as well as the natural landscape are supposed to facilitate achieving peace and calm, as in the case of mizar where the state of contemplation is inspired by simply passing through the gate to the freely developed green areas, integral to the necropolis (Fig. 12).

As in the case of Tatar cemeteries or cemeteries of other ethnicities, stakes formed integral parts of the landscape. Initially, they were placed near the mosques; later, sanitary regulations forced their relocation to the outskirts of villages, on wooded hills, and enclosure, in a more or less formal way. In Kruszyniany, it is an embankment of field stones, in Bohoniki – a brick wall. On gravestones, freely arranged among the trees, there are Arabic, Polish and Russian inscriptions.



**Fig. 12.** The mizars in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki.  
Photograph by Agnieszka Janowska taken 2020

As already mentioned, the mosque in Kruszyniany represents one of the main components of the village. Due to historical conditions, it was located by the road. The whole spatial development of the establishment is a typical arrangement where most of the buildings were situated by the main road. The mosque is not the main landmark; nevertheless, combined with the nearby mizar, it counterbalances the main composition axis. The location of the building of worship in the village structure, combined with the existing green areas and the landscape, gives the place characteristics of a space where ‘architecture’ shall be deemed as a signifier. On the one hand, it is a symbol of the past and on the other hand, a signifier of the impact of the history on the present times.

This kind of spatial discourse gives both the building and the landscape the importance of separate forms that become signs of the past on the one hand and allow their protection and continuation on the other. Despite the adverse effects of time, the local Tatar community fought to preserve the memory and heritage of their ancestors, respecting the current principles of Conservation Science [16-23]. Using modern processes and technologies, people have made efforts to maintain the structure and urban form of the mosque and mizar in their original state (Fig. 13). Restoration and construction work on the mosque building was carried out in 1992 and 1993, the restoration concept being created by Barbara Tomecka, Białystok.



Fig. 13. The mosque in Kruszyniany. Photograph by Adam Nadolny taken 2021.

A certain phenomenon in the community of Kruszyniany is the meticulous restoration of the history saved in the buildings and the surroundings. Such a form of shaping the cultural landscape reflects the strong attachment of the Polish Tatars to their heritage. The cultural landscape of the place can be defined in two ways. On the one hand, there are structures and spaces generating tourist traffic; on the other hand, the generation of such activities increases the popularity of the structures, at the same time promoting the local culture and architecture. The Tatars in Kruszyniany have resisted to the present-day temptation – the mass social function of a monument based on popular beliefs and simple cultural clichés rather than on the culture and in-depth historical knowledge.

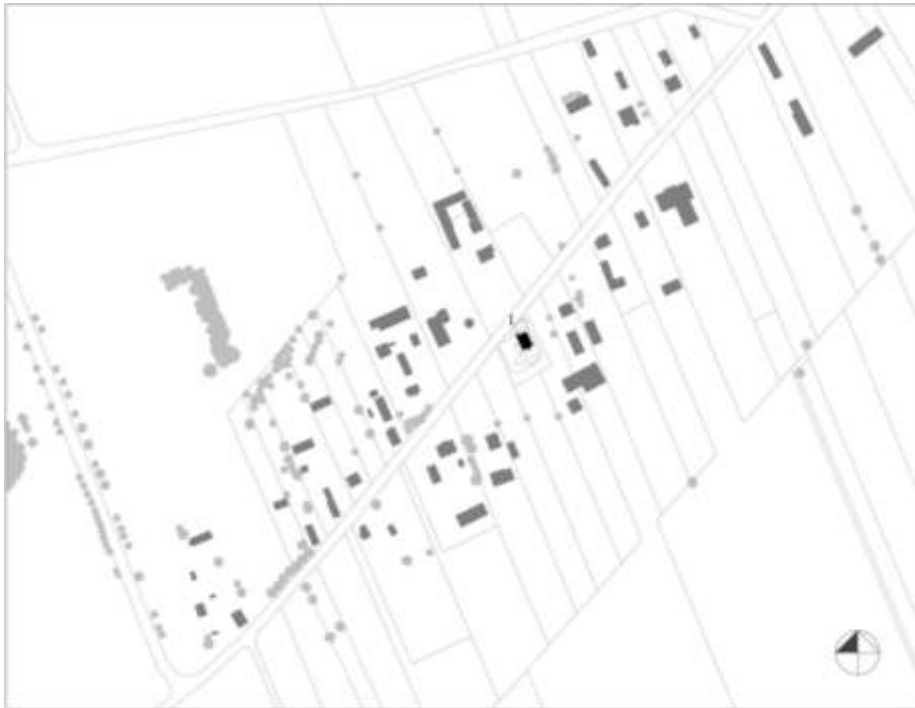
The mosque in Kruszyniany is protected in accordance with the old art of architectural conservation based on the power of imagination supported by knowledge, capable of carrying the human mind to distant past periods while fulfilling religious functions. By the virtue of the legal protection of historical buildings in Poland of 2012, the regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski, both a mosque and mizar gained the status of a historical monument.

### **The mosque in Bohoniki. The context, form, development plans**

A different approach to the structure protection method is adopted with regard to the mosque in Bohoniki built around 1900. In the 1970s, its façades were painted green and the hip roof together with an onion-like tower were covered with sheet zinc, replaced with wood shingles as late as 1985. The nearby maples and lindens, the orchard surrounding the mosque and a wooden paling made its environment look like the neighbouring residential buildings. Subsequent renovations were carried out rather inconsistently; on the one hand, the roofing was restored to wood shingles – a traditional roofing material for most mosques, e.g. those in Łukiszki, Iwie (currently covered by sheet metal), Łowczyce, Nowogródek and Widze.

According to iconographic accounts, the dome-shaped mosque in Dowbuciszki also has wood shingle roofing. On the other hand, the green colour of the façade was replaced by crude wood, subsequently stained brown in an unskilful manner. The lindens and the orchard trees were cut and replaced with a large rectangular lawn and then with a quasi-park garden, with broad winding paths made from smooth stones surrounding the mosque building and with multi-coloured flowerbeds. Such an environment has no equivalent in the traditions of Podlachia; neither does it take account of a broader context or genius loci. Rather, it is an attempt to give a different, more representative meaning to the simple mosque building (Fig. 14).





**Fig. 14.** Plan sytuacyjny Bohonik: 1 mosque.

From the point of view of heritage protection (a status of a historical monument in Poland), the structure is consistent with mainstream protection activities; however, the difference in the present-day images of the mosques in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki definitely underpins the measures taken in Kruszyniany, preserving, as far as possible, the initial condition of the building and, first and foremost, maintaining the original nature of the place (Figs. 15 and 16).

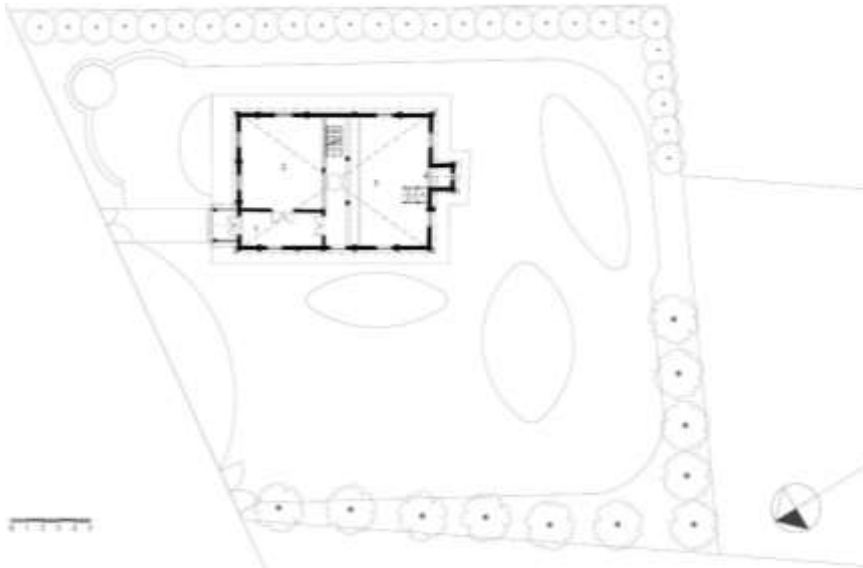


**Fig. 15.** The mosque in Bohoniki (around 1900), in 1988 and at present.  
Photograph by R. Brykowski and Maciej Janowski

In this case, the redevelopment of the surroundings and giving them the form of a domestic garden has unfavorably changed the original context of the building. In 1985 there were plans to extend the mosque as designed by the architect Iwona Bogacka. Those measures

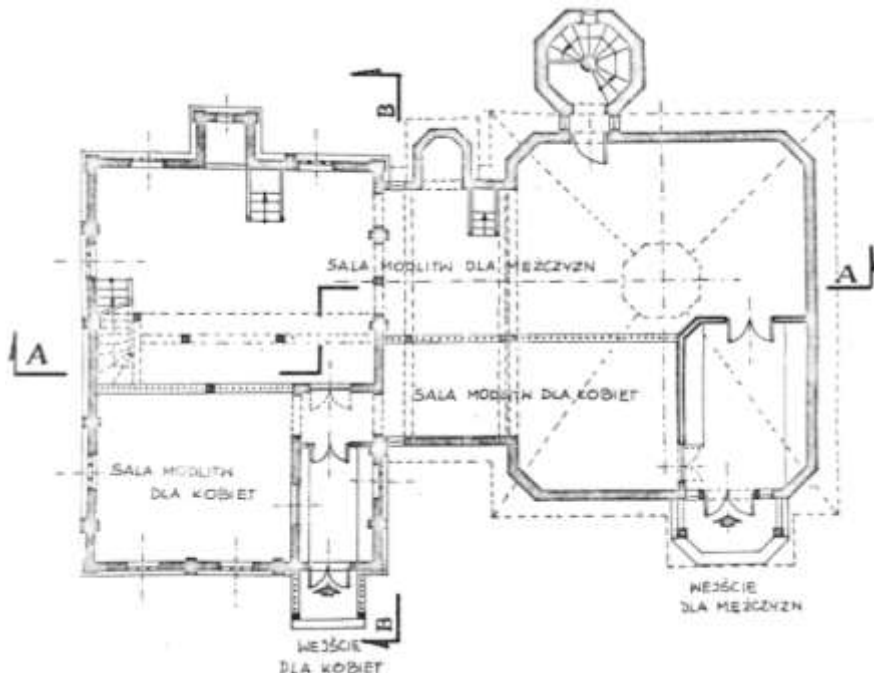
were probably attributable to the easing of the communist regime and broad plans to erect new shrines of various religions in the territory of Poland at the turn of the 1970s and the 1980s.

The extension plans included the construction of a new wing of the mosque, located on the right of the existing building. Such a procedure, combined with the rebuilding of the interior of the existing part, would have doubled the area of the prayer halls for women and men and would have allowed the separation of entrances for female and male worshippers (Fig. 17).



**Fig. 16.** The plan of the mosque in Bohoniki:

1 - vestibule, 2 - the women's hall, 3 - the men's hall, 4 – mihrab, 5 - minbar.

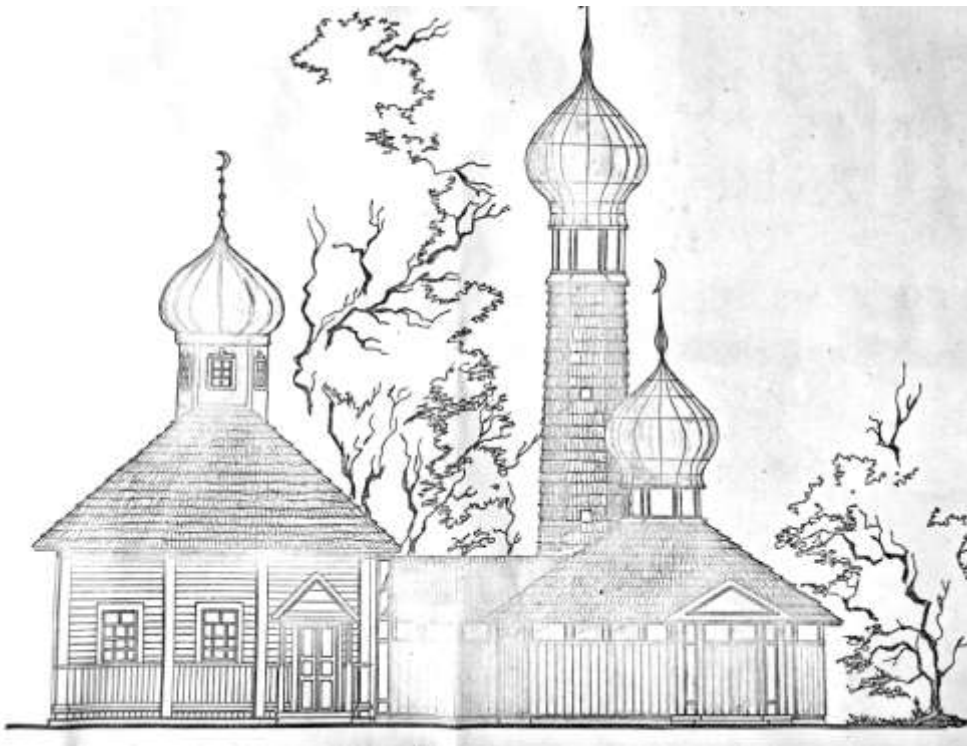


**Fig. 17.** Iwona Bogacka, extension design for the mosque in Bohoniki, 1985.  
The photograph published by courtesy of the Tatar Community in Bohoniki

In this mosque, the original form of the altar would have been dominated by a new building, while an unwieldy combination of women's and men's prayer rooms would have distorted their clear functional arrangement, subordinate to the mihrab.

An interesting element included in the design is the minaret, in a form not found in the architecture of Tatar mosques. The concept of extending the form of the mosque follows the model, i.e. the original building: a similar size, the use of a wooden structure and shuttering and wood shingle roofing. The towers were also given characteristic onion-shaped domes. However, such unification obliterates the differences between the historical and the present, changing the meaning of the form of the mosque and its historically embedded relationships with the landscape.

The extension design for the mosque in Bohoniki clearly showed inspiration with the local models of sacral architecture, of both Catholic and Orthodox churches. However, those are kept in a style characteristic of the provincial architecture of the 1980s that not infrequently used very superficial references to vernacular architecture or quotations from historical architecture taken out of context. As a result of a firm objection raised by the voivodship conservator, the design project was not implemented. From time to time, however, new proposals for extending the mosque in Bohoniki are put forward, as a result of which its form, functional arrangement and surroundings may undergo further and, possibly, destructive changes like for example inappropriate proportions of the designed building stemming from the changed roof pitch of the limited height of the prayer hall (Fig. 18).



**Fig 18.** The façade design for the mosque in Bohoniki under extension, proposal, not yet built (1985).  
The photograph published by courtesy of the Tatar Community in Bohoniki

Figure 18 shows the design of the facade for the mosque in Bohoniki in expansion, proposal, not yet built (1985). Note the unfavorable change in the silhouette of the existing mosque through the extension of the tower and the inappropriate proportions of the designed building resulting from the changed slope of the roof by the limited height of the prayer hall.



The present-day designs and implemented projects of Muslim communities are equally problematic. The Muslim Community Centre in Białystok in the course of construction, in spite of being an adaptation and extension of the centre from the 1930s, has little in common with the local architecture of the Polish Tatars. The arcades, the ogival entrance gate and the minaret whose form refers to the towers of the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul, whereas colourful mosaics suggest the Shirdar Madrasa in Samarkand. At the same time, the traditional fountain – şadırvan, non-existing in the architecture of the Polish Tatars – has more in common with the architecture of the Mongolian sultans (vide the pavilions of Sultan Humayun’s tomb in Delhi, India) than with the local wood building tradition. The construction of the Polish Tatars’ Muslim Education and Culture Centre in Kruszyniany, designed by Tomasz Ołdytowski, is more attentive to this regional style of architecture.

The free arrangement of buildings refers to a rural dwelling typical of Podlachia, whereas their form, scale and roof geometry make the Centre an integral part of Kruszyniany (Fig. 19), where one can see a view of the courtyard and the main building subordinate to the qibla and accentuated by the entrance and a gazebo in the middle. The facades were finished with wooden formwork with decorative elements in the form of laubzekins, called wyżynka in Podlachia, and śparogs that overhung the tops of the building. The qibla determines the axis of a half-open courtyard created by the building of the Centre, with exhibition and workshop areas and the hall of ceremony with an adjacent room intended for the traditional corpse washing. A wooden pavilion, situated in the middle of the courtyard, also performs utility and ceremonial functions such as family ceremonies, common events etc.



**Fig. 19.** Tomasz Ołdytowski, the Polish Tatars’ Muslim Education and Culture Centre in Kruszyniany, 2015.

When comparing the present-day project implementations with the concepts of protecting the mosques in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki, special attention must be given to preserving the uniqueness of their features and context. Importantly, those elements bear testimony to the identity as well as supporting education and knowledge dissemination activities, reflecting the multi-cultural history of Podlachia. The significance of remembering

the past is the maintenance of a certain framework or skeleton to serve as the basis for building the identity of place. Aldo Rossi aptly diagnosed that ‘history becomes analogous to a “skeleton” whose condition serves as a measure of time and, in turn, is measured by time. It is this skeleton which bears the imprint of the actions that have taken place’[24]. In the case of the architecture of the Polish Tatars, the relationship with the place and the awareness of their own history and identity are very strong.

The architecture of the Polish Tatars represents a part of the history of the region, but primarily of the history and present of a specific place in the European hinterland. Their dispersed homeland – as it is distributed between Lithuania, Belarus and Poland – forms an interesting and still not fully explored space. Together with oral accounts, rituals and events fixed in the collective memory, architecture constitutes an element of that space that has a very strong impact on the present. Its incomplete picture, resulting from the passage of time and the dramatic events that affected that part of Europe, leaves room for further activities, a patient search for forms of continuation of the cultural landscape of that European region [25-29]. It needs protection and – at the same time – development in a way appropriate to the mentality and customs of the communities concerned. Developed by years of coexistence at the meeting point of the influences of powerful states and religions, the negotiation methods of shaping living space can be applied in today's world.

## Conclusions

In the aggregate, mosques of the Tatar communities in Poland are merely modest peripheral djami (Friday mosques) and masjid (houses for daily prayers); however, due to their historical context and placement in a complex cultural context, the role they play significantly surpasses the small form. On the one hand, the phenomenon is marginal owing to the peripheral location in relation to major cultural centres; on the other hand, in local terms, those structures are of great importance to local identity. The Polish Tatars, living for centuries in the areas in question, currently divided between Belarus, Lithuania [26] and Poland, have been inextricably linked with the history and culture of the region.

One might be tempted to say that – from the point of view of modern Poland, mostly characterised by limited ethnic diversity – the region of Podlachia is a unique phenomenon, defined not only in spatial or architectural terms, but also as a special area of interactions, combinations and intermingling of cultures, customs, rituals and religions. Thanks to endeavours of local Podlachian communities, the remnants of the multi-cultural and ethnically, linguistically and religiously differentiated Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth are still clear to an attentive observer. That diversity has been subject to various tests resulting from social changes.

The democratisation of Poland after 1989, the ongoing globalisation and political unrest in the region [27] of the Caucasus have contributed to intensified migrations. Having encountered Muslims from other countries (e.g. from Chechnya and the Arab World), the Tatars have been confronted with different interpretations of religious dogmas, thus of space and architectural forms. They meet some of more orthodox Muslims for whom the Polish Tatars constitute a certain unique phenomenon, given their open approach to religious matters. That dissimilarity results from centuries of traditions, persistence, the mixing of Islamic, Catholic and Orthodox cultures in that region of Poland [28] and, more broadly, of Europe.

Polish Tatars represent a kind of collective memory of the community. More importantly, it strengthens social bonds. Tatars are a united community; naturally, it does not mean blocking relationships such as marriages between Tatars and Poles or men. Tatars themselves continue to say that intermarriage is very important to them because it adds value [29]. The Polish Tatar community cultivates the centuries-old traditions of their ancestors, seeks to preserve and protect the heritage of their past in a completely different geopolitical situation.

A situation where the driving factor is not brute force, as it once was in the not-too-distant past, but the collective will of people taking action for their local communities.

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