

THE ROLE OF RITUALS AND CEREMONIES IN THE IDENTITY STRUGGLE OF A SOCIETY THAT HAS LOST ITS LANGUAGE: THE EXAMPLE OF LITHUANIAN TATARS

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Abstract. Language, history, geography, belief, and culture have an important role in the societies to have a common identity and to maintain their existence by embracing this identity. Identity generally refers to a person or group's definition of itself and its positioning among other people or groups. One of the basic processes of the formation of identities at the group level is collective memory. A common emphasis plays an important role in the formation of group identity. Rituals and ceremonies are very functional in highlighting a common past and keeping the collective memory alive. Ritual, which means the repetition of certain values related to individuals or groups with symbolic and invariable sequential behaviour patterns, is an emotional channel that feeds group consciousness and unity. It guides new knowledge and experience. Rituals that connect the past to the present and the present to the future can be either religious or secular. Rituals contribute to the raising of group consciousness in the participants; they determine social status and roles; they offer ready patterns of behaviour by showing how the individual will behave in society; they connect individuals to the past with an emotional bond.

Lithuanian Tatars, who had important rights and privileges recognized by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the equivalent of their important services, have preserved their identity thanks to the rights and privileges granted to them, Islamic beliefs, rituals and ceremonies. Religious rituals, commemoration and celebration ceremonies supported the efforts of Lithuanian Tatars to keep their traditions alive; contributed to efforts to maintain ties between them; it kept their commitment to the roots or the common past alive. Celebrations and ceremonies related to religious festivals and transition periods perform important duties in the transfer of culture to children and young people. The celebration and commemoration programs organized for the 620th anniversary of the arrival of the Tatars in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, on the one hand, expressed loyalty to the Lithuanian State and the Lithuanian people, on the other hand, contributed to remembering the roots. In particular, Sabantuy, held in Lithuania in 2017, contributed to the development of the relations of

Lithuanian Tatars with other Tatar groups living in the Russian Federation and Anatolian Turks.

In this study, rituals and ceremonies will be discussed and interpreted through various rituals (religious festivals, rites of passage, Sabantuy, etc.) and ceremonies that contribute to the efforts of the Lithuanian Tatars to protect their identity and culture.

Keywords: loss of language, Lithuanian Tatars, identity, collective memory, ritual, ceremony.

RITUALŲ IR CEREMONIJŲ VAIDMUO GIMTAJĄ KALBĄ PRARADUSIOS VISUOMENĖS KOVOJE UŽ TAPATYBĘ: LIETUVOS TOTORIŲ PAVYZDYS

Santrauka. Kalba, istorija, geografija, tikėjimas ir kultūra užima svarbią vietą visuomenėse, turinčiose bendrą tapatybę ir siekiančiose išgyventi, išsaugant identitetą. Tapatybė paprastai reiškia asmens ar grupės savęs apibrėžimą ir jos užimamą padėtį tarp kitų žmonių ar grupių. Vienas iš pagrindinių tapatybių formavimosi procesų (grupės lygmeniu) yra kolektyvinė atmintis. Bendras bruožas atlieka svarbų vaidmenį formuojant grupės tapatybę. Ritualai ir ceremonijos itin išryškina bendrą praeitį ir palaiko gyvą kolektyvinę atmintį. Ritualas, kurio reikšmė – tam tikrų vertybių, susijusių su asmenimis ar grupėmis, turinčių simbolinius ir nekintamus nuoseklius elgesio modelius, kartojimas, yra emocinis kanalas, maitinantis grupės sąmonę ir vienybę. Tai veda prie naujų žinių ir patirties. Ritualai, jungiantys praeitį su dabartimi ir dabartį su ateitimi, gali būti religiniai arba pasaulietiniai. Ritualai atlieka šias funkcijas: prisideda prie sąmoningo grupės dalyvavimo lygio kėlimo; lemia socialinį statusą ir vaidmenis; siūlo paruoštus elgesio modelius, parodydami, kaip individas elgsis visuomenėje; sujungia asmenis su praeitimi emociniu ryšiu.

Lietuvos totoriai, turintys svarbių teisių ir privilegijų, kurias Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė pripažino kaip savo svarbių tarnybų atitikmenį, savo tapatybę išsaugojo naudodamiesi jiems suteiktomis teisėmis ir privilegijomis, išpažindami islamo tikėjimus, atlikdami ritualus ir ceremonijas. Religiniai ritualai, minėjimas ir šventimo ceremonijos palaikė Lietuvos totorių pastangas išlaikyti savo tradicijas, prisidėjo prie pastangų palaikyti ryšius tarp savųjų; tai išsaugojo jų nostalgiją savo kilmei ar bendrai praeičiai. Su religinėmis šventėmis ir pereinamaisiais laikotarpiais susijusios šventės ir ceremonijos atlieka svarbų kultūros perdavimo vaikams ir jaunimui vaidmenį. Totorių įsikūrimo Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje 620-ųjų metinių minėjimo šventės ir kitos įvairios programos, viena vertus, išreiškė lojalumą Lietuvos valstybei ir Lietuvos žmonėms, kita vertus, padėjo prisiminti savo kilmę ir šaknis. 2017 m. Lietuvoje surengtas Sabantujus prisidėjo prie Lietuvos totorių santykių su kitomis totorių grupėmis, gyvenančiomis Rusijos Federacijoje, ir Anatolijos turkais plėtojimo.

Šiame straipsnyje bus aptariami ir interpretuojami įvairūs ritualai ir apeigos (religinių švenčių, įšventinimo, Sabantujaus ir kt.), kurios prisideda prie Lietuvos totorių pastangų išsaugoti savo tapatybę ir kultūrą.

Raktiniai žodžiai: kalbos praradimas, Lietuvos totoriai, tapatybė, kolektyvinė atmintis, ritualas, ceremonija.

Introduction

The desire to live together, language, history, geography, belief, culture and tradition have an important place in societies having a common identity and maintaining their existence by owning this identity. Identity refers to a person or group's self-identification and positioning among other people or groups. Collective memory has an important place in the formation of identities. In order for a group identity to be formed, a common past must be built, and this common past must be emphasized on various occasions. Rituals and ceremonies play an important role in emphasizing a common past and keeping the collective memory alive. Ritual, which means the repetition of certain values related to individuals or groups with symbolic and unchanging successive behaviour patterns at appropriate times, is an emotional channel that develops group consciousness and unity by nurturing it. Ritual is a guide to new knowledge and experience. Therefore rituals contribute to raising group consciousness in participants; they determine social status and roles; they present ready-made patterns of behaviour by showing how the individual will behave in society; they connect individuals to the past with an emotional bond.

Tatars, who came from the Golden Horde and settled in Lithuania since the end of the 14th century, have forgotten their mother tongue since the 16th century. Lithuanian Tatars, who have important rights and privileges granted by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in return for their important services, have managed to preserve their identity through the rights and privileges granted to them, the Islamic belief, rituals, ceremonies and festivals, but they have lost their mother tongue. The rituals, ceremonies and festivals they have maintained and recently developed have supported the efforts of the Lithuanian Tatars to keep their traditions alive, contributed to the attempts to preserve the ties between them, and kept their commitment to the roots or the common past alive. Celebrations and ceremonies related to religious holidays and transition periods played an important role in the transfer of culture to children and youth. Celebration and commemoration programs organized within the scope of the 620th anniversary of the arrival of the Tatars in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, on the one hand, expressed the gratitude

and devotion to the State of Lithuania and the Lithuanian people, on the other hand, contributed to the not oblivion of the roots.

In particular, Sabantuy, which was held in Lithuania on a large scale in 2017, contributed to the development of relations between Lithuanian Tatars and other Tatar groups living in the Russian Federation and Türkiye Turks.

This study aims to interpret the rituals, ceremonies and religious holidays of the Lithuanian Tatars, who have lost their language, in their efforts to preserve their identity and culture, through various rituals / transition rituals, religious holidays, ceremonies and festivals, through virtual kinship practices.

1. Ceremonies and Rituals Related to Transition Periods

When we say ritual, the first thing that comes to mind is the rituals formed around transitional periods. For this reason, we will continue to talk about the rituals and ceremonies of the Lithuanian Tatars specific to the transitional periods.

Birth is an important event in Lithuanian Tatars, who belong to the Hanafi branch of Sunnism, as it is in all world societies. Many beliefs and practices have been developed around birth and child, which are essential for the continuation of the lineage and the continuation of family life in happiness and abundance. The expectations of “kut / life force”, “abundance”, “happiness”, “health” and “longevity” lie on the basis of beliefs and practices that develop around birth and child.

1.1. Birth / Child Oriented Ceremonies and Rituals

For the Lithuanian Tatars, whose population is around 3000, birth and child are of vital importance like for any other society. Various rituals, practices and celebrations are performed before, during and after the birth of the child. This means the continuation of the Tatars' presence in Lithuania. While these beliefs, rituals, practices and celebrations aim for the newborn baby to survive and become a healthy and fertile person, they also cause the Tatar society to come together in common joys, be happy and look to the future with hope. The birth, called “nifas” by the Lithuanian Tatars, is an important event, but it is not celebrated with magnificent ceremonies as in other Muslim societies¹. The birth of a child portends happiness in Tatar families. Here, only naming and circumcision will be emphasized as it is more ritual and ceremonial focused. According to sources that give information

1 M. M. Dziekan, 2011, s. 31.

about the traditional life of the Lithuanian Tatars, the baby's name is usually given in the family home. This naming ceremony, called "azan" (call to ezan / call to prayer), is usually held in the afternoon. An imam and two witnesses also attend this ceremony, to which the guests invited by the mother also come. The midwife or the puerperant's best friend brings the washed baby on a pillow and puts it on the table where there are two candles, the Holy Quran, bread, salt, water, honey and cheese. And finally the imam reads "intention". Imam repeats his name three times in the child's ear and tells him not to forget his name until Judgment Day. The imam then holds the child's index finger and repeats the kalima-i shahada seven times. The imam recites the adhan in the right ear of the child and the iqama in the left ear. The ritual ends with a special prayer. After the "Azan", the imam receives a handkerchief from the child's mother, and all guests are first served vanilla honey sherbet for healing purposes, followed by tea, meatballs, and white cheese and they sit and chat happily². Although it is not a "fard" or "religious obligation" in Muslim societies, the practice of circumcision, which is obligatory and causes men to be excluded from society or condemned if not fulfilled, has been almost completely abandoned in today's Lithuanian Tatars³, but it has been one of the leading elements of traditional life in the past. It is very difficult to find information about the circumcision traditions of the Lithuanian Tatars in current sources, as it is almost completely abandoned today. The limited information available is also about the past of the tradition and does not go into details.

Circumcision calls "siunniet" by the Tatars. Although it is generally seen as one of the most distinctive traditions in Muslim societies, it is not mandatory, just recommended. Circumcision of boys was given utmost importance in the past of the Lithuanian Tatars, who tried to keep their national identity alive with Islam⁴. In the 1930s, when Kryczyński wrote his "Tatarzy Litewscy", circumcision, which was usually performed in May in conservative parts of the Lithuanian Tatars, was performed by a "siunniedžeye" (circumciser). The circumciser had a respectable position among Tatars, like other Muslim societies. Kryczyński recorded that at the time he wrote his work, he heard from W. Niemiezy that circumcision should be done, and that he had experts brought to Iwye (former Poland, present days Belarus) for circumcision from the old hospital in Vilnius⁵.

2 S. Kryczyński, 1938, s. 242; Я. Я. Гришин, 1995, с. 68–69; M. M. Dziekan, 2011, s. 31–32.

3 S. Kryczyński, 1938, s. 242; Я. Я. Гришин, 1995, с. 69; M. M. Dziekan, 2011, s. 32.

4 S. Kryczyński, 1938, s. 242.

5 S. Kryczyński, 1938, s. 242.

1.2. Marriage Oriented Ceremonies and Rituals

Marriage is a social event, just like birth and death. Marriage is carried out not only with the participation of the family and relatives of the married individuals, but also with the participation of other individuals forming the society, accompanied by a ceremony. The community that comes together on this occasion strengthens the foundations of the community over and over again at each marriage ceremony, reinforcing its belief in the continuity of the community. Marriage ceremonies bring together the individuals who make up the society, enable them to share happiness and joy, and enable individuals to perform their duties towards each other. Marriage ceremonies also allow for a temporary break from daily life, for people to reconnect among themselves, for people, especially for women in traditional societies, to stay away from the troubles of daily life, to relax by eating, drinking and having fun. To put it more succinctly, marriage ceremonies keep the individuals' desire to live together and their consciousness of being a community alive and increasing.

The marriage ceremonies of Lithuanian Tatars were traditionally performed until the 20th century. The traditional Tatar marriage ceremony started in the groom's house, where an imam and other guests gathered before noon. The guests were greeted with treats and talk about the advantages of marriage. Finally, the gathered people prayed and walked around the table three times with an imam. Then they went to the bride and groom's house with bread and salt and scattered millet, which was believed to bring them prosperity and happiness. The marriage ceremony used to be held at the bride's house, but today it is usually held in a mosque or a Muslim centre. After this religious wedding ceremony, official wedding ceremony is also held. Lithuanian law mandates civil marriage. Marriage takes place at a table with a white cloth on it. There are candles, water, bread and salt on the table. The bride and groom stand on a sheepskin, facing Mecca. The ceremony is conducted by an imam in the presence of witnesses (called the deputy or vekil; from the Arabic "wakil") and guests. The imam writes down the amount of *mehir* in the marriage contract and gives it. The marriage sermon, prayer is read, and then the bride's face is covered with a veil. The imam reads another prayer and gives the couple the wedding rings. The imam is the first to wish the newlyweds well. While wishing the bride well, sometimes it is necessary to touch her embroidered veil. When the newlyweds arrive at the groom's house after the wedding, the neighbours greet them with a bucket of water or create some other obstacle (e.g. pole, beam, etc. across the road). Newlyweds have to 'buy' the

right of passage with money thrown in the bucket, linen handkerchief or towel. Weddings are clearly celebrated more lavishly for the rich and less solemnly for the poor, but even poor Tatars spend their last penny just to welcome guests and host a grand wedding feast for their daughter⁶.

The marriage ceremony, in the words of Galina Miškinienė, is one of the most unpretentious rituals, which has changed insignificantly since its inception. In the tradition of Lithuanian Tatars, the most interesting moment of the wedding ceremony is the sermon given by the imam before the wedding ceremony. Again, in Miškinienė's terms, the wedding ceremonies of the Lithuanian Tatars are more similar to the wedding traditions of the native Christian inhabitants.

One of the excellent examples of how the local traditions of the Christian environment permeated the rituals of the Lithuanian Tatars is the pre-wedding sermon and the coronation of the bride. The sermons are contained in the "Kitab" and "Hamail" of the Lithuanian Tatars.

Weddings are held in a festive atmosphere with bridal crowns, traditional dishes, dances and games. Traditional dishes include meatloaf, belyash (small round meat pie), a roll of "pierekaczewnik" filled with meat or cottage cheese, and onion soup. The traditional Tatar drink "syta" (honey broth), which is served during all kinds of rituals, has become indispensable over time. Over time, the wedding ceremonies of Lithuanian Tatars became increasingly similar to the wedding traditions of the local Christian people⁷.

1.3. Death Oriented Ceremonies and Rituals

People who share joy and happiness in childbirth and marriage, share pain in death, comfort those left behind, and cooperate to have the funeral abolished. People who act on the idea that happiness increases as they are shared and pain decreases as they are shared, make an intense effort to overcome the threshold (this threshold is a temporary death) and to continue their normal lives. It causes death, loss, destruction and suffering, but also allows people to question their own existence, life goals, and relationships with individuals and society; ends resentments and fights caused by small accounts. Although death is considered a natural phenomenon and compensated by childbirth, it causes great trauma and can only be overcome by people in solidarity with each other. Those who die are comforted, taken care of, the debts of the deceased are paid, and even, as in the case of Lithuanian

6 S. Kryczyński, 1938, s. 243–244; A. S. Nalborczyk, 2009, p. 63–64.

7 G. Miškinienė, 2020, p. 29–30.

Tatars and Anatolian Turks, the sins of the dead are undertaken by other people who are alive. Death, just like birth and marriage, allows Lithuanian Tatars to enter into much tighter solidarity in these moments when life temporarily stops.

The information provided by Miškinienė and Statkienė, who conducted a survey for the inhabitants of Nemėžis Village, where the Tatars live, is also important for determining the current status of the funerals of Lithuanian Tatars. Miškinienė and Statkienė also revealed the changes by comparing the data they detected from Tatars living in Nemėžis Village with the information provided by Kryczyński⁸. According to their information, elderly people in Nemėžis Village play the main role of administrator in the death ceremonies, washing the dead, praying and preparing meals. They know all the details of these ceremonies and their order. Younger ones have to follow the activities carried out at the ceremony remotely because they do not have enough information about it. Miškinienė and Statkienė also dwelled on some elements of ceremonies that were not included in S. Kryczyński's monograph titled "Tatarzy Litewscy: próba monografii historyczno-etnograficznej" or that have changed recently. After the deceased is dressed in a white dress, it is wrapped in a white shroud, covered with primroses, then placed in a coffin taken from the mosque. A. Voronovic and S. Kryczyński used the words "coffin / tabut" for the stretcher where the body was placed and "sarık" for the veil on the head of the dead. However, these words are not used by Tatars today.

Inside the shroud are long rolls of paper called *dalavari* / *dvas* (Turkish "dualar" / prayers), which are written in various prayers. If they do not exist, then short "prayer texts" from the *hamail* or the Quran are placed inside the shroud. During the day, relatives, friends and acquaintances pray and offer their condolences to their relatives. They ask for forgiveness from the relatives of the deceased for their mistakes. The deceased's family gives lunch or dinner to those who come. Sometimes it distributes sugar, fruit, *cayma* and halva as a charity. At night, only men who will pray until the morning for a fee remain next to the deceased (some of which come from Vilnius or other settlements where the Tatars are located), they are called "prayers"; sometimes the mullah stays with the dead. Mullah and the prayers, taking into account the principles of Islam, read the appropriate prayers for this ceremony – *deur* / *devur*. The body is lowered into the grave, which is covered with long ropes or straps and boards. According to S. Kryczyński, after the completion of the prayer, the ritual in which the "prayers" wash their hands is carried out, for which a bowl, water jug and towels were brought by the relatives of the deceased. It is understood that this item is not protected for today, and that the par-

8 G. Miškinienė, N. Statkienė, 2013.

ticipants did not say anything about it. During this study, the participants told us a very interesting detail: it was stated that a prayer rug and pillow were placed inside the tomb in a ceremony. This new practice is not tolerated by Islam. Among Tatars, suits are rarely used instead of shrouds. Likewise, the coffin is used in extremely rare cases: this method is applied if the institution where the deceased worked undertakes to pay some of the costs or if the deceased is to be taken from the hospital. As it is known, only those working in the Communist Party were buried with suits and coffins during the Soviet period. When the burial is completed, it is desirable to cover the tomb with stones; flowers and wreaths are placed on it. S. Kryczyński writes that the wreath was rarely used by Tatars, but this tradition, borrowed from Christianity, has now become an integral part of the death ceremony. S. Kryczyński writes that visitors to the funeral home leave money in tissues, which is given to those who pray. All expenses are covered by the deceased's family. After the burial, cakes, cayma, halvah, sugar are distributed as alms to those who attend the ceremony. In the past, charity was distributed during the farewell at the funeral home, and now it is distributed in the cemetery after burial. Wealthy Tatars give alms twice. Since it takes a long time to prepare and is expensive, it is not possible to serve halva and cayma. After the handouts are distributed, everyone returns to the deceased's house to attend the charity dinner. Tatars, who observe the principles of Islam, do not drink alcoholic beverages at burials or charity dinners, they consume only compote; "Sherbet" is distributed for mullahs and prayers. Traditionally, as the charity dish, soup with rice porridge and meatballs is given, as well as šimtapis (poppy cake) and kundum (some kind of ravioli). It should be noted that the cemetery mizar / mizer, which used to be located in the courtyard of the mosque, and now close to the mosque, belongs only to Muslims, the Christian cemetery is located elsewhere. The word zirets (Turk. ziyaret) meaning Muslim cemetery is almost never used by the villagers. According to scientists, this word indicates that the Lithuanian Tatars belonged to the Coptic branch of the Turkish languages. The word Mizar is probably quoted from Turkish⁹.

Lithuanian Tatars still bury their dead with traditional methods accompanied by Islamic practices and visit their dead in accordance with their traditions. Lithuanian Tatars are reunited with their roots or past, especially those who pray for their relatives visiting the Švenčionys cemetery on the last Saturday of August. This ritual contributes to the coming together of the Lithuanian Tatars and keeping their sense of unity alive.

9 G. Miškinienė, N. Statkienė, 2013, s. 359–361.

1.4. Virtual Kinship: Ahretlik

Virtual kinship instances can be found in many nations, especially Turks. It is possible to give examples of virtual kinships such as “musahiplik” (companionship), “brotherhood / brotherhood”, “ahretlik”, “sister-in-law”, “kirvelik”, “best man” among Anatolian Turks carried out by people who do not have blood ties and kinship relations between them¹⁰. One of such fraternities is called “ahret” or “ahretlik” among Lithuanian Tatars. The practice of the pledge has allowed men and women who do not have a blood connection and kinship relationship between Lithuanian Tatars to enter into solidarity with each other in a sense of brotherhood or consciousness, and to feel responsible for each other. It is possible to give the following information, starting from Kryczyński, about the *ahret* or *ahretlik* among Lachowicze, Murawszczyzna, Janusze and Vilnius Tatars, which continued until the years of World War II. The ritual of kinship in Lithuanian Tatars has changed forms under the influence of the Islamic cult. Its beginning undoubtedly goes back to the ancient times of the Tatars’ lives in the Kipchak steppes. This ritual is defined as “achretania” (ahretlik) and the brothers are called “acrec” (ahret) (“acrecka” in the case of a woman) or brother of the covenant. The source of the word Ahret is the Turkish word “afterlife”, which comes from the Arabic word *al-ahire(t)*, which means the same thing. Because it is a relationship entered not only in this world, but also for future (other world) life, unlike marriage. The ritual of remembrance is like a wedding held at home in the presence of the mullah. People with a kinship walk around the table three times with water, bread, salt, Quran or *hamail* in their hands or by shaking their right hands, touching each other with their thumbs or holding their index fingers. Meanwhile, the mullah blesses the relatives in the name of God by praying from the *hamail*. Prayer usually lasts an hour or more, and after finishing the prayer, he “congratulates” his fellow citizens. At the end of the ceremony, they give each other towels or something; in any case, the gift must be of a permanent, “lifetime” value. Only ritual kinship is important. These two people are affectionately called *ahretlik*, but no one sees it as an official kinship. Only two men or men and women can perform this ceremony among themselves. But both men and women must be single. The ceremony can never be held between two women. Kinship is very important. As the Tatars say, “a man is like a brother, a woman is like a sister”. “While the Ahrets are considered too close to each other to marry their children, Muslim law does not prohibit marriage even

10 B. Ayaz, 2021.

among children born to sharia brothers. Ahret must show great respect to the ahret, rush to help in unfortunate situations (he cannot refuse this help under any circumstances), look after it, etc. If Ahret expresses that he wants to buy a commodity from his fellow country, he should give it to him without objection, even if the other ahret is his favourite thing. The Ahrets are not allowed to argue with each other; “You can argue with your father, your brother, your sister, but you can’t argue with your ahretin”. If Ahret speaks in public, you must not listen to him, and you should walk away. You can’t say a bad word about Ahret. The Ahrets will meet in the afterlife. You can also repent the sins of your covenant. It’s best to have seven covenants between men and women. Violating kinship is considered a great sin. However, if they do not agree (for example, if the ahrets fight), they take the towel back into their hands and symbolically cut the towel with a hand stroke as a sign of ending the mullah kinship¹¹.

The tradition of the Ahret, as stated above, continued among Lithuanian Tatars until World War II.

2. Religious Holidays and Days

Among Islamic societies, there are two major religious holidays called Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. These holidays, especially the Eid al-Fitr holiday, are still important for Lithuanian Tatars, although not as much as they used to be. Both holidays are regularly celebrated.

Miškinienė and Statkienė through their survey of Nemėžis Tatars concluded that the number of Tatars who know religious prayers by heart is small, the majority pray in their own words, and the mosque is only visited during the holidays (the mosque is mostly closed on other days). Again, according to their findings, Tatars theoretically know the general conditions of fasting, but very few follow these rules for a month. The majority of Muslims in the village (Nemėžis Village) either do not fast at all or can keep it for a few days¹². Nemėžis Tatars, who participated in the survey of Miškinienė and Statkienė, answered the question “What are the main holidays of Muslims?” (which they regularly celebrate) as Kurban and Ramadan. 79% of the participants added Ashure and 46% added Mevlid to this answer. But these holidays are not equally important to everyone. Some give more importance to Christmas. Others celebrate both Muslim and Christian holidays. Miškinienė and Statkienė noted that the situation should be considered natural because the Tatars

11 S. Kryczyński, 1938, s. 253–254.

12 G. Miškinienė, N. Statkienė, 2013, s. 359.

live in a Christian-majority social environment, and some of them are married to Christians¹³. Eid al-Fitr lasts for three days in Lithuania, as in the entire Islamic world. Lithuanian Tatars go to the mosque and visit relatives and friends during this holiday. On this day, they also make sure to support poor people with donations. Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha do not just mean a religious ritual for Lithuanian Tatars. These holidays are also an occasion for them to come together. Although not everyone participates in today's mass prayers, the holidays are also functional in that they bring together relatives and long-lost acquaintances¹⁴. Although Lithuanian Tatars, living in the conditions, stated by Miškinienė and Statkienė, do not fulfil the conditions required by Ramadan as before, Eid al-Fitr means coming together in holy places for them, visiting relatives and friends, helping those in need. Eid al-Adha, one of the most important holidays of Muslim communities, is also celebrated among Lithuanian Tatars. During this four-day holiday, mosques are visited, animals are sacrificed, their meat is distributed, visits are made, gifts are given. As with Eid al-Adha, Ramadan, those in need and foundations are helped.

Among the months and days that Lithuanian Tatars know as sacred are Muharrem Bear (hence Ashure) and Mevrit Kandili. 79% of respondents to the survey conducted by Miškinienė and Statkienė in Nemėžis Village included ashure, and 46% of them included Mevrit among the main holidays of Muslims¹⁵. This result shows that Muharrem month, also known as Mevrit and ashure month, is highly valued among Lithuanian Tatars, just as it is among Anatolian Turks.

The beginning of the year (1 Muharrem) is known as the "day of forgiveness of sins". 1 Muharrem has been a very special day celebrated by Lithuanian Tatars in the past. Ashure (10 Muharrem) is the culmination of a month of mourning that began on the first day of the year. In 10 Muharrem, ashure is prepared and served from forty kinds of materials. Lithuanian Tatars probably inherited the tradition of preparing ashtrays from Türkiye. In the local tradition, it is mentioned that compote is usually prepared in 10 Muharrem.

Lithuanian Tatars also celebrate Mevrit (Mevrit Kandili), considered Mohammed's birthday, on the 12th day of the third month of the year. In the past, there were assemblies where prayers of gratitude were read to the Prophet Muhammad, and texts describing the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad were read from books in mosques. These fragments are also found in the religious books of Lithuanian Tatars.

13 G. Miskiniene, N. Statkienė, 2013, s. 358.

14 E. Račius, T. Bairauskaitė, 2016, p. 40.

15 G. Miškinienė, N. Statkienė, 2013, s. 358.

2.1. Seasonal Rituals

2.1.1. Sabantuy

Sabantuy has also recently come to the fore in the efforts of Lithuanian Tatars to protect and develop common identity. As E. Račius and T. Bairašauskaitė have stated, the most well-known of the joint festivals is Sabantuy, an event consisting of songs, dances, games and the kitchen, which lasts several days. Račius and Bairašauskaitė noted that Sabantuy was practically unknown among Lithuanian Tatars until the end of the 20th century, and that some Lithuanian Tatars had internalized this festival and began to brand it as their own¹⁶. As a matter of fact, Galina Miškinienė also drew attention to this situation during our meeting. Visaginas Tatars (who arrived from Kazan during the Soviet era) have celebrated Sabantuy since 1996. Sabantuy was listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the UNESCO mission in Lithuania in 2019. Lithuanian Tatars celebrated their first Sabantuy in Trakai in 2010, inspired by Visaginas Tatars. These celebrations were later celebrated in different districts and villages. Sabantuy was celebrated in Forty Tatar village in 2014, Forty Tatar village and Nemėžis in 2015, and Vilnius (European Sabantuy) in 2017. In Klaipėda, Sabantuy is celebrated every year because there the Kazan Tatars live.

Račius and Bairašauskaitė showed, how Lithuanian Tatars formed a bond between Sabantuy and Trakai, quoting Adas Jakubauskas, the President of the Association of Lithuanian Tatar Communities: “During the time of the Great Duke Vytautas, Trakai was famous for being one of the largest concentration places of Tatar communities in Lithuania [...]. That’s why we decided to introduce Sabantuy with the slogan “Back to Trakai”, and we hope Trakai will become a traditional place to organize this festival, which helps Lithuanian Tatars maintain their national traditions”¹⁷.

2.1.2. Festivals, Artistic and Cultural Events

Lithuanian Tatars have not only embraced their traditions to preserve and improve their identity and culture. They continued their struggles with the festivals they have recently implemented and the artistic and cultural events. Folk dance ensembles, which started to be established in the late 1990s, have received a lot of attention. As Račius and Bairašauskaitė point out, the sacred component of the

16 E. Račius, T. Bairašauskaitė, 2016, p. 39–40.

17 E. Račius, T. Bairašauskaitė, 2016, p. 39–40.

celebrations is supported by dance and music performances by local Tatars or Tatarstan guests in rental halls in the evenings. Given their small number, Tatars are quite active in participating in performing arts such as folk dances. For example, in 1996, while celebrating the 600th anniversary of the Tatars' residency in Lithuania, a folklore society called "Alije" was established. Since then, it has become a feature that stands out not only in Lithuania, but also in Poland and Belarus in many Tatar celebrations and festivals. "Miras" (Heritage), another folk dance troupe based in Visaginas, has recently been as active as "Alije"¹⁸.

In autumn 2010, the Tatars organized the seventh International Lithuanian Tatar Culture and Sports Festival in Vilnius, which lasted for two days and included, among other things, musical and dance performances by Lithuanian and foreign Tatar groups, ensembles and choirs.

Another opportunity to come together – very new or rather another way to bring the Tatars together – is the "Šimtalapis"¹⁹ Festival", which is organized exclusively by the Lithuanian Tatars. In February 2011, about 150 people gathered in Vilnius for such a Festival organized by the Lithuanian Association of Tatar Communities. The festival featured cooking competitions, folk music and song concerts, poetry readings and dance performances.

A report on the festival on one of the Tatar-sourced websites expressed the wish that "in the future the "Šimtalapis Festival" will become traditional, where Lithuanian Tatars will come together and the women and girls of the Lithuanian Tatar commune will show their culinary culture"²⁰.

Conclusion

It is understood from the above descriptions and comments that religion and traditions have an important place in the efforts of the Lithuanian Tatars to preserve their cultural identity. The fact that they wrote their religious texts in Lithuanian, Polish and Belarusian languages in Arabic letters after losing their languages reveals the role of religion in the process of protecting the identity of Lithuanian Tatars. Of course, the great people and clerics raised by Lithuanian Tatars have an important contribution to maintaining religious and cultural identity. However, it should be noted that the tolerance of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Republic of

18 E. Račius, T. Bairašauskaitė, 2016, p. 40.

19 Poppy cake.

20 E. Račius, T. Bairašauskaitė, 2016, p. 40–41. For detailed information about fairs and festivals organized to revive and promote Tatar food heritage, see: G. Miškinienė, 2019.

Lithuania with the privileges they provide is also vital. In order to preserve and develop their identity, Lithuanian Tatars have not only embraced their religion, rituals and traditions, but also resorted to many other means that can bring the community together and improve identity and culture. The expansion of Sabantuy celebrations, the arrangement of food festivals, the creation of folk dance groups and artistic performances are just a few of these modern ways. The science and commemoration meetings held on the anniversaries of Tatars' arrival in Lithuania and other scientific and cultural activities show that special attention is paid to science in efforts to protect and develop identity and culture. The announcement of 2021 as the Year of Tatars in Lithuania has added a different pace to the Tatars' efforts to promote their culture and act together. As a result, the traditional practices and rituals of Lithuanian Tatars keep the collective memory alive. In addition to traditional rituals and ceremonies, applications of the newly developed festival genre are also effective in developing a sense of unity and bringing together the individuals who make up the community frequently, as well as in the transfer of collective memory. The ritual, ceremony, festival, scientific and artistic activities in question feed the awareness and unity of the group. All this also fulfil the task of being a tool for the young generations to gain knowledge and experience. Rituals also take on the task of connecting the past to the present, the present and the future, and connect individuals to the past with an emotional connection.

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