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Transcription and transliteration of the texts of the Tartars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania written in the Arabic script: conclusions from team discussions held during workshops and expert opinions

Last year, while initiating an in-depth substantive and methodological debate about the implementation of the *TAFSIR* research project, I often asked these fundamental, at least to me, questions: **Transcription or transliteration? Which transcription? Which transliteration?** Animated and highly substantive discussions held by the research team during the *kitab* workshops as well as experts' analyses confirmed the immense complexity of the problem and the pertinence of the above queries, which cannot be answered unequivocally as there exists neither ideal (strict) transliteration nor ideal (strict) phonetic transcription, especially of written rather than spoken texts. Thus, sometimes it is necessary to make **arbitrary decisions on research methodology, decisions that will depend on the proposed and pursued research objectives.**

Experts' remarks and opinions contributed much new material to project implementation in terms of ideas and decisions. First and foremost, they confirmed different understanding of the key terms: **transcription** and **transliteration**. Among others, the opinions included a distinction between **strict** and **simplified** transliteration as well as an evaluation of their usefulness to study various language levels of the texts. Moreover, three types of transcription were classified: **phonetic** (strict), **traditional**, and **hybrid**. It was even postulated that several versions of the *tafsir* content should be studied and made available to the readers.

Consequently, it must be remembered and emphasised once again that the **project objective** is to render into the **Latin alphabet** a Slavic (Polish and/or Belarusian) text which was originally written in the **Arabic script**. This objective implies **transliteration**, that is **alphabetic conversion**, and we mean it as the **first stage** of the linguistic research into the translation of the Arabic-encoded *tafsir* into **Old Polish**. The point is to make the text written in **hermetic Arabic script** available in the **Latin one** to experts in Slavic studies. Only this graphic denotation of the text can become the basis for further research into the phonetics, grammar, lexis, style, and other features of the language into which the Quran was translated. Such reasons as the systemic and chronological multilayer

nature of *tafsirs* make it impossible to **precisely** describe text phonetics, especially in terms of the complex palatal relations in the language variety spoken at the Polish, Lithuanian, and Belarusian borderland (Polish: *polszczyzna północnokresowa*), which results from the lack of distinction between the graphic denotation of the sounds /i/ and /y/. Nevertheless, it does not disprove the fact that a whole range of basic phonetic (and grammatical) Polish and/or Belarusian features will be revealed directly in the transliterated version.

The features clearly distinguishing the Polish and Belarusian language layers (especially in the second half of the sixteenth century and later) and reflected in the writing system and the graphic denotation of the manuscripts of the Polish-Lithuanian Tartars include primarily:

1. the spelling of etymological /*g/ as [g] (in Polish) or as [h] (in Belarusian), for example: *bóg* (spelt *bog* or *bug* in Polish-Lithuanian Tartars' texts) or *boh*; in the manuscripts of the Polish-Lithuanian Tartars these sounds are written with the Arabic graphemes <ġ> or <h>, respectively;
2. the presence (in Belarusian) or the lack (in Polish) of vowel reduction (*akkanye*);
3. the spelling of Old Slavonic groups such as *tort, *tolt, *tert, *telt with pleophony (*polnoglasije*, in Belarusian) or with metathesis only (in Polish);
4. the presence (in Belarusian) or the lack (in Polish) of forms with epenthetic [l];
5. the presence (in Polish) or the lack (in Belarusian) of etymological groups *tl and *dl (for example, *modlitva* – *molitva*);
6. the presence (in Polish) or the lack (in Belarusian) of nasal vowels. The script presents various variants of the spelling of etymological nasal vowels;
7. the pronunciation (and spelling) of preposition//prefix v- as v- (in Polish) or as ũ - (in Belarusian); in the manuscripts of the Polish-Lithuanian Tartars these sounds are written with the Arabic graphemes <w> (*wāw*) or <◌◌◌ //◌◌◌> (*damma* or *wāw* with *damma*);
8. the spelling of [-l] in the word-final position in the third person singular in the past tense as [-l] (for example, Polish *činil* is written in Arabic texts with grapheme <◌◌◌>, denoting both [l] and [l]) or as -v (Belarusian *čiviv* is written with grapheme <◌◌◌> in the manuscripts of the Polish-Lithuanian Tartars);
9. Without detailed and in-depth research determining whether a given language form is Polish or Belarusian may be very risky. Unfortunately, there is no time for such

analyses in the transliteration process. A typical example are the masculine nominative forms of adjectives, ordinal numbers, and pronouns such as *który*, *jaki* (meaning ‘which’) ending with *-i//(-y)* (in Polish) or *-ij//(-yj)* (in Belarusian), which theoretically can be a good determinant of whether the text is Polish or Belarusian. Interestingly enough, predominantly Belarusian *Kitab Milkamanowicza* (*Milkamanowicz’s Kitab*, abbreviated to KMilk.) does not contain any *-ij//(-yj)* endings, even in the stressed position, whereas the *-i//(-y)* ending, irrespective of where the stress falls, is a feature of south-eastern Belarusian dialects, excluding Brest ones (Łapicz, 1986:184-185). However, in the manuscript of the *Tafsir* of 1788 the *-ij//(-yj)* ending is predominant even though no difference is made between both variants in writing as the Arabic graphic encoding system adjusted to the Slavic spelling does not distinguish the variants of the phonemes /i/ and /y/. Examples include the following words: *poważnij* (meaning ‘respected’), *mondrij*, *dużij* (meaning ‘powerful, strong, mighty’), *mocnij*, *miloserdnij*, *nebeskij* (from *nebo*, meaning ‘sky’ or ‘heaven’), *nalepšij* (the superlative with the prefix *na-*, used before *naj-* was employed), *otpusklivij* (in Old Polish *odpust* meant ‘forgiveness’, so here *otpusklivij* stands for ‘forgiving’, that is ‘absolving’), *večnij*, *zeslanij*, *čitaniij*, *vjedomij*, *mondrij*, *takovij*, *dobrij*, *peršij*, and *slapšij*.

As a matter of fact, the studied text sample did not contain any form with the *-i//(-y)* ending, which is both present in south-eastern Belarusian dialects (excluding Brest dialects, see map 111 in *The Dialectological Atlas of the Belarusian Language*) and coincident with appropriate adjectival forms in Polish. This is a major surprise as the other linguistic features of the manuscript clearly and unambiguously indicate that the monument was written in the Polish language. It is interesting as the feminine adjectival forms do not contain the uncontracted ending *-aja*, which is typical of Belarusian, but the Polish ending *-a*, for example: *značna* (*kśenga*), *kuźde*¹ (*duše* – nominative singular) and *šeroka* (*laska*, meaning ‘grace’), is used consistently. Written (predominantly) in Belarusian KMilk. contains both endings, *-a* and *-aja*, the latter being prevalent. In the KMilk. text sample, comprising several dozen pages of the manuscript, the *-a* and *-aja* ending ratio is 6:17, the alternation of both inflectional elements

¹ Sometimes, the unstressed ending *-a* is written as *-e*, which must reflect the actual pronunciation, that is the reduction of unstressed *-a* to *-e* due to *akkanye* (*ekkanye*).

being typical of south-eastern Belarusian dialects (Łapicz 1986:144). The study of the *Tafsir* of 1788 did not reveal the use of Belarusian endings of neuter adjectival forms (-*ojo* and -*ejo*, the latter being used after soft consonants); the work contains the Polish ending -e (or -'e), for example: *čiste, zabite, nečiste, cenžk'e*, exclusively.

The above facts seem to demonstrate that the nominative singular ending -*ij*//-*yj* of adjectives, ordinal numbers, and pronouns, such as *który* and *jaki*, used in the studied manuscript of the Polish-Lithuanian Muslims does not have to be a direct Belarusian inflectional element but that it is a permanent and consistently used feature of the language variety spoken in some parts of the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland, which should be 'genetically' associated with the language substratum of Belarus, where the variety was formed. Parszuta describes this convincingly:

В I типе словоизменения именительный и совпадающий с ним винительный падежи соотносимых с мужским родом слов имеют наряду с окончанием -i(-y) дублетное -ij (-yj). Окончание -ij (-yj) проявляет тенденцию к большему употреблению, чем -i (-y): в магнитофонных записях с окончанием -i (-y) 134 словоупотребления, с -ij (-yj) – 179. Окончание -ij (-yj) не закреплено за какими-либо определенными словами, а употребляется наряду с -i (-y). Это явление наблюдается также в восточно-славянской речи наших информантов, хотя под влиянием русского литературного языка здесь оно не является таким активным².

The results of the studies of other *tafsirs* of the Polish-Lithuanian Muslims seem to confirm the researcher's conclusions. For example, the published passages from *Tefsir londyński (London Tafsir)* of 1725 also contain only the ending -*ij*//-*yj*: *kturyj, ruvnyj, vekuistyj, vadomyj*. Moreover, besides the text sample that was the subject of statistical analysis, rarely can forms such as *ktury* (*ktūri*) and *vadomi* be found in the *Tafsir* of 1788. Due to their uniqueness statistical comparisons have no sense and the use of the forms may be explained with spelling mistakes. Interestingly enough, the ending -*ij*//-*yj* in the language variety spoken at the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland was not mentioned in the monograph by Kurzowa [1993];

² Паршута (1973: 61).

10. the endings of feminine forms of ordinal numbers, such as *druhaja*, *treceja* (in Belarusian) or *druga*, *treca* (in Polish; the Arabic spelling did not distinguish between the phonemes /c/ and /ć/ and denoted both with grapheme <ص with three dots ۞ beneath>);
11. the participle ending with *-uči* (e.g. *iduči* or *jiduči* in Belarusian) or *-qcy* (in Polish most often spelt as *-oncy* or *-onci* as the Arabic system that was used to write Slavic texts did not distinguish between sounds /i/ and /y/ and denoted both phonemes with one letter, e.g. *idonci* or *jidonci*);
12. Belarusian synthetic forms of imperfective verbs in the future tense with surviving personal forms of the auxiliary word *imati*, such as *mecime*, *čucimeš*, and *pecime*, as opposed to the Polish analytism, such as *będziemy mieli*, *będziemy czuli*, *będziemy piali* (in Old Polish *piać* meant ‘pray, recite the Quran’).

There are many more linguistic facts which could enable us to differentiate unambiguously the Polish and Belarusian language layers³. Apart from the general features of the Belarusian language, we might distinguish numerous dialectal facts in the texts of the Polish-Lithuanian Tartars. When identified, they help to determine with high precision the geographical territory where a given monument originated or with which the copyist of the manuscript was related, e.g. due to his descent⁴.

Chronological complexity is yet another feature of the language of religious manuscripts of the Tartars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Due to the fact that the time when the original (or translated) texts of the Polish-Lithuanian Muslims were written (the second half of the sixteenth century) is not identical with the period their numerous copies were created (sixteenth to twentieth centuries), particular texts, depending on the time they started to exist physically and the content of the copied passages, usually accumulated features of and facts from various periods in the history of a given language (Polish and/or Belarusian) just as particular copied passages, of which a given manuscript consists, can come from

³ For example, different continuation of former *yer* vowels, sonants, long vowels, close vowels, etc.

⁴ See the definition of the dialectal substratum of KMilk. in Łapicz (1986:213): „Many features of the *kitab* can be associated with very specific territories, which illustrates the relation of the manuscript with a concrete dialectal substratum. It must be concluded that most dialectal features unambiguously demonstrate the language of the *kitab* bears resemblance the south-western Belarusian dialects and varieties, especially those spoken in the bifurcation of the Neman and Shchara rivers.” Later on, the definition is narrowed down (p. 219): „The analysis of the manuscript inflection and a remark on phonetics allow us to conclude that if the language features of the *kitab* were to be marked on a map as isoglosses showing their geographical range, we would clearly and unambiguously see a dialectal territory in the bifurcation of the Nemunas and Shchara rivers, with ‘border points’ in the towns of Navahrudak, Stołbce, Nesvizh, Kletsk, Lyakhavichy, Baranovichy, and Slonim to which the *kitab* is the most closely related”.

different periods. Consequently, a concrete monument, dating back to the nineteenth or the twentieth century, can contain linguistic facts which originated much earlier, even in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, and which were mechanically reproduced in subsequent copies produced over centuries. It is particularly important to realise this specificity of the texts of the Muslims of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as it allows us, owing to the identification of the time when particular linguistic facts originated, to determine the time when the originals were written as well as the periods when they were copied in full or in fragments. This feature of Muslim text monuments should be helpful in answering the question about the language (Polish or Belarusian?) of the oldest translation of the Quran into a Slavic language.

This inventory of linguistic facts typical of the manuscripts of the Muslims of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania should list numerous hybrid forms which were created where both language systems were used but which exist neither in Polish nor in Belarusian, for example: *muščizna* (Belarusian *мужчына* + Polish *mężczyzna*), *krapla* (Belarusian *kapl'a* + Polish *kropła*), *jedin* (Belarusian *ažin* + Polish *jeden*), *ceplenia*, *ceplento* (presumably Belarusian *ciplenja* + Polish *pisklęcie*)⁵.

This is why almost all *kitab*-related publications whose authors use their **own alphabetical transliteration systems** contain important and interesting phonetic and grammar analyses and descriptions; however, the language-related **conclusions** contained therein always **imitative** and based on an **earlier transliterated version**. Consequently, **wrong transliteration** can result in **wrong linguistic interpretation**. This can be clearly seen in several samples of alphabetic conversion of various *tafsir* fragments performed by the research team as well as in publications on *kitabs*.

The expectations that the research team should work out **many specialist text versions** and their comprehensive interpretation under **one research project** are unreasonable as the team members should be specialists in Oriental studies (Arabic and Turkish ones), Islam, the Quran, and linguistics (both synchronic and diachronic, both Polish and Belarusian), the language variety spoken at the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian borderland, translation studies, history, etc. at the same time. Moreover, if we realise that *tafsir* manuscripts can be even over a thousand pages long, some of these expectations will be

⁵ The example comes from a *chamail* dating back to the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which I received from Associate Professor Michas' Tarélka and for which I am grateful to him.

impossible to be met under one project, for example due to technical limitations. Therefore, we decided that our task should be **developing a clear collection of resources based on a verified and objective methodology** (that is a strict transliteration and/ or transcription system) **that will become a basis for later expert analyses and descriptions**. The above mentioned expectations demonstrate the possibility and necessity of conducting further comprehensive studies of *kitab*s prepared in order to provide reliable and strict transliteration. **However, the transliteration system cannot ignore Slavic (Polish and Belarusian) transcription signs used in linguistics and established in research practice, including the transcription applied in Slavic dialectology.**

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