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**TIBET IN THE CRIMEA? POLISH EMBASSY
TO THE KALMYKS OF 1653 AND A PROJECT
OF AN ANTI-MUSLIM ALLIANCE***


Abstract

In early modern world, cross-cultural contacts were not a monopoly of Western European 'trading nations' and they were not made exclusively through trans-ocean trade. Buddhist Kalmyks arrived in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century and have remained there until today. Following the medieval tradition when Christian Europe looked for allies in Inner Asia against 'the Muslim danger', Moscow and Warsaw competed to win the Kalmyks over so that they would become their allies against the Crimean Tatars. In 1653, the Polish court prepared an embassy to the Kalmyks, proposing to help them conquer the Crimean Peninsula in return for a military alliance. Curiously, the letters of the Polish king and chancellor were written in Turkish and drawn in Arabic script, as in that period these were the accepted media of Eurasian communication, even though the letters' tenor was anti-Muslim. Both letters are extant today and their content is analysed in the article.

Keywords: Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, Poland, Christian-Buddhist relations, Turkish language

EUROPE'S FORGOTTEN BUDDHIST HERITAGE

Recent defendants of 'Christian Europe' against a 'Muslim invasion' might be reminded that Muslims can claim continual presence on the continent for over a millennium. Almost four centuries ago, Eastern Europe has also become a home of Buddhist Kalmyks. For a contem-

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porary Western reader, the most probable association of the term ‘Kalmyks’ is with a novel by a Polish-American writer Jerzy Kosiński, who in *The Painted Bird* depicted them as bestial rapists and slaughterers, employed by the Nazis on the eastern front during the Second World War.¹ Although rooted in historical reality when a number of Kalmyks, torn between Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, were recruited to German auxiliary formations, Kosiński’s story hardly does justice to the entire nation. To be sure, the Kalmyks were fierce warriors and terrible in military excesses, not unlike most soldiers in early modern Europe. Yet at the same time they were known for their observance of Buddhist legal code and even instructed their Russian neighbours that this code did not provide for death penalty, torture and bodily mutilations, then still common in Russia and Western Europe.² John Bell, a Scottish traveller and doctor who accompanied the Russian embassy to China in 1719, observed that “[t]he Kalmucks are not such savage people as they are generally represented; for I am informed, a person may travel among them with greater safety, both in his person and effects, than in many other countries”.³ Jan Potocki, a Polish traveller who visited a Kalmyk camp near the Volga River in 1797, noted the high level of literacy among the Kalmyks, unusual among the steppe peoples, and attributed it to their respect for Tibetan lamas and Buddhist holy books.⁴

¹ Jerzy Kosinski, *The Painted Bird* (New York, 1966), 157–65.

² On the Kalmyks’ observance of their legal code rooted in Buddhist teaching, see Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met. The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600–1771* (Ithaca and London, 1992), 42, 123, 166, 221–2 (n. 53), 247.

³ John Bell, *Travels from St. Petersburg in Russia, to diverse parts of Asia*, i (Glasgow, 1763), 197.

⁴ “Dans cette horde-ci, qui n’est que d’environ mille *ghirs* [i.e. *gers*, tents], c’est-à-dire trois mille âmes mâles, il y a deux cent vingt individus religieux, tant prêtres que diacres ou sous-diacres, mais ils ne sont point inutiles. Outre les devoirs de leur état, ils s’occupent encore de l’éducation de la jeunesse, et s’en acquittent si bien que presque tous les Kalmouks, même les plus pauvres, savent lire et écrire, ce qu’on ne voit pas chez des nations plus policées. De plus, les *ghelongs* [i.e. *gelüings*, fully ordained Buddhist monks] copient les livres et perpétuent les bibliothèques. Enfin l’on trouve parmi eux des médecins habiles, particulièrement dans la connaissance des simples. Plusieurs Russes ont eu recours à eux et s’en sont bien trouvés”; see Jean Potocki, *Voyage dans les steppes d’Astrakhan et du Caucase. Expédition en Chine*, ed. by Daniel Beauvois (Paris, 1980), 66.

THE KALMYK MIGRATION TO EUROPE

In the context of recent upsurge in environmental history, it seems likely that the rise of the Mongol Empire in thirteenth-century Eurasia was to great extent rooted in climatic changes.⁵ In comparison to the thirteenth century, the climatic changes of the seventeenth century known as the 'Little Ice Age' were far worse and felt worldwide. Probably the same climatic disaster that pushed the Manchus southwards to conquer Ming China also pushed western Mongols, the Oirats, to expand to the west.⁶

In the course of the seventeenth century the majority of the Oirats, alternatively referred to as Dzungars, established a mighty empire between the Altai Mountains and Tibet which reached its apex under Galdan (r. 1676–97) and Tséwang Rabdan (1697–1727). At the same time one of the Oirat tribes, the Torghuts, headed by Kho-Urlük, effected an epic march to the west. In 1606, Kho-Urlük established first contacts with the Russian provincial authorities in western Siberia and in the following decades his relations with Russia oscillated between border warfare and friendly trade relations. The Kalmyks, as the Oirats were called by their Turkic neighbours, competed for

⁵ Most scholars have simply linked the rising activity of steppe nomads with the periods of extreme cold and/or increased aridity; cf. Gareth Jenkins, 'A note on climatic cycles and the rise of Chinggis Khan', *Central Asiatic Journal*, xviii, 4 (1974), 217–26; Ian Blanchard, 'Cultural and economic activities in the nomadic societies of the trans-Pontine steppe', *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, xi (2005), 191–206, esp. 198; on the relation between soil moisture and husbandry in the context of the rise of past nomad empires, see also Rieks Bosch, 'Climate change and the upcoming of the Mongol Empire' (unpublished paper read at the Fourth International Golden Horde Forum, Kazan, 17–18 March 2015). Yet recent findings suggest that drought in the late twelfth century was indeed responsible for extreme political instability in Mongolia that paved way to the rise of centralized leadership under Genghis Khan, but in the following years (1211–25) which coincided with the empire's fastest territorial expansion, the climate was mild and wet, in fact enabling increased horse breeding; see Neil Pedersen, Amy Hessl, Nachin Baatarbileg, Kevin Anchukaitis, Nicola Di Cosmo, 'Pluvials, droughts, the Mongol Empire, and modern Mongolia', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, cxi, 12 (2014), 4375–9.

⁶ For the climatic context of the fall of Ming China, see Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis. War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London, 2013), 125–51. To much regret, Kalmyks are not even mentioned in Parker's *opus magnum* even though much of his book is devoted to Russia and Eastern Europe.

grazing lands with Russian tributaries, the Bashkirs and especially the Nogays, pushing the latter westwards towards the Volga river.⁷

In the 1630s, the Kalmyks pushed the Nogays across the Volga and from that time on, the left bank of the river came to be known in Russian sources as the 'Kalmykian side'. Exasperated Nogays set out for a 'great trek' finding new pasturages on the Black Sea shores, especially in the Budjak between the Dniester and the lower Danube. There they joined their brethren who had been present in the region already earlier, dwelling under the joint suzerainty of the Crimean khan and the Ottoman sultan.⁸

Precisely at the same time, the Kalmyks began plundering caravans in Central Asia and raiding the surroundings of Tashkent, Bukhara and Khiva, causing panic and anxiety not only among local rulers, but even in Safavid Iran.⁹ In 1644, Kho-Urlük crossed the Volga and Terek rivers and attacked Kabarda in northern Caucasus. Although he was defeated and killed by a Kabardinian-Nogay coalition, the Kalmyk raids soon resumed under his son Daichin (r. 1647–61) who returned from a pilgrimage to Tibet to assume the father's position. In February 1648, the Kalmyks crossed the Don River in an abortive raid against the Crimea, but they were stopped by heavy snow and frost. Nonetheless, in the subsequent years their raids against the Nogays and Crimean Tatars were repeated with a rising frequency.¹⁰

The Kalmyk pressure against western neighbours was of a double nature, materializing through both direct raids effected by the Kalmyks, and through the raids of the Nogays who, deprived by the Kalmyks of ancient pasturages, desperately sought to provide for themselves and their kin by looting southern Russian provinces and

⁷ Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 77–9.

⁸ Vadim Trepavlov, *Istoriya Nogaïskoi ordy* (Moskva, 2001), 406–9; Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 80–2. On the Ottoman-Crimean shared sovereignty over the Black Sea steppe, see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania. International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th–18th century). A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents* (Leiden and Boston, 2011), 200–1 (n. 563), 451–2, 508–10.

⁹ Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 83; Giorgio Rota, 'Safavids and Kalmyks in the 17th century: A preliminary assessment', in Antonio Panaino and Riccardo Zipoli (eds.), *Classical and Contemporary Iranian Studies* (Proceedings of the 5th Conference of the Societas Iranologica Europaea held in Ravenna, 6–11 October 2003, 2, Milano, 2006), 189–204.

¹⁰ Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 86–9.

the Crimean Khanate.¹¹ Evliya Chelebi, a famous Ottoman traveller who visited the Crimea in 1665, recorded the memory of past Kalmyk raids and the hatred towards the invaders shared by the Crimean Tatars. He also correctly perceived the Kalmyks as the main cause of turbulence among the Nogays who repeatedly raided the Crimean Peninsula kidnapping people and stealing Tatar property.¹²

LEGITIMIZING STRATEGIES OF KALMYK RULERS

The Kalmyk challenge to Moscow and Baghchararay did not merely consist of military force. When the Kalmyks arrived in Siberia in 1606, only eight years had passed since the Russian conquest of this former Genghisid khanate. Although some descendants of Kūchūm, the last Siberian khan, were taken as honorary captives to Moscow, others continued to fight and welcomed the opportunity to ally with warlike newcomers. In 1619–20, a marriage was arranged between Kūchūm Khan's son, Ishim, and a daughter of Kho-Urlūk. The liaison offered the groom a much needed military assistance, at the same time elevating his Kalmyk father-in-law who thus became related to the Genghisid dynasty.¹³ Marriages of Genghisid princes with the daughters of Kalmyk tribal chiefs were also common in the generation of Kūchūm's grandsons and served similar purposes.¹⁴

The charisma of Genghisid dynasty among the Mongol-Turkic peoples lasted for several centuries after the death of its founder. According to the 'Genghisid principle', only male descendants of Genghis Khan were entitled to the title of 'khan'. Even the most successful warlords who were not Genghis's male descendants, such

¹¹ On the impact of Kalmyk presence on Russian borderlands and the first reactions of Russian provincial authorities, see Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier. The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2002), 130–5; Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejey, 'Les Kalmuks de la Volga entre l'Empire russe et l'Empire ottoman sous le règne de Pierre le Grand (d'après les documents des Archives Ottomanes)', *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, vii, 1 (1966), 63–76, esp. 65.

¹² *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, vii (Istanbul, 1928), 498–9, 688–90; see also the Polish annotated translation of the relevant fragments: Zygmunt Abrahamowicz (ed.), *Księga podróży Ewliji Czelebiego (wybór)* (Warszawa, 1969), 212–13, 328–30.

¹³ Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 78; Vadim Trepavlov, *Sibirskii yurt posle Ermaka. Kuchum i Kuchumovichi v bor'be za revansh* (Moskva, 2012), 66.

¹⁴ Trepavlov, *Sibirskii yurt posle Ermaka*, 85–6.

as the conqueror of Central Asia – Timur (d. 1405), or the *de facto* rulers of the Golden Horde – Mamay (d. 1382) and Edigü (d. 1419), satisfied themselves with more modest titles such as ‘emir’. In order to augment their legitimacy, they typically married Genghisid princesses and maintained at their courts Genghisid puppet princelings, ruling in theory in the latter’s name.¹⁵ As we have seen above, this was also the policy of Kho-Urlük. Yet, already his son, Daichin, was not satisfied with the traditional Kalmyk title of ‘tayishi’ and in his correspondence with Moscow adopted the title of ‘khan’.¹⁶

This ‘usurpation’ contained a direct challenge to the Russian tsar, whose rule over Siberia and the Volgine region was still far from secure. It also upset the Crimean khans who still nourished hopes that one day they would recover and reunite the former territories of the Golden Horde, and who maintained contacts with the Bashkirs, the Volgine and the Siberian Tatars well into the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁷

What was new in the context of Eastern Europe and western Siberia was that the Kalmyk rulers also owed their legitimacy to the authority of Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁸ Cooperation between Tibetan monks and Mongol rulers preceded the Mongols’ conversion to Buddhism and can be dated back to the thirteenth

¹⁵ Junko Miyawaki, ‘The legitimacy of khanship among the Oyirad (Kalmyk) tribes in relation to the Chinggisid principle’, in Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan (eds.), *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy* (Leiden, Boston, and Köln, 2000), 319–31, esp. 320; Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 4–5, 444.

¹⁶ Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 97; Rota, ‘Safavids and Kalmyks’, 200; Vadim Trepavlov, “*Belyĭ tsar*”: *Obraz monarkha i predstavleniya o poddanstve u narodov Rossii XV–XVIII vv.* (Moskva, 2007), 157.

¹⁷ On the Crimean khans’ pretensions to the rule over the Bashkirs and Siberia, proclaimed as late as 1672, see Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 167, 187, 358, 362–3; on the cultural contacts between the Crimea, Siberia and Central Asia in the seventeenth century, see *idem*, ‘Popytki vosstanovleniya mongol’skoĭ traditsii v Krymskom khanstve nachala XVII veka: *baĭsa, Tat ve Tavgach*’, *Zolotoordynskoe obozrenie / The Golden Horde Review*, 3 (2015), 91–101.

¹⁸ Miyawaki, ‘The legitimacy of khanship’, 322–4; Rota, ‘Safavids and Kalmyks’, 200. In the seventeenth century, also among the eastern Mongols one can observe “the shift of authority from a lay khan to an embodiment of the Buddha’s wisdom – reincarnated lama, called in Mongolian *gegegen* (or *gegen*), i.e. ‘Serenity’”; cf. Agata Bareja-Starzyńska, *The Biography of the First Khalkha Jetsundampa Zanabazar by Zaya Pandita Luvsanprinlei. Studies, Annotated Translation, Transliteration and Facsimile* (Warszawa, 2015), 88.

century, when a Tibetan monk Chögyal Phagpa was appointed as imperial preceptor by Kubilay Khan. After their conversion *en masse* to Buddhism in the late sixteenth century, eastern Mongols accepted the authority of Dalai Lama (thus named after the Mongolian term for ‘ocean’), to be soon followed by western Mongols, the Oirats, who converted to Buddhism in the early seventeenth century.¹⁹ On their part, the Oirats acted as patrons of Tibetan clergy and often intervened in Tibet’s internal affairs, hence no wonder that René Grousset compared the Tibetan policy of Oirat rulers to the involvement of Pepin and Charlemagne in Papal Rome.²⁰ In both cases, political and military patronage was exchanged for spiritual legitimation.

The Torghut Kalmyks who migrated far to the West could not exert such influence in Tibet as their Oirat cousins from the Choros tribe who ruled the Dzungar Empire, yet they also maintained contacts with Dalai Lamas, hosted Buddhist monks in their entourage and performed pilgrimages to Tibet as was already illustrated by the case of Daichin.²¹

The above described ‘patchwork’ legitimizing strategy of the Kalmyk rulers, composed of military charisma, claimed Genghisid origin (obtained by birth, marriage, or entirely pretended), and heavenly blessing received from Dalai Lama, was nothing unusual as such strategies had been practiced by successful rulers from ancient times.²² What distinguished the Kalmyks in the context of

¹⁹ Miyawaki, ‘The legitimacy of khanship’, 322; Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge, 2000), 167–9.

²⁰ René Grousset, *L’empire des steppes. Attila, Gengis-khan, Tamerlan* (Paris, 1948), 604.

²¹ The immediate reason for the Chinese embassy of 1712–15 to the Torghut Kalmyk ruler Ayuki was the arrangement for a safe trip home of Ayuki’s nephew, who had performed pilgrimage to Tibet yet could not return because the road was controlled by hostile Oirat troops of Tséwang Rabdan with whom Ayuki was at war; a detailed report from the embassy, composed by a Manchu envoy Tulishen, is available in English translation by Lord Staunton, a former member himself of the famous British embassy of Lord Macartney to China of 1793; for the description of the fate of the Kalmyk prince, see *Narrative of the Chinese Embassy to the Khan of the Tourgouth Tartars, in the years 1712, 13, 14, & 15, by the Chinese ambassador, and published, by the emperor’s authority, at Peking*, trans. from the Chinese by George T. Staunton (London, 1821), 99–100.

²² To invoke just three examples: the Ilkhanid rulers in Iran successfully conglomerated the Islamic model of rule with the ancient Persian ideals of kingship and their own Genghisid traditions, cf. Charles Melville, ‘The royal image in Mongol Iran’, in Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville (eds.), *Every Inch a King. Comparative*

seventeenth-century Eastern Europe was that, unlike other nomads of Turko-Mongol extraction who roamed the steppe and claimed Genghisid legacy, the Kalmyks were not Muslims.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE MONGOLS, KALMYKS AND BUDDHISM IN EARLY MODERN POLAND

Poland was for the first time affected by a Mongol raid in 1241, when Prince Henry II the Pious perished at the battle of Legnica. In the years 1245–7, a Polish Franciscan friar Benedict participated in the embassy of Pope Innocent IV to the Mongols, headed by Giovanni da Pian del Carpine.²³ Also Polish Dominican friars actively participated in the projects of converting steppe nomads or finding the semi-mythical kingdom of Prester John, which excited so much medieval Christian Europe.²⁴

In the early modern era, Poland did not participate in the European expansion overseas which encouraged thousands of young men from Southern and Western Europe to set out for distant and exotic missions. The Polish Catholic Church authorities as well as the Roman Curia preferred to siphon the religious zeal of young Poles towards missionary activity in ‘home India’, i.e., the eastern provinces of Poland-Lithuania, inhabited by Orthodox Ruthenians. Nonetheless,

Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds (Leiden and Boston, 2013), 343–69; Akbar, the ruler of Mughal India, elevated his kingly position by fusing Hindu practices with Islamic mysticism, cf. Ebba Koch, ‘How the Mughal *pādshāhs* referenced Iran in their visual construction of universal rule’, in Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (eds.), *Universal Empire. A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge, 2012), 194–209, esp. 200; finally, the Ottoman sultans simultaneously presented themselves as Turkic khans, Muslim caliphs, Roman emperors, and the followers of Alexander, Caesar, Chosroes, and Solomon, cf. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, ‘Khan, caliph, tsar and emperor: the multiple identities of the Ottoman sultan’, *ibidem*, 175–93.

²³ Jerzy Strzelczyk, ‘Mongolowie a Europa. Stolica Apostolska wobec problemu mongolskiego do połowy XIII wieku’, in Jerzy Strzelczyk (ed.), *Spotkanie dwóch światów. Stolica Apostolska a świat mongolski w połowie XIII wieku. Relacje powstałe w związku z misją Jana di Piano Carpiniego do Mongołów* (Poznań, 1993), 84–6, 90–1.

²⁴ On the search for ‘Prester John’, an imaginary Christian ruler of a Christian kingdom situated somewhere in inner Asia, who was to aid Latin Europeans in their fight against Muslims, see Lev Gumilev, *Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom. The Legend of the Kingdom of Prester John* (Cambridge, 1987).

a number of Polish Catholics were able to fulfill their dreams and, having joined the orders of Jesuits, Franciscans or Discalced Carmelites, to be sent on missions overseas, including the missions in East Asia.²⁵

In 1628, a Polish Jesuit Fryderyk Szembek published a Polish translation of the description of Tibet by a Portuguese Jesuit António de Andrade. The translation was based on an Italian edition dated 1627, and Szembek himself never travelled to Asia but only acted as a propagandist of missionary activities, yet through this medium a Polish reader received up-to-date information regarding a distant and exotic land. In the booklet, Tibet was presented as a promising mission country, ruled by a benevolent monarch and inhabited by people overwhelmed by a natural aversion towards the ‘Mahometan sect’. It thus seemed only a matter of time when pious and clever Jesuit fathers would win over the king and his entourage for the Christian religion and disclose the “magical tricks and lies” that had been diffused by Buddhist lamas.²⁶

Nonetheless, when the first news on the arrival of Kalmyks in the Caspian steppe reached Poland, the newcomers’ religion and social structure remained a mystery and their cultural affinity with Tibet apparently remained unknown.²⁷ What mattered for the Polish

²⁵ Duc Ha Nguyen, *Polscy misjonarze na Dalekim Wschodzie w XVII–XVIII wieku* (Warszawa, 2006), 34–123.

²⁶ *Tybet wielkie państwo w Azyey, do którego oycowie Societatis Iesu nie dawno przebywszy, wiarę świętą chrześcijańską, błędami wielkimi pogańskimi w nim zfałszowaną, do iey szczeroci przywodzą. To jest krótkie opisanie zwyczajów, nabożeństwa y wiary narodow tybetskich przez iednego kapłana tegoż zakonu z pism do Wielebnego Oycy swego Generała o tym ztamtąd posłanych, a w Rzymie drukiem światu wszytkiemu ogłoszonych* (Kraków, 1628); on this and other publications by Szembek, see Nguyen, *Polscy misjonarze na Dalekim Wschodzie*, 151–2; the aforementioned publication is also mentioned by Bohdan Baranowski who erroneously renders the Polish publisher’s first name as Teofil instead of Fryderyk, cf. *idem*, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce do XVIII wieku* (Łódź, 1950), 224.

²⁷ Probably the earliest mention of the Kalmyks in Polish literature can be found in the translation of *Sarmatiae Europaeae descriptio* by the Italian author Alessandro Guagnini, published in Cracow in 1611. Its Polish translator, Marcin Paszkowski, supplemented the Italian edition with additional paragraphs, including one on the ‘Kalmyk Tatars’. According to Paszkowski, the Kalmyks lacked any religion and lived like beasts (*Ci Kalmucykwowie nie wiedzieć co są, wiary żadney nie trzymają, tylko jak bestye za morzem żyjąc ...*); see Alexander Gwagnin, *Kronika Sarmacyey Europejskiej, w której się zamyka Królestwo Polskie ze wszystkimi państwami, księstwami, y prowincjami swemi, tudzież też Wielkie Księstwo Lithewskie, ruskie, pruskie, żmudzkie,*

court was the Kalmyks' enmity with the Crimean Tatars, whatever its reason. In the years 1648–51, when the Crimean khan Islam III Giray supported a Cossack rebellion led by Bohdan Khmel'nytskyi and the Cossack-Tatar allies almost crushed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, any news about Kalmyk raids against the Crimea were received in Warsaw with the hope for a welcome diversion.²⁸ The situation turned still more dramatic when in June 1652 a Polish army was defeated at Batoh by a joint Cossack-Tatar force. The Polish field hetman, Marcin Kalinowski, and a few thousand Polish nobles and soldiers perished in battle or were taken prisoner and then executed.²⁹

THE POLISH EMBASSY TO THE KALMYKS OF 1653³⁰

Even though the Polish court had very vague knowledge about the distant newcomers, it correctly perceived the Kalmyks as valuable potential allies against the Crimean Tatars. In the spring of 1653, it was decided to send Kasper Szymański as an envoy to 'the Kalmyk nation'.³¹ Szymański was furnished with a written instruction and two

inflantskie, moskiewskie, y część Tatarów (Kraków, 1611), book VIII, pt. 1, 17; cf. Zygmunt Abrahamowicz, 'The unrealized legation of Kasper Szymański to the Kalmuks and Persia in 1653', *Folia Orientalia*, xii (1970), 9–23, esp. 12–13.

²⁸ Baranowski, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce*, 216–17.

²⁹ For a general historical background and further literature, see Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 157–62; Tomasz Ciesielski, *Od Batohu do Żwańca. Wojna na Ukrainie, Podolu i o Mołdawię 1652–1653* (Zabrze, 2007); Dariusz Milewski, *Rywalizacja polsko-kozacka o Mołdawię w dobie powstania Bohdana Chmielnickiego (1648–1653)* (Zabrze, 2011).

³⁰ This embassy was first discussed at length by Zygmunt Abrahamowicz whose main findings and conclusions remain largely valid; cf. *idem*, 'The unrealized legation of Kasper Szymański'. Some points found problematic by the present author will be discussed below.

³¹ Szymański is known to have also travelled several times to the Crimea, hence apparently he was regarded as a man experienced in the affairs of the steppe. For his mission to the Kalmyks, the envoy was provided with 8,000 florins from the Crown Treasury (*Panu Kasprowi Szymanskiemu do Tatar Kalmudzkich ex Senatus consulto wyslanemu fl. 8000*); see Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Warsaw [hereinafter: AGAD], Archiwum Skarbu Koronnego, Dział II, vol. 51 (expenditures register covering the period between the Diet held at Brest Litovsk in March–April 1653, and the Diet held at Warsaw in February–March 1654), fol. 62b. The fact that in the register the envoy was referred to as *Pan* and not *Jaśnie Wielmożny Pan* like other envoys sent to other courts confirms the thesis of Bohdan Baranowski and Zbigniew

letters, one issued by King John II Casimir (r. 1648–68) and another by Crown Chancellor Stefan Koryciński. Ignorance of the power structure within Kalmyk society ensured that the instruction was vaguely worded. Having reached with God’s help the Kalmyk ruler’s headquarter, the envoy was to ask to be conducted to the “first vizier” in order to salute him and present him with the chancellor’s letter (*a stanąwszy tam daj Boże szczęśliwie, pytać się będzie do Wezera najpierwszego, przy którego pozdrowieniu od Jaśnie Wielmożnego Jego Miłości Pana Kanclerza Wielkiego Koronnego list odda Wezerowi służący*). With the aid of this Kalmyk dignitary the envoy was to demand access to “the highest senior *mirza*,³² or by whatever other name he is called, who

Wójcik, who maintained that Szymański had been born as a commoner, probably a townsman, and ennobled only later in return for his services; cf. Baranowski, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce*, 123, 217; Zbigniew Wójcik, ‘Dyplomacja polska w okresie wojen drugiej połowy XVII w. (1648–1699)’, in *idem* (ed.), *Historia dyplomacji polskiej*, ii: 1572–1795 (Warszawa, 1982), 275. Paradoxically, the Polish envoy owed his future ennoblement to the same Crimean Tatars whose destruction he was ordered to arrange in 1653. His ennoblement was probably effected in 1656, when a letter of the Crimean vizier Sefer Ghazi Agha asked Chancellor Stefan Koryciński to enoble Szymański in recognition for his past and current diplomatic services; see the copies of two letters by Sefer Ghazi to Koryciński, in AGAD, Archiwum Koronne Warszawskie [hereinafter: AKW], Dział tatarski, karton [box] 62, teczka [folder] 52, p. 2, and 54, pp. 2–3 (although the copies are dated 1654, they apparently should be dated 1656 since the Crimean vizier invoked Polish victories in the war with Sweden, which had begun only in 1655). Both letters refer to the same embassy performed by Szymański, who is mentioned by name, and also refer to his previous missions to the Crimean court of 1649. In the second letter, the vizier explicitly asked on his own behalf and on behalf of the khan that Szymański be ennobled for his past and current services as a mediator between the two courts (*aby za zaleceniem Chana Jego Miłości i moim jako dobrze zasłużony i za przeszłego państwa Chana Jego Miłości i terażniejszego i teraz za szczęśliwego panowania jego był nobilitowany*). Admittedly, in the royal instruction of 1653 given to Szymański for his embassy to the Kalmyks (cf. n. 34 below), he is titled *urodzony* (a Polish equivalent for Latin *generosus*) and *slachetny* (noble) whereas a townsman would have been titled *slawetny* (a Polish equivalent for Latin *famatus*). It is nonetheless likely that the instruction reflected standard formulas and chancery language with no regard to the envoy’s status. Unfortunately, no information on Szymański can be found in the monumental edition compiled by Barbara Trelińska, which lists 2595 ennoblements effected in the years 1419–1794; cf. Barbara Trelińska (ed.), *Album armorum nobilium Regni Poloniae XV–XVIII saec. Herby nobilitacji i indygenatów XV–XVIII w.* (Lublin, 2001).

³² *Mirza* (from Persian *mirzade*, ‘emir’s son’), also pronounced as *murza*, was a Tatar noble title.

rules over these states” (*przez którego do Najwyższego Starszego Murzy albo też jakim go imieniem zowią innym, który temi państwa rządzi, o przystęp starać się będzie*). Having obtained an audience with “the highest ruler of the Kalmyk nations” (*najwyższy rządca narodów kałmuckich*), Szymański was to deliver him the royal letter, salute him and the Kamyk elders on behalf of the king and disclose the details of the mission which for security reasons were not contained in the letters.

The Polish envoy was to deplore the ingratitude of the Crimean khan Islam III Giray (r. 1644–54), who having been once prisoner in Poland had been set free after a Polish-Tatar reconciliation and yet had allied with the Cossack rebels and attacked Poland.³³ Interestingly, the instruction remained silent concerning the recent humiliating Polish defeat at Batoń (1652), but invoked the Polish victory over the Cossack-Tatar troops obtained in 1651 at Berestechko, when Islam Giray had fled the battlefield, apparently with the intention of presenting the Poles as valuable allies and not as constant losers. Szymański was to incite the Kalmyks to invade the Crimea, precisely at the time when the Tatars would set out for a new campaign against Poland so the peninsula would remain defenceless. In return, the king offered a military subsidy of 50,000 thalers. Most interestingly, the Polish royal court offered the Kalmyks to settle in the Crimea and to assist them to keep their conquest in the future. To quote the royal instruction:

Hence the Kalmyk nation not only stands before an opportunity to obtain rich spoils from the enemy, but also to seize the Crimean state which from the ancient times had belonged to the Kalmyk nation [*sic* – DK]. And if with God’s blessing they capture the Crimea, His Royal Majesty promises to keep the Kalmyk nation in the possession of this state with the force of his troops, and thereafter to conclude with [this nation] a perpetual alliance on behalf of his own, his successors, and his states. (*W czym nie tylko podaje się okazja narodowi kałmuckiemu obfitych korzyści z nieprzyjaciela, ale też i samego osiągnięcia Państwa Krymskiego, z dawna narodowi kałmuckiemu służącego. ... A poszczęci li Pan Bóg, że Krym będą mogli opanować, obiecuje Jego Królewska Miłość siłami wojsk swoich przy tym państwie zatrzymywać naród kałmucki, i z nim napotem wiecznie z sobą i z następcami swemi i państwa zawrzeć przymierze.*)³⁴

³³ On Islam Giray’s captivity in Poland in the years 1629–34, see Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland–Lithuania*, 139–40, 237, 891.

³⁴ AGAD, AKW, Kałmuckie [the Kalmyk section], sign. 41b/10; in fact, the Kalmyk section merely consists of three documents in Polish, all pertaining to

TWO POLISH LETTERS TO THE KALMYK ELDERS
– THEIR LANGUAGE AND CONTENTS

Bohdan Baranowski, who studied Szymański's embassy to the Kalmyks over sixty years ago, knew only the Polish-language copies of the letters by the Polish king and chancellor, which were entered along with the royal instruction into the Legation Books (*Libri Legationum*) of the Polish Crown Register (*Metrica Regni Poloniae*).³⁵ The Polish historian also knew that the proper letters had been composed in Turkish since the Polish copy of the chancellor's letter contained a heading which referred to its translation from Turkish (*Copia listu ... z tureckiego na polski przetłumaczonego*).³⁶ Yet Baranowski considered both Turkish originals to be lost.³⁷ In fact, they have both been preserved in the Czartoryski Library in Cracow, in a collection of Oriental documents that had once been held in the Polish Crown Archives.³⁸

Szymański's embassy, namely the royal instruction and two drafts of the letters by the king and the chancellor addressed to Kalmyk leaders; these three documents are also entered in clear copies in AGAD, *Metryka Koronna, Libri Legationum*, no. 33, fols. 83b–85a; for the royal instruction, see 83b–84a. The instruction is vaguely dated "in the year 1653" (*Anno Domini 1653*), yet a more precise dating can be established thanks to the date that figures in the royal letter: 29 April 1653 (see below).

³⁵ *Ibidem*, fols. 84b (*List od Króla Jego Miłości polskiego do tychże kałmuckich Tatarów*) and 85a (*Copia listu od Jaśnie Wielmożnego Jego Miłości pana kanclerza najwyższego koronnego do Kałmuków z tureckiego na polski przetłumaczonego*); earlier drafts of these two letters, written in less diligent handwriting, are preserved in AGAD, AKW, Kałmuckie, sign. 41b/9.

³⁶ In spite of the heading, it is doubtful whether the Polish copies were indeed translated from Turkish. For instance, the Polish version of the royal letter contains the full and proper *intitulatio* of John Casimir whereas in the Turkish version the title of the grand duke of Lithuania is missing (cf. n. 52 below). One would rather expect that original drafts were composed in Polish and only later translated into Turkish. The Polish drafts were then copied into the Legation Books, yet the chancellor's letter obtained an erroneous heading which suggested that it had been translated from Turkish.

³⁷ Baranowski, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce*, 217–18.

³⁸ Biblioteka Czartoryskich, Kraków [hereinafter: *Bibl. Czart.*], ms. 609, nos. 37–8, pp. 293–4, 301–2. They are correctly described in the typewritten catalogue by Abrahamowicz, prepared in 1954; only its section has been published so far as *Katalog dokumentów tureckich. Dokumenty do dziejów Polski i krajów ościennych w latach 1455–1672* (Warszawa, 1959), whereas a larger part has for decades remained forgotten and unknown to scholars, only recently rediscovered by Tadeusz Majda and the present author in the library of the Oriental Faculty of the University

The choice of a Turkic language and the Arabic script for the Polish royal correspondence with the Kalmyks should not come as a surprise. Edward Keenan stressed the importance of Central Asian Turkic as *the* language of steppe diplomacy, which in the late medieval and early modern era connected immense territories extending from Cairo to Peking and from Vilnius to Delhi, and compared it to “the Latin of this world”.³⁹ Russian tsars issued letters in Turkic both to their own subjects in Siberia and to the neighbouring rulers in the Crimea, Central Asia, and Mongolia, often providing these letters with illustrated monograms in Arabic script styled after the *tughras* of the Crimean khans.⁴⁰ Letters in the Arabic script, in Tatar or Turkish, are also known to have been issued in the Lithuanian and Polish chanceries, yet at the moment the two letters to the Kalmyks, described in the present article, are the only specimens of this genre that have come down to our times.⁴¹

For the Kalmyks, the fact that the Polish court addressed them in Arabic script must have been quite natural. Arabic was also the standard script in which they were addressed by the Russian tsars whose correspondence was drawn by Tatar translators employed at the Kremlin chancery.⁴² Only by the late seventeenth century, the

of Warsaw. These originals are also invoked in Abrahamowicz, ‘The unrealized legation of Kasper Szymański’, 16, and Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 244–5.

³⁹ Edward Keenan, ‘Muscovy and Kazan: Some introductory remarks on the patterns of steppe diplomacy’, *Slavic Review. American Quarterly of Soviet and East European Studies*, xxvi, 4 (1967), 548–58, esp. 550.

⁴⁰ Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 224; Sagit Faizov [Faiz], *Tugra i vselennaya. Mokhabbat-name i shert-name krymskikh khanov i printsev v ornamental'nom, sakral'nom i diplomaticheskome kontekstakh* (Moskva and Bakhchisarai, 2002), 27–9.

⁴¹ Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 242–5. One can hardly agree with Abrahamowicz who resigned from the linguistic analysis of the two letters having resolved that “the great number of errors in these texts makes their translation into English quite difficult, and even a commentary would be too bulky since the significance of these letters for Orientalists is not so high”. The very fact of their uniqueness justifies scholarly interest in their form and contents as well as the types of errors committed by their writer. The present author prepares their full edition that will be accompanied by an English translation.

⁴² Cf. a Russian copy of the letter by Tsar Mikhail Romanov which was delivered to Kalmyk elders by the Russian envoy to Persia Mikhail Tikhanov, dispatched from Moscow in November 1613; the original letter was “written in the Tatar script”

Russian chancery also began to employ translators fluent in the so-called ‘clear script’ (*todo bichig*), created in 1648 by an Oirat Buddhist monk Zaya Pandita Namkhajamts with the aim to record the Oirat-Kalmyk dialect.⁴³

While the ‘clear script’, derived from the Uighur-Mongolian alphabet, initially served mainly to spread the Buddhist teachings, the Kalmyk rulers continued to use Turkic languages and the Arabic script as the media of foreign communication. They also frequently appointed Muslims as their envoys to foreign courts: Bukharans, Turkmens, Nogays and other Muslims in the Kalmyk service are known to have been sent in embassies not only to Muslim capitals such as Isfahan or Istanbul, but also to Moscow.⁴⁴

One notable difference was that the letters of the Polish king and chancellor, addressed to Kalmyk leaders, were not worded in a Kipchak Turkic dialect that was widely understood in the steppe, but in a quite sophisticated Ottoman Turkish.⁴⁵ A possible reason was that, unlike

(*napisav tatarskim pismom*), i.e. in a Tatar dialect recorded in Arabic script; see Nikolai Veselovskii (ed.), *Pamyatniki diplomaticheskikh i torgovykh snoshenii Moskovskoi Rusi s Persiei*, ii: *Tsarstvovanie Borisa Godunova, Vasiliya Shujskago i nachalo tsarstvovaniya Mikhaila Feodorovicha* (St. Peterburg, 1892), 259–60.

⁴³ Trepavlov, *Istoriya Nogaïskoi ordy*, 651; Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 63–7. Zaya Pandita, Namkhajamts (1599–1662) spent most of his life in Tibet and Dzungaria, but he also paid visits to the Volgine Kalmyks and was highly revered by Daichin and his entourage; see *ibidem*, 102. On his visits in the camp of the Torghut Kalmyks in the years 1645 and 1656, see ‘Biografija Zaja-Pandity’, in *Kalmytskie istoriko-literaturnye pamyatniki v russkom perevode* (Elista, 1969), 164, 177. For his biography, see Hidehiro Okada and Junko Miyawaki-Okada, ‘The biography of Zaya Pandita, the greatest Oirat monk’, in Johan Elverskog (ed.), *Biographies of Eminent Mongol Buddhists (PIATS 2006: Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Königswinter 2006)* (Halle, 2008), 29–48. He should not be confused with Zaya Pandita Luvsanprinlei (1642–1715), a Khalkha Buddhist monk who also bore the honorary title of Zaya Pandita; see Bareja-Starzyńska, *The Biography of the First Khalkha Jetsundampa Zanabazar*, 23–31, 49–50.

⁴⁴ Rota, ‘Safavids and Kalmyks’, 199–201.

⁴⁵ Abrahamowicz, who did not try to identify the translator merely referring to him as “an unknown interpreter of the Crown Chancellery”, entirely dismissed his skills by pointing to “the great number of different errors ... in spelling, phraseology, and style” and by observing that the letter was written “by an unskilled hand”; see *idem*, ‘The unrealized legation of Kasper Szymański’, 16, 23. Yet this opinion is too harsh, even though some errors, untypical phrases, and calligraphic peculiarities in the Ottoman *divani* script suggest that the letters were penned by a foreigner.

in Moscow where Oriental translators were mostly recruited from among Volgine Tatars, if any Oriental translator was to be found in Warsaw, it was more likely that this translator would have been trained in the language of the Ottoman chancery.⁴⁶ The most likely personage who might have drafted and penned the Turkish letters of the Polish king and chancellor was Wojciech Bieczyński, the Crown translator of Oriental languages of the time.⁴⁷ Yet even Baranowski, who praised Bieczyński's practical language skills and regarded him as the only mid-seventeenth-century Polish diplomat who knew Oriental languages well, seriously doubted whether Bieczyński was able to read the Arabic script, let alone write it.⁴⁸ Judging by the fact that both letters are written in a fairly trained hand, in the *divani* script that was commonly used in Ottoman chanceries, and contain only minor orthographic mistakes, one cannot entirely exclude the possibility that the letters were composed by an Ottoman prisoner held in Poland, or even commissioned in an Ottoman provincial border chancery by a Polish envoy or agent.⁴⁹ Yet, given the fact that the prospective Polish-Kalmyk alliance was directed against the Ottoman vassals, and that such a commission would have required some time whereas the task was urgent, such possibility is not very likely.

The *intitulatio* of the Polish king contained in the royal letter was almost literally copied from the *inscriptio* of Ottoman letters referring

⁴⁶ In the mid-seventeenth century, incoming Ottoman as well as Crimean Tatar correspondence to the Polish court was written predominantly in Ottoman Turkish. On the ratio between Kipchak and Oghuz elements and the Ottomanization of the Crimean chancery, see Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 223–9.

⁴⁷ Bieczyński figures in the same Crown Treasury expenditures register for the period between April 1653 and February 1654 which also lists the expenses for Szymański's mission to the Kalmyks. For his translator services, Bieczyński was paid 1200 florins (*Jego Miłości Panu Woyciechowi Bieczynskiemu tłumaczowi Jego Królewskiej Miłości ex Senatus consulto fl. 1200*); see AGAD, Archiwum Skarbu Koronnego, Dział II, vol. 51, fol. 68a.

⁴⁸ Baranowski, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce*, 121–3; see also Bieczyński's short biography by Eugeniusz Latacz in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, v (Kraków, 1935), 22–3.

⁴⁹ Similarly, when in 1656 the Crimean khan Mehmed IV Giray resolved to send a letter to the ruler of Brandenburg, he asked a Polish envoy then present at his court to help compose this letter in Latin; Baranowski, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce*, 128.

to Christian rulers, with the addition of genuine titles of the Polish kings from the Vasa dynasty, who at the time also claimed the throne of Sweden:⁵⁰

[T]he pride of the great Christian princes, the chosen of the illustrious dignitaries in the nation of the Messiah, the restorer of the proper course of the peoples of the Nazarene community, he who trails the skirts of pomp and stateliness, the possessor of the signs of glory and pride, the great prosperous king of the prosperous and great kingdom of Poland, of Sweden, Ruthenia, Prussia, Mazovia, Samogitia, Livonia, Smolensk, Chernihiv, Gothia and Vandalia (*iftiharü`l-ümera`i`l-`izami`l-`iseviye muhtarü`l-kübera`i`l-fıham fi`l-milleti`l-mesihıye muslıhu masalıhi cemahiri` t-tayıfeti` n-nasraniye sahibü ezyalı`l-haşmet ü`l-vaqar sahibü delayılı`l-mecd ü`l-iftihar sa`adetlü ve`azimetlü*⁵¹ *Lih memleketiniñ ve Şveçanıñ ve Urus ve Purus ve Mazoviniñ ve Jumuciniñ ve İnflant Smolensqıñ ve Çernihoviyanıñ ve Gotnıñ ve Vandalınıñ a`zam qral-i devleti*).⁵²

The letter was addressed “to his excellency, the prosperous and dear sultan who is the ruler (*hakim*) of the Kalmyk country, and to our other friends, the great aghas, mirzas, and notables of all the soldiers” (*sa`adetlü ve muhabbetlü Qalmuq vilayetiniñ hakim olan sultan hazretlerine ve sair cemi`-i` askeriyan büyük agalarına murzalarına ve bel[[i] başlılarına dostlarımızı*).⁵³ Having forwarded his greetings, the king invoked the fame of ferocious soldiers enjoyed by the Kalmyks and notified the Kalmyk ruler of Szymański’s embassy, adding that all details will be communicated orally by the royal envoy. The royal letter in Turkish does not contain any date, but its extant contemporary Polish draft is dated 29 April 1653, in Brest Litovsk (*Datum w Brześciu Litewskim dnia 29 miesiąca kwietnia roku pańskiego MDCLIII*).⁵⁴

⁵⁰ For the titles with which the Polish kings were referred to in Ottoman documents, see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th–18th Century). An Annotated Edition of ‘Ahdnames and Other Documents* (Leiden, Boston, and Köln, 2000), 21–4.

⁵¹ *Sic*, it should read ‘*azametlü*’.

⁵² Bibl. Czart., ms. 609, no. 37, p. 293. The omission of Lithuania in the *intitulatio* of the Polish king was almost certainly coincidental since in the Polish draft (on the relation between the Polish and Turkish versions see n. 36 above) the royal letter contains the title of “the grand duke of Lithuania” (*wielkie xiążę litewskie*); cf. AGAD, AKW, Kałmuckie, sign. 41b/9.

⁵³ Bibl. Czart., ms. 609, no. 37, p. 293.

⁵⁴ AGAD, AKW, Kałmuckie, sign. 41b/9.

The letter of Chancellor Koryciński was equally brief and repeated the contents of the royal letter. It was undersigned in the Arabic script in the exact manner in which Ottoman viziers signed their letters addressed to their peers: *muhlis-i muhib Stepan Qoriçinski Lih qiralınır veziri* (“the loving friend Stefan Koryciński, the vizier of the Polish king”).⁵⁵

Moreover, since it was presumed that for security reasons the embassy’s route might pass through Persia, Szymański was provided with two passport-letters addressed to the Safavid court: one by King John Casimir to Shah Abbas II, and another by Chancellor Koryciński to the Persian vizier.⁵⁶ Both letters were dated in Warsaw,⁵⁷ on 30 April 1653. Interestingly, unlike the letters to the Kalmyks, the letters to the Safavid court were composed in Latin.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Bibl. Czart., ms. 609, no. 38, p. 301.

⁵⁶ The fact that Szymański was sent not only to the Kalmyks, but also to Persia was first established by Abrahamowicz who identified the two letters addressed to the Safavid court in the Czartoryski Library; see *idem*, ‘The unrealized legation of Kasper Szymański’, 16–18. Abrahamowicz assumed that Szymański was first to go to the Kalmyks and only later to Persia, yet a reverse order was possible as well and the letters’ tenor leaves no doubt that Iran was merely to serve as a transit country while the embassy’s main target was the Kalmyk court. Persian route might have been used if the envoy wanted to omit Russia or was prevented by Russian authorities from reaching the Kalmyks. In that case he could travel anonymously through Ottoman Asia Minor and then from Iran across the Caspian Sea. Safavid Iran was traditionally perceived in early modern Europe as a potential ally against the Ottoman Empire, even though since the Treaty of Zuhab (1639) the two states had remained in peace. In the years 1645–54, the post of the Persian vizier was occupied by Seyyed ‘Ala’ od-din Hoseyn, a Muslim clergyman also known as Soltan ol-‘Olama or Khalife os-Soltan; cf. ‘Abd or Rafi’ Haghghat (Rafi’), *Waziran-e Iran az Bozorgmehr ta Amir Kabir* (Tehran, 1386 [2007]), 342–4; Rudi Matthee, ‘The career of Mohammad Beg, Grand Vizier of Shah ‘Abbas II (r. 1642–1666)’, *Iranian Studies*, xxiv (1991), 17–36, esp. 21.

⁵⁷ The apparent confusion between the place of issue of the letters to the Kalmyks (Brest Litovsk, 29 April 1653) and the place of issue of the letters to the Persian court (Warsaw, 30 April 1653) may be explained by the fact that different sections of the Polish court and chancery were on the move. Between 24 March and 18 April 1653, an extraordinary Diet was held at Brest, while after its conclusion the king and chancellor moved to Warsaw for the Senate meeting that took place in May; cf. Tomasz Ciesielski, *Sejm brzeski 1653 r. Studium z dziejów Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1652–1653* (Toruń, 2004), 123–32, 243–5.

⁵⁸ Bibl. Czart., ms. 610, pp. 169–84. Both letters to the Persian court are preserved in the originals, along with the sealed envelopes addressed *Serenissimo*

THE EMBASSY'S FAILURE AND THE EAST EUROPEAN
DIPLOMATIC REVOLUTION OF 1654

The brief character of written messages by the Polish king and chancellor disclosed their fear that the letters might be intercepted. The most important messages and proposals were to be transmitted orally. The fact that both the letters addressed to the Kalmyk elders and the letters addressed to the Safavid court are today found in Poland proves that these fears were fully justifiable. The original letters were restored to the royal archive either because Szymański had never left for his mission, or he was returned by Russian or Ottoman authorities, or he resigned from his mission and returned out of fear of being ambushed by hostile Tatars or Cossacks who barred his passage to the Kalmyk camp.⁵⁹ Abrahamowicz argued that the embassy had been doomed to failure because at that time the Kalmyks had already been subjects of the tsar so that they would not have done anything without his consent, and suggested that Szymański had been possibly returned from the Muscovite territory through which he had intended to pass to the lower Volga.⁶⁰ Yet neither of these statements must be true: firstly, at that period the Kalmyks were still far from being obedient Russian subjects; secondly, the Polish court was certainly aware of the political risks linked to the Russian

Principi Domino Sach Abbas Persarum et Medorum Regi Amico Nostro Charissimo and Illustrissimo Principi Supremo Wezyro Serenissimi Persarum et Medorum Regis Domino Amico Observandissimo, respectively.

⁵⁹ No Kalmyk embassy is known to have ever reached Poland. One cannot rely on the article by Eugeniusz Zawaliński who claimed that a number of Kalmyk letters were preserved in the Czartoryski Library in Cracow; cf. *idem*, 'Zbiory tureckich dokumentów w bibliotece Czartoryskich w Krakowie', *Rocznik Orjentalistyczny*, xiv (1938), 113–35, esp. 131–2. Firstly, he mistook the two letters in Turkish discussed in the present article for letters authored by the Kalmyks and addressed to the Polish court; secondly, he assumed that a certain Kaya Bey (erroneously rendered as Kapa Bey in his article), several of whose letters are extant in the Czartoryski Library in the original as well as translations (Bibl. Czart., ms. 609, no. 39, p. 309; ms. 612, p. 53; ms. 914, pp. 5–6, 11–12; ms. 2760, pp. 11–12), was a Kalmyk, whereas in fact he was a prominent dignitary in the Crimean Khanate and the head of the powerful Mansur/Manghit clan; cf. Abrahamowicz, 'The unrealized legation of Kasper Szymański', 20–2. Unfortunately, Zawaliński's erroneous information is repeated in Baranowski, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce*, 218.

⁶⁰ Abrahamowicz, 'The unrealized legation of Kasper Szymański', 22–3.

passage and probably for that reason considered alternative routes, including the one leading through Persia.

Whatever caused the Polish embassy to end in failure, its rationale soon became obsolete anyway. In January 1654, the Ukrainian Cossacks gathered in Pereyaslav accepted the suzerainty of the Russian tsar.⁶¹ For Poland, but also for the Crimean Tatars, a unification of Ukraine with Russia constituted a mortal danger. In result of intensive negotiations, a Polish-Crimean military alliance was concluded in the same year, and was to last until 1666. The Polish king even engaged to help the Tatars recapture Kazan, Astrakhan and Siberia, although such promises were hardly realistic.⁶² Polish pamphleteers, who shortly before had nourished plans of evicting the Tatars from the Crimea in cooperation with Russia or the Kalmyks, turned to praise their Muslim neighbours as trustful partners and allies.⁶³

The new allies invited the Kalmyks to join them in order to form a broader anti-Russian coalition, but the Kalmyks chose an alliance with Moscow. A Russian-Kalmyk agreement was reached in 1655, to be renewed in 1661, 1673, and subsequent years by Daichin's successors – Puntsuk (r. 1661–9) and Ayuki (r. 1669–1724).⁶⁴ The Russian-Kalmyk alliance was anything but stable, yet the Kalmyks proved to be Moscow's valuable allies in the Russian-Ottoman war of 1711, and in the Persian campaign of Peter I of 1722–3.

The Poles approached the Kalmyks anew when their own relations with Muslim neighbours again turned into war. During the Polish-Ottoman war of 1672–6, a Polish envoy was sent to incite

⁶¹ The events of the seventeenth century and their interpretation still play a role in contemporary politics and propaganda in Eastern Europe. In 1954, in commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the Pereyaslav Union, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev decided to award the Ukrainians for their loyalty to Moscow by ceding the Crimea from Soviet Russia to Soviet Ukraine. Sixty years later, when this loyalty was questioned by Khrushchev's successor in the Kremlin, the award was consequently annulled.

⁶² Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania*, 163–8.

⁶³ Cf. *idem*, 'Lice and locusts or allies and brethren? The ambivalent attitude towards the Crimean Tatars in early modern Poland-Lithuania', in Maria Baramowa, Grigor Boykov, and Ivan Parvev (eds.), *Bordering early modern Europe* (Wiesbaden, 2015), 39–44.

⁶⁴ On the agreements of 1655, 1661, 1673, 1677, 1683, 1697, 1708, 1710, see Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 90, 95–6, 105–7, 111–12, 119, 132, 144–5, 147.

the Kalmyks to anti-Crimean diversion.⁶⁵ Again in 1684, when Poland joined the Holy League following the second siege of Vienna (1683), King John III Sobieski sent envoys to Ayuki inviting him and his people to settle in Polish Ukraine and join the anti-Muslim coalition. The Kalmyk participation in anti-Muslim crusade was to be remunerated by munificent subsidies provided by Pope Innocent XI.⁶⁶ Yet all these efforts proved short term and ultimately unsuccessful.

Ayuki, described by a modern French historian as “the last of the great nomad sovereigns” (*le dernier des grands souverains nomades*),⁶⁷ quite successfully maintained equilibrium in diplomatic relations, exchanging embassies with Istanbul, Moscow, Peking, and a number of smaller power centres. Yet this was the last cry of the steppe and the Kalmyk enterprise ended in disaster. In 1771, a majority of Volgine Kalmyks chose to escape the colonizing efforts of imperial Russia and decided to return to Dzungaria. After a march of death through hostile lands, they reached their destiny only to learn that these territories had been recently annexed by China.

The frequently invoked explanation as to why western Mongols ultimately failed to build a lasting empire, while their eastern cousins had succeeded in building one 400 years earlier, was that by the eighteenth century the bureaucratic empires of Russia and China disposed of effective firearms, able to stop the raids of their nomadic neighbours.⁶⁸ In 1783, also the Crimean Khanate ceased to exist, and in 1795 the same fate met Poland, although the latter could hardly be described as ‘nomadic’. These three events – the collapse of the Kalmyk Horde, the Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania have rarely been grouped together by historians, even though they were strongly linked with the rise of the Russian Empire and vaguely fit in the picture drawn by John Darwin, who observes that “between the 1750s and the 1830s the long equilibrium of cultures and continents

⁶⁵ Baranowski, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce*, 220.

⁶⁶ Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 121–2; Rota, ‘Safavids and Kalmyks’, 192.

⁶⁷ Lemerrier-Quellejey, ‘Les Kalmuks de la Volga entre l’Empire russe et l’Empire ottoman’, 65.

⁶⁸ Cf. the opinion of René Grousset who referred to the Oirat empire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a “historical anachronism”; Grousset, *L’empire des steppes*, 621.

was swept away by the Eurasian Revolution”.⁶⁹ The parallel demise of the Kalmyk nomad society and the noble republic of Poland-Lithuania found a fascinating link in the personage of Count Jan Potocki, a Polish aristocrat, writer and traveller who has already been invoked at the beginning of this article. After the last partition of Poland he entered the Russian service and undertook several travels to the southern frontiers of Russia in the years 1797–1806. While he penned valuable ethnographic descriptions of the Kalmyks and other steppe peoples, at the same time he became an ardent supporter of Russian expansion in Asia, one of the founding fathers of nineteenth-century Russian imperialism.⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ John Darwin, *After Tamerlane. The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London, 2007), 157.

⁷⁰ Daniel Beauvois, ‘Introduction: Du cosmopolitisme à l’impérialisme’, in Jean Potocki, *Voyage dans les steppes d’Astrakhan et du Caucase*, 7–26.

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