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Lviv Orientalis

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The city of Lviv is often perceived as a gateway to the West for Ukraine, alongside being proof of Ukraine's European heritage. However, the city's history as the intersection of key trade routes between Central Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East demonstrates its multi-cultural heritage which reaches far beyond that perception. Lviv is not only a European city; it is to a certain degree an Oriental one as well.

In the Polish and Ukrainian historical memory Lviv is primarily associated with maintaining close relations with the West. For Ukrainians, it is the part of the country that is the furthest to the West, not only in terms of geography but also with its culture. It is the best guarantee of Ukraine being a part of Europe. However, in Poland Lviv is perceived as a European bulwark, one that has, on several occasions, halted the marching of the Eastern Asian "hordes". This vision of the world is best illustrated by the inscriptions on the facade of Lviv town hall, which say: "Michael the Archangel saved the city of Lviv from the jaws of the Asian dragon." The inscription refers to the brief siege of the city by the Turks, Tatars and Ukrainian Cossacks which took place in 1672.

Nevertheless, Lviv was established and thrived thanks to its location at the intersection of key trade routes from Central Europe to Central Asia (West-East) and from the Baltic Sea, through the Black Sea, to the Middle East (North-South). As a result, elements of Muslim culture have become, both directly and indirectly, an integral part of the city's cultural landscape and have formed key characteristics of its original identity.

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Proto-globalisation

The first mention of Lviv in historical sources appears in the mid-13th century. This was the time when the Mongol invasion resulted in the near total destruction of the Kievan Rus'. Even so, this area was included in the *Pax Mongolica*, spreading from the Carpathian Mountains to the Pacific Ocean and from the Baltic Sea to the Indian Ocean. Later, at the dawn of the modern era, the whole territory of Central and Eastern Europe was under the rule of two empires: the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Ottoman expansion established *Pax Ottomana*, which turned the Black Sea into an Ottoman lake. In the north, the Ottoman Empire bordered the *Pax Respublica* created by the Polish-Lithuanian Union/Commonwealth. It was one of the largest European states ever to exist, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Throughout the Commonwealth's 400 year existence, it only fought against the Empire for approximately 25 years (mainly at the end of the 17th century). As a result, according to Fernard Braudel, a famous French historian, the Gdańsk-Lviv-Istanbul trade route was established.

These three historical processes led to the opening of unprecedented opportunities for trade development on a continental scale; a phenomenon that, can be called "proto-globalisation". The trade boom facilitated the migration of various ethnic groups and their integration with the native populations. As a result, since its earliest days, Lviv has been a multi-cultural city. People who settled there included Jews, Levantines (Italians from Genoa trading with the Middle East and the Eurasian Steppe), Armenians and Karaim and Tatar merchants. Along with the settlements came the temples of the Abrahamic religions that took root in the city: synagogues, a mosque and Armenian churches. Józef Bartłomiej Zimorowic, a mayor of Lviv in the 17th century, claimed that in the mid-14th century, the only place to resist the Poles was "Lviv, which was miraculously saved by … the Tatars, Saracens, Armenians and others who stood by the duke's side and hence it closed its gates to foreign dukes". Despite this opposition, when Casimir III the Great, a Polish king, captured the city, he paid tribute to the diversity of the city's inhabitants when he said: "Armenians, Jews, Saracens (Muslims) … and other peoples, regardless of their condition or class, while we grant them an extraordinary grace, we wish their rights regarding their religious rituals to be unaffected and remain as they are."

Early settlers in Lviv included Jews, Levantines, Armenians and Karaim and Tatar merchants.

Even though they had been assimilated into the city's population by the first half of the 16th century, Muslims living in Lviv frequently visited Ottoman lands

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because of the city's strong trade relations with that part of the world. Martin Gruneweg, a 17th-century German merchant and chronicler from Gdańsk, compared Lviv to Venice: "In the city as in Venice, it became quite common to meet people at the market from all countries of the world in their dress: Magyars in magerkas, Cossacks in kuchmas, Muscovites with hats, Turks in white turbans. All of them are in long clothes. ... Each of them, whatever language they speak, find their own language here. The city is more than a hundred miles away from the sea. Yet when you see crowds of Cretans, Turks, or Italians dressed as sailors, you get the feeling that a seaport could be just beyond the city gate."

For Lviv, the Eurasian Steppe was its equivalent of the sea beyond the gate.

In Lviv's case, the Eurasian Steppe was its equivalent of the sea beyond the gate. However, the key difference between Lviv and Venice was that in Lviv, Muslims could move around freely and the influence of Islamic culture on art, clothing, cuisine, weaponry and language was much more significant. In fact, its influence was so strong that Lviv did not end up being merely a passive recipient of Muslim material culture; it also created it. Art historians called this cultural phenomenon the Lviv manufacture, which meant the onsite production of oriental products for domestic consumption. The most vivid example of this was a crafts factory in a royal townhouse run by Armenians, which was established by King John III Sobieski at the end of the 17th century.

Another great symbol of this cultural syncretism is the Renaissance altar in the Roman Catholic cathedral. The altar's ornamentation was inspired by the patterns of Persian carpets. Andrzej Dziubiński, a Polish historian, observed that the Orient also had an impact on Lviv's institutions: "some organisational Turkish (and more broadly Muslim) models were transferred onto the Polish, or more specifically, Lviv ones with regard to oriental trade. ... In the Ottoman Empire which, together with Islamic civilisation, took over numerous institutions from the era of the early caliphates, the organisation of the market and trading operations was supervised by a municipal official."

The East had to communicate with the West

Lviv's cultural melting pot became its trademark. During the interwar period, Stanisław Wasylewski, a Lviv-born, Polish journalist and literary critic, wrote the following about the city's historical heritage: "a multi-lingual Tower of Babel, although frequented by Persians, Greeks, Italians, Turks, Germans and Tatars who

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would come here to trade goods, was in need of translators. The East had to communicate with the West". Another chronicler, Józef Wittlin, wrote the following: "What is this bright-coloured crowd? It is Lviv. Diversified, multi-patterned, stunning like an eastern carpet. Greeks, Armenians, Italians, and Saracens all become Lviv-like among the Polish, Ruthenian and Jewish locals."

Relations between Lviv and the East did not end when the Russians conquered the Commonwealth and pushed the Ottoman Empire away from the Black Sea. During the interwar period, Lviv became a key Orient centre in Poland. For example, in 1922, the Polish Oriental Association was established in Lviv. Its journal, called the *Oriental Yearbook*, was launched in 1925 and was published in Lviv until the Second World War. One of the key professors who taught eastern languages at Lviv University was an Azeri named Sadykh Bey Aghabekov. He served as a general in the Russian Imperial Army and later worked as a deputy minister of internal affairs. He set up the police force in Azerbaijan, which was the first democratic and secular republic in the Islamic world. While serving in the Imperial Army, Aghebekov conducted studies on the culture of the Turkmen people of Central Asia. In Lviv, he published a Turkish and Arabic textbooks. He was invited to Lviv by Zygmunt Smogorzewski, a Russian, and later Polish, diplomat who worked as an oriental languages teacher in Lviv following his retirement from the diplomatic service and was the driving force behind Lviv's development as the centre of Polish studies of the Orient. Ali Ismail Woronowicz, a Polish Tatar who later became an imam in Warsaw and the chief Imam of the Polish Army, was also a student of these outstanding orientalists. In 1941 he was arrested and most probably killed by the Soviets.

No other nationality in Lviv contributed so much to its orientalisation as the Armenians

No other nationality in Lviv contributed so much to its orientalisation as the Armenians. Thanks to trade relations with their compatriots, the Armenians could do business from the Middle East to China. The greatest landmark and most important oriental symbol of Lviv which still stands today is the city's 14th-century cathedral, built by a Levantine Italian architect from Crimea. The building bears numerous characteristic features of Islamic art. Armenians came to Lviv from Crimea, where they adopted the Tatar language as their own, giving it a specific Armenian accent. They called the trade route from Lviv to Crimea "the Tatar route". Consequently, they were often associated with the Tatars, calling their language the Tatar language and often using Tatar-Muslim names. Although they maintained their Christian beliefs. Their weaponry, clothing and customs were also described as "Tatar". They identified with the Tatars to such an extent that the greatest Polish chronicler, Jan Długosz,

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claimed that the Tatars were the descendants of Armenians. Furthermore, in 1618 Armenians published the first book in the Turkic language in Lviv.

Intermediary between civilisations

Other Lviv residents had mixed feelings about such close identification with the Tatars. On the one hand, Lviv Armenians played crucial roles as Polish diplomats, translators and royal secretaries, as well as being general specialists on Turkey and Iran. On the other, according to the Polish historian Andrzej Zięba: "they were suspected of doing dishonest business with the Turks and Tatars and carrying out intelligence work for them. At the same time, their foreign descent, the Kipchak (Tatar) language and their trade relations in the Orient rationalised these prejudices."

The Armenian community in Lviv maintained very close relations with their compatriots from Turkey, Iran and even India. Minas Tohatetsi, born in Tokat in Anatolia, moved to Lviv and went down in history as one of the most significant Armenian poets and miniaturists of the 16th century. Another important figure was the 17th-century Armenian traveller Symeon Lehaci, who was born in Zamość but spent most of his life in Lviv. He is the author of a chronicle detailing numerous journeys in the Middle East that lasted several years. That chronicle has since become a unique source of knowledge about Armenian communities living in that part of the world. The role of the Armenian Lviv as an intermediary between civilisations is confirmed in the Bible of Lukas of Babert, which was written in Lviv. Its illustrations portray the Book of Revelations according to Albrecht Durer's woodcuts.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Lviv Greeks were a major rival to the Armenians in terms of trade with the Ottoman Empire. Beyond that, the Greeks were a part of the Constantinople patriarchate religious community, which was subject to the Ottoman Emperor, not the Orthodox Church community in Ukraine. At the same time, Lviv was the closest large city in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to the Ottoman border. The most significant Greek merchant in Lviv's history was Konstanty Korniakt, who lived during the 16th century. He was originally from Crete but spent most of his life initially in Istanbul and then later Lviv. He became one of the wealthiest men in the Commonwealth. Even the king Sigismund II Augustus would borrow significant amounts of money from him. Korniakt helped finance buildings that later became symbols of Lviv: the chapel and the tower by the Dormition Church and the Korniakt Palace, the most beautiful example of Renaissance-style architecture on Ukrainian soil. Korniakt married into the Polish

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and Ruthenian aristocracy. Moreover, he had a significant impact on the development of the Ruthenian community's religious life. He supported the establishment of the Lviv Dormition Brotherhood, including its school and printing house.

The Greeks played a key role in the development of the Orthodox Church and Ruthenian culture opposed to the Catholic counter-reformation and the notion of a church union between the Orthodox and Catholic churches. The brotherhood was also granted privileges under Jeremias II, the patriarch of Constantinople, who had stayed in Lviv. The patriarchate's actions were supported by the Ottoman Emperor. Orthodox Christians considered him to be the lesser of two evils (according to a well-known saying at the time: "the sultan's turban is better than the Pope's tiara"). On the other hand, as Igor Lylo, a Ukrainian researcher, observed: "the Poles… had reasonable grounds to suspect that the Greeks arriving in Poland were secretly serving the sultan. Poles … were extremely cautious, even towards the most important representatives of the Orthodox Church" coming from the Ottoman Empire.

For the Orthodox Church, Ottoman rule was the lesser of two evils, as illustrated by the well-known saying: "better the sultan's turban than the Pope's tiara".

Today Lviv is a bastion of the church union and Greek Catholicism. Paradoxically, of all the major Ukrainian cities, Lviv stayed faithful to Orthodox Christianity the longest, due primarily to its very strong ties with Constantinople. The Polish authorities, concerned about the loyalty of the Orthodox Christians, pushed for the union in Lviv.

Unique religious connections

For several generations, the Jewish community living in Lviv was made up of three main groups: Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardic Jews and the Crimean Karaites. The latter group spoke a language closely related to that of the Tatars; they came from Crimea and are currently regarded as followers of a different religion to Judaism. Sephardic Jews arrived in Lviv from the Balkans. However, they have roots in the Iberian Peninsula where, for 800 years, they had been heavily influenced by Arabic culture. Even though they came from the West, Ashkenazi Jews have their roots in the Eurasian Steppe, as their name originates from the name of the Scythians, Iranian nomads who had been living on the Eurasian Steppe since ancient times. Since the Middle Ages, Europeans had perceived the Scythians to be the ancestors of all nomads, including the Tatars. Although Ashkenazi Jews originated from

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Germany, they played an important role in the trade between Europe and Asia, along the route where Lviv was later established. They were called the Radanites, most probably a derivative of the Iranian word *rah-dan*, which means "one who knows the way".

Sephardic Jews in Lviv were concentrated around Yasef Nassi (also known as Joseph Nasi) and his commercial activities. He was an Ottoman diplomat (the sultan even bestowed him with the title of duke) with significant influence in the court in Istanbul and possessed great wealth. In exchange for a substantial loan, the Polish king Sigismund II Augustus granted Nassi numerous trade privileges in the Lithuanian-Polish Union/Commonwealth. He also played a significant role as a behind-the-scenes lobbyist in the election of Stefan Batory as Polish king.

The Crimean Karaites and Sephardic Jews gradually began to meld with the Ashkenazi Jews. Nevertheless, Sephardic culture maintained its influence over the Jewish community in Lviv as it was close to the border with the Ottoman Empire, where the majority of Jews were Sephardic. At the same time, the border between the Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire was not an iron curtain and it did not separate Sephardic Jews from Ashkenazi ones. A good example is Zvi Hirsh Ashkenazy, one of the most prominent rabbis in Lviv's history. Zvi Hirsh was a descendant of Ashkenazi refugees from Vilnius, who fled the Russians in 1655 and found themselves in the Ottoman Empire. His grandfather was the Rabbi of Buda and Zvi Hirsh himself was educated in Ottoman Thessaloniki by Sephardic Jews, even though he originated from the Ashkenazi tradition. As a result, he was appointed Rabbi of Sephardic Sarajevo. His spiritual career was concluded in Lviv, where he died. Simon Ashkenazy was his descendant and became an outstanding Polish diplomat and historian during the interwar period. He is also known for establishing the Lviv School of History in Polish historiography.

Relations between Muslims and Sephardic Jews in close proximity to Lviv resulted in the emergence of unique religious forms connecting Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

Relations between Muslims and Sephardic Jews in close proximity to Lviv, i.e. the border region of Podolia, which had even been an Ottoman province for a quarter of a century, resulted in the emergence of unique religious forms connecting Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the region. This phenomenon led to the beginning of Sabbateanism, a religious movement founded in the second half of the 17th century by Sabbatai Zevi, a mystic whose roots are in the Balkans. Zevi proclaimed himself to be a messiah. After being rejected by the Jewish community, he and his followers converted to Islam. Sabbatai's wife was a Jew from Podolia. The Sabbatean move-

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ment gave rise to Hassidism, a mystic stream in Judaism that adopted the rituals of Sephardic Jews and was founded in the 18th century in Podolia. Baal Shem Tov, its founder, was initially a Sabbatean follower.

In the second half of the 18th century, groups of Podolian and Lviv Jews migrated to the Ottoman Empire and, thanks to their relations with Sabbatean followers, converted to Islam. The most prominent among them was Jacob Frank, who was born in Buchach, outside Lviv, and raised under Ottoman rule. His mother tongue was Turkish. When he returned to Poland with his followers (the Frankists), he converted from Islam to Roman Catholicism and was ennobled. The conversion took place in Lviv and followed a famous theological dispute between the Frankists and the Judaists, during which Frank's speech had to be translated from Turkish.

The wide ranging influence of the Orient on Jewish Galicia was met with both reluctance and fascination by Lviv's inhabitants. The former is illustrated by the fact that Galicia was labelled "semi-Asia", mainly due to the strength of Hassidism, shaped by its relations with Islam. Lviv's fascination with the Ottoman Orient mixed with Hassidism found the most prominent expression in the works of Leopold von Sacher Masoch, a Lviv-born Austrian writer who presented himself as a descendant of the Spanish Moors. The term masochism, i.e. deriving sexual pleasure from pain and humiliation, is derived from his surname. According to American historian Larry Wolff, a fascination with masochism in Masoch's writings was related to his perception of the Orient through the prism of slavery, harem and despotism, things that the writer also saw in Galician villages.

The wide ranging influence of the Orient on Jewish Galicia was met with both reluctance and fascination by Lviv's inhabitants.

Lviv was not only subject to the influences of the Orient; its people greatly contributed to major cultural transformations in the world of Islam and were important intermediaries between both civilisations. Lviv-born Ali Ufki Bej (alias Wojciech Bobowski, 1610–1675) was made a Tatar slave when he was a boy. He then became a dragoman at the court of the Ottoman Emperor (chief translator), as well as a musicologist and composer. It was thanks to him that Ottoman music was written for the first time using the form of European music notation. His collection of Ottoman musical pieces is invaluable to Turkey's cultural heritage. His works connected Ottoman and Orthodox Church music (before he converted to Islam, he was a Calvinist). Bobowski was the first person to translate the Christian catechism and the Bible into Turkish. He also wrote an explanation of Islam in Latin in order to acquaint Christians with Islamic rules, as well as translating the

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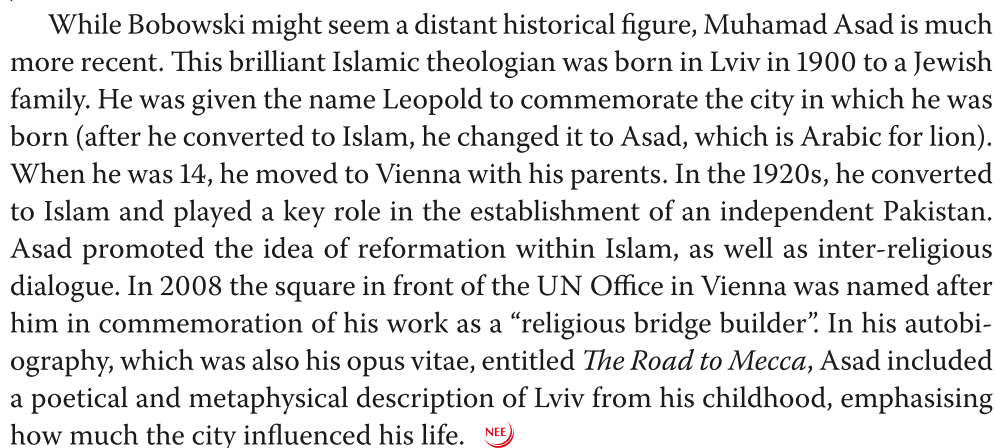
works of the most outstanding European Protestant thinkers, Hugo Grotius and Jan Amos Comenius, into Turkish.

While Bobowski might seem a distant historical figure, Muhamad Asad is much more recent. This brilliant Islamic theologian was born in Lviv in 1900 to a Jewish family. He was given the name Leopold to commemorate the city in which he was born (after he converted to Islam, he changed it to Asad, which is Arabic for lion). When he was 14, he moved to Vienna with his parents. In the 1920s, he converted to Islam and played a key role in the establishment of an independent Pakistan. Asad promoted the idea of reformation within Islam, as well as inter-religious dialogue. In 2008 the square in front of the UN Office in Vienna was named after him in commemoration of his work as a "religious bridge builder". In his autobiography, which was also his opus vitae, entitled *The Road to Mecca*, Asad included a poetical and metaphysical description of Lviv from his childhood, emphasising how much the city influenced his life.



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