



Interreligious Relations in Medieval Ukraine: Coexistence of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Communities

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Abstract

The study was devoted to investigating the specifics of interreligious relations in medieval Ukraine during the 12th-17th centuries, particularly the interaction of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities in Kyivan Rus and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The research methods included a comparative historical analysis, which allowed assessing the differences in the legal status of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in different periods of the medieval history of Ukraine. The study results showed that interreligious relations in medieval Ukraine were characterised by a complex structure that included both social integration and conflict processes. Christianity served as the main institutional mechanism that ensured the legitimation of state power, regulation of public relations, and the development of a regulatory framework. Non-Christian religious communities, especially Jewish and Muslim ones, had a special legal status that ranged from obtaining economic privileges to introducing discriminatory norms and legal restrictions. The Orthodox and Catholic denominations competed for dominance in the religious and political space, which was manifested in the desire to gain the support of secular elites and the population. The conclusion of the Union of Brest in 1596 was an important factor that contributed to the transformation of the confessional landscape, which, in turn, led to the deepening of disagreements between Orthodox and Catholic traditions and the activation of socio-religious contradictions.



Keywords: Confessional Policy, Socio-Cultural Assimilation, Ethnic Communities, National Identity, Discriminatory Practices.

Introduction

Interreligious relations in medieval Ukraine were a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that reflected the dynamics of socio-political, economic, and cultural processes in the region during the 12th-17th centuries. The diversity of religious minorities created unique conditions for the development of interreligious relationships, which were not always harmonious, but simultaneously contributed to the development of a complex system of interaction between religious communities. The study of interreligious relations of this period helped to trace how the religious factor influenced political stability, social integration, and economic development.

Raffensperger (2025) emphasised that Christianity, in particular Orthodoxy, played an important role in creating the state ideology of Kyivan Rus. Tsebenko (2022) noted that Orthodoxy played an important role in shaping the legal framework of society, since many legal norms of Kyivan Rus were based on Christian moral and ethical principles and played a significant role in the development of culture, education, and literature.

Zaiats (2023) demonstrates that Jewish communities, due to the royal privileges, have played a significant role in the economic life of society, actively engaging in crafts and trade. Curta (2021) drew attention to the connection between the economic activity of Jewish communities in medieval Ukraine and social tension. The researcher emphasised that the privileges granted by the monarchs, which contributed to the development of Jewish crafts and financial structures, simultaneously caused discontent among the townspeople and gentry. As noted by Račius (2021), Muslim communities, represented mainly by Tatars, showed a different vector of integration. Unlike Jewish communities, they were more involved in military administrative structures, performing the functions of border guards, security guards, and even senior military officials.

Romanovych (2024) noted that the Orthodox and Catholic churches throughout the medieval period were constantly fighting for dominance in the religious space of Ukraine. This competition became particularly acute after the conclusion of the Union of Brest in 1596, which not only led to a transformation of the confessional landscape of the region but also became a catalyst for significant changes in the socio-cultural and political spheres.

The Union, which provided for the transfer of part of the Orthodox clergy and laity under the jurisdiction of Rome, caused resistance among a significant part of the Ukrainian population, which traditionally identified itself with Orthodoxy (Stadnik, 2024). Friedrich (2023) confirmed that despite the multiethnic and multiconfessional nature of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which for a long time covered most of the Ukrainian lands, interfaith groups showed the ability to coexist peacefully, which was ensured due to the legal and political context of that time.

The political system of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland contributed to the development of an inclusive policy that guaranteed freedom of religion and ensured interfaith harmony in the context of socio-cultural diversity. The study by Vizer and Rerepeliuk (2023) demonstrated that attempts at reconciliation between the Orthodox and Uniate churches in Ukraine in the second half of the 1620s were aimed at achieving religious peace and social stability.

This study aims to analyze interreligious relations in medieval Ukraine and assess the role of religion in shaping the socio-political landscape of Kyivan Rus and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Key objectives include:

- investigating the legal status of Christian (Orthodox and Catholic), Jewish, and Muslim communities;
- analyzing periods of peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and tension or conflict among these communities;

– identifying key socio-economic, political, and cultural factors influencing interreligious dynamics.

Materials and Methods

The research employed a comprehensive methodology, combining historical, regulatory, socio-cultural, political, and comparative analysis. This interdisciplinary approach provided a thorough understanding of interreligious relations, legal regulations, and the socio-economic conditions of religious communities. The use of primary sources and academic literature enabled a critical analysis of political, social, and economic transformations linked to medieval religious policies.

At the first stage of the study, historical analysis was applied to reconstruct the process of Christianisation of Kyivan Rus and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Special attention was paid to the relations between secular and ecclesiastical authorities, mechanisms for legitimising princely power through religion, and the role of the archdiocese as an instrument of political influence on state processes (Bremer, 2020; St. Josaphat Ukrainian Catholic..., 2025). Methods of historical analysis and comparison of sources were used, including a contextual approach to investigate the evolution of canon law, which regulated religious policy.

Historical and legal analysis was applied at the second stage of the study, which provided for the investigation of regulatory documents and legal acts that regulated the status of religious communities in medieval Ukraine. The study examined the legal mechanisms that safeguarded religious freedoms and defined the jurisdictional status of minority communities and restrictions on the legal opportunities of Jewish and Muslim communities. The study analysed how government decisions affected the socio-economic situation of Jewish and Muslim communities, in particular, their role in finance, trade, and handicrafts (Wayback Machine, 2013; Wiener Holocaust Library, 2025; Info Kalisz, 2024).

At the third stage of the study, a socio-economic approach was applied to compare the influence of state and religious institutions on the development of interreligious relations. The contribution of Jewish and Muslim communities to the region's economy, their participation in lending, international trade, the tax system, and handicrafts was investigated.

Special attention was paid to the analysis of the interaction of economic interests of various social groups and the impact of state restrictions on the social mobility of religious minorities. The study examined how the economic activity of Jewish and Muslim communities changed depending on political and religious transformations in medieval Ukraine (Kieval, 2021; Dov Cooperman et al., 2024; Milerowska, 2020).

Results

The role of Christianity in Kyivan Rus and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Christianity's adoption as the state religion in 988 transformed Kyivan Rus. Prince Volodymyr's conversion strengthened political unity and boosted international prestige. This common faith consolidated diverse tribes under Kyivan rule by establishing a shared identity. Christianity legitimized princely authority through divine sanction, reinforcing central governance and institutional development. Princes and clergy maintained a symbiotic relationship – rulers provided financial support and land, while the church offered legitimacy and social influence. In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, religious policy had its characteristics.

Even though the majority of the population professed Orthodoxy, the ruling elite gradually adopted Catholicism, which led to a certain tension between different faiths. However, the state tried to preserve religious tolerance by granting autonomy to the Orthodox Church and ensuring the coexistence of various religious communities.

In medieval Ukraine, the Orthodox Church held a clear position on non-believers, guided by dogmatic and canonical restrictions (Temirbolat et al., 2025). The Orthodox clergy considered representatives of other faiths as “schismatics” or “heretics”, which reflected the official attitude towards them. Such doctrinal exclusion resonates with modern debates. Nasution et al. (2025) note that religious prohibitions on interfaith greetings often reflect institutional anxieties about identity preservation, a dynamic similarly evident in medieval Orthodox policies. In 1620, when Patriarch Theophanes of Jerusalem restored the Orthodox hierarchy in Ukrainian lands, he stressed the need to avoid contact with representatives of the Uniate and Catholic churches, considering their faith to be a deviation from true Christianity (Bremer, 2020).

Similar views were consolidated in the charters of fraternities, such as the Lviv Dormition Brotherhood, which required its members to strictly observe Orthodox norms and warned against joint prayers or marriages with Catholics. In the 17th century, Orthodox bishops warned against Catholic services and sacraments, highlighting the anti-Polish actions of the Cossacks, led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky.

Relations between the Orthodox and Catholic clergy were characterised by both competition and attempts at religious rapprochement (Kassymova et al., 2025). After the Union of Krewe in 1385, which consolidated the dynastic union between Lithuania and Poland, Catholicism gradually began to spread its influence to Ukrainian lands (Wayback Machine, 2013). Grand Duke Jagiello, by converting to the Catholic faith, helped to strengthen the position of the Catholic Church, which caused concern among the Orthodox clergy.

The Catholic clergy received state support and privileges, while the Orthodox Church remained outside the system of official recognition, which led to a gradual decrease in its influence (Bulakh, 2024). In response to these challenges, the idea of Uniatism was formed among some Orthodox hierarchs – the unification of the Orthodox and Catholic churches under the rule of the pope while preserving the Eastern Rite.

The religious policy of the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania significantly influenced interfaith relations, as it contributed to the strengthening of Catholicism and the gradual displacement of Orthodoxy from public administration. After the Union of Horodlo in 1413, the Catholic gentry received significant privileges, in particular, the right to hold public office and participate in meetings of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Dov Cooperman et al., 2024). But the Orthodox gentry was deprived of these opportunities, which created prerequisites for social inequality and caused tension in society.

Orthodox communities faced economic and legal harassment. The growing discontent of the Orthodox gentry and townspeople led to the intensification of religious struggle, which was manifested in the creation of Orthodox fraternities and the organisation of printing houses that published polemical literature in defence of Orthodoxy. The Lviv and Kyiv fraternities became centres of Orthodox resistance, distributing anti-Catholic works and supporting opposition-minded Orthodox hierarchs. Social tension resulted in open conflicts, especially after the Union of Brest in 1596 (St. Josaphat Ukrainian Catholic..., 2025), when a significant part of the Orthodox did not accept the new Uniate church (Table 1).

Table 1. Dynamics of religious politics and conflicts in the 14th-17th centuries

Period	Event	Main consequences
1385	Union of Krewo	Lithuania accepts Catholicism, and the gradual strengthening of the influence of the Catholic Church in the Ukrainian lands begins.
1413	Union of Horodlo	The Catholic gentry receives privileges, while the Orthodox remain without access to the highest positions in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.
1569	Union of Lublin	Establishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, gradual subordination of the Orthodox Church to Catholic influence.



1596	Union of Brest	Some Orthodox Christians convert to Uniatism (the Greek Catholic Church), and conflicts begin between Orthodox and Uniates.
1632	Articles for the Reassurance of the Ruthenian People	Legalisation of the Orthodox Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth after decades of oppression.

Source: compiled by the authors based on Wayback Machine (2013), St. Josaphat Ukrainian Catholic Community of Munster (2025), J. Malec (2023).

The Union of Brest failed to achieve religious unity, facing strong resistance from the Orthodox population, particularly the Cossacks, townspeople, and clergy, who saw it as a threat to their faith and traditions. This caused a split in the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, with significant religious and political consequences. The Orthodox Church, opposing the Union, lost its official status in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, while the Greek Catholic Church gained support from the Polish state and the Vatican. In the 17th century, Cossack uprisings, led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky, targeted both Polish political domination and the Union, which they saw as a tool of Polonization. After the 1654 Pereyaslav Council, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church came under the Moscow Patriarchate, intensifying tensions with Greek Catholics. The failure to resolve these intra-confessional conflicts increased hostility both within and between religious communities, deepened doctrinal disputes, and fueled power struggles and political interference.

Privileges and limitations of Judaism in medieval Ukraine

Judaism remained the main religion of Jewish communities in medieval Ukraine, defining their way of life, social organisation, and interaction with the surrounding population. Despite numerous restrictions imposed by state and ecclesiastical institutions, Jews retained the opportunity to adhere to their religious traditions, build synagogues, and conduct divine services.

Formally, Jews received guarantees of religion in the 13th century, when Prince Boleslav the pious issued the Kalisz Statute in 1264 (Info Kalisz, 2024). This document guaranteed Jews personal safety, freedom of religious rites, and the right to engage in trade and crafts. The granting of such privileges was intended to involve Jewish communities in the economic development of the state, since they played an important role in money circulation, lending, and trade. In a medieval economy where a shortage of qualified financiers was common, Jewish communities ensured economic stability through banking and trade ties (Kubiczek et al., 2024; Murtezaj et al., 2024). In addition, their status as direct subjects of the monarch contributed to the centralisation of power, since Jews were subordinate to the royal administration, and not to the local nobility.

Jewish privileges under Casimir III the Great expanded when he confirmed the Kalisz Statute in 1364 and 1367, extending protections to Galicia. This benefited both Jewish communities and the royal treasury, as the monarch secured tax revenue and credit while Jews received legal protections including freedom from forced baptism, religious autonomy, and community self-governance in matters of marriage, inheritance, and religious law. Despite these legal guarantees, Jews faced significant religious restrictions. Many cities prohibited new synagogues or required expensive permits, and synagogues sometimes suffered attacks during riots. The situation was especially difficult in cities with the "Privilegium de non tolerandis Judaeis," which officially restricted Jewish residence and activities (Milerowska, 2020). These restrictions, driven by economic competition with Christian merchants and guilds, prohibited Jews from permanent residence, property ownership, trade operations, and civic participation in affected cities.

Medieval Christian clergy – both Catholic and Orthodox – generally had a negative attitude towards Judaism and the Jewish community (Bazarbayeva et al., 2024). This was expressed

both in theological doctrines and in social and legal restrictions. This attitude was based on the biblical view of Jews as “God-killers”, which became a common motif in sermons and church instructions. In the Catholic tradition, the image of a Jew was often associated with sin and deception. Since the 12th century, so-called “blood libel” – accusations of Jews abducting and murdering Christian children for ritual purposes – has been spreading in Europe and, accordingly, in the Ukrainian lands that fell under the influence of Poland. Such accusations have often been used to justify pogroms and legal prosecutions (Kieval, 2021). Some Catholic bishops demanded the forced conversion of Jews to Christianity. This became especially noticeable in the 17th century, when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was experiencing periods of counter-reformation.

The Orthodox clergy also had a wary attitude towards Jews, although it usually did not take such a radical form as in Catholicism. One of the main reasons for hostility was the fear of the influence of Judaism on the Orthodox flock. Already in the 14th-15th centuries, Orthodox sermons appeared with warnings about contacts with Jewish communities. In particular, the Kyiv clergy insisted that Christians avoid buying goods from Jewish merchants and do not use their financial services. The Orthodox Church supported legal restrictions on Jewish communities (Sapozhnik, 2024). In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Jews could not hold administrative positions and testify in courts against Christians (Wiener Holocaust Library, 2025).

Within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where the Muslim population was represented mainly by Tatars, and the Jewish community consisted of Ashkenazi Jews and Karaites, both groups were in the position of a religious minority. Accordingly, they focused on supporting their communities, adapting to political realities, and surviving economically while avoiding open conflict. Jews traditionally engaged in trade, financial transactions and handicrafts, while Muslims, in particular Tatars, often served in the army or performed administrative functions (Yesimov & Borovikova, 2022; Yudina et al., 2022). However, local cases of confrontation could arise on economic grounds. For example, competition in trade or financial services has sometimes caused tension between members of both religious communities.

In the Crimean Khanate, where Islam was the state religion, Jews (in particular Krymchaks and Karaites) lived in relatively stable conditions. The Karaite community, which differed from traditional Judaism in the specifics of the faith and liturgy, received certain privileges from the Crimean Khans and often had an autonomous status. However, Jews who adhered to rabbinic Judaism were in a more vulnerable position. It is known that some Muslim religious figures had a negative attitude towards Judaism and periodically demanded restrictions for Jewish communities. However, in practice, such initiatives usually had limited impact, as Jewish merchants played an important role in international trade, which was beneficial for the Khan's administration. Another factor holding back interreligious conflicts was the structure of Islamic law. According to Sharia law, Jews, like Christians, belonged to the category of “people of Scripture” (Ahl Al-Kitab) and had the right to religious autonomy in exchange for paying a special tax (jiziya).

Muslim presence in medieval Ukraine: Analysis of interreligious relations

In medieval Ukraine, Muslims primarily inhabited Crimea, which became the Crimean Khanate's center from the mid-15th century, along with steppe regions influenced by the Golden Horde. Muslim communities also existed in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, mostly comprising Tatars who served militarily or worked in trade. Religious freedom varied by political jurisdiction. In the Crimean Khanate, Islam was the state religion with full rights to practice, including mosques, madrasas, and Sharia courts. In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Lithuanian Tatars received privileges for their military service, including religious freedom, internal autonomy, and permission to build mosques.

Formally, Muslims had the right to freedom of religion, but this right largely depended on the will of monarchs and local magnates. Grand Duke Vytautas, who contributed to the migration of Tatars to the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 14th century, allowed them to build mosques and preserve their religious traditions. Tatar communities had their religious leaders-imams and Qadi, who administered justice by Islamic law. However, gradually, especially after the Union of Lublin in 1569 (Malec, 2023), which led to the unification of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with the Kingdom of Poland and the transfer of Ukrainian lands under Polish rule, the situation of Muslims began to change towards restrictions.

Polish kings during the 16th-17th centuries issued decrees that restricted the Muslim population in their rights, especially after the wars with the Ottoman Empire. After the Battle of Khotyn in 1621, when the Ottoman threat escalated, the Polish gentry began to demand additional restrictions for Muslims, suspecting them of collaborating with the Turks. This led to the adoption of the law of 1631, which prohibited Tatars from holding administrative positions and serving in the army without special royal permission (Shvangiradze, 2024).

The growth of interreligious tensions peaked after the war with the Ottoman Empire in 1672-1676. One of the main restrictions for the Muslim population was the gradual restriction of the construction of mosques, which was conditioned by both political and religious factors. The Christian clergy, especially the Catholic clergy, saw Islam as a potential threat, as Muslims remained true to their traditions and did not succumb to Christianisation. As a result, the Catholic Church actively advocated reducing the rights of Muslims, especially in the context of strained relations with the Ottoman Empire. In 1679, under pressure from the Catholic clergy, a law was passed that made it difficult not only to build new mosques, but also to repair existing ones (Shvangiradze, 2024). This led to the gradual decline of many Muslim religious buildings, as communities could not obtain official permission to renovate them.

While legally enforced, mosque restrictions varied by local officials and landlords. Muslims adapted by building in remote areas, converting homes, or continuing worship secretly in Tatar communities. Some found protection through influential patrons who secured exceptions. Religious limitations coincided with rising anti-Muslim sentiment, particularly from Catholic clergy like Jesuits who portrayed Muslims as untrustworthy during Ottoman conflicts. Consequently, Muslims faced exclusion not only from building religious structures but also from government positions and military service, where Tatars had traditionally held significant roles.

The restrictions significantly affected the lives of Muslim communities, especially Tatars, who traditionally lived in Lithuania, Volhynia, Podillia, and Kyiv Oblast. As a result of legislative oppression, some Tatars were forced to assimilate, accepting Catholicism or Orthodoxy to preserve their social status and the possibility of owning land. Some Muslims moved to the Ottoman Empire or the Crimean Khanate, where they had more opportunities to preserve their religion. The Catholic clergy viewed Muslims as a threat to the Catholic monarchy and supported their Christianisation (Tolan, 2023). The Jesuits, who had a significant influence on political life, promoted the idea of converting Tatars to Catholicism through education and cultural pressure. In particular, special schools were created for Tatar children, where they were taught Latin and the basics of the Catholic faith.

Despite restrictions, some Muslim communities preserved their religious identity through the protection of local nobles who employed Tatars as mercenaries or guards. Authorities often overlooked anti-Muslim laws for influential Muslim families. Nevertheless, the Muslim population gradually declined under Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth rule, nearly disappearing from most Ukrainian territories. The Orthodox Church, while still negative toward Islam, took a less hostile stance than Catholics. Following Byzantine tradition, Orthodox clergy viewed Muslims as followers of a separate, though false, religion rather than heretics. This perspective somewhat moderated anti-Muslim sentiment, though the Orthodox Church still supported certain restrictions against Muslims.

In the 16th-17th centuries, the Orthodox clergy repeatedly appealed to local authorities to limit contacts between Orthodox and Muslims, especially in those regions where they lived nearby,

in particular, on the lands bordering the Crimean Khanate. The main danger was seen in the possibility of conversion of Orthodox Christians to Islam, which was sometimes carried out under pressure or to obtain social and material advantages (Arshad et al., 2025). In this regard, church resolutions and sermons have repeatedly stressed the need to preserve the Orthodox faith and prevent the assimilation of Christians.

The Orthodox clergy also opposed mixed marriages between Orthodox and Muslims, seeing this as a threat to the preservation of Orthodox identity. These restrictions were both religious and social, since marriage to a Muslim often meant a change of religion and the loss of an Orthodox community of one of its members. It is known that in some cases, Orthodox Church hierarchs appealed to local secular rulers to take action against people who left Christianity in favour of Islam.

However, in territories controlled by Orthodox state entities, such as the Hetmanate, the attitude towards Muslims was even tougher than in Catholic lands. The Cossack environment perceived Muslims primarily in the military context as opponents, because the Cossacks waged constant wars with the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire. Muslim prisoners often became slaves, and any manifestations of the Islamic faith within the territories controlled by the Cossacks were banned.

Many of them were forced to live in isolated communities, where they preserved their traditions, but had limited access to governance, military service, and economic privileges. Those Muslims who sought better opportunities were forced to convert to Orthodoxy, which contributed to the gradual assimilation of the Muslim population in some regions. Thus, although the Orthodox Church did not show such an aggressive policy towards Muslims as Catholicism, its activities in the 16th-17th centuries still contributed to social marginalisation and restriction of the religious rights of Muslim communities in Ukrainian lands.

Muslim communities in medieval Ukraine were heavily influenced by political and religious factors that determined their rights and development opportunities. Legislative and administrative restrictions, which were tightened in the 16th-17th centuries, significantly complicated religion, which contributed to the assimilation of some Tatars who were forced to convert to Christianity to preserve their social status.

Medieval Ukraine's interreligious relations were complex, with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities facing oppression, economic restrictions, and political struggle (Table 2).

Table 2. Religious status of Christians, Jews and Muslims in medieval Ukraine in the 12th-17th century

Item	Christians	Jews	Muslims
Legal status	Dominant religion; support for the state and ruling elites	Recognised as a separate religious community; often faced restrictions and discrimination	Small presence; status depended on the region and political conditions
Social status	High; Christians held key government and military positions	Limited; limited access to government positions and professions. They were mainly represented in trade and craft areas	Restricted; restricted access to government positions. Mostly represented in the army
Religious rights and restrictions	Freedom of religion; the construction of Churches was supported	They were allowed to observe their own rites, but the construction of synagogues was often restricted	The ability to observe their own rituals; the construction of mosques was rare
Conflicts and	Rare; conflicts between different	Frequent pogroms, expulsions, and	Local conflicts; generally fewer

harassment	Christian denominations	discrimination	documented cases
Diplomatic relations	Active ties with Byzantium, Rome, and other Christian states	Limited international relations due to discrimination	Relations with Muslim states; depended on the political situation

Source: compiled by the authors based on Wiener Holocaust Library (2025), Tolan (2023), Shvangiradze (2024).

The analysis of Table 2 reveals significant differences in the status of religious communities in medieval Ukraine. Christianity, as the dominant religion, received state support, granting its followers broad social, economic, and political opportunities. In contrast, the Jewish community, though autonomous in religious life, faced legal restrictions and discrimination, particularly in economic matters, often limited to crafts, trade, and financial transactions, leading to conflicts with the local population. Muslims, particularly Crimean Tatars and Islamic merchants, were the smallest group, with limited influence due to their numbers and lack of political support. Their status varied based on political circumstances and trade relations, especially with the Crimean Khanate and Ottoman Empire. Interreligious relations were not uniform, fluctuating with political conditions. Christians enjoyed privileges, while Jews and Muslims operated within constraints imposed by the authorities. Periods of tolerance were interspersed with conflicts, such as Jewish pogroms and persecution by the Catholic Church, highlighting the complex interplay between religion, social, and economic status.

Discussion

Bentzen and Gokmen (2023) demonstrate Christianity's foundational role in shaping state institutions, aligning with this study's findings. Religion served not merely as spiritual guidance but as a key governance tool, legitimizing power through doctrinal norms to ensure regime stability. The research reveals how medieval states integrated religious principles into legal systems, with rulers strategically leveraging ecclesiastical authority to validate policies and reinforce social hierarchies. Similar aspects were investigated by Baumgarten (2021), who noted that royal privileges, on the one hand, provided Jewish communities with opportunities for economic growth, expanding commercial activities and engaging in credit and financial transactions, and on the other, provoked social conflicts and increased the risk of discriminatory measures. In the context of interreligious dialogue, it is worth noting the study by Witcombe (2023), which focused on the strategic use of diplomatic mechanisms by religious communities in medieval Europe to resolve interfaith differences and social conflicts. Bain (2023) proved that interaction between representatives of different faiths was carried out not only in the field of theological discussions, but also in the political dimension, where religious leaders played the role of mediators in negotiations between secular authorities and ethno-confessional communities.

Modern scholarship, including Wooden (2021), underscores the Union of Brest (1596) as a pivotal event in Eastern Europe's religious and political history. Far beyond a mere ecclesiastical union, it reshaped power dynamics, fueling lasting Orthodox-Catholic tensions. The union triggered doctrinal clashes, socio-religious strife, and anti-Uniate movements, while influencing Polish-Lithuanian policies toward religious groups. Sysyn (2022) highlights Orthodox resistance from nobles and clergy, exacerbating conflicts and drawing external political interference. Ultimately, the Union of Brest not only transformed confessional relations but also played a key role in shaping regional identities. According to Barella et al. (2024), economic cooperation between representatives of different faiths was an important factor in stimulating trade and production processes, contributing to the growth of urban centres, handicraft production, and the development of financial institutions.

Muslim Tatars in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania held a distinct socio-political role, integrated primarily through military service while maintaining religious and judicial autonomy. As Krotofil



et al. (2022) demonstrate, their legal status ensured preservation of Islamic traditions and Sharia law in exchange for loyalty. This study confirms that Tatar communities successfully balanced ethno-confessional identity with political integration, reflecting both state flexibility toward minorities and their active participation in public life. Rubin (2020) and Barzilay (2022) note that discriminatory policies were not static but were undulating in nature, due to changes in the domestic and foreign policies of state entities. These observations were consistent with the findings of this study, which showed that, despite periods of intense religious discrimination and legal harassment, there were also phases of relative tolerance. This study is consistent with the work of Jones and Shogimen (2023), who thoroughly analysed the interdependence of interfaith relations and the political will of rulers in the context of medieval Europe. The researchers argued that state institutions, guided by both pragmatic and ideological motives, actively influenced confessional groups, determining their legal status, level of autonomy and opportunities for participation in socio-political life.

Conclusions

The study analyzed interreligious relations in medieval Ukraine, focusing on Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities in Kyivan Rus and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It found that interfaith relations were complex and multi-layered, influenced by religious, political, and economic factors. Christianity was the main institutional mechanism, while non-Christian religious communities, such as Jewish and Muslim, had specific legal statuses. The Jewish population played a significant role in trade, finance, and crafts, but faced discriminatory policies and violence. The Muslim population, mainly Crimean and Lithuanian Tatars, was integrated into the military-administrative structures of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but faced religious unification attempts and restrictions. The competition between Orthodox and Catholic denominations for dominance in medieval Ukraine was a key factor in the formation of interfaith dynamics. The Union of Brest in 1596 led to the deepening of differences between Orthodox and Catholic traditions, intensifying socio-religious contradictions and triggering political and national movements. Interreligious relations were dynamic, characterized by periods of tolerance, conflict, and reform.

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