

The Crimean Khanate
between East and West
(15th–18th Century)

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Introduction

Denise Klein

This volume presents a collection of studies exploring the politics, society, and culture of the Crimean Khanate, as well as the khanate's place within early modern Europe. Most of the contributions were originally presented in the spring of 2008 at a conference in Munich, at which scholars from a variety of backgrounds and specializations discussed this often-neglected region of Eastern Europe. A descendant of the steppe empires, the Crimean Khanate was a semi-autonomous polity under Ottoman suzerainty and a player in its own right within Eastern Europe. Featuring hybrid forms of political and social organization, the khanate was home to a society of exceptional cultural diversity.

Among the khanate's most interesting characteristics is its peculiar political organization. As heir to the empire of the 'greatest ruler of the East,' Genghis Khan, the Crimean Khanate retained steppe institutions and practices throughout its existence. In particular, the khans' political authority was limited by the most powerful elements in society, the Tatar tribes, who chose the khans in the *kurultay* and constantly forced them to negotiate their policies.¹ Nevertheless, little is known about the steppe legacy of the Crimean Khanate and how it was transformed by the incorporation of forms of political and social organization borrowed from the Ottomans. Tatar customary law (*yasa, töre*), for instance, coexisted with sharia law and Ottoman state law (*kānūn*), while the khanate's governmental structures and institutions often followed the Ottoman model.

The Crimean Khanate was an integral part of the Eastern European political order. Neighboring the Latin West and the Orthodox East, the Tatar state was the northern stronghold of the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world for more than three centuries. The khans served under the sultan's command and depended on Istanbul's approval and financial support.² However, having inherited all Genghisid political claims when 'taking over' the Great Horde in the fifteenth century, the khans also acted with the prerogatives of independent sovereigns – for example, they

1 See in particular Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Clans of the Crimean Khanate, 1466–1532*, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 2:3 (1978), pp. 282–309 and Halil İnalçık, *The Khan and the Tribal Aristocracy: The Crimean Khanate under Sahib Giray I*, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3:4 (1979–1980), pp. 445–466.

2 On the latter, see Alan Fisher, *Les rapports entre l'Empire Ottoman et la Crimée: l'aspect financier*, *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 13:3 (1972), pp. 368–381.

maintained their own diplomatic relations.³ Further research is required to describe this ambiguous position of the khanate and to replace the obsolete view of the Tatars as simply agents of Ottoman imperialist policy regarding Christian Europe. This investigation would have to begin by distinguishing between official rhetoric, centered on the idea of religious struggle, and policies dictated by pragmatic considerations.

Crimea was a land of great diversity, illustrated, for example, by the variety of religions found on the peninsula. The presence of Muslims and Orthodox, Armenian, and Catholic Christians, as well as Rabbinic and non-Rabbinic Jews was reflected in all spheres of life, from urban space and architecture to art and literature.⁴ However, little is known about how people actually lived together and how attributes other than religion, such as gender, kinship or occupation, impacted daily life. Our understanding of how the state handled this diversity is equally imperfect. The situation is rendered even more complex by the fact that people were moving and thinking in spaces that transgressed the political borders of the khanate. This was the case for the Nogay Tatars, who lived as nomadic livestock breeders in the frontier zones and engaged in raids into neighboring countries. Armenian merchants on the peninsula were integrated into trading networks that reached as far as Iran and Western Europe. The Crimean Tatar elite also looked outside the khanate's borders as it came increasingly under the influence of Ottoman culture.⁵

Much of our information on the Crimean Khanate and its people comes from accounts written by travelers from Christian Europe. It is striking that although the khanate was integrated both economically and politically into Eastern Europe, its Christian neighbors typically used the Tatars as 'the other' in order to define themselves as Europeans. Thus, before using these texts as a source of information about Crimea, one needs to be aware of the role this literature played in the process by which the European 'self' came into existence in the early modern era. On the European mental map, the Crimean Tatars were characterized as the last avatars of the steppe horse-riding raiders, or as barbarian versions of the Ottomans. These cate-

3 See recently 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 2011.

4 On religious minorities in Crimea, see most recently Mikhail Kizilov, *Krymskaja Iudeja: Očerki istorii evreev, hazar, karaimov i krymčakov v Krymu s antičnyh vremen do naših dnei* [Crimean Judea: Notes on the history of the Jews, Khazars, Karaites, and Krymchaks in Crimea since ancient times], Simferopol' 2011.

5 Crimea's economic and cultural relations with other regions are seldom studied, with the exception of the Crimean slave trade; see the article by Gáspár Katkó in this volume for the most recent publications. On Armenian trade networks, see Sebouh D. Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*, Berkeley 2011. On Crimean Tatar art and architecture, see Nicole Kançal-Ferrari, *Kırım'dan Kalan Miras Hansaray* [The khans' palace: A heritage from Crimea], Istanbul 2005 and Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, Joachim Gierlichs, and Brigitte Heuer (eds.), *Islamic Art and Architecture in the European Periphery: Crimea, Caucasus, and the Volga-Ural Region*, Wiesbaden 2008.

gorizations impacted politics, as can be seen in the case of the ‘civilizing’ Russian conquest of 1783, and have persisted for centuries, outlasting the khanate itself.

Studying the Crimean Khanate in all its complexity requires handling sources written in more than a dozen languages and understanding a number of different regional histories. This can only be achieved by combining diverse expertise through scholarly exchange, an undertaking that often encounters serious obstacles. Research on Crimea is conducted within the framework of the largely unconnected fields of Asian, Middle Eastern, Eastern, and Western European Studies, in many different countries and languages, and typically has a single focus on history, religion, literature, or philology. This means that scholarship on the khanate follows a variety of traditions, each with its own set of questions, and appears in publications addressed to different academic communities.

The present collection of essays, in English and German, brings together research from scholars of different backgrounds and perspectives who share a common interest in Crimea, in an attempt to stimulate interdisciplinary discussion of the khanate. This is timely, since research on the subject has undergone a transformation over the last two decades. Not only have there been major changes regarding the possibilities of studying the Turkic and Tatar past of Eastern Europe, but there has also been a wave of new scholarship through which the region’s history is being rewritten. Growing numbers of studies now examine a historical period that had been marginalized since Tsarina Catherine II (1762–1796) annexed the khanate in 1783, when the last ruling house of Genghis Khan disappeared not only from the political but also from the mental map of Eastern Europe.

The Russian Empire and its successors appropriated the newly acquired territory of the khanate and created a national historiography that gave no space to the Turkic and Tatar past. This historiography claimed that Crimea had been Russian since late antiquity or the Middle Ages, describing the khanate’s annexation as a “reunification” and legitimizing Russia’s imperial expansion by a civilizing rhetoric. Many of these views persisted under the USSR, where, apart from a brief flowering of studies in the decade following the 1917 revolution, research on the Turkic and Tatar past was possible only to a very limited extent.⁶ Russian and Ukrainian Studies in the

6 The most influential publication on the khanate in the Russian language is still Vasilij D. Smirnov’s two-volume monograph *Krymskoe hanstvo pod verhovensvom Otomanskoj Porty do načala XVIII veka* [The Crimean Khanate under the overlordship of the Ottoman Porte up to the beginning of the 18th century], St. Petersburg 1887, and, vol. 2, *Krymskoe hanstvo pod verhovensvom Otomanskoj Porty v XVIII stoletii* [The Crimean Khanate under the overlordship of the Ottoman Porte in the 18th century], Odessa 1889. For an extensive discussion of Russian, Soviet, and post-1991 scientific and non-scientific literature on Crimea, see Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums. Der russische Krim-Diskurs im Zarenreich*, Konstanz 2007. On the conceptual problems related to the writing of national histories and the Ukrainian case in particular, see the remarks of Paul R. Magocsi, On the Writing of the History of Peoples and States, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 46:1–2 (2004), pp. 121–140. Magocsi’s solution to this, however, is debatable, see Serhii Plokyh, Between History and Nation: Paul Robert Magocsi and the Re-writing of Ukrainian History, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*

West also largely neglected this part of the region's history, and only a few specialists on Turkic and Ottoman studies dedicated their research to this successor state of the Golden Horde.⁷ Many of the contributions on Crimea, in fact, came from scholars of Hungary and Poland, countries in which centuries of contact with the khanate had left its mark – not only in popular stereotypes about 'Tatar raiders,' but also in a scholarly tradition of Turkic and Tatar studies.⁸ Of course, research has also been conducted in Turkey, a center of Ottoman and Turkic studies and home to many historians of Crimean Tatar origin.⁹ However, after Stalin's deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944, political discourse and historical research on Crimea was often inspired by Pan-Turkic ideology, discouraging many scholars from approaching the subject. Fortunately, this situation has changed substantially in the last two decades. The breakdown of the USSR, the opening of its archives, and a growing interest within Eastern Europe and Turkey in the study of Crimea's history beyond ideological paradigms have all given considerable impetus to new research.¹⁰

39:1 (2011), pp. 117–124, who suggests that by adopting transnational approaches to the history of Ukraine one can overcome the pitfalls of national and multi-national historical narratives.

- 7 After Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's *Geschichte der Chane der Krim unter osmanischer Herrschaft* (Vienna 1856), little was written on Crimea in Western languages until the second half of the twentieth century, when a nucleus of Crimean studies evolved in Paris. The circle of scholars led by the Russian émigré Alexandre Bennigsen prepared a major edition of documents regarding the khanate: Alexandre Bennigsen, Pertev N. Boratav, Dilek Desai, and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejey, *Le Khanat de Crimée dans les archives du Musée du palais de Topkapı*, Paris 1978. Together with Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, Victor Ostapchuk, Gilles Veinstein, and Alan Fisher, author of *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea 1772–1783* (Cambridge 1970) and *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford 1978), these researchers contributed much of our knowledge of the khanate's political system and Crimea's relations with the Ottomans.
- 8 Important research, particularly regarding the khanate's foreign relations and steppe traditions, has come from Mária Ivanics, István Vásáry, Zygmunt Abrahamowicz, and Ananiasz Zajaczkowski. The two latter have also edited two major Tatar chronicles, *Historia Chana Islam Gereja III: Üçüncü Islâm Girây Hân ta'rîhi* [The history of Khan Islam III Giray] (Warsaw 1971) and *La Chronique des steppes Kiptchak: Tevârîh-i deşt-i Qipçaq du XVIIe siècle* (Warsaw 1966), respectively.
- 9 The most prominent examples are Halil İnalçık and Akdes Nimet Kurat, both of whom studied the khanate's political, social, and economic history. Kurat has also edited a collection of Tatar documents kept in Istanbul: *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivindeki Altın Ordu, Kırım ve Türkistan hanlarına ait yarlık ve bitikler* [Yarlıg's and bitiks related to the khans of the Golden Horde, Crimea, and Turkistan from the archive of the Topkapı Saray Museum], Istanbul 1940.
- 10 See, for instance, the research by the Russian scholars Il'ja V. Zajcev, author of *Krymskaja istoriografičeskaja tradicija XV–XIX vv.: puti razvitija, rukopisi, teksty i istočniki* [The Crimean historiographical tradition of the 15th–19th centuries: Development, manuscripts, texts, and sources] (Moscow 2009), and Sagit F. Faizov, author of *Pis'ma hanov Islam-Gireja III i Muhammed-Gireja IV k carju Alekseju Mihajloviču i korolju Janu Kazimiru. 1654–1658. Krymsko-tatarskaja diplomatika v političeskom kontekste postperejaslavskogo vremeni* [Letters of Khan Islam III Giray and Khan Mehmed IV Giray to Tsar Aleksej Mihajlovič and King John Casimir (1654–1658): Crimean Tatar diplomacy in the political context of the post-Pereyaslav period] (Moscow 2003). See also the work in Tatar Studies carried out at the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences, founded in 1997 (<http://www.tataroved.ru/>, accessed March 11, 2011).