

A New Source of Information on Circassians, Kabarda and the Kinjal Battle in the Early 18th Century: A Hebrew Chronicle from the Crimean Khanate

Dan Shapira*

The aim of this paper is to bring to the attention of Circassian scholars and the researches in Circassian studies the English translation of a new-old and hitherto unstudied documentary source on one of the events in the Circassian territory of Kabarda in the early 18th century Kabarda territory of Circassia in English translation. Here. Below are the English translations of chapters 22, 24, 36, 47 and 48 of a Hebrew chronicle written in around 1730 in the Crimean Khanate.

The name of the chronicle partly translated here is *Deḇar Šepatayim* (pronounced *Devár Sefatáyim*), ‘an utterance of lips’, or ‘a word of two lips’, with ‘lips’ meaning dual in Hebrew, referring thus to the fact that most of the book’s contents was based on the information provided by two high-ranking Muslim informants from the Crimean Khanate, and that the book is a Hebrew translation of what had been transmitted to the author in Ottoman-Turkish or in Ottomanized Crimean-Tatar.

The chronicle is written mostly in the style of broken Biblical (and, to a much lesser extent, Talmudic) quotations. This style of writing was normal in the pre-Modern Hebrew literature. This is why I relied heavily on the King James’ Bible to translate the Hebrew quotations. The reader of English is supposed to stumble and ponder for a while about what the text says, exactly as the Hebrew reader does. In many cases, the reader the chronicler had in mind to target was supposed to grasp not only the Biblical or Talmudic, *etc.*, quotations, but the quotation’s broader context as well, or to raise to his mind the subsequent verses. Of course, it was impossible to mimic the Hebrew subtext thoroughly.

The book covers events that occurred between 1681-1730/1 in the Crimean Khanate (with a special interest on the local events in

* Dan Shapira, professor, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel. E-mail: shapiradan.apple@gmail.com. (Received: 21.12.2019; Accepted: 30.01.2020)

Karasub/Kara-su-Bazar, where the author lived); in the European parts of the Ottoman Empire, - especially in Istanbul; in the territories under the influence of the Crimean Khanate, such Circassia including Kabarda; Bujak/Bucak, Nogay territories, and Ottoman enclaves around the Crimean Khanate, such as Azak/Azov, etc.

The author of the book was David son of Eli'ezer Lechno/Lekhno, a Rabbi of the Crimean Rabbanite community, which was a Jewish minority amongst the Jewish-Karaite majority in the Crimea. Apparently, he was an inhabitant of Karasub where almost all the Crimean Rabbanites lived by then (a few others lived in Çufut-Kal'eh, the former capital of the Crimean Giray Khans, next to the newer capital of Bahçe-Saray, and in Mangup and Keffeh/Caphá/ Kafa on the territory of the Ottoman Eyalet of Keffeh). It is evident from his book and from what we know about him from other sources that he also frequented Bahçe-Saray, Istanbul, Çufut-Kal'eh. As the author of an unpublished Hebrew grammar, working hand in hand with the Karaite leadership of Çufut-Kal'eh, he also carried out some reforms in his small community while ascribing his own reforms to the authority of R. Moses the Exile of Kyiv (early 16th century) (Shapira Essay Review).

Under the auspices of the Sinani-Çelebi Karaite family, which was acting as though it was the *nešī'im* (the heads of the Jewish *millet*) of the Crimean Jews, Karaite and the Rabbanite alike, David son of Eli'ezer Lechno/Lekhno had the Rabbanite *siddur* (prayer book) printed several times in the newly established Karaite press of Çufut-Kal'eh. The first print went out in 1735, but it seems that there were several re-prints or prints in different formats slightly afterwards. This *siddur* contained *piyyuṭim* (poetic composition of religious content), Song of Songs and Ruth with Turkish/Tatar translations. Still, members of the community continued to copy handwritten *siddurs* even after the printed editions had appeared, with the same contents (*piyyuṭim*, Song of Songs and Ruth with Turkish-Tatar translations) (Shapira Judeo-Turkic). However, his *Ḥazzaniya* (book of synagogue ritual), which was composed between 1723-25, though held in high esteem, was never printed.

The chronicle became known to the academic world in the 1840s. In 1850, Finkel published Ch. 9, 10, 13, 17, 23 in his Russian translation, and Markon published chapters 3 and 16 in the original Hebrew in

1923, and in 1946 Markon published Ch. chapters 4-6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 20, 28-30, 36, 37, 39, 50, also in Hebrew, in 1946. The work was shortly reviewed in 1910 and by Borovoj in 1941. The work was edited and studied in a two-volume Master's thesis in Hebrew by Avi'ezer Tutian under the supervision of Prof. Yaron Ben-Naeh at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2011/12. My translation is based on this unpublished edition. Similar Hebrew texts from the Crimea from the end of the 18th Century were edited and studied by Akhiezer in 2011 and 2015.

Debar Šepatayim*

David son of Eli'ezer Lechno/Lekhno

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And in the year 1119 according to their¹ counting (04 April 1707 – 23 March 1708), Kaplan-Giray became the Crimean king, and Mengli-Giray Sultan became his deputy, and there was in his days, that “the Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst of” (Isa 19:12) Circassians, the chieftains of Kabarda, “and they shall fight every one against his brother” (Isa 19:2), who were ‘Ali-Sultan-Beg with his brothers against the Great Chieftain, Kirgok-Beg,² who ruled over all the people settled under his rule, and he did not share with them their shares and their rights, as should be in accordance with their customs.

‘Ali-Sultan-Beg with his brothers came crying for help to get from Kaplan-Giray and presenting him their petitions to be judged before him together with their brother, Kirgok. And they “vowed vow unto”

* See the original manuscript at the National Library of Israel, [https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000080285/NLI#\\$FL36516224](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH000080285/NLI#$FL36516224)

¹ *i.e.*, the Muslim.

² Kurgoko son of Hatokshoko Atažukin (?-1710/11?), the Grand Prince-Vali of Kabarda (1695?-1711?), fought the Crimean raid in 1699 under the *Kalga* Shahbaz-Giray (in December 1699 Shahbaz-Giray was killed in Besleney in the house of the prince Timur-Bulat), in 1700 and 1701 under Kaplan-Giray Sultan, in 1703 under the *Kalga* Gazi-Giray, in 1707-8, when the Kabardian princes and their allies defeated the Crimeans and Ottomans under Kaplan-Giray Khan at the Kinjal River, and in 1710.

(after Judges 11:30) him, because all the Circassian chieftains are subjugated under the high hand of the Khans of the Crimean Khans. Therefore, the Khan listened to their words and sent high-ranking and respected messengers to Kirgok-Beg inviting him to stand before Khan's court together with his brothers. But Kirgok-Beg did not pay attention and did not listen to their words, and did not believe them, lest they may "have taken crafty counsel against" (Ps 83:4) him, seize him, and punish him with a great punishment.

When the Khan saw that he did not hearken to his invitation, he sent to him another messenger with a letter saying 'I shall send a judge to you, an arbiter according to the religion, between thee and two thy brothers, according to the truth and to the justice'.

But the brothers did not believe him lest he might kill them by trickery. The Khan, Kaplan-Giray, "when he saw that he prevailed not against" (Gen 32:26/5) them from any direction, "and it repented him" (Gen 6:6), "and he thought scorn" (Esther 3:6), and the Khan took counsel whether he "shall go up to the battle against" (Judges 20:18) them, to besiege Kirgok, and to destroy all the Kabardian country, "to take a spoil, and to take a prey" (Ezek 38:12).

He ordered to announce in all his kingdom and under his government³ to register in a list "every mighty valiant man, and every man of war" (1Sam 16:18), "every man armed to battle" (Num 32:29). They were counted, all the men going to war, and were found to be some 20,000 "armed for war" (after Num 31:5).

The Khan, Kaplan-Giray, proceeded with all the regiments of the *seymen* army and all the "mighty men of valour" (Judges 11:1), with all the tribal chieftains, "and they departed from" (Num 33:3) Bahçe-Saray "and came unto" (Num 13:22) the fortress of Yeni-Kal'a'.

Murtaza-Pasha, the governor of Keffeh, Yeni-Kal'a', and Taman joined them there, all the "mighty men of valour" (Judges 11:1), "expert in war" (Song 3:8). They took out from the fortress six very big cannons and they "girded themselves with strength" (after 1Sam 2:4) and crossed the sea strait to the shore of Taman-Kal'esi. From there they went to besiege the encampment (*mošab*) of Kabarda.

³ The distinction here is made between the Crimean Khanate proper and its dependencies.

When Kirgok heard this, he panicked fearing for his life and the lives of his sons and grandchildren, “lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that are with him” (after 2Sam 17:16), and lest “strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not” (Hosea 7:9), and they could pick him up “as one gathereth eggs that are left” (after Isa 10:14).

“Then he rose up, and set his sons and his wives” (after Gen 31:17) and his daughters, and his servants, and all the poor found with him, nothing was left, even one, “and all their substance that they had gathered” (Gen 12:5), “and all the substance that was in their possession” (Deut 11:6), “and they departed from” (Num 33:3) the places of their encampments.

They retreated back, descending and ascending “upon the high mountains, and upon the hills” (Deut 12:2), “the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills” (Deut 43:15), called *kuh-i Elburuz* (Persian; Mt. Elbrus, 5,642 m), which means “the ancient mountains”,⁴ to take refuge there. There are there trees and woods from the Six Days of Creation, treasures of “snow and hoarfrost” (after Ps 147:16), “the drops of dew” (Job 38:28) and hail.

The mountain is sloping “and the height thereof reached unto heaven” (after Daniel 4:8/11) for it was higher than “all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven” (Gen 7:19).

There are steps to ascend and the unbeaten track to go up “through byways” (Judges 5:6) among the forest trees twisted in their branches, until two men cannot ascend together stumbling into each other, there is no another way and passage except this one.

When Kaplan-Giray Khan heard this, he arose arming his forces (after Gen 14:14) and they journeyed, going on still toward (after Gen 12:9) the place of their (new) encampment, while destroying all the woods to broaden the way⁵ to his soldiers and to all “that was in their

⁴ The name of the mountain in the Turkic Kipchak of the local populations (the Karachay-Balkar) was closely connected to the Crimean-Tatar language and was understood by the author, is *Mingi-Taw*, the “eternal mountain”. In the Circassian language, the meaning of the Circassian name is “the mountain of auspicious omen”.

⁵ The same tactics were used by the Russian army during the Russo-Caucasian and Russo-Circassian wars in the mid-19th Century.

possession” (Deut 11:6), “they presumed to go up unto the hill top” (Num 14:44), but they were not able to ascend anymore. They climbed up about one half of the mountain⁶ and camped there until the voice could be heard between the two camps.

The Khan sent to them messengers telling them to give him 3,000 slaves,⁷ and then he would leave them in peace and depart proudly, with contempt and with “the stout heart” (Isa 10:12).

They replied in a reconciling and compromising tone, but the Khan did not listen to them, according to the counsel of the great minister, Ḥaji ‘Ali-Aga, for he said ‘certainly shall I execute my word told to them!’.

The Chieftain Kirgok-Beg and all the Circassian princes refused and they allied themselves in a very strong bond, and they planned and tried “to slay them with guile” (after Ex 21:12), “for they saw that there was evil determined against them by the king” (after Esther 7:7), and “their wrath was kindled” (Ps 124:3) especially against Ḥaji ‘Ali-Aga, for he was one of them by origin.

‘This is as people say: From and within the forest comes the ax to it’ (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 39b), meaning ‘from it and in the same forest, the ax comes in it’;⁸ the explanation is ‘the wooden part of the ax’.

For this reason, “they rebelled, and vexed the spirit” (after Isa 63:10) and the will of the Khan, for he (Ḥaji ‘Ali-Aga) used to be one of the most despicable Circassian chieftains, subjugated under the hands of the Great Chieftain Kirgok-Beg.

And while they were camping safely and taking counsel, namely, the Khan with his great men and chieftains, and advisers, there came to the Khan one commander of the military unit of Azak (Azov), who was one of the chieftains of the Nogays, called Jubak-Aga, he “stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself” (1Sam 24:8) before the Khan.

⁶ Apparently, the Crimeans were unable to move up any further in the rarified / thin air, unlike the Kabardian Circassians and other local mountaineers.

⁷ Cf. Krolikowska.

⁸ In the chronicle, the original Babylonian-Aramaic text is translated into Hebrew.

And he raised his voice saying “Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech” (after Isa 28:23), “trust ye not in lying words” (Jer 7:4), for they have no (**customary Turkic law**) *töre* (*twrh*⁹), **no law** (*dat*), and **no religion** (*dīn*); they are the sort of men who break their oaths!’.

The Khan and the men who were with him did not answer Jubak-Aga a thing, but the great minister, Ḥajī ‘Ali-Aga, “his wrath was kindled” (after Ps 124:3) and “and he gnashed upon him with his teeth” (after Ps 37:12), but he, too, answered him nothing, from good to worst.

“So” Jubak-Aga “turned and went away” (2 Kings 5:12) to his way. But the king, Kaplan-Giray Khan, sent his brother, Safi-Giray Sultan, who was his *Nureddin*, and 3,000 men with him, “prepared for war” (Josh 4:13), to destroy completely their encampment and to straighten and beat a path, in order that the army could ascend after them, if this could be possible.

And so he did; he found a place between “the cliffs of the rocks” (Isa 57:5) and “the holes” (Jer 16:16) of the boulders, and he entered there.

When Kirgok-Beg and the princes that were there with him “saw that there was evil determined against them by the king” (after Esther 7:7), they panicked and “they have taken crafty counsel” (Ps 83:4/3).

The sent honorable messengers, who were some princes, and agreed to give away slaves according to the Khan’s order, but they promised him a lie; however, the Prince (Safi-Giray Sultan) believed them and camped there with all his army.

And it happened to be “in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night” (Prov 7:9), “and they girded on every man his sword” (1Sam 25:13) and broke their oath and chose another route and another path. And they came to the Khan’s encampment which was “spread” (2Sam 5:18) all over the mountain’s slopes, while (the Khan was) certain in the Prince (Safi-Giray Sultan), and they began to shoot their guns and arches felling their (Crimean) men dead “even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down” (Josh 7:5).

The Khan was “afraid, and rose up, and went” (after 1Kings 1:49) to flee and run away in order to save his life, “and nobody was

⁹ Clearly not ‘the Torah’.

recognizing his friend" (Josippon) "and all his army were scattered from him" (2Kings 25:5), "and they fled for their life" (2Kings 7:7) leaving behind their tents and their baggage train as is, going in total darkness, with (the Circassians) chasing them, "and they smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hōrmah/total liquidation¹⁰" (Num 14:45), "and they slew the worthiest of them" (after Ps 78:31), their chieftains, "behold, they were all dead corpses" (Isa 37:36).

When the Prince (Safi-Giray Sultan) heard "tumult, shouting, and the sound of the trumpet" (Amos 2:2) of war, he "was greatly afraid and distressed" (Gen 32:8), and he left with all his army by the route he had come in there, by the route of (River) Kinjal, lest they (the Circassians) seize the mountainous passages and they (the Crimeans) could be seized by the hand of their enemies "as the fishes that are taken in an evil net" (Eccl 9:12).

When the Prince (Safi-Giray Sultan) was moving by this route, he stumbled on the Khan who was in a panic and in a haste to go together with the Prince, and his second in charge, Hāji 'Ali-Aga, "with a few men" (Deut 26:5) with him. He drove them the beaten path and brought them to Keffeh.

The Circassians took prisoners many among the chiefs of the army, those who had come to war, and all the implements of war; particularly, the *Tatar-Sultan* was seized, called Sahib-Giray Sultan, and with him the Grand Deputy, Murtaza-Pasha.

When their chieftain, Kirgok-Beg, saw that he "has brought so great a sin upon" (after Ex 32:21) himself against the king, Kaplan-Giray Khan, he was afraid "and took counsel in his soul, having sorrow in his heart" (after Ps 13:3), and he set Sahib-Giray Sultan and the Deputy, Murtaza-Pasha, free. The rest of the Circassian chieftains slew the (seized) people of the army at the tip of the sword (Nahmanides on Num 21:1), "and took some of them prisoners" (Num 21:1).

And they hung on a tree¹¹ the judge who was the head of the religious court, and they "execute judgment" (Ex 12:12) and heavy evil tortures on him, because he was "who did very wickedly" (2Chr 20:35) "due to the fact that he did issue his ruling as practical *halakha*"

¹⁰ A Hebrew pun.

¹¹ This is a reference to the Circassian custom of hanging important prisoners on trees, generally, wrapped in raw hides.

(Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 88a) “to slay the souls that should not die” (Ezek 13:19), and “to hunt souls” (after Ezek 13:18).

And the Khan returned and came to Bahçe-Saray and with him the men who had survived the sword. He took counsel whether to assemble the army another time to attack them in battle and take vengeance upon the army of the Kabarda Circassians for the spilt blood of his slaves.

He decided to gather all the military commanders and the grandees of the Crimean land, together with the *seymen* regiments, and to force them against their will to wage war. But the entire people remained silent and did not answer him a thing, since they did not want to go fighting against them any more – because of their cowardice, “the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth” (Lev 26:36).

While they were still preparing to go to war against them, there arrived a messenger named *Emir-i ahur* (the Lord of the Stable), bearing a *Ḥaṭṭ-i şerif* missive of the Turkish king, Sultan Ahmed, may his glory be raised up.

And the Sultan dismissed Kaplan-Giray Khan from his rule over the Crimean lands, and exiled him to the land of Urumeli (Rumelia); and he exiled the grandee Ḥaji Ali-Aga to Babylonia, which is called Bagdat, because he had committed offenses and crimes in his conduct of the war. And the rest of his deeds and his wars, “are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings” (after 1Kings 15:7) of the Crimean land. The days that he ruled over the Crimean lands were one year and seven months (1707-1708).

And in his place, they made Khan his elder brother, Devlet-Giray Khan, on the suggestion of the Grand Vizier, Çorlu ‘Ali-Pasha¹² who had loved him for a long time. And it happened despite the fact that it was contrary to the wishes of the Turkish king and his mother, Valide-Sultan, who hated Devlet-Giray Khan because he had caused the death

¹² Çorlulu ‘Damad’ Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier in 1706-1710. He was dismissed sent to rule Keffe in the Crimea, but his dismissal was revoked and then exiled to Lemnos where he was killed in 1711.

of the Turkish king, Sultan Mustafa, and was the instigator of his downfall.

So he (the Grand Vizier 'Ali-Pasha) ordered him (Devlet-Giray) to be taken from the island of Rhodes, the place of his exile, and brought before the Turkish king Sultan Ahmed; and he (Sultan Ahmed) forgave him and "brought away his sin, which he hath sinned" (Lev 4:3). He put the royal crown on his head; and made him Khan in his brother's place over the Crimean lands; and gave him gifts, presents, and provisions; and sent him away. And he came to Bahçe-Saray and became Khan and sat on his royal throne.

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When Devlet-Giray Khan¹³ was king, he sent for Sa'adat-Giray Sultan¹⁴ from the Circassian land, from the Bestenay tribe¹⁵ he had fled there from the wrath of the Turkish king, who became greatly enraged with him because he (Sa'adat-Giray Sultan) had laid waste Ibrail,¹⁶

¹³ 1699-1702 and 1709-1713; here his second rule and its end are described.

¹⁴ Brother of Devlet-Giray Khan, 1662-1732; in 1692-1699, he was Or-Bey, commander of the fortress Or (Perekop); *Nureddin* in 1699; *Kalga* in 1699-1709 and 1708-1713; and Khan in 1717-1724. He stepped down from the Khan's throne in order to prevent a revolt and died in Yanbolu. As Khan, he continued the policies of his brother Kaplan-Giray I (1713-1715 and 1730-1736) in order to take more control over Circassia, and had more success in this than Kaplan-Giray I.

¹⁵ The Bestenay/Bestenay/Besleney people are one of the Circassian subgroups. Their traditional territory was on the right bank of the upper course of the river Laba, and along the rivers Khodziu, Urupu, and the Small and Great Tegens. Their language was close to Kabardian. Their neighbours were Abaza in the south and southeast, Mamkhegh in the west, and Makhosh in the northwest. They were part of the sphere of the Crimean Khans as early as 1571, when they participated in the Crimean raid on Moscow; Evliya Çelebi visited them in 1667 (cf. Shapira *The Mamshukh*); in 1882, there were 6,063 Russian subjects registered as Besleney. Nowadays, there are five small Besleney villages in the Russian Federation; the numbers of the Besleney people and their descendants in Turkey are unknown, but certainly there are many thousands.

¹⁶ Brăila in Wallachia.

Klm¹⁷ and **TWM'RWW' (?)**, and sought to assault the royal city of Edirne with an army and to lay it waste. And yet he kept all this from him on the advice of the Grand Vizier Çorlulu 'Ali-Pasha, who afterwards sent him a letter on the authority of the Turkish king and appointed him Viceroy – what is called *Kalga-Sultan* – “and the sin which he hath done shall be forgiven him” (Lev 19:22). He came to the Crimean lands and settled in the big city of Ak-Me[s]çid, which was under his rule; and so he resided there. But after a year had passed, the king Devlet-Giray Khan dismissed him from being *Kalga-Sultan* and accused him of crimes and rebellion, saying: ‘He does what he is not commanded to do’ – i.e. the acts of destruction I mentioned above – “which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind” (Jer 19:5).

All this disgusted them, so Kapuci-Bashi (Chief Warder) came and dismissed Sa'adat-Giray Sultan from his rule over the land and exiled him to the land of Yanbolu, the land of exile for the Crimean Khans. And while he was there, the messengers of the Turkish king arrived, took him from there and put him in prison, and then brought him to the city of Kostandina (Constantinople) and sentenced him there to death.

When the Crimean prince (Sa'adat-Giray Sultan) saw “that there was evil determined against him by the king” (Esther 7:7), and he knew for a certainty that all this evil had come upon him because of his brother Devlet-Giray Khan, who had accused him of **GWD'DB' (?)** – an accusation of the offense he had committed – he (Sa'adat-Giray Sultan) sent a messenger to show the Turkish king a letter from his brother the king Devlet-Giray Khan, sent on his authority and in his words, which demonstrated that it was by his (Devlet-Giray Khan's) command and orders that he (Sa'adat-Giray Sultan) did all that he had done.

When they saw the signature of the Khan, they declared him (Sa'adat-Giray Sultan) innocent and took him out of prison and sent him to a place near the city of Yanbolu called Çingene Saray,¹⁸ and he settled there. The king Devlet-Giray Khan brought his elder son, the most experienced among his brothers, and made him *Kalga-Sultan*;

¹⁷ Kilinburun? Kilia?

¹⁸ The 'Gypsy Palace'.

this was the one called Bahti-Giray,¹⁹ and he ruled the Crimean land, and came to settle in the city of Ak-Me[s]çid.

36

In the year 5479 from the Creation of the World²⁰ (Mon, 26 September 1718 – Wed, 13 September 1719) that is, 1131 according to the Ishmaelite era²¹ (Saturday 17 December 1718 – Monday 13 November 1719), there was a heavy plague in all the land of the Crimea, in towns and in villages, among the Ishmaelites (Muslims), and the Jews, and the uncircumcised (Christians), and especially in the Holy Community²² of Karasub.

¹⁹ Bahti-Giray, known as Deli-Sultan (*the Crazy Prince*), was the eldest son of Devlet-Giray Khan II; he was *serasker* of the Kuban Horde in 1699-1710 and 1713-1726; *Nureddin* in 1709; *Kalga-Sultan* in 1709, and *Kalga* in 1709-1713. In 1711, during the war with Muscovy, Bahti-Giray raided the Muscovite territories but was resisted fiercely by the Kalmuk Khan, Ayuka. In reprisal for the raid, the Muscovites decided to annihilate the Kuban Horde, and in August-September 1711, Kuban was invaded by 20,000-strong Kalmuk cavalry and by Muscovite infantry under P.M. Apraksin supported by Kabardians. The *Kalga-Sultan* Bahti-Giray was defeated on the river Čala in September, and the joint Kalmuk-Muscovite forces began methodically destroying the Nogay *ulus*; more than 22,000 were captured, more than 16,000 killed, and the Nogay people in Kuban were nearly exterminated. In 1713, after his younger brother Kaplan-Giray was appointed as Khan (r. 1713-1716), Bahti-Giray fled to Circassia and then back to Kuban where, without his younger brother's authority, he proclaimed himself *Kuban-serasker*; soon Bahti-Giray was supported by another younger brother, Bahadır-Giray, who had just lost his position as *Nureddin*. Bahti-Giray provoked a civil war amongst the remnants of the Nogays, and in 1713 he initiated another war with the Kalmuks, successfully raiding Ayuka's *ulus*, and brought back to Kuban 1,200 *kibitkas* from the Yurt Nogay, who had previously been subjugated by the Kalmuks; and some 1,000 *kibitkas* from other Nogay *ulus*s, and then all the Yadsan and Jembuyluk Nogays who numbered some 10,300 *kibitkas*. So Bahti-Giray's Kuban *ulus* grew by some 60,000 people.

²⁰ The Jewish date.

²¹ The Hijra date.

²² A Jewish community. The Jewish community of Karasub was the author's home.

And because of the plague, “the cry of the city went up to heaven” (1Sam 5:12), “even every man upon his son, and upon his brother” (Ex 32:29), “yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb” (Job 21:32).

And in the year 1132 according to their (Muslims’) counting, in his third regnal year, “yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled” (2Sam 14:14), (namely,) the people of Greater Kabarda who had been in the state of blood revenge towards them (*nzwfym lhm*²³) since they rebelled against Kaplan-Giray Khan “and slew their governors, and smote down their chosen men” (after Ps 78:31),²⁴ as is written above.

He (Kaplan-Giray) wanted to go against them to wage war in order to take revenge “by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which was shed” (Ps 79:10) by them and to punish them “by banishment, or by confiscation of goods, or by imprisonment” (after Ezra 7:26).

It was in winter that he, his commanders, and his slaves went to war against them; they camped in villages and in unprotected areas, for there were inter-fighting and internal unrest amongst the Circassian princes, and they fought each other. They were divided into two factions: one that of Aslan-bek,²⁵ and one that of Musa-unam-oglu Shev-Sultan-bek.²⁶

²³ Contaminated with Turkish < *Arabic *nezif*.

²⁴ This is a rare reference to the Circassian victory in the Kinjal/Kanjil Battle of 1708. Cf. Kazem-bek 1832.

²⁵ Our author combines here, probably, two different persons:

1. Aslan-Bek s. of Kaytuk s. of Jambulak, d. 1746. In Spring 1720, Sa’adet-Giray Khan camped on the border of Greater Kabarda with an army of 40,00, demanding supplies of 4,000 slaves and indemnities for the Kinjal Battle of 1708.

2. Islam s. of Misost, the leader of the pro-Crimean part among the Kabardian princes, whom Sa’adet-Giray Khan appointed the superior prince (pshisho) of Greater Kabarda.

²⁶ Hatakshoko s. of Misost s. of Kazi d. 1720/1, the superior prince (pshisho) of Greater Kabarda in 1709/10-1720/1, the leader of the pro-Russian Boksan party among the Kabardian princes, fought the Crimean Khanate, who, together with Nogays, raided Circassian lands in 1710-1717 and 1720 (cf. Dilek Desai & Özalp Gökbilgin 1970); cf. Xatozhuko son of Misost

The king, Sa'adet-Giray Khan, when he left the Crimea to go to make peace between them, he leant towards Aslan-Bek, for he "saw that the wisdom of God was in him" (1Kings 3:28), he thought in his heart: "Now he shall come first to receive my presence, and when he shall see me, he will be glad in his heart" (after Ex 4:14).

But he, "howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Isa 10:7).

And Aslan-bek did not come to receive the Khan; nevertheless, the Khan waited for him in the city of Taman, and in Besteney, and in Khemir-Goy,²⁷ until he came to his encampment. He saw that he did not come towards him, and realized that he, too, was among his enemies.

He grew sad and angry, and sent messengers to his son, Şaliḥ-Giray Sultan, who was having been growing and educated there in Kabarda,²⁸ to become his helper. But he did not want to hearken to his father's voice and leant towards the Circassian grandees revolting against his father outwardly and openly, but not inwardly and in the hidden. He did this because he was wise and did not want the Circassian grandees to revolt against him lest they "shall not surely thrust him out hence altogether" (after Ex 11:1) or "shall have taken crafty counsel against" (Ps 83:4) him to kill him. He behave towards them in disguise and the Circassian grandees believed him and trusted him, for they saw that he sinned towards his father, Sa'adat-Giray Khan. They changed their attitudes towards him and did not know his heart's hidden secrets.

One day, Şaliḥ-Giray Sultan was sitting in his tent while all his slaves were standing behind him on his right and left sides, and behold, Aslan-bek came, with all his horses and men, to see his presence. When he drew near towards the encampment, he descended from his beast honoring the Sultan (=the Giray prince). He arose to his feet and went

mentioned together with Aslam-Bek in the first quarter of the 18th century in Nogmov 1861, p. 122.

²⁷ South to R. Kuban.

²⁸ In accordance with the North-Caucasian custom of *atalyk*, some Crimean princes were growing in Circassian noble families having been thus culturally Circassianized, and that in order to cement relations between the Crimean ruling family and the Circassian tribes in the Crimean sphere of influence.

to meet him shouting his greeting while drawing near to the Sultan. Immediately, the Sultan went close to him greeting him in return. When Aslan-bek saw that the Sultan arose from his stead towards him to receive his greeting, he thought immediately that this would be a treachery trick. He turned around and went his way.

Şaliḫ-Giray Sultan went out shouting many times “return unto me” (after Isa 44:22), don’t be afraid, ‘for what have I done thee?’.

But he did not hearken or pay attention to his voice, for it is not in accordance with customs or royal practices to arise in the presence of a commoner. So he rode away with his horses and retinue and fled. All his host and his men assembled themselves together, defiant men learnt in the craft of war (after Song 3:8). When the Sultan saw that Aslan-bek did not hearken and did not accept his words, he prepared himself to fight him. So he called up together all the people found with him there, and they arranged a fight each against the other. The army of the Sultan lost, and many fell; the rest fled away from their enemies.

All the Circassian grandees, when they saw that they have sinned against the King, Sa’adat-Giray Khan, they allied themselves together strongly and decided to put over them as their ruler one of the sons of the King Devlet-Giray, one of the Sultans. They chose Bahti-Giray Sultan. They thought that he would come to save them from the hands of their enemies, for “it is in the power of his hand to do” (Gen 31:29) this. Additionally, he had also sinned against the Turkish king, and from the point of view of Sa’adat-Giray Khan, there was a difference between them, the Circassian grandees, and him. They did take counsel in their souls (after Ps 13:3) and they decided firmly (after Ps 77:9) to come to the Khan’s encampment and attack it, destroy it, to fallen down as many dead as they could, just as they did to the King Kaplan-Giray Khan: as this was done in the days of old, so must it be done by the later generations.

Bahti-Giray Sultan sent messengers to all the leaders and grandees of Kabarda, saying: ‘If you do call me back to the throne and if you do accept my leadership, then do send, ye all of the princes, everyone his son or his brother from amongst the choice of the grandees, so I would make with them an alliance, by a strong promise and by a cordial enduring alliance’.

When his letters and missals arrived them, they believed his promises sending to him eight princes of the most chosen and acceptable on them.

And there it was, when those people came trusting his words, immediately he turned against them and tied them up and had them bound in irons and in "fetters of brass" (Judges 16:21) on their feet. He sent them to the encampment of Sa'adat-Giray Khan. When the Khan saw them, he was glad very much about this matter, but he was astonished and all this great matter was very strange in his eyes, for "out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judges 14:14). The Khan did not believe what he was told and sent them bound in handcuffs to Bahçe-Saray. Then, after a passage of time, they gave their ransom, every one of them, according to their estimated value.

As to the soldiers, the grandees, and the popular militia, all of them grew tired because all this took too much time, and for they run out of money. All the people "were murmuring against" (Ex 16:2) the Khan. Then the Khan hearken their complaints and saw the anguish of their souls (after Gen 42:21) and he returned to his place to the city of Bahçe-Saray.

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And it happened afterward that the Grand Vizier sent 'Adil-Giray Sultan in place of Safi-Giray Khan-Kalga to be second to the Khan at the behest of Mengli-Giray Khan; so he came to the Crimea and settled in the city of Ak-Me[s]çid. But while he was occupying his office, his heart turned away from the Khan "to love his enemies, and to hate his friends" (cf. 2Sam 19:7); and he was not fulfilling the orders of the Khan and was "destroying his counsel" (Isa 19:23).

So the Khan sought to make him commander of the army and send him against the Circassians and the people of Abaza, to seize Hāji-Beg with all the Khan's enemies. But he did not wish to go and refused, saying 'I do not fulfil his will, because the one who appointed him as Khan is the same one who also appointed me as an officer'. When the Khan saw that he was acting arrogantly toward him, he wrote to inform the Grand Vizier about all these matters; but the Prince knew nothing of this.

And it happened that once 'Adil-Giray-Kalga came to receive the presence of the king (the Khan) in a village close to Bahçe-Saray called

Kara-'Elez,²⁹ at a gathering of the nobles and Khan's servants. The Khan answered and said, in an effort to pacify and satisfy him: 'You have been superseded, and your kingdom is no more, and your rule and your glory have gone'. When the Prince heard this, he was astonished and did not understand what he meant; so he went outside and told one of his nobles the truth of the matter, and his servants immediately readied his carriage and he did not return to see the Khan again. The Khan sent him six *kise* as provisions for the road, and asked him which route he preferred to take, by way of the sea or the land; so the Prince chose to go by land, and they did not know that he sought to lodge against them canards and "wicked works" (Ps 141:4). So the Prince journeyed from Ak-Me[s]cid and took with him all the members of his household and his property and treasures; and went on his way, by way of Or, towards Urumeli (Rumelia).

And he crossed the river Özü-Suyu (Dnipro) to Ak Kerman, and went there; and on that same night, a spirit of insanity entered into the clan of the Nogaylı, and a few of the nobles came and bowed down to the *sultan*, and incited him to rebel against the Khan, and fight him, and return the government to himself. The Prince consented to listen to their advice and their blandishments, because he was a simple and upright man; so they wrote and sealed letters to the rest of the nobles of the Nogaylı, inviting them to come before the Prince and forge a treaty with them. And every night they would go to a feast "in the twilight, in the evening" (Prov 7:9); and in the morning all the nobles of the people would return, each one to his place, till they were all united in a single strong bond. So the people grew in number, and all of the warriors appeared; and they all came and bowed down before him "even as the sand that is upon the seashore in multitude" (Josh 11:4). And they arose from there and camped on the edge of the river Ak-Suv; and a herald came to the Khan and said: 'The horde of Ak Kerman has been swayed toward 'Adil-Giray Sultan, and they are gathering their forces to wage war against you'. When the Khan heard this, he became very angry that he had not sent him by sea on a ship; so, he sent for all the nobles of the Crimean land. And the Khan came

²⁹ Büyük Karalez / Krasnyj Mak, 18 km from Bahçe-Saray; or Yukarı Karalez / Zalisne/Zalesnoje, 19 km from Bahçe-Saray. Both were at the time a part of Mangup Kadilik, of the Keffe Eyalet in the Ottoman Empire.

to Karasub and gathered all the nobles and the **scholars** (*Imdnym*); and he made a pact with them and struck a treaty with them that they would stand with him and assist him. And he withdrew stores of gold and silver and hired troops; and he appointed over them “captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties” (Deut 1:15). And the entire people went out to wage war against them “knit together as one man” (Jud 20:11).

And with the king went Shelemet (Selamet)-Giray Sultan and Murad-Giray Sultan; and they departed Or Kal’esi a very great and mighty people, “they all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night” (Song 3:8).

They came and “they encamped there by the waters” (Ex 15:27), on the banks of the river Özü-Suyu; it was winter at the time, and there was a great cold, and snow, and ice, and “frost by night” (Gen 31:40). So the poor among them grew impatient, and they grew exhausted from cold and hunger; and the horses died, so the indigent soldiers began to flee – “hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them” (Ps 107:5), “and their cry came up unto God” (Ex 2:23) “and God heard their groaning” (Ex 2:23-24).

And that night, fear and terror came upon the Nogaylı horde and the horde of Ak-Kerman, and the people camped around the Prince; “and they rose up in the twilight” (2Kings 7:5) and each one went to his city and his country. So on the second and third nights, “the people were like complaining” (cf. Num 11:1), and their numbers shrank to the point that no one was left but his servants and his subjects. So when ‘Adil-Giray Sultan saw that he had been deceived by the Nogaylı people and the horde of Ak-Kerman, he got up and left and went on his way, saddened and sighing over the fact that he had sinned a great sin against his brother Mengli-Giray Khan. But before he could begin his journey, the chiefs of the Nogaylı people arose, some of them “allies of Korah”, “these sinners against their own souls” (Num 17:3); and they took their sons and their wives and their cattle, and all their possessions and all their slaves. They started out and crossed the river Turlu and came to the border of the land of Poland (*pwlwny*) to seek refuge there; and they went and bowed before the king of Poland (*pwllyn*) and it was good in his eyes and he gave them a place to settle in the best of his land. So they came and joined together, forming an

alliance with Yalı-Aga-sı Čirčir Muhammad-Aga and with Kara Devlet; and they lived with them.

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And it was before he travelled, he had come to the fortress of Özü and he did besiege it (after 2Kings 24:11). He fined the people of the fortress **with 30 kise** and went to the fortress of Bender, besieged it and entered into the town. He did not destroy it, but he fined the town's governor, 'Ali-Pasha, <...> **kise**.

Before he left the town to go his way, for "it repented" (Gen 6:6) him on the account of the revolt he had revolted, the Khan sent his son, Tokhtamish-Giray Sultan, and when he came to Bender, 'Adil-Giray Sultan was still sitting there. He tried to catch him, but was unsuccessful, so he left it and went his way. All his army "spread out from him" (Rashi to 1Sam 13.15).

Mengli-Giray Khan heard this and crossed the river Özü-Suyu (Dnipro); he camped across all the towns and villages in the areas of the Nogaylı camps, "the land was filled with them" (Ex 1:7). He "destroyed" their crops and "the tree of the field which is man's life" (Deut 20:20), and the cereals of them. They left them no means to survive, no bull, no sheep, no camel, not even a horse, no ass, they destroyed everything without mercy. He put on them "toll, tribute, and custom" (Ezra 4:13) and poll tax, and he fined them, every man aged 13 up from amongst all tribal chiefs, chieftains, and their deputies; the total sum arrived to 660 **kise**. The Nogaylı people "was greatly impoverished" (Judges 6:6) so that they "cannot bear" (Prov 30:21) anymore. The Khan went back before the end of the winter, and till the beginning of the summer, when his whole year became fulfilled, he made an allegiance with them on the condition that if one another time they "turn again to folly" (Ps 85:9) to do things as they did, then they must pay another equal fine to what is written above.

After these things, the Khan sent Murad-Giray Sultan, the governor and commander over the Circassian land and the Nogaylı people,³⁰ commanding him "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, for your own benefit" (after Rashi on Gen 12:1), and stay there do not "contend with them in battle" (Deut 2:9),

³⁰ Here the reference was to the Nogays of the Kuban area.

and tell your brother, Bahti-Giray Sultan, in my name, that I seek the best for him, “for he is our brother and our flesh” (Gen 37:27).

“And when” Bahti-Giray Sultan “heard that, he was content” (after Lev 10:20), he believed in the sincerity of the Khan and he and his brothers, sons of Devlet-Giray Khan, joined Murad-Giray Sultan, “and they joined one to another into one stick” (after Ezek 37:17).

And it came to pass “and the time drew nigh that” Bahti-Giray Sultan “must die” (after Gen 47:29). He took counsel with his brother whether they should go fight the people of Greater Kabarda for “he hath said in his heart” (Ps 10:11) ‘let me find peace with the Khan for “should” I “not be with the heads of these men?”’ (after 1Sam 29:4)’.³¹

But the Khan did not command him to do this.

His brother, Fatih-Giray Sultan, answered and told his brother, Murad-Giray Sultan, ‘be not seduced by the words of Bahti-Giray, be not “contend with them in battle” (Deut 2:9), for we would not find grace in the eyes of the Turkish king and the Crimean Khan, so that they would not give us any positions of authority nor *khanship* and rulership. We shall sit here until the day of our death, we shall not make peace with them until they would bring us there to Urumli.³¹ And now please stop, do not provoke them lest you fall in a trap’.

When Bahti-Giray Sultan heard these words “that his wrath was kindled” (Gen 39:19) and he strengthened his spirit “to do valiantly” (Ps 118:16). He took his brother with him being sure about his bravery and “he regarded no man” (after Isa 33:8) and he went with few men and entered a territory near the Kabardian settlements. His brother, Murad-Giray Sultan, progressed with his men in a rout close to that of Bahti-Giray Sultan, securing him.

They supplied 60 covered carts (**kibitka*), with four men “prepared for war” (Josh 4:13) and armed with a rifle in each covered cart. Each cart was driven by two armed men.

Murad-Giray Sultan said to his brother, Bahti-Giray: ‘I see the carts and their drivers are strangely dressed and “the shew of their countenance doth witness against them” (Isa 3:9) that “they be come out for war” (after 1Kings 20:18), and if “they be come out for peace” (after 1Kings 20:18), they would not come out armed with weapons. “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold”

³¹ As prisoners were to be killed secretly in Rumelia.

(2Kings 2:11) “the shooters shot” (2Sam 11:24) their rifles on the army of Bahti-Giray Sultan when “the shadows of the evening are stretched out” (Jer 6:4), “and there was there a great slaughter” (2Sam 18:7) “and many were overthrown and wounded” (Judges 9:40) “and they smote them in the going down” (Josh 7:5) “and it came to pass in the mean while” (1Kings 18:45), people are coming to their rescue, the Ten (Don) Cossacks,³² and they are dressed in strange attire, like that of the Circassians, they shot on them with their rifles “and slew them with a great slaughter” (1Sam 19:8) and “behold, the battle was before and behind” (2Chr 13:14) “and it came to pass in an evening tide” (2Sam 11:2) that all his army scattered from him; the most of them died in the battle.

He was left alone close to a river; five of those who were pursuing his fugitive warriors found him and they recognized him; they talked to him in Circassian.

Then they turned their backs to go their way and one of them said ‘behold, we have heard that his brother Murad-Giray Sultan was killed and his body was thrown in the woods; we should be quick killing him lest he shall take the revenge of the spilt blood of his brother’.

They came back and killed Bahti-Giray. But before killing him, they cut his hand with sword, undressed him and took his precious mailcoat³³ and brought it with them to announce the Circassian chieftains.

“And the men marvelled one at another” (Gen 43:33) when they saw the mailcoat and the hand saying “Why have we done this, that we have let” (Ex 14:5) send our hand against a son of the Khan “which is not according to the law³⁴” (Esther 4:16)’. They decided to return the

³² Most probably what was referred to here was not the Don Cossacks, but the Greben/Terek Cossacks, who, till 1711, were not Muscovite/Russian subjects, but formed one of the “free societies” (*jama’at*) allied with Kabardian Circassians. They accepted Muscovite protection in 1711 or 1712, participated in the Terek Campaign of General F.M. Apraksin against the Little Nogay Horde, and moved to the Russian territory on the northern bank of the Terek in 1712.

³³ Taking valuable mailcoats of fallen enemies or even killing one in order to take his mailcoat are frequently mentioned in Circassian traditions.

³⁴ Here Hebrew *dat* refers to ‘*adat*, the unwritten law of the mountains.

mailcoat to his oldest son hoping he would forgive them. One of their tribal leaders said 'We had already revolted against the Crimean Khan and sinned a grave sin, our "punishment is greater than we can bear" (after Gen 4:13); let it remain in your possession as a bargaining bit; give it to the son of Kirgok-Beg'.

In the climax of the battle, "and the battle went sore against" (1Sam 31:3) Murad-Giray Sultan, and he and his men ran away and fled; the Circassians pursued him and "in their haste" (2Kings 7:15) to go away he said to his servants 'help me dismount my horse for I got a rupture, it's an epileptic attack!'. They dismounted him and put him on the ground.

It was "in the evening, in the black and dark night" (after Prov 7:9), "and they would be driven to darkness" (after Isa 8:22), and the Sultan was lying as if he is a dead man with his head resting on the knees of Yinir-Aga, one of his servants, while the men camping around him.

At the moment they (the enemies) came and caught up with him while they were dead-weary tired and sleeping, and they slaughtered them. And they cut off the head of Murad-Giray Sultan and "they walk on in darkness (all the foundations of the earth are out of course)" (Ps 82:5) and they stub with sabres all those lying down who were unable to raise their heads, for they were lying down frightened as if they were dead, and so they were being stubbed. None was left of them but two heavily stubbed men.

And there was in the morning, and they searched for the corpse of Murad-Giray Sultan and did not find it but after three days. The Circassian grandees behaved magnanimously: they delivered the corpse of Bahti-Giray Sultan after his servants had it embalmed and hurried it so swiftly to Bahçe-Saray to be buried in one of the royal tombs.

And the rest of his deeds and valor and his wars that he did, "are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings" of the Crimean land (after 1Kings 15:7). And after five days, they brought the corpse of his brother Murad-Giray Sultan to be buried in the royal tombs.

This calumnious affair was in the year 1141 to the Ishmaelite reckoning (7 Aug 1728 – 23 Aug 1729), that is, the year 5498 to the Creation (4 Sept 1728 – 23 Sept 1729).

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