



bitig Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi

bitig Journal of Faculty of Letters

(Cilt/Volume: 3, Sayı/Issue: 5, Haziran/June 2023)


British Travelers on the Crimea at the Turn of 18-19th Centuries

**18-19. Yüzyılların Başında Kırım'ın Ruslaştırılması Üzerine
İngiliz Seyyahlar**

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Araştırma makalesi/Research article

Geliş Tarihi/Received: 11.04.2023

Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 22.05.2023

Atıf/Citation

Asan, Elmaz (2023), "British Travelers on the Crimea at the Turn of 18-19th Centuries", *bitig Journal of Faculty of Letters*, 3 (5), 30-47.

Asan, Elmaz (2023), "18-19. Yüzyılların Başında Kırım'ın Ruslaştırılması Üzerine İngiliz Seyyahlar", *bitig Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 3 (5), 30-47.



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This article was checked by iThenticate, turnitin or intihal.net.

Abstract The 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea revived the historical myth that the peninsula has always been a Russian territory and is “a primordially Russian land.” “Krym nash” (“Crimea is ours”) has become a catch phrase symbolizing the revival of Russian imperial ambitions. The creation of the myths around Crimea and the falsification of history has been an integral part of Russian imperial politics since 1783 when Russia annexed the peninsula. To justify the annexation of Tatar inhabited Crimea, Russian historiography often depicts the Tatars as “barbaric people,” “the descendants of the Mongols,” and as a nation that does not have its own intellectual heritage and cultural past. Such rhetoric is the marker of a colonial history which denies conquered people their cultural and political identity and justifies imperial hegemony, which it legitimizes as a ‘civilizing project.’ Following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783, foreign travelers made their way to the region and recorded their observations of the daily life, social and political institutions, cultural traditions of the Crimean Tatars as well as the Russian colonial policies and their consequences. In the study, on the basis of these primary sources (mostly travelogues), it is proposed to examine the cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatars at the time of their subjugation by the Russian state and the changes in their life brought about by the Russian colonial policies.

Keywords: Crimea, Crimean Tatars, Russian annexation, British travelers

Öz 2014'te Rusya'nın Kırım'ı ilhakı, yarımada'nın her zaman bir Rus toprağı ve “esasen bir Rus arazisi” olduğı şeklindeki tarihi efsaneyi yeniden canlandırdı. “Krym nash” (“Kırım bizimdir”), Rus emperyal ihtiraslarının yeniden canlanmasını simgeleyen bir slogan haline geldi. Kırım etrafında mitlerin yaratılması ve tarihin tahریف edilmesi, Rusya'nın yarımada'yı ilhak ettiğı 1783'ten beri Rus emperyal siyasetinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olmuştur. Rus tarihçiliğı, Tatarların yaşadığı Kırım'ın ilhakını haklı çıkarmak için Tatarları genellikle “barbar insanlar”, “Moğolların torunları” ve kendi entelektüel mirasına ve kültürel geçmişine sahip olmayan bir ulus olarak tasvir etmektedir. Bu tür bir retorik, fethedilen insanların kültürel ve siyasi kimliklerini reddeden ve bir “medenileştirme projesi” olarak savunduğı emperyal hegemonyayı meşrulaştıran bir kolonyal tarihin işaretidir. 1783'te Rusya'nın Kırım'ı ilhak etmesinin ardından bölgeye giden yabancı gezginler, Kırım Tatarlarının günlük yaşamı, sosyal ve siyasi kurumları ve kültürel gelenekleri ile Rus sömürge politikaları ve bunların sonuçlarına ilişkin gözlemlerini kaydettiler. Çalışmada, bu birincil kaynaklara (çoğunlukla seyahatnamelere) dayanarak, Kırım Tatarlarının Rus devletine boyun eğdirdikleri dönemdeki kültürel mirasları ve Rus sömürge politikalarının yaşamlarında meydana getirdiğı değışiklikler incelenmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Kırım, Kırım Tatarları, Rus ilhakı, İngiliz seyyahlar

Introduction

When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 breaking the fundamental principles of international law, breaching international agreements and violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine, the response of the international community was rather muted. In Russia itself the annexation revived the longstanding myth of Crimea being an ‘integral part’ of Russia. Slogans such as “Crimea is Ours,” “Welcome to the Native Harbor” became ubiquitous in the Russian propaganda, which disregarded both the internationally recognized status of Crimea as an integral part of Ukraine, and the history of Crimean Tatars for whom the peninsula is an ancestral homeland, colonized by Russia in the late 18th century.

The roots of this Russian myth go back to the period of the first annexation of Crimea, when Russia, violating the -“Küçük Kaynarca”- agreement of 1774, encroached on the independent Crimean Khanate. It is from this period that Russian historians and

politicians started rewriting the history of Crimea and introduced the idea of Crimea as a “primordially” Russian land into the public discourse. At the basis of this claim lays the old narrative that position Russia as ‘heir’ to the Byzantine heritage and to the pre-ordained mission of civilizing the backward ‘barbarians’. To legitimize the imperial colonial project Catherine the Great placed the local Greek community and the Orthodox Church under state patronage and set in motion both the process of Christianization of the population of Crimea and the forced expulsion of Muslim Tatars from their ancestral lands. The Crimean Tatars, who at the time of the annexation of the peninsula to the Russian empire, formed the dominant majority population of Crimea, -became an obstacle and inconvenience to the new Russian narrative, which portrayed them as ‘aliens’ who have to be either assimilated into Orthodoxy or expelled from their homeland. The religious, cultural and intellectual heritage of the Crimean Tatars was denounced as ‘barbarian’ and people turned into outcasts in their own land. Despite official declarations that the state would safeguard their Muslim faith, a de-facto policy of discrimination and forced expulsion led to the gradual decline of the Crimean Tatar people.

Notwithstanding Russia’s colonization of Crimea, there is a wealth of historic evidence, in the Crimean Tatar sources as well as in the accounts of foreign travelers and historians that attests to the rich cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatars. The eyewitness accounts of visitors to Crimea in the late 18th and early 19th centuries form an invaluable and informative source the daily life, political practices, religious rituals, and cultural traditions of the local Crimean Tatar population. They also document the impact of Russian policies on the lived reality. Among the travelogues that will be examined here are the works by British travelers such as Edward Daniel Clarke (1769 –1822), Charles Henry Scott (1814-1891), Reginald Heber (1782-1826), Thomas Milner (1808-ca.83), Lyall Robert (1789-1831), and Edmund Spencer (1799-1877).

The material is grouped into two sub-sections – in the first part of the paper, I will discuss Crimean Tatar culture including music, architecture, philosophy and science as it was described by foreign observers and as it was portrayed in Russian colonial discourse. In the second part, I will examine the consequences of Russian imperial policies on the Crimean Tatar population of the peninsula on the evidence of the testimonies of British travelers.

Crimean Khanate: Myth and Reality

“The Crimean Khanate was weak not only politically, but also economically, due to the very low level of productivity. The extremely backward Tatar economy, - was based on extensive forms of economy - on nomadic cattle breeding, combined with nomadic agriculture, and on non-economic appropriation through predatory raids on neighboring countries. The social organization of the Tatars remained tribal for a long time. The stability of the tribal system among the Tatars is explained primarily by the dominance of primitive forms of economy among them”. (Yakobson 1973: 57)

The above-quoted text exemplifies the typical approach of Soviet historiography regarding Crimea, which promotes the notion of Crimean Tatars as a “barbaric” and culturally “backward” nation, whose economy was primarily based on slave trade and livestock breeding. Following the second annexation of Crimea in 2014, the military historical society of Russia spearheaded the publication of another book entitled “History of Crimea” (by V. Khapaev, A. Nepomnyashchy, I. A. Spivak), which contains blatant falsifications of history. The preface justifies the first annexation of Crimea by claiming that the main activity of Crimean Tatars was “raids, slave trade, and massacres of their neighbors.” According to the book:

"One of the important vocations of the Crimean Tatars was raiding Russia, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and Polish lands with the aim of capturing slaves for sale in Turkey. There were times in Russian history when a year did not go by without another raid, bloody massacre, and the abduction of thousands of Russian youths and girls with ropes around their necks. The fate of the prisoners was not enviable - men were subjected to exhausting service on galleys, while young girls and boys suffered violence. Raids prevented normal life for the population in the Wild Field – the sparsely populated Azov coastal and steppes lands. Naturally, such a situation was intolerable, and as the Russian state and then the Russian Empire grew stronger, the question of eliminating this threat arose." (Khapayev, Nepomnyashchy, Spivak 2015: <http://www.krimoved-library.ru/books/kodzova-istoriya-krima1.html>).

Criticizing this work, Nariman Dzhelyalov, deputy chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, warned against the one-sided presentation of the past both in academic and popular history books and literature. In his address to Deutsche Welle, he stated that:

"It is completely wrong to view the Crimean Khanate as a robber state at a time, when human trafficking was carried out all over the world, including Russia itself. I would like to remind authors who allow themselves to talk about some facts and keep silent about others, that the Russian Empire itself was the last state to abolish serfdom in Europe. Until 1861, Russian noblemen traded with their serfs, and not only traded, but also chained dogs on people, gambled and lost them in card games, thereby demonstrating complete contempt for human dignity." (DW 11.12.2014 <https://www.dw.com/ru/спорный-бестселлер-история-крыма-по-российски/a-18121419>)

Devaluing the historical past of the indigenous people of the peninsula, creating the image of a people of no importance and historical value is an integral part of the presentation of Crimean history in most Russian sources. It is difficult to find information on the philosophical, literary and architectural heritage of Crimea in Russian historiography. All texts focus on raids, slave markets and barbaric behavior patterns. However, according to Professor Alan Fisher, a leading American scholar who studied the history of the peninsula, the Crimean Khanate was one of the important states of Eastern Europe with a diverse economy, well developed legal system and diplomacy as well as rich cultural and intellectual life.

"From the early sixteenth century until the end of the seventeenth century the Crimean Tatar Khanate was one of the most important states in Eastern Europe. This is true even though most historians have considered the Tatars to be, at best, vassals of the Ottoman sultan and a northern extension of his aggressive imperialistic policies against the Christian world, or, at worst, semi-civilized brigands whose only function was to raid and devastate the steppe, living upon their more civilized neighbors. In fact, however the Crimean Khanate met all of the prerequisites for early modern statehood. It possessed a viable government with a central administration that provided leadership in military, political, and economic affairs. Its administration was based on both historical tradition and a well-developed legal system. The legal system was modeled primarily on the Ottoman Islamic example although it contained some remnants of the Tatars' central Asian traditions. The Khanate had a clearly defined social system, with at least as high a proportion of urban population as its northern and eastern neighbors. Its economy depended greatly upon trade, including trade in slaves, agriculture, and livestock. Its educational system was complex and finally, the Crimean khans were patrons of the arts" (Fisher 1978:17).

The cultural heritage of the Crimean Peninsula during the period of the Crimean Khanate warrants particular attention. The Crimean Tatar heritage, which had evolved over centuries on the peninsula, was shaped by a variety of cultural influences.

Numerous important mosques and madrasas were built during the reign of the Crimean Khans. The Khanate's arts and crafts industry was equally impressive, with notable examples of intricate embroidery, pottery, and jewelry. The Khan's Palace, in particular, was a prominent symbol of Crimean Tatar statehood. Only a small portion of the palace remains today, and since 2014, crude restoration work carried out by effort by the occupying Russian regime has accelerated its deterioration.

According to Swietlana Czerwonnya;

"By the 16th century Crimea was literally on the route between the Ottoman Empire and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – the first European power to have established permanent diplomatic relations with the Turkish Empire. It is important to bear in mind that mosques, turbe (mausoleums of the local saints), tombstones and other structures of a sacred nature have been built at this 'meeting' point of different civilizations. Many of these structures differed from the places of worship common in the Christian world and were perceived by Europeans as being signs of 'the other', as being of an 'alien' culture. Palaces, houses with their expressive protruding balconies and terraces, the workshops of craftsmen in urban areas, water sources decorated by stone carvings or majolica, schools and universities, all created an atmosphere that was comprehensible to Europeans of the Renaissance. Crimea was the place where understanding and convergence between different civilizations naturally arose, rather than a source of 'alienation'" (Czerwonnya 2017: 97).

The Crimean khans played an important role in the peninsula's cultural development. Each khan sought to leave behind cultural monuments as the legacy of his reign. As a rule, the monuments built consisted of the main mosque of the ruler, his palace, the tomb of his ancestors, a school for the education of state personnel, and for the townspeople a charitable building, public fountains, hospitals, etc. At the turn of the 15th-16th century, the heir of Hacı Giray, Mengli Giray I (1445-1515) built the Devlet Sarayı – the khan's palace was designed by a Venetian architect working in Crimea. It is no coincidence that the palace was unusual among Crimean Tatars structures; it had the appearance of a typical Italian palazzo. Unfortunately, under Russian rule, only the elaborate portal of the front door of the place was preserved while the structure itself was lost. The surviving portal, for unknown reasons, was transferred to the Bakhchisaray Palace. In this unique architectural monument, elements of the Italian Renaissance and khan titles in Arabic and Crimean Tatar patterns in the Seljuk style coexist.

"Khan Mengli Geray I constructed the Renaissance-style Iron Gate at the peak of his reign, when he was the most powerful ruler in the whole region north of the Black Sea. The portal can thus be seen as a triumphal arch, an expression of his political success as well as an audacious challenge to the Ottoman claim of ruling the world. In erecting the Iron Gate, Mengli Geray I contributed a unique architectural structure to a movement that can appropriately be called the 'Renaissance in the Borderlands'."

Architectural samples of the Khans' palaces were located throughout Crimea. Only in the Bakhchisaray neighborhood there were several such palaces, for example Devlet-Saray, Ulakly-Saray, Ashlama-Saray, Alma-Saray, Syuren-Saray, Tole-Saray (Kachi-Saray). It is a great shame that none of these palaces have survived the Russian colonial rule, only the Bakhchisaray Palace has been preserved and it currently under the threat of destruction.

According to Abdulvaapov the palace of Kalga-Sultan was one of the most significant palaces in Crimean Tatar culture. Evliya Chelebi, a famous Ottoman traveler who visited the Crimea in the 17th century, noted that, according to his information, the Kalga-

Sultan's palace was in a suburb of Akmescit, numbering "three hundred and seventy buildings covered with tiles, with walls laid out of stone", located "on the bank of the Salgyr River from the side of Akmesdzhit." Akmesdzhit itself was an ancient city and the capital of Kalgi-Sultan (Abdulvaapov 2021: 124).

The Weisborda brewery was erected on the former site of the Kalga Sultan Palace, which was razed during the Soviet era. After the second illicit annexation of Crimea in 2014, construction of a church commenced on the land previously designated as a protected conservation area where the palace once stood. The situation described highlights complex political, historical, and cultural concerns that arose with the annexations of Crimea. The construction of the brewery and the church on the site of the former palace by occupying authorities reveals a lack of regard for Tatar culture and the contempt for the aspirations of the Crimean Tartars preserve their heritage.

The arts of music, poetry, and calligraphy were highly developed elements of Crimean Khanate culture. In addition to being accomplished military leaders, the Crimean khans both patronized and engaged with the arts. Many of them were poets and calligraphers themselves. In their diplomatic correspondence, the khans favored rhyming poetic style, choosing a sophisticated mode of writing. Among the most notable examples of such "poet-warriors" was Khan Gazy Giray II (1551-1607), who was not only a formidable military commander but also an exceptionally creative artist. He composed more than 70 instrumental works, although only a few have survived to this day. These surviving pieces remain popular in various countries and are performed by different orchestras. Likewise, as Hakan Kırımlı notes:

"Selim I Geray Han was a successful musician as well as a literary man. Only one of his many compositions has survived. Selim I Geray Khan was also in close contact with the most prominent composers and musicians of his time and always protected them. Personalities such as Itri and Hafiz Post, who are among them, were among the most important names in their fields not only of that period, but of all times. It is absolutely certain that such people of culture, literature and art should be found in the entourage of the Crimean khans, both in Crimea and in the Ottoman lands, and that they should be protected. It was not exclusive to Selim I Geray Khan. It is known that other khans and other members of the Geray dynasty also had such personalities in their entourage" (Hakan Kırımlı 2022:195).

Kyrym Gerai Khan (1758-1764) made a noteworthy contribution to the advancement of the Crimean Khanate. During his reign, the economic, cultural, and educational sectors of the peninsula flourished significantly. He oversaw architectural transformations in the khanate, including the construction of new fountains and parks. Furthermore, he prioritized the cultural and artistic growth of the region, as his entourage frequently included artists. It was under his governance that the theatrical arts began to thrive in the peninsula.

According to S. Chervonnaya, a professional theatre was established at the Khan's Palace in Bakhchisarai. The plays of Moliere, Shakespeare and other performances of Eastern and European repertoire were performed there. The rich collection of the Khan's library reached an impressive scale. Unfortunately, a barbaric destruction of Crimean Tatars culture accompanied the 18th -century Russian conquest of Crimea; by the barbaric distraction 'a bonfire of books' could be seen glowing in Bakhchisarai. (Czerwonnya 2017:98). There are accounts of the existence of a theatre of shadows - "Karagöz ve Ajivat". As Meriem Idrisova, a Crimean Tatar musicologist explains: "On the basis of such sources as khan's letters, 'Kaziasker books' and handwritten 'tezkire', it can be assumed that musical performances were staged at the court of the Crimean khans by court chapels. It is obvious that folk art played a significant role in the development of Crimean Tatar theater" (Idrisova 2019:3).

The Crimean Khanate boasted a rich and well-established tradition of philosophical thought. According to the research of the esteemed Ukrainian scholar of the Crimean Tatar philosophical tradition, Mykhaylo Yakubovych, the philosophical and intellectual customs of the khanates from the 14th to the 18th centuries assimilated the legacy of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, whose works were extensively read and transcribed in Crimea. Furthermore, Muslim scholars of great repute who embraced and furthered the philosophical tradition of antiquity also contributed to the khanate's intellectual milieu. In 1550, the renowned Zyndzhyrly madrasah (Madrese with a chain), the first Islamic institution of higher learning in Eastern Europe, was established in the vicinity of Bakhchisarai. The curriculum included logic, philosophy, astronomy, and other natural sciences. Along with Muslim Spain, Sicily and Balkans, Crimea was the fourth region of Europe where Medieval Islamic Philosophy dominated the intellectual tradition (Yakubovych 2013: 219-232).

As this brief overview shows, the Crimean Khanate was not only a politically stable state, but also an important cultural center where the entanglement of the Muslim and European heritage engendered a highly original and sophisticated philosophical cultural that paralleled both European and Jewish philosophy. "Until the mid-eighteenth century the Russians had looked upon the Crimeans as a rather strong and unified vassal state of the Porte, although Russian officials recognized certain indications of internal decline." (Fisher 1970: 10)

The Crimean peninsula would have continued to develop as a Crimean Khanate state with its own system of government and intellectual heritage, if it had not been invaded by the Russian Empire. Throughout the 18th century when the Russian Empire began expanding its territorial reach in the Black Sea region, it persistently sought to gain control over the Crimean peninsula, which was then under Ottoman control. Despite numerous attempts in, 1687-1700, 1710-1713, 1735-1739, and 1768-1774, Russia's attempt to capture Crimea proved to be futile. The resistance of the Crimean Khanate was a major factor preventing Russian success. Nevertheless, Russia continued to pursue its expansionist ambitions in the region.

In 1768, Russia embarked on its fourth Black Sea expedition, which ultimately proved successful. The Russian-Turkish War of 1768-1774 concluded with Russia's victory and led to the signing of the Küçük Kaynarca peace treaty on July 21, 1774. The treaty not only granted Russia access to the strategically significant Crimean fortresses of Kerch and Yenikale but also secured unrestricted navigation rights for the Russian fleet in the Azov and Black Seas.

The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca from 1774, which basically ended Ottoman control of the Black Sea, ostensibly acknowledged the independence and sovereignty of the Crimean Khanate. However, the reality of Russian presence in the region portended the eventual annexation of the peninsula. The formidable Crimean Khanate, which had been engaged in a perpetual state of conflict between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, was severely debilitated by the protracted war. Thus, when faced with the prospect of further Russian aggression, the Khanate lacked the resources and means to mount an effective defense. Nine years after the treaty, in 1783, Russia employed an array of strategic maneuvers and political intrigues to annex the Crimean Peninsula. The annexation of Crimea was a pivotal milestone in Russia's expansive aspirations in the region and represented the commencement of a protracted period of conflict with the indigenous inhabitants of the peninsula, the Crimean Tatars

As Kelly O'Neill writes:

“The story of Crimea’s transition from khanate to Russian province has eluded the attention of most historians. It did not, after all, involve the bloody glories of wars of conquest like those that unfolded in the Caucasus or Central Asia; nor did the annexation manifesto wrest people, resources, and property from a European power, as was the case with the nearly contemporaneous partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Unlike many other borderland territories, Crimea seemed to go quietly into the fold, quickly subsumed within the administrative terrain of the empire.” (Kelly 2017: 2).

The English ambassador James Harris, saw the annexation of Crimea as Potemkin’s political gamble taken in opposition to the cabinet of ministers, and the outcome of would determine his further career. “If all fails,” wrote Harris; “he is lost; if he achieves success he will become stronger than before. The acquisition of such an important province without a single shot testified to Russia’s power better than any victories. At the same time, it symbolically suggested the natural character of this extension of the empire.” (Zorien 2014: 93)

Catherine II’s interest in Crimea developed in 1779 and involved various schemes to justify invasion and establish Russian hegemony over the peninsula. One such method was the Greek project, a strategy that aimed to emphasize Crimea’s Byzantine Christian heritage and cement Russia’s presence in the region. The project, which began in the late 18th century, was instrumental in shaping the myth of Russian Crimea.

Through the Greek project, Catherine sought to highlight cultural and religious connections between Crimea and the Byzantine Empire. The project, part of a larger colonial policy, involved the construction of Greek Orthodox monasteries and churches in the peninsula, the establishment of Russia settlements and military bases in Crimea, and the suppression of local Crimean Tatar resistance. Through these measures, Catherine sought to create a dominant Russian presence in the region and assert her authority over the Crimean Tatars, who had historically been the dominant group in the peninsula. The Greek project mythologized Russia’s presence in the region. As G. Sasse explains:

“The process of mythmaking and the dissemination of myths help to forge, maintain, and mobilize identities. There is no clear-cut boundary between fact, memory, symbol, and myth, because they all revolve around perceptions and interpretation. Myths politicize space, historical experience, and cultural heritage. The most powerful myths are explicitly linked to nationhood, to the nation’s origins, evolution and glorious struggles that can be called upon in the quest for self-determination” (Sasse 2007: 37).

Catherine’s second grandson was named Constantine, and in the privacy of her personal correspondence, she [Catherine] sometimes called him Constantine II. He was given Greek nurses and tutors and learned to speak Greek before he spoke Russian. Coins were struck to commemorate both his birth and his destiny, which was identified unmistakably with Constantine the Great and the legendary Tsargrad on the Bosphorus” (Ragsdale 1988:4). The political practicalities of the Greek project went into effect immediately after the annexation of the peninsula.

The Crimean Tatar toponymy of cities and villages in the region was seen as an obstacle to Catherine’s imperial ambitions. It interfered with the empire’s efforts to establish a dominant presence in the Black Sea region, and thus they were systematically replaced with Greek ones. The name of the peninsula itself, which had its origins in the Crimean Tatar language, was seen as particularly problematic. “Etymological studies located its origin in the Crimean Tatar word ‘Qırım’ (Russian: Krym), meaning ‘stronghold’ or ‘fortress’, and the name of the administrative center

of the Crimean Tatars was (from the thirteen to the fifteenth century), the town of Eski Qırım (Russian: Starii Krym)." (Sasse 2007: 37-42). The use of the Crimean Tatar name Qırım conflicted with Catherine's vision of a Greek cultural landscape, and thus it was gradually changed. Catherine came to replace all local names with ancient Greek variants the Dnieper River was rechristened the 'Borysthenes', the Black Sea became the 'Euxine', and Crimea itself was renamed 'Tauris' (Tavrida in Russian). Catherine's extension of Russian rule to the Taurian peninsula advanced the claim that Russia was the rightful heir to ancient Greek civilization (Dickinson 2002:12).

Crimea in late British Travelogues

After Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, a multitude of Western travelers, among them British explorers, developed an interest in the newly acquired territory. These travelers embarked on journeys to the region at various points in time, with the aim of exploring the lands of the empire. The reactions and experiences of these travelers were diverse, but their travelogues offer valuable insight into the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea. Notably British travelers, included Edward Daniel, a naturalist and mineralogist; Charles Henry Scott, a traveler; Reginald Heber, a bishop and writer; Thomas Milner, Lyall Robery- a botanist and traveler; and Edmund Spencer, a journalist. Most of the travelers were affiliated with emerging natural sciences disciplines and prioritized pure observation of the Crimean habitant. None of them, at least openly, were engaged in politics or foreign affairs. Nevertheless, many Russian sources condemned these travelers for Russophobia and accused them of espionage: "The information obtained by travelers during their trips inevitably fell within the scope of the secret intelligence services. Often, travelers themselves were agents of such departments or were simply suspected of espionage." (Nepomnyashii 2019: 29).

However, despite the subjective nature of their accounts, British travelers' accounts offer a valuable perspective on the political and social changes that occurred in Crimean after annexation. In particular, they shed light on the rich cultural heritage of Crimea and the political power it once held. Moreover, British travelers expressed sympathy for the indigenous inhabitants of the peninsula who had to endure the new conditions under the control of the Russian Empire. These travelers were able to witness firsthand the impacts of imperialism on local communities, including the displacement of people, cultural assimilation, and the imposition of foreign customs and values. Edmund Spencer writes:

"A succession of the most perfidious intrigues now commenced that ever disgraced any cabinet: to enumerate them is not the object of my present work: I shall, therefore, merely add, that, after several unsuccessful attempts of a deluded prince and people to reign their lost independence, the authority of Russia was ultimately established over the Crimea, and the whole of the adjoining provinces. Thus, we see the final fall of a great and warlike people, who had been for ages the terror of the surrounding nations, the last remnant of the Mogul - Tartar empire , one of the most powerful and extensive that ever existed -" (Spencer 1837: 123).

And "The Tartars, dejected by the loss of their sovereignty, and deserted by their degenerate allies the Turks, soon fell a prey to the political in- trigues of Russia, carried on by the well - known Prince Potemkin , who violated every principle of honour , good faith , and justice , in his relations with the devoted Tartars -" (Spencer 1837: 122).

Upon arrival in Crimea, British travelers were immediately fascinated by the customs and traditions of the Crimean Tatars. These travelers found the unique culture of the Crimean Tatars intriguing and inspiring.

To gain a deeper understanding of the local culture, some travelers went as far as to live in Crimean Tatar houses, thereby immersing themselves in the daily lives of the indigenous population. This firsthand experience allowed them to witness the distinct customs and practices of the Crimean Tatars, including their language, dress, and food. Through this exposure, travelers gained an appreciation for the diversity and richness of the local culture, which was often at odds with the customs of the British culture.

“The Tatars, who form the great majority of the stated population, are commonly divided into three classes, – the inhabitants of the steppe, the hill dwellers, and the Nogais. The differences between them are not very important, and have evidently been produced by diverse local circumstances. The first class are scattered at intervals over the northern plains, and are either grouped in villages, or occupy detached homesteads. They are of rougher manners and more Asiatic aspect than their brethren on the southern highlands, the latter having been more in contact with civilised life, and with the nations of Western Europe, when the Genoese held their coast. At the same time, they are more simple and hospitable, and will receive the stranger without expecting an exorbitant fee for the entertainment, often declining even the least gratuity” (Milner 1855:360).

Also Clarke confirms the same point:

“When a stranger arrives, they conduct him into an apartment destined for the men, and present him with a basin, water, and a clean napkin, to wash his hands. Then they place before him whatever their dwelling affords of curd, cream, honey in the comb, poached eggs, roasted fowls, or fruit. After the meal is over, the basin and water are brought in as before; because all the Tartars, like the Turks and other oriental nations, eat with their fingers, and use no forks. Then, if in the house of a rich Tartar, a long pipe is presented, with a tube of cherry - tree wood , tipped with amber or ivory . After this, carpets and cushions are laid for the guests, that they may repose. All the houses of the Tartars, even the cottages of the poor, are extremely clean, being often whitewashed” (Clarke 1848:125).

According to British travelers who documented the cultural practices of the Crimean Tatars, horses played a critical role in the success of the Tatars in battle. The Tatars' expertise in riding horses with exceptional speed and precision was a key factor in their ability to overcome their enemies. In contrast, it is noteworthy that the Russian invaders were reported to have lacked even the basic knowledge of saddling a horse, thereby highlighting the stark contrast in horsemanship skills between the two groups.

“Their figure on horseback is in the highest degree stately; and among all the Crimean Tartars, of whatever rank, an elegance of manners may be remarked; this, although perhaps common to Oriental nations, affords a striking opposition to the boorish figure of a Russian. It is diverting to see them conversing together. The Tartar has in common with the Russian an impetosity and eagerness in uttering his expressions; but it is a zeal very differently characterised. The Tartar may be said to exhibit all the playful flexibility and varying posture of the leopard; while the Russian, rather resembling the bear, is making an awkward parade of his paws.” (Clarke 1848: 317).

The fastidious approach to maintaining household cleanliness, prioritization of comfort and refinement in Crimean Tatar dwellings have garnered consistent acclaim from those who have visited the region. In fact, Edward Daniel Clark, a prominent travel writer, made a noteworthy observation in support of this view, which is documented in his travel notes.

“Though simplicity is a prevailing characteristic both in the manners and dress of the Tartars, yet some of their customs betray a taste for finery. Their pillows are covered

with coloured linen; and the nap kins, for their frequent ablutions, which hang upon their walls, are embroidered and fringed.” (Clarke 1848: 125)

It is particularly noteworthy that the Crimean Tatars placed a distinct emphasis on the importance of the family unit. In fact, the family was regarded as the most cherished aspect of their culture, as evidenced by the fact that familial issues were resolved exclusively within the family circle. The virtual absence of beggary amongst the Crimean Tatars is a testament to the effectiveness of this approach.

“In the more secluded districts, the Tatars are generally a very creditable people, not having been exposed to the contaminating influence of low Russian life, They are sober, honest, generous in the extreme, and remarkably domesticated. Though polygamy is allowed by law and the Mohammedan religion, it is very rarely practised. Kohl inquired of one in possession of some wealth, how many wives he had, and the answer was, “Of course only one! No Tatar has more than one wife, except such as are rascals.” Their family life is said by all travellers to be almost unexceptionable, marked by union among the different members, the love of regularity, the industry of the females, and the home attachments of the men, who seldom spend a copeck away from their, households. On entering one of their villages, remote from general society, the first thing that attracts the attention of the stranger is the cleanliness of the streets and houses. Naked, ragged, and dirty children are never seen running about, as is so frequently case in both Mohammedan and Christian countries” (Milner1855: 365).

Apart from the customs and traditions of the Crimean Tatars, the architectural structures also captivated the travelers. The presence of fountains on the peninsula garnered significant interest, as fountains formed an integral part of the architectural landscape. The customary practice of ablution provided evidence of the existence of fountains and underscored their importance in religious rituals. The Crimean Tatars also succeeded in creating their own irrigation system:

“They created these water infrastructures through various practices, including digging a small canal that guides the flow from a mountain river to one’s house or a mill. This canal could then be used by other people who would dig their water branches in the directions they needed, creating a network. This decentralized approach to water meant that water was part of the complex infrastructure of collective responsibility; and this collective responsibility for the water network brings us to the notion of caring infrastructure.” (Engelhardt & Shestakova, 2022: 532-544).

The foreign travelers also found impressive the sheer number of fountains erected throughout the peninsula:

“The most striking feature, however, is the number of fountains sparkling in every direction; there being about a hundred, independent of those in the palace, of which fifty are in the streets, while the remainder are private. Groups of Tartars may be seen at these fountains, washing and purifying themselves at the hour of prayer, before entering the mosques; as the pious Moslems really practice an adage which their Christian neighbours, the Russians, utterly despise, viz., that “ cleanliness is akin to godliness.”” (Scott 1854:305).

Regrettably, as a result of the Russian colonial policy, the fountains were subjected to destruction and demolition, their remains repurposed for other uses. The primary objective of the imperial policy was to eliminate any vestiges of the religious practices and customs of the Crimean Tatars, something that people found extremely painful and distressing.

“The most lamentable part of the injury thus sustained has been in the destruction of the conduits and public fountains, which conveyed, together with the purest water from distant mountains, a source of health and comfort to the people. They carried off the leaden pipes in order to make bullets; then they take down all the marble slabs and large stones for building materials which they employ in the construction of barracks; lastly, they blow up the channels which convey water, because, they say the water porters cannot earn a livelihood where there are public fountains. Some of those fountains were of great antiquity, and beautifully decorated with marble reservoirs, as well as by bas - reliefs and inscriptions .. In all Mahometan countries it is considered an act of piety to preserve and adorn the public aqueducts. Works of that nature once appeared in almost every street of Caffa; some were public washing places; others poured out streams of water as clear as chrysal for allaying the thirst of the inhabitants, and for ablutions prior to going to the mosques. They were nearly all demolished when we arrived” (Clarke 1848:260).

One of the most significant violations perpetrated by the Russian colonialists against the Crimean Tatars was the assault on their religious beliefs. The primary objective of the Russian Empire was to Christianize the population of the Crimean Peninsula, which proved to be a formidable challenge due to the staunch opposition of the indigenous population. The Crimean Tatars' religious affiliation posed a significant obstacle to the implementation of Russian plans, and it was viewed as a grave threat by the Russian authorities.

Consequently, the Russian colonialists sought to undermine the religious beliefs of the Crimean Tatars, constantly destroying their religious heritage. Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov was in favor of further repressing Muslims on the peninsula. He did not believe that Islam and Christianity could coexist. He wrote that “the Muslims, on account of their faith, are the born enemies of Christians, and as once they ruled over Russia, it should be Russia's policy to treat them as her enemies”. (Fisher 1968:546). This is confirmed by travel notes which describes how the Russian colonialists not only encroached on the religious beliefs of the Crimean Tatars, but also engaged in acts of mockery and ridicule. These acts of derision were directed not only towards the religious practices of the indigenous population but also towards the people themselves.

“Where I to detail half the cruel ties, the extortions, the rapine, and barbarity, practised by the Russians upon the devoted inhabitants of the Crimea, and their deluded khan, the relation would exceed belief. I have the authority of one of their commanders, whom I dare not name, for asserting, that when the mullas, or Tartar priests, ascended the minarets at mid - day to proclaim the noon , according to their usual custom , the Russian soldiers amused themselves by firing muskets at them ; and in one of these instances a priest was killed.” (Clarke 1848:270).

The above passage paints a grim picture of the atrocities committed by the Russian Empire against the Crimean Tatars, particularly in the context of their religious beliefs and practices. Such accounts of violence and brutality have been documented in various traveler notes, shedding light on the oppressive and authoritarian nature of colonialization and its impact on the subjugated populations. According to historical accounts, there were more than 1,500 mosques in Crimea before the Russian occupation, but the vast majority of these structures were either destroyed or converted into warehouses or used for other needs. Traveler Thomas Milner gave a detailed description of the fate of mosques on the Crimean peninsula:

“The mosques are either churches, or applied to secular uses; one having been converted into a museum, while marble pilasters ornamented with arabesques serve as door steps to taverns.” (Milner 1855: 328).

The destruction of mosques not only undermined the spiritual and cultural foundations of the Crimean Tatars, but it also served to intimidate and demoralize the population. In E. Spencer's "Travels in Circassia, Krim Tartary" published in London in 1837, the author not only highlights the profound stillness and emptiness of the grand structure of the Khan's Palace, but also portrays the religious silence that permeates the city. Spencer notes that the traditional Muslim call to prayer is absent in the cities, leaving a sense of religious stillness and quietude. This observation may reflect the aftermath of political upheavals and changes in ownership that had occurred in the region during that time. Spencer notes that the Crimean Tatars constantly had been displaced from their ancestral lands and were reduced to outcasts in their own land. The arrival of new, so-called "owners" had brought with them an aura of emptiness that permeated the region, leaving behind a sense of desolation that is reflected in the silence that now characterizes the city. This depiction highlights the impact of political and social upheavals on the cultural and religious practices of a region, as well as the emotional toll that displacement can take on a people.

"But now all is silent- silent as the grave: no footstep echoes through its lofty gilded halls, save that of the keeper; no moullah, from the graceful minaret, calls the faithful to prayer; no fair captive now sighs for liberty within the ramparts of a seraglio prison. In short, here you have every thing as it existed in the days of the great Khan Devlet Guérai, except inhabitants: these the imagination must supply". (Spencer 1837:16).

The transformation of the Crimean Tatar people, as noted by many travelers to the region, is a significant and concerning development in the history of this region. Once considered the masters of their land, the Crimean Tatars have faced long and difficult sufferings and injustice under Russian rule.

"It is the sorrowful remembrance that these children of the hills, who but lately were free as the wind that plays round their mountains are now only bonds men; and bondsmen to one who despises their religion, desecrates their tombs, and tramples on themselves." (Scott 1854: 222-223).

The plight of the Crimean Tatar people under Russian rule has been further exacerbated by the confiscation of their lands by Russian authorities. One of the most immediate impacts has been the forced displacement of many Crimean Tatars from their ancestral lands.

"The pomeschchiks (landowners – E.A.), with the help of the local authorities, thus frequently appropriated for themselves, land belonging to the Tatars; on the state lands Tatar land was mortgaged without the knowledge of its owners. Proof of this can be seen in the fact that 30 years ago in the Crimea there were almost no landowners other than free Tatars and persons possessing gardens on the southern shore and in the river valleys; now, however, the greater part of the land in the Crimea belongs to the pomeschchiks and the Tatars living on it have been practically turned into serfs." (Williams 2016:13).

The expropriation of lands from the Crimean Tatars by imperial authorities had far-reaching implications, resulting in the gradual transformation of Crimea into a Russian province:

"After the first annexation of Crimea in 1783, Prince Potemkin gave the indigenous lands to the 'favorites' of Catherine II to build summer recreational houses known as 'dachas'. The serfs brought to the peninsula by the new landowners did not know how to work on unfamiliar ground. The forests were felled for military vessels, the wellsprings, which had been watering the steppe, were dried, and the fertile

soil, unbound by the roots of plants either cut or dried out, was dispersed.” (Engelhardt, Shestakova 2022: 534).

The Crimean Tatars' inability to reconcile with their new Russian overlords, who continuously imposed destruction upon them, led them to display hostility towards anyone they believed to be Russian. This behavior highlights the underlying animosity and resentment harbored towards the Russian regime, which had subjected and oppressed the Crimean Tatars. Upon encountering British travelers whom they initially mistook for Russians, the Crimean Tatars exhibited their lack of fondness for the Russians. However, upon realizing that these foreigners were not Russians, the Tatars assumed a generous and hospitable manner towards them. This reaction is indicative of the complex and nuanced nature of inter-group relations, where the perceptions of identity can significantly impact the dynamics of interaction. R. Lyall wrote:

“At length an individual, for whom we had sent, returned an answer, that " If we were not Russians, he would make us a good dinner”, and the business was easily arranged”. (Lyall 1825: 362).

Hostility towards and mistrust of everything to do with Russia and Russians was often harmful for their own economic interests. Thus, R. Herber attested to Crimean Tatars steadfastness in;

“refusing Russian money; and it is necessary to procure a sufficient stock of usluks, paras, and sequins. This is not their only way of showing their dislike to their new masters: at one village we were surprised at our scanty fare, and the reluctance with which everything was furnished, till we learnt that they had mistaken us for Russian officers. On finding that we were foreigners, the eggs, melted butter, nardek, and bekness, (national Crimean Tatar dishes. – E. A.) came in profusion” (Herber 1829: 49).

The British travelers witnessed the implementation of Russian imperial policy towards the Crimean Tatars and their first-hand accounts provide invaluable insights into the treatment of Tatars by the Russian occupiers. Again, quoting R. Lyall:

“We have heard much of the forbearance, kindness, and toleration of Russia towards her conquered provinces, and she often deserves that praise; but, assuredly, for many years, the Tartars were treated with much severity, which led to great emigration. They have also suffered the most violent insults: their mosques, their minarets, their palaces, their baths, their water - conduits , their fountains , and even their tombs , have been thrown down , ruined , and rased.” (Lyall 1825:361)

The scholarly investigation carried out by Yağmur Derin Ükten, an academic with expertise in the field of Western travelers and their encounters pertaining to the Russian invasion of Crimea, provides valuable insights into the enduring and recurrent nature of the coerced displacement experienced by the Crimean Tatars.

“The migration that began immediately after the Russian occupation and lasted for approximately 150 years reached its peak during seven distinct periods: 1812, 1828-1829, 1860-1861, 1874, 1890, and 1902, which were particularly notable during the 19th century. After 1874, the compulsory military service for the Tatars became a significant factor contributing to their migration. It is estimated that between 1783 and 1922, approximately 1,800,000 Crimean Tatars were forcibly expelled from their homeland.” (Ükten:153).

The strategic objective of the Russian Empire on the Crimean Peninsula was to secure and consolidate its dominion by implementing a policy that specifically targeted the forced displacement of the indigenous population. This policy, characterized by the

deliberate expulsion of the native inhabitants, aimed to undermine their cultural, social, and economic structures, thus facilitating the establishment of Russian control and dominance over the region.

"This massive outflow of Tatars from Crimea from late 1700s to late 1800s is documented by the census of 1897 that showed a dramatic decrease in the share of Tatar population, while the Slavic population numbers rocketed. Whereas it is estimated that Tatars comprised some 83 per cent of Crimea's population in the year of the annexation, hundred years later their share had dropped to about 35 per cent". (Zidkova, Melichar 2015: 92)

Thus, Catherine the Great's idea of the Greek project, which aimed to expel the Muslim population, was actively implemented. Crimea became increasingly populated by Russian settlers, and the idea of Catherine was supported by prominent Russian writers, poets, and artists. This is evident in numerous Russian literary and artistic works associated with Crimea, including Alexander Pushkin's poem "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai" (1824). In this work Pushkin asserts the bond between Crimean place and Tatar personality only to break it and initiate an elevation of place over personality that will be perpetuated by his successors (Finnin 2022:29). This typical Orientalist view of the local who depicts Crimean khan as a lustful decadent ruler and a ruthless barbarian worrier describing him as "a scourge of nations," "violent Tatar" who coming back from the 'horrific raids' was 'drowned in luxurious laziness.

"The people were not needed. Their high culture was not needed. It was hated and dangerous, as it was seen as a guarantee for the preservation of the self-consciousness of the Crimean Tatars, and in the event of new catastrophes - for its restoration, rebirth. Therefore, this culture hindered the planned transformation of the people into a gathering of amnesiac people without memory, obediently bowing their heads to the "elder brother". And therefore, it was subject to fiery destruction". (Vozgrin:<http://www.krimoved-library.ru/books/istoricheskie-sudbi-krimskih-tatar.html>).

It is not surprising that British travellers were taken aback by Russia's treatment of the Crimean Tatars. Although Britain was also an active colonizer, democratic ideals were emphasized in its policies. In "The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain," John Gleason highlights the distinction between Russia's punitive approach and Britain's democratic trajectory.

"Like the adventitious concatenation of events, the differences between the Russian and the British political and social systems were beyond the control of individuals. Yet they too contributed to Russophobia. The United Kingdom was a democratic and parliamentary, the Russian empire an autocratic and authoritarian, polity. Both British and Russian statesmen knew that British policy was subject to popular sanction and must be consistent with public sentiment, while Russian's could be formulated and executed in strictest secrecy. Herein lies an explanation of the fact that the Russians seem not to have attributed to their British contemporaries a policy of aggressive hostility toward Russia in spite of the vigor with which Russian action in Constantinople, Circassia, Persia, and Afghanistan was thwarted, in spite of a course of policy which was in fact more inimical both deed and in purpose than was Russian's. Thus the character of Russia's polity is a partial explanation of the suspicion with which her policy was regarded both by the British statesmen and by the British public" (Gleason 1950: 288).

Conclusion

The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 1783 marked a significant turning point in the history of the Crimean peninsula. The policy of taking control of Crimea and

transforming it into a Russian province had dire consequences for the indigenous people of the region, the Crimean Tatars. The systematic destruction of their cultural heritage, the renaming of geographical names and the forced displacement of the Crimean Tatars from their ancestral homeland were all part of a deliberate campaign to create a narrative about Russian Crimea that would legitimize Russia's dominance in the region.

The Greek Project was the primary ideological basis of the Russian propaganda campaign to establish dominance over Crimea. This project claimed that Russia was the only legitimate heir and protector of the Byzantine Church of Constantinople. However, the presence of Muslim Tatars in Crimea posed a challenge to the Hellenic Project narrative, as it sought to exclude them from the history and culture of the region. In fact, Russian officials declared the Crimean Tatars as barbarians, only recognized for their raids, and a people without any cultural heritage.

In contrast to Russian writers, poets, and artists who perpetuated the myth of Russian Crimea by ignoring the Crimean Tatars, British travelers who visited Crimea acknowledged the importance of the Crimean Tatars in the wealth and distinctiveness of the peninsula. The accounts of British travelers who explored Crimea not only recognized but also emphasized the pivotal role played by the Crimean Tatars in shaping the prosperity and uniqueness of the peninsula. These firsthand testimonies vividly portray the rich heritage of the Crimean Tatars, showcasing their contributions in diverse areas such as the development of an intricate irrigation system and the construction of palaces and mosques. Moreover, they noted the intellectual and artistic contributions of the Crimean Tatars to the philosophical thought of the Islamic world, as well as their creation of musical works, poetry by the Crimean khans, constitute a rich cultural heritage that extends far beyond the geographical boundaries of Crimea.

Furthermore, the lifestyle and warm hospitality exhibited by the Crimean Tatars left a lasting impression on these travelers, to the extent that they sought to experience firsthand the indigenous people's way of life by choosing their houses as accommodations. The allure stemmed not only from the cleanliness and comfort of the Tatars' homes but also from the unique oriental flavors infused within the gastronomic traditions of the Crimean Tatars.

Regrettably, the British travelers also bore witness to the desolation and devastation inflicted upon the authentic Crimea under the oppressive rule of the Russian invaders.

Russian policy led to the ethnic oppression and mass expulsion of the Crimean Tatars, resulting in their current minority status and ongoing struggle for statehood. This propaganda policy has created ethnic tension and instability in the region, as evidenced by the ongoing conflict over Crimea.

The implications of the "Russian Crimea" myth as a part of imperial ideological discourse have been far-reaching and continue to shape the dynamics of the region. The ongoing conflict over Crimea is a testament to the enduring legacy of this myth, which has led to the marginalization and discrimination of Crimean Tatars. Their quest for justice and the restoration of their lands and rights remain unresolved.

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