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Divided Sovereignty in the Genghisid States as Exemplified by the Crimean Khanate: “Oriental Despotism” *à rebours*?

DARIUSZ KOŁODZIEJCZYK

In 1957, when Karl Wittfogel published his seminal book on “Oriental Despotism,”¹ it was evident from the outset that the author’s arguments were heavily biased against Russia and deeply rooted in the Cold War atmosphere. Wittfogel’s chief argument about the liaison between irrigation and state despotism had to wait for its critics until more recent times,² but his treatment of Russia as an example of a “hydraulic society” was immediately perceived as an intellectual aberration. Nonetheless, the notion of Russia as an “Oriental Tyranny” or “Asiatic Tyranny” proved handy in journalistic efforts to explain the Soviet system to a Western reader, and it has retained some popular currency up to the present day. In a paragraph of his book, headed “The Introduction of Oriental Despotism into Russia,” Wittfogel blamed the Tatars for being “decisive both in destroying the non-Oriental Kievan society and in laying the foundations for the despotic state of Muscovite and post-Muscovite Russia.” In doing so, he invoked such different authorities as historians Vasilij Ključevskij³ and George Vernadsky, and... the poet Alexander Pushkin.⁴ Among the tremendously rich literary tradition that blames the Mongols and Tatars for infecting the Russian soul with the spirit of despotism, two other influential writers can be named here: a nineteenth-century French author Marquis de Custine⁵ and an early twentieth-century Polish historian Jan Kucharczyński.⁶

- 1 Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, 1957).
- 2 For a recent discussion, invoking earlier literature, see Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 31–37.
- 3 The system of Latin transcription, adopted in the present article with the kind permission of the ASI Editorial Commission and differentiating between Russian, Ruthenian, and modern Ukrainian texts recorded in the Cyrillic script, is based on the one proposed by George Shevelov, although with a number of modifications; for additional details, see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland–Lithuania: International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15th–18th Century). A Study of Peace Treaties Followed by Annotated Documents* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 524–525.
- 4 Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*, pp. 219–225, esp. p. 225.
- 5 See especially his letter from July 8, 1839, in Astolphe markiz de Custine, *Listy z Rosji. Rosja w 1839 roku* (Warszawa 1991), pp. 18–19 [I quote the Polish edition.].
- 6 See Jan Kucharczyński, *Od Białego Caratu do Czerwonego*, vol. 1 (Warsaw, 1926); for typical terms such as “the savage school of Mongol slavery” or “Mongol tyranny” see the abridged English translation: *The Origins of Modern Russia* (New York, 1948), pp. 19–20.

To state that the Muscovian rulers borrowed despotic forms of government from the Tatars, one must tacitly assume that such forms were indigenous and “natural” for the Tatar society. Yet, such an assumption is far from the truth. At times of great military conquests, most notably during the reign of Genghis Khan, high-level centralization and violent suppression of domestic opposition might have been achieved temporarily in the Mongol empire, but to make this vast empire function and survive in the long term, the cooperation of local elites must have been secured. To strengthen and legitimize their rule, the khans were compelled to share the spoils of war and the rights to exploit subjugated populations with their immediate family members, the leading Mongol and Tatar clan leaders and their followers, rank and file warriors, and finally, landed and urban elites as well as clergymen⁷ belonging to various ethno-religious groups peopling the Genghisid empire. Given the lack of precise inheritance rules in steppe society, following the death of Genghis Khan any of his agnate descendants would have been able to claim the throne. Consequently, with the ongoing fragmentation of the Eurasian empire once founded by Genghis Khan, the members of various branches of the Genghisid dynasty, who struggled to secure control over the whole empire or at least its substantial parts, were in desperate need of cooperation from the side of the local elites. In the Mongol tradition, the election of the khan as well as his most important decisions was subject to acceptance by the noble general assembly known as *qurultay*. This institution survived in the late Genghisid states in Eastern Europe, with which Muscovy maintained intensive contacts, most notably the Kazan Khanate and the Crimean Khanate.⁸ In the sixteenth-century Muscovian chronicles one finds numerous mentions of *qurultay*, referred to as *vsja zemlja*, i.e. “the whole land,” thus the Russians must have been familiar with this “democratic” institution of their Mongol-Tatar neighbors.⁹

7 To invoke just one example, regarding the privileges granted to Russian clergymen by the khans of the Golden Horde, see Arkadij Grigor'ev, *Sbornik xanskix jarlykov russkim mitropolitam. Istočnikovedčeskij analiz zolotoordynskix dokumentov* (St. Petersburg, 2004).

8 It is worth emphasizing that a number of Mongol traditional institutions, reflecting the pattern of “steppe democracy,” survived better in Genghisid states in Eastern Europe, Siberia, and Central Asia, than in Persia and China, where the rulers from the Ilkhanid and Yuan dynasties largely adopted local models of kingship typical for the urbanized and bureaucratized empires that had existed in Persia and China since ancient times.

9 See Mixail Xudjakov, *Očerki po istorii Kazanskogo xanstva* (Moscow, 1991 [first published in 1923]), pp. 191–196, and Donald Ostrowski, “Ruling Class Structures of the Kazan Khanate,” in H. Güzel, C. Oğuz, and O. Karatay, eds., *The Turks*, vol. 2: *Middle Ages* (Ankara, 2002), pp. 841–847, esp. p. 844 (both aforementioned studies refer to the Kazan Khanate, but their conclusions apply just as well to the Crimean Khanate).

**"STEPPE DEMOCRACY" AS REFLECTED IN THE CRIMEAN KHANATE'S
FOREIGN RELATIONS**

This article addresses the problem of divided sovereignty in the Crimean Khanate, the last Genghisid state in Eastern Europe, which was to persist until 1783. It is based on the records related to the diplomatic exchanges between the Crimean Khanate and its northern neighbors: Poland-Lithuania¹⁰ and Muscovy.¹¹ The question of who was in charge of the Khanate's foreign policy and with whom one should negotiate political agreements reappeared with regular frequency in both mutual negotiations and in internal discourse at the courts in Moscow, Vilnius, Cracow (later Warsaw), as well as Qırq Yer (later Baghchasaray).

Any foreign envoy sent to the Crimean Khanate in the sixteenth or seventeenth century knew that it was insufficient to negotiate with the khan. Peace treaties concluded by the Tatars with their northern Christian neighbors were typically negotiated, sworn and confirmed by numerous members of the Giray dynasty, the four clan leaders named *qaraçi beys*,¹² lesser Tatar and Nogay nobles, Muslim clergymen, and courtiers.

The most prominent Crimean dignitary after the khan was the *qalğa*¹³ – typically a younger brother or the eldest son of the ruling khan. In the earliest *yarlıqs* (khan decrees) and *şartnames* (oath-letters) addressed to the Polish-Lithuanian rulers, the name of the *qalğa* is listed among the personalities who swore the peace, directly after the name of the khan. In the subsequent period, the *qalğas* began to edit their own instruments of peace.

While the consent of the *qalğa* was instrumental for securing peace even when his relations with the khan were impeccable, it was even more crucial during internal conflicts within the Giray family. In 1527, during uneasy co-

10 Until the early sixteenth century Vilnius and Cracow maintained contacts with the Crimea separately even though Poland and Lithuania were joined by a dynastic union. Nonetheless, already in this period one observes a gradual amalgamation in the foreign policy of the two states. For instance, Casimir and Sigismund were titled as kings when they received Crimean embassies in Vilnius, although in Lithuania they formally acted as grand dukes and not as the kings of Poland.

11 Foreign policy is of course but one "window" through which one might view the Crimean structure of power. No less valuable insight can be gained through the examination of such aspects of the Khanate's domestic policy as the distribution of lands and pasturages, the structure of tax collection, or the unequal levels of the khan's jurisdiction over various segments of Crimean society; for a recent ground-breaking study of the latter aspect, undertaken by Natalia Królikowska, see n. 60 below.

12 On their role in the Mongol world, see Uli Schamiloğlu, "The *Qaraçi* Beys of the Later Golden Horde: Notes of the Organization of the Mongol World Empire," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 4 (Wiesbaden, 1984), pp. 283–297.

13 On the term and its usage, see Joseph Matuz, "Qalğa" *Turcica. Revue d'études turques* 2 (1970), pp. 101–129.

habitation between the khan Sa'adet Giray and his nephew, the *qalğa* Islam Giray, the Polish–Lithuanian diplomacy secured two instruments of peace issued separately by both Girays.¹⁴ The fact that Islam Giray received foreign embassies and that he could issue a peace instrument separately from the ruling khan contributed to a somewhat blurred picture of the khanate's domestic hierarchy of that period, both in his contemporaries' opinions and in modern historiography. In 1532, during the renewed open conflict between Sa'adet Giray and Islam Giray, the lords of the Lithuanian Council wrote to King Sigismund that "in the present time there have remained two khans in this Horde" (*teperešneho času na toj Orde dva cary zostaly*).¹⁵ This vision found a modern corroboration in the opinion of Władysław Pociecha, an eminent Polish historian, who observed that, in 1534, King Sigismund of Poland had dispatched an embassy to "both khans" (*do obu chanów*) who reigned in the Crimea.¹⁶

In the seventeenth century, the *qalğas* had their own chancery based in Aq Mesdjid Saray, their residence located near modern Simferopol. They issued documents provided with their own monograms (*tuğras*), not inferior in artistic quality to the monograms of the ruling khans.¹⁷ Two instruments of peace (*'ahdnames*), issued by Qalğa Islam Giray along with the instruments of his elder brother, Khan Bahadır Giray, in 1637 and 1640, have been preserved in the Polish archives.¹⁸

The *qalğas* also corroborated peace instruments along with or on behalf of the ruling khans. In 1595, after the Ottoman–Polish negotiations at Țuțora/Cecora, in which the Ottomans were assisted by the Tatars, the resulting peace

14 See the instruments from 1527 issued by Khan Sa'adet Giray and Qalğa Islam Giray, published in Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 665–680.

15 See A. Dubonis, ed., *Lietuvos Metrika. Knyga Nr. 15 (1528–1538). Užrašymų knyga 15* (Vilnius, 2002), p. 174.

16 Pociecha's observation is related to the period when Islam Giray once again rioted against the ruling khan, Sahib Giray (r. 1532–1551), another uncle of his; *Acta Tomiciana*, vol. 16, pt. 1 (Wrocław etc., 1960), p. 597, n. 11. Albeit reflecting the *de facto* Crimean realities of that time, the opinion of the Polish scholar is nonetheless misleading. The Polish court often tacitly supported Islam Giray in the hope of weakening the ruling khan, but it could not risk open confrontation with the Ottoman sultan, whom Sahib Giray owed his throne; hence, in the Polish–Ottoman peace treaty, concluded shortly before, in 1533, King Sigismund formally acknowledged Sahib Giray as the Crimean khan and engaged not to assist the Crimean malcontents; see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman–Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th–18th Century): An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents* (Leiden, 2000), p. 233.

17 For some fine examples, published in color facsimiles, see Sagit Faizov, *Tugra i Vselenajaja. Moxabbat-name i šert-name krymskix xanov i princev v ornamental'nom, sakral'nom i diplomatičeskom kontekstax* (Moscow–Baghchasaray, 2002).

18 Published in Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 919–922 and 942–947; the instrument from 1640 is preserved in the Turkish original, provided with Islam Giray's *tuğra* (see *ibid.*, facs. IXa–c), whereas the instrument from 1637 is extant only in a Polish translation. Islam Giray later became Khan Islam III Giray (r. 1644–1654).

instrument of the Muslim side was corroborated by Khan Ghazi II Giray, his brother, Qalğa Feth Giray, and the Ottoman governor of Bender, Ahmed Bey.¹⁹ In 1667, in result of the Polish–Crimean pacification at Pidhajci/Podhajce, in the absence of Khan Adil Giray, the Crimean instrument was sealed by Qalğa Qırım Giray, two other Giray princes who were the khan’s and the *qalğa*’s nephews, and seven other Crimean dignitaries.²⁰

The Giray princes who did not hold the post of the *qalğa* also felt entitled to participate in negotiations with foreign courts, exchange presents with foreign rulers, and even issue their own instruments of peace along with the instruments issued by the khan. When Mehmed Giray ascended the throne in 1515, he was compelled to grant the post of *qalğa* to his younger brother, Ahmed, unwillingly, even though he would have preferred to grant it to his oldest and favorite son, Bahadır. Nonetheless, this move did not discourage Bahadır Giray from playing an independent role in the Crimean foreign policy. We know about his unsuccessful overture to negotiate a separate peace instrument with Moscow: in 1515 the Muscovian envoy, Ivan Mamonov, was instructed to negotiate with the khan only and *not* to accept any separate instrument from Bahadır (*a nečto carevič stanet davati Ivanu svoju opričnjuju šertnuju gramotu, i Ivanu u careviča gramoty ego ne imati*).²¹ Bahadır’s initiative to play a semi-independent role in the Crimean foreign diplomacy was better received in Vilnius and Cracow. In 1517, the Giray prince issued an instrument of peace in his own name, corroborated with his oath and signet seal, in which he reiterated the contents of his father’s instrument previously sent to King Sigismund.²²

The *qalğa*, typically identified with the heir apparent, was appointed by the khan from among his male family members. Nevertheless, the khan’s freedom of choice was limited by custom and domestic pressure, sometimes aided by foreign (i.e. Ottoman) intervention. Whereas the khans usually preferred to appoint their oldest sons, thereby tacitly promoting the rule of primogeniture, the Genghisid tradition favored the rule of seniority which gave the khan’s younger brothers precedence over the khan’s sons in the order of succession to the throne. This tension is exemplified by the previously described conflict of Bahadır Giray, the ambitious son of Mehmed I Giray (r. 1515–1523), and the khan’s brother, Ahmed Giray, who held the post of *qalğa* from the time of Mehmed’s accession in 1515. In 1519, Ahmed openly rebelled against the khan and was killed by Bahadır, who only then ascended to the post of *qalğa*. After the violent deaths of both Mehmed and Bahadır Giray at the hands of the Nogays in 1523, the next decade was strongly affected by the conflict between the late khan’s brothers, Sa’adet Giray (r. 1523–1532) and Sahib Giray (r. 1532–

19 Published in Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman–Polish Diplomatic Relations*, pp. 298–299.

20 Published in Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 984–990.

21 G. Karpov and G. Štendman, eds., *Pamjatniki diplomatičeskix snošenij Moskovskago gosudarstva s Krymskoju i Nogajskoju ordami i s Turciej*, vol. 2: 1508–1521 gg. in *Sbornik Imperatorskago Russkago Istoričeskago Obščestva* 95 (St. Petersburg, 1895), p. 215.

22 Published in Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 633–641.

1551), and the late khan's sons, Ghazi Giray (r. 1523) and Islam Giray (r. 1532), whose short reigns were frustrated by concerted efforts of the Ottoman Porte and the domestic opposition in the Crimea. When a similar conflict broke out once again in the Crimea, and in 1581, Khan Mehmed II Giray (r. 1577–1584) was prevented from appointing his son, Sa'adet Giray, to the post of *qalğa*, which was given instead to the khan's rebellious brother, Alp Giray, Mehmed II Giray resolved to create for his son a new post of *nureddin*. Because *nureddin* had become third in rank in the Crimean hierarchy, it is no wonder that foreign courts hastened to establish direct friendly relations with this new Tatar dignitary. At least once, a *nureddin* is known to have issued his own instrument of peace: in 1640, Nureddin Qırım Giray sent to Poland his '*ahdname*, provided with his own *tuğra*. His document was brought to Warsaw along with the instruments of his two older brothers, the khan and the *qalğa*.²³

Among the other Crimean officials who took part in diplomatic negotiations, a special role was played by the chief *qaraçı* – the leader of the most prominent noble clan in the Crimea.²⁴ This special role was already evident in the fifteenth century. In 1480, during his audience in Vilnius, a Crimean envoy Hadji Baba swore on behalf of his lord and all the Tatar nobles a solemn oath to keep peace with King Casimir. Significantly, the Tatar envoy invoked by name only three Crimean personages: Khan Mengli Giray, the khan's brother, Qalğa Yaghmurcha Sultan, and the *qaraçı* from the Shirin clan, Eminek. Three decades later, Eminek's nephew and successor, Agish, in his correspondence with Moscow, frankly disclosed the political aspirations of the Shirins: "Are there not two shafts to a cart? The right shaft is my lord the khan, and the left shaft am I, with my brothers and children."²⁵ As might be expected, Agish's name is, in turn, duly invoked in the peace instruments sent by Mengli Giray to Vilnius and Moscow in the years 1507 and 1508, respectively, although – contrary to his lofty ambitions – the name of the Shirin leader is preceded by the names of Tevkel and Mamish, the leaders of the clans of Manghuts and Sedjevüts, who competed with the Shirins for the preeminence in the hierarchy of the Crimean noble clans and who strongly challenged the Shirins' position in the early sixteenth century.²⁶

23 Published in *ibid.*, pp. 935–941; the instrument is preserved in the Turkish original, provided with Qırım Giray's *tuğra* (see *ibid.*, facs. VIIIa-c). Although the post of *nureddin* was created initially for the khan's oldest son whereas the post of *qalğa* was occupied by the khan's brother, it had never become a formalized rule. A khan's son could still become the *qalğa* and, vice-versa, a khan's brother (or any other male relative) could become the *nureddin*.

24 On the *qaraçıs*, whose number should have been four (although this rule was not always observed in the Crimean Khanate), cf. n. 11 above.

25 Quoted after Beatrice Forbes Manz, "The Clans of the Crimean Khanate 1466–1532," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 2 (1978), pp. 282–309, esp. p. 282.

26 Cf. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 33–34; the instrument sent in 1507 to King Sigismund is published in *ibid.*, pp. 566–579.

Although the Sedjevüts proved unable to establish themselves permanently at the top of the Crimean noble hierarchy, the challenge of the Manghits was more serious. In the early seventeenth century, the Manghit leader, Kantemir, outdid other Crimean clans by far in drawing his military strength from the Nogay tribes dwelling on the Black Sea steppes; he openly challenged the khan's authority by establishing a semi-independent rule in Budjak and by invoking Ottoman mediation in his conflicts with successive khans. The Porte was all too happy to strengthen its hold in the region by interfering in the Khanate's internal disputes.²⁷ The Polish authorities were so desperate to prevent Kantemir's raids from neighboring Budjak that the royal instrument from 1624, in which Sigismund III confirmed the conditions of Polish-Ottoman peace, negotiated in 1621 at Hotin, contained a special clause providing that the khan, the *qalğa*, the Manghit leader and other Tatars – nobles (*mirzas*) as well as commoners (*nec ipse chan, nec galga sultan, nec Cantimir murza, nec alii murzi et Tartarii*) – abstain from raiding and causing harm to the royal domains.²⁸ It is telling that Kantemir was listed by name in this instrument after the khan and the *qalğa*, just as Eminek had been once listed in the oath of the Tatar envoy, pronounced in Vilnius in 1480.

After the Ottomans executed unruly Kantemir in 1637 and after Khan Bahadır Giray massacred numerous Nogay leaders in 1639, the Manghits lost much of their power. The Shirins were able to reassume their position as the leaders of the Crimean nobility, with the Manghits still counting as the second most important clan in the Khanate. The Tatar instrument of 1667, resulting from the peace negotiations at Pidhajci/Podhajce and already mentioned above, was corroborated with the seals of the *qalğa*, two other Giray princes, and seven Crimean dignitaries, among whom one finds the Shirin *qaraçı* and a representative of the Manghit clan named Murad-shah Mirza.²⁹ It is particularly interesting that the Shirin *qaraçı*, Mengli Giray Bey, whose name opens the list of non-Giray dignitaries, was “immodestly” named after the Crimean khan Mengli Giray who had reigned in the years 1466–1515 (with two interruptions). He also used the almond-like seal, which was otherwise restricted to the use of the Giray dynasty members, and his seal's legend openly invoked his descent from Khan Hadji Giray, the founder of the Crimean Khanate.³⁰ These were not

27 On Kantemir, see Mihnea Berindei, “La Porte Ottomane face aux Cosaques Zaporogues, 1600–1637,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 1 (1977), pp. 273–307, esp. pp. 291–306.

28 For the document, issued on 1 April 1624 in Warsaw, see Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman–Polish Diplomatic Relations*, pp. 419–426, esp. p. 421.

29 Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 986–987 and 989–990. Murad-shah Mirza is referred to as Mansur-oghlu (*Mansur utu*) in the Polish text while in that period the Manghits were alternatively known as the Mansurs or Mansur-oghlus. Murad-shah was not the clan leader, as the *qaraçı* would have been titled *bey* and not *mirza*.

30 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 989, n. 14, and facs. XIIIc. The Shirin clan members customarily married Giray princesses. Therefore, the *qaraçı*'s claim to descent – though only matrilineal – from the Giray, and consequently the Genghisid family, was justified. To give just one example,

innocent pretensions: they reflected the ambitions of the powerful clan, whose members had frequently influenced Crimean policy and with whose opinion every khan had to reckon.

The Giray family members and the leaders of the most powerful noble clans were not the only ones who participated in the Khanate's foreign correspondence and the procedure of peacemaking. Mengli Giray's instrument of peace, sent to King Sigismund in 1507 and already described above, contains a long list of the Crimean dignitaries who corroborated the newly established peace with their oaths taken in the presence of the royal envoy. The dignitaries can be grouped into three categories: the dynasty members, the Muslim clergymen, and the leaders of the Crimean nobility.³¹

Dynasty members:

- Yaghmurcha (the khan's younger brother and *qalğa*)
- Mehmed Giray (the khan's oldest son, future *qalğa* and khan)
- Ahmed Giray (the khan's second son)
- Yapancha (Yaghmurcha's son)
- Mahmud Giray (the khan's third son)
- Feth Giray (the khan's fourth son)
- Burnash (the khan's fifth son)

Muslim clergymen:

- Babaka Seyyid³²
- Sultan Ali³³
- Burghan Mullah³⁴

Mahdum-shah, a daughter of Khan Mengli Giray and hence granddaughter of Khan Hadji Giray, was married to Devletek, the head of the Shirin clan and the son of Eminek; see Ilya Zaytsev [Zajcev], "The Structure of the Giray Dynasty (15th-16th Centuries): Matrimonial and Kinship Relations of the Crimean Khans," in E. Boikova and R. Rybakov, eds., *Kinship in the Altaic World: Proceedings of the 48th Permanent International Altaistic Conference, Moscow 10-15 July, 2005* (Wiesbaden, 2006), pp. 341-353, esp. p. 341.

31 Cf. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 483-484; for more details about the listed personages, see *ibid.*, pp. 574-576, notes 2-17, and p. 579, n. 40.

32 Babaka or Babike Seyyid, the brother-in-law of Mengli Giray.

33 Probably identical with the "great mullah Ali," mentioned by Mehmed Giray in his letter to Vasilij III from 1516 and referred to as "my great mullah, superior to all our mullahs, and also my great kadi;" see Karpov and Štendman, *Pamjatniki diplomatičeskix snošenij*, vol. 2, p. 299.

34 In my book, I regarded the above two persons, Sultan Ali and Burghan Mullah, as one person named Sultan Ali Abdulghani (recorded as *soltan ali abulgan malla* or alternatively *soltan ali aburghan malla* where the letter *a* displayed in bold could be read as the first letter in a proper name but also as a conjunction in Ruthenian); see Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 566 and 574. Yet, a discussion with Laimontas Karalius persuaded me that these were two different persons. Apart from Mengli Giray's instrument of peace dated 1507, Burghan Mullah is recorded two more times in the Lithuanian Register, in the docu-

- Baba Sheikh (on him see below)

Highest noble functionaries and leaders:

- Mamış Ulan, lieutenant (*qaymaqam*) of Qırq Yer³⁵
- Saqal Bey, leader of the Crimean branch of the Qıyats³⁶
- Tevkel Bey, leader of the Crimean Manghıts and the khan's brother-in-law³⁷
- Mamış Bey, leader of the Sedjevüts (Sedjeuts) and the khan's brother-in-law
- Ağış Bey, *qaraçı* of the Shirins
- Devlet Bakhtı Bey, *qaraçı* of the Barıns and lieutenant of Qarasu Bazar³⁸
- Merdan Bey, *qaraçı* of the Arghıns
- Mahmud Bey, *qaraçı* of the Qıpchaqs.³⁹

Apart from those listed by name, many more Tatar nobles and courtiers participated in the oath ceremony. A year later, in 1508, a Muscovian envoy Kostjantin Zabolockij resolved to remunerate each who had sworn to keep peace with Moscow, with one sable. It soon turned out that he had no sables left: twenty dissatisfied Tatars remained with empty hands.⁴⁰

Well aware of the decentralized structure of Crimean politics, the Khanate's northern neighbors insisted that the oath to keep peace should be taken

ments from 1507 and 1509; see the recently published volume: I. Ilarienė, L. Karalius, and D. Antanavičius, eds., *Lietuvos Metrika. Knyga Nr. 7 (1506–1539). Užrašymų knyga 7* (Vilnius, 2011), pp. 104 and 142. Moreover, Burghan Mullah is recalled as deceased (*pokojniku Bur-gan molle*) in the aforementioned letter by Mehmed Giray, addressed in 1516 to Vasilij III, whereas in the same letter Mullah Ali figures as a living person; cf. n. 32 above. I would like to thank Laimontas Karalius for his help in solving this puzzle.

- 35 Mamış Ulan, son of Sarmak Ulan, figured prominently in the diplomatic negotiations with Muscovy and Lithuania and headed embassies to these countries. Syroec'kovskij's assumption that he belonged to the Qıpchaq clan has been challenged by Beatrice Forbes Manz; see Manz, "The Clans of the Crimean Khanate," pp. 292–293. In the period concerned, the post of the Qıpchaq *qaraçı* was occupied by Mahmud Bey (see below), whose political influence was nevertheless much weaker than that of Mamış Ulan.
- 36 Saqal's father (or perhaps a more distant ancestor), Qıyat Mansur, was the founder of the branch of the Qıyat clan, which had left the Volga region after 1380 and settled in Lithuania and the Crimea.
- 37 Tevkel, son of Temir, was the Manghit (i.e., Nogay) leader who had entered the Crimean service in 1503, after the collapse of the Great Horde; his sister, Nur Sultan, was Mengli Giray's wife.
- 38 Devlet Bakhtı also figured prominently in Crimean international policy and led embassies to King Sigismund I (1512–1513) and to the Ottoman sultan Selim I (1515).
- 39 The last two beys are not listed by name in the instrument proper but their names can be found in the appended list that has been recorded in the Lithuanian Register along with the *şartname*; the list also contains the names of Mehmed Giray, Mamış Ulan, Ağış Bey, and Devlet Bakhtı Bey, who are already mentioned in the instrument proper; in 1508, Merdan and Mahmud Beys also swore an oath to preserve the peace with Muscovy.
- 40 Anna Xoroškevič, *Rus' i Krym. Ot sojuza k protivostojaniju. Konec XV – načalo XVI ss.* (Moscow, 2001), p. 252.

not merely by the khan, but by his family members, dignitaries, and prominent Crimean clans as well. A very long list of those who had taken an oath to keep peace with Muscovy in 1524 has been preserved in a copy in the Russian archives. It includes over two hundred names, grouped into the following categories: Muslim clergymen (*seyyids* and mullahs), the Giray princes, the *beys* and *mirzas* from the Shirin and Barın clans, the members of the khan's council (*divan*), the khan's mother and other prominent harem ladies, the Manghuts, the sheikhs and kadis, the palace clerks and the khan's courtiers, Qalga Özbek Giray's retinue members, Prince Islam Giray's retinue members, the *ulans*, the Sedjevüts, Arghuns, Kipchaks, Qongrats, Qıyats, and others.⁴¹

It is worth noting that in both 1507 and 1524, Muslim clergymen were listed *before* the clan leaders. This was also the case in 1508, as shown by a list of the Crimean dignitaries who swore to keep peace with Muscovy.⁴² The only clergyman invoked by name in 1508 was Baba Sheikh, the mullah at the khan's court, referred to in the Russian sources as *molna* and *bogomolec*. One of his sons, Hadji Mehmed Sheikh-zade, was then the mullah at the court of Prince Mehmed Giray. Another, Qurtqa, figures among the clergymen on the list from 1524. In the list from 1507, Baba Sheikh was preceded formally by three other Muslim hierarchs, but his political position was probably greater because three years later Sigismund asked him to mediate the peace, invoking his great influence on the khan. In Polish domestic correspondence, Baba Sheikh was then designated as the khan's archbishop (*archiepiscopus imperatoris* in Latin).⁴³ We might assume that his prestige, already high in Crimean society, was further elevated because of his correspondence with Sigismund, in which the mullah was compared explicitly with the archbishop of Gniezno, who in Poland crowned the king and acted as *interrex* during the interregna. Unfortunately, the role of the Muslim clergy in Crimean society and politics is still very much under-researched.⁴⁴

The attitude of the khans in relation to the idea that not just the ruler, but the whole Tatar society should participate in the process of peacemaking was ambiguous. On the one hand, admitting the limits of his power dimin-

41 Moscow, Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj arxiv drevnix aktov [RGADA], f. 123, op. 1, no. 6, fol. 86b–88b; published in "Istoričeskoe i diplomatičeskoe sobranie del proisxodivšix meždju rossijskimi velikimi knjaz'jami i byvšimi v Kryme tatarskimi carjami s 1462 po 1533 god." Collected by A. Malinovskij, in *Zapiski Odesskago Obščestva istorii i drevnostej*, vol. 5 (Odessa, 1863), pp. 178–419, esp. pp. 412–415; in Central Asia, the Qıyats originally formed a subsection of the Qongrats.

42 See Karpov and Štendman, *Pamjatniki diplomatičeskix snošenij*, vol. 2, p. 20.

43 Cf. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 37, 485, and 575, n. 11.

44 Pace the studies by Damir Isxakov, which are nonetheless based almost solely on Russian sources and focused on the early sixteenth century; cf. Damir Isxakov, "Islam v pozdnezolotoordynskix tatarskix xanstvax," in R. Muxametšin, ed., *Islam v Srednem Povolž'e: istorija i sovremennost'*. Očerki (Kazan, 2001), pp. 59–89, esp. pp. 74–82; Damir Isxakov, "Seidy v Krymskom xanstve," *Qasevet* 33 (2008), pp. 14–19.

ished the prestige of the khan as a sovereign monarch. On various occasions, the khans emphasized their exclusive right to negotiate with foreign courts in their correspondence and in disputes with foreign envoys as to who should participate in the ceremony of oath-taking that usually cemented the exchange of peace instruments (see below). On the other hand, claiming the limits of his power served as a convenient excuse for a khan who was unable or unwilling to restrain his subjects from raiding the domains of a neighboring ruler, even though the two states formally remained at peace. In 1566, when Tatar troops had been invited by the Ottoman sultan, Suleyman the Magnificent, to participate in his campaign in Hungary and the campaign was prolonged by the siege of the fortress of Szigetvár, Khan Devlet Giray (r. 1551–1577) openly forewarned the envoy of Ivan IV that although he wished a peace with the tsar, he could not swear an oath in the name of “the whole land”⁴⁵ because many *beys* and *mirzas*, along with Qalğa Mehmed Giray, were still overseas.⁴⁶

WHO IS IN CHARGE? THE KHANATE IN THE EYES OF ITS NORTHERN NEIGHBORS

The decentralized structure of Crimean politics provoked different attitudes among members of the foreign courts. On the one hand, both the Muscovian and the Polish–Lithuanian diplomacies strove to appease with kind words and gifts as many Crimean notables as possible. On the other hand, Crimean partners at times displayed growing irritation with the need to negotiate each agreement repeatedly with numerous Crimean dignitaries who all claimed that they were entitled to do so and expected fitting gifts in return. Curiously, their Portuguese contemporaries experienced quite similar cross-cultural encounters in West Africa.⁴⁷

45 In the Russian version: *šertovat' vsej zemlej*; as described earlier, the expression *vsja zemlja*, encountered in Muscovian sources, typically referred to the Tatar noble assembly known as the *qurultay*.

46 Aleksandr Vinogradov, *Russko-krymskie otnošenija: 50-e – vtoraja polovina 70-x godov XVI veka*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2007), p. 66.

47 Michał Tymowski, a Polish medievalist historian and anthropologist, offers an illuminating case study by tracing the whereabouts surrounding the death of a Danish knight, Valarte, who commanded one of the Portuguese trading expeditions to the shores of today's Senegal. In 1447, Valarte successfully negotiated a trade agreement with a local leader named Guitenya, who assured his European partners that he was furnished with supreme authority by the head ruler of the Serer tribe, who was absent in pursuit of a military campaign. Yet, when Guitenya left to hunt elephants, several Europeans, including Valarte, were killed in an ambush. In his article, Tymowski strove to reconstruct the internal structure of the fifteenth-century Serer society. According to the Polish scholar, by his negotiations with European merchants Guitenya sought to elevate his political position and simultaneously gain wealth. Yet, his real power was severely limited by other local leaders and community members who also took part in the negotiations and deliberately frustrated Guitenya's plans during his temporary absence; see Michał Tymowski, “Dlaczego zginął Valarte? Śmierć duńskiego rycerza w czasie wyprawy do Afryki Zachodniej w połowie

In 1515, when the Muscovian chancery declined the offer of Bahadır Giray to issue a separate instrument of peace along with the instrument of his father, Khan Mehmed I Giray (see above), the move was apparently dictated by the unwillingness to send additional gifts to the ambitious Giray prince, who acted as if he were a sovereign ruler.⁴⁸ Negotiating each additional peace agreement involved more money spent on gifts, sending and hosting envoys, etc.

The wish to limit the number of embassies and envoys is expressed openly in Article 10 of the Polish–Lithuanian instrument, negotiated with a Crimean envoy in Cracow and sent to Khan Sahib Giray for ultimate acceptance in 1541: “The khan should not send numerous couriers to His Royal Majesty because it causes great detriment [...] in His Majesty’s treasury.”⁴⁹ The royal side also sought to prevent the khan’s subjects from sending separate embassies to the royal court.

In the khan’s instrument from 1542, the offer was plainly rejected. Sahib Giray emphasized the right of all the Giray princes (titled as *sultans* in the Crimea) as well as the Crimean *qaraçıs* to send separate embassies to foreign courts, invoking the ancient tradition, the *qaraçıs*’ military power and their social standing parallel to that of the Lithuanian and Polish lords. His only concession was his advice to the king not to receive the envoys sent by other Crimean subjects:

Envoys and couriers should be sent [to you] by us and our sons: Emin Giray Sultan and other *sultans*. As they used to be sent formerly, also now they should be sent likewise by the aforementioned *sultans*. And as regards the *qaraçıs*, they have each 20,000 or 30,000 servants and they used to send envoys and couriers; should we now reduce their number [i.e., the number of their envoys]? They used to send envoys in the times of our ancestors and fathers, we cannot reduce their number. As you have the Lithuanian and Polish lords at your side, so they are their peers at our side. But other people should not send envoys. And even if [envoys] are sent by other people, you should not receive them and we will gladly accept it. If you receive those who come without any reason, they will not stop coming. So if they come without any reason,

XV wieku,” in S. Kuczyński, A. Rachuba, and M. Tymowski, eds., *Afryka, Orient, Polska. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Andrzejowi Dziubińskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin* (Warsaw, 2007), pp. 133–143.

48 The expression *vol’nyj čelovek* (“free man”), referring to the khan, figured prominently in the Crimean correspondence with Muscovy, preserved today in Russian copies; the term reflected the ancient Mongol–Tatar notion of sovereignty and probably derived from the Mongol–Turkic term *darhan/tarhan*. It expressed the sovereign’s independence from other rulers and especially his right to endow his subjects, including those foreign rulers whom he regarded as vassals, with titles, lands, or privileges at his will; see Xoroškevič, *Rus’ i Krym*, pp. 117–118; Vadim Trepavlov, “Belyj car’”: *Obraz monarxa i predstaolenija o poddanstoe u narodov Rossii XV–XVIII vv.* (Moscow, 2007), pp. 38–40.

49 *A ne maet’ car mnohyx honcov svoyx do Korolja Eho Mylosty slaty, bo Hospodar[u] Eho Mylost[y] škoda velykaja u skarbe Eho Mylosty sja deet’*; published in Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 724 and 727.

you should send them back with empty hands so that they should not come again; thus you should know.⁵⁰

Significantly, the khan did not forbid his remaining subjects to send embassies abroad, but only relieved the king from the obligation of feeding and hosting them. At the same time, this obligation remained in power with regard to the embassies sent by the khan, the Giray princes, and the Crimean *qaraçıs*.

Although not mentioned in the correspondence presented above, female members of the Giray dynasty also participated in diplomatic exchanges.⁵¹ In 1539, Sahib Giray emphasized the right of "us, our wives, daughters, and daughters-in-law, [...] the *qalğa sultan* and all [other] *sultans*, whatever their number, and [...] the four *qaraçıs*, and [...] the two *mirzas* from the retinue of each *qaraçı*" to send embassies to Poland-Lithuania.⁵²

The royal efforts to limit the number and size of Crimean embassies continued during the reign of Sahib Giray's successor, Devlet Giray, but their effects were rather unimpressive. In a letter sent to King Sigismund Augustus in 1552, the new khan adopted an almost conciliatory tone and remarked that his family consisted of merely four wives, two sons, and two daughters, in comparison to the two wives, six sons, and six daughters of Sahib Giray, hence the royal treasury would save on extra presents.⁵³ In his instrument of peace, sent along with the aforementioned letter, the Crimean ruler engaged:

And we should not send more envoys and couriers but only the number that used to be heretofore. According to the custom, envoys and couriers should be sent primarily by us and our wives, the *qalğa sultan* and other *sultans*, three *qaraçıs* and two *mirzas*, their sons, and by nobody else. If more envoys and couriers were to go, you may send them back without giving them anything, and I will not reproach you, our brother, for this, because as you lavish gifts on the envoys and couriers who come to you, on seeing this, they do not want

50 Published in *ibid.*, p. 738.

51 On the correspondence of the ladies from the Giray family with the Swedish court, see Elżbieta Świącicka, "The Diplomatic Letters by Crimean Keräy Ladies to the Swedish Royal House," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 55:1 (2002), pp. 57–90. In the Habsburg Imperial Court, where the protocol barred females from receiving foreign embassies, the letters of Crimean ladies (e.g. the mother of the khan) were typically delivered to and responded by the emperor himself; see Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Türkei I, 130, Conv. B (April–June 1658), fol. 67a–b; Türkei I, 134, f. 66 (June–August 1662), fol. 88a–b; Türkei I, 144, f. 69 (January–March 1673), fol. 63a–64a, 69a; Türkei I, 150, 2 (January–June 1680), fol. 75a–78b; cf. Mária Ivanics [Ivanič], "Posol'stva krymskix tatar pri Venskom dvore v 1598–1682 gg. (iz istorii krymsko-tatarskoj diplomatii XVI–XVII vv.)," in I. Zajcev and S. Oreškova, eds., *Turcica et Ottomanica. Sbornik statej v čest' 70-letija M. S. Mejera* (Moscow, 2006), pp. 226–237, esp. p. 234.

52 See Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 719–720.

53 The letter, dated May 15, 1552, is published in M. Obolen'skij and I. Danilovič, eds., *Kniga posol'skaja Metriki Velikago Knjažestva Litovskago, sodержaščaja v sebe diplomatičeskija snošenija Litvy v gosudarstvovanie korolja Sigizmunda-Avgusta (s 1545 po 1572 god)* (Moscow, 1843), pp. 60–63.

to stop going, but if you send them back with empty hands, you would see yourself whether they would come again.⁵⁴

In analogy to Polish–Lithuanian rulers, Muscovian rulers also sought to limit the number and size of Tatar embassies that visited Moscow annually, consuming large amounts of food and fodder at the expense of their hosts, and extorting gifts on behalf of those who had sent them. The correspondence of Ivan III with Mengli Giray, originating from the end of the fifteenth century, is full of the grand duke’s requests that the khan not send embassies of redundant size (*ne vo mnogix ljudej; lišnix ljudej ne posylat’*). Two Crimean envoys, who visited Moscow in 1521, were accompanied by almost 100 “men of rank” (*dobryx ljudej*) while the entire embassy might have numbered 400 horsemen. Not incidentally, this exceptionally large embassy was sent after the devastating raid of 1521, when the humiliated Muscovian court sought peace at almost any price, fearing a restoration of the Golden Horde by the ambitious khan Mehmed I Giray.⁵⁵ Although the embassy was exceptionally large in the history of Muscovian–Crimean relations, it still did not match the size once attained by the embassies from the Golden Horde, which might have greatly exceeded 500 horsemen.⁵⁶ Although this size certainly reflected the hegemonic pretensions of Tatar rulers, expressed by ceremonial pomp, it also expressed the composite and decentralized structure of Tatar society, whose numerous members wanted to benefit from the awe in which the Tatar cavalry was perceived by the Slavs.

It was not until the seventeenth century that the Russian and Polish courts managed to include respective clauses in their treaties negotiated with the khans, limiting the number and size of the Crimean embassies sent to Moscow and Warsaw.⁵⁷ A changed military balance between the Crimean Khanate and its northern neighbors enabled the latter to ignore or openly reject Tatar claims for augmented gifts or even to “punish” the Tatars for their raids executed during a formal peace by not sending gifts at all. Simultaneously, the khans adopted a centralizing policy and preferred to send smaller embassies com-

54 *Y my tež ne maem bolšej poslov y hon’cov, odno tak, jako y pered tym byvalo, podluh obyčaju posly y hon’cy majut’ yty najpervej ot nas y ot žon našyx, y ot koalkgy carevyča, y ot ynšyx carevyčov, y ot trex koračeev, a ot yx synov dvux murz, a bol’šej toho ne maet’ nyxto slaty. Estli by bolšyi toho posly abo y honcy mely xodyt’, vy tež nyčoho ym ne dajte, otpustyte; ja za to vam, bratu svoemu, nyčoho ne maem movyty, bo posly y hon’cy, kotoryi xodjat’ do vas, vy tyx daruete, ony tež vydečy to, toho xožen’ja svoeho perestat’ ne xočut’; jako li by este takovyx ny ščym otpustily, samy by este toho dosmotrely, estli by ony u druhyj raz xodyly;* published in Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 745 and 751.

55 Apart from securing his rule in Kazan and Astrakhan, Mehmed Giray contemplated a restoration of the independent Duchy of Rjazan’ whose territories had been recently annexed by Muscovy; see Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, p. 60.

56 Xoroškevič, *Rus’ i Krym*, p. 270.

57 Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 467–470.

posed of trusted men instead of sharing the splendor and gifts with numerous members of Tatar nobility.

“OATH-TAKING CRISES” AND THE CENTRALIZING EFFORTS OF THE CRIMEAN KHANS

During the same period, the khans tried to bar the members of Tatar nobility and even the members of the khan’s court from participating in the traditional procedure of oath-taking that usually took place during audiences of foreign envoys. In 1623, Mehmed III Giray (r. 1623–1628) announced to a Russian envoy that – unlike in the times of his predecessor, Djanibek Giray – his courtiers were merely his slaves (Rus. *xolopy*) and not his companions, so there was no need for them to take an oath.⁵⁸ A similar scene was observed in 1654, when a Polish envoy sent to Baghchasaray insisted that the newly negotiated treaty be confirmed not merely by the khan, but also by Tatar dignitaries. In response, the envoy heard that it was unnecessary because, unlike the Polish king, the khan was an absolute ruler. If we are to believe the envoy’s report, Khan Mehmed IV Giray himself retorted: “like God is one on the earth, so am I the single lord” (*jako Bóg jeden jest na ziemi, tak i ja pan jeden*).⁵⁹ When the envoy still insisted that at least the Shirin *qaraçı* should take an oath, he was told that the latter was absent from the Crimea but he might meet him on his way home in the steppe and there try to bring him to the oath.

After another 30 years had lapsed, in 1681, a Russian request that the oath should be taken not just by the khan but also by the “five noble Crimean clans” was similarly rejected one more time. The Russian envoys heard that just like bringing their tsar’s subjects to the oath would diminish his “monarchic honor” (*gosudarskaja čest’*), it would be equally unfitting to demand that the khan’s engagement be confirmed by his subjects.⁶⁰

58 Aleksej Novosel’skij, *Bor’ba Moskovskogo gosudarstva s tatarami v pervoj polovine XVII veka* (Moscow – Leningrad, 1948), p. 111. On Mehmed III Giray’s centralizing domestic policy that was inspired by the Ottoman model even though in his foreign policy the khan was often conflicted with the Porte, cf. Oleksa Hajvoronskyj, *Poveliteli dvux materikov*, vol. 2: *Krymskie xany pervoj poloviny XVII stoletija v bor’be za samostojatel’nost’ i edinovlastie* (Kiev – Baghchasaray, 2009), pp. 86–88.

59 For the diary of Mariusz Jaskólski, see Warsaw, Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych [hereafter AGAD], Libri Legationum, no. 33, fol. 41b–45a, esp. fol. 44b; on his two embassies to the Crimea effected in 1654, see Sławomir Augusiewicz, “Dwa poselstwa Mariusza Stanisława Jaskólskiego na Krym w 1654 roku,” in F. Wolański and R. Kołodziej, eds., *Staropolski ogląd świata. Rzeczpospolita między okcydentalizacją a orientalizacją*, vol. 1: *Przestrzeń kontaktów* (Toruń, 2009), pp. 46–60; and Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 164–168.

60 N. Murzakevič, ed., “Spisoks statejnago spiska Velikago Gosudarja Ego Carskago Veličestva poslannikov: stol’nika i polkovnika i namestnika perejaslavskogo Vasil’ja Mixajlova syna Tjapkina, d’jaka Nikity Zotova,” in: *Zapiski Odesskago obščestva istorii i drevnostej*, vol. 2, *otdelenie vtoroe i tretie* (1850), pp. 568–658, esp. pp. 630–632. On the three “oath-taking crises” in the Crimea which took place in the years 1623, 1654, and 1681, cf. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, pp. 486–487.

It would be tempting to see the last procedural dispute, recorded during the reign of Murad Giray (r. 1678–1683), as an illustration of this khan's alleged efforts to return to the Mongol roots as the means of strengthening his rule. Such a plan of abandoning the Muslim *sharia* and replacing it with the Genghisid law (*töre-i cingiziyye*) was imputed to Murad Giray by an eighteenth-century Crimean chronicler, Seyyid Mehmed Riza. Yet, in a recent doctoral thesis, Natalia Królikowska demonstrates persuasively that this legend should be dismissed as spurious. Murad Giray certainly wanted to consolidate his rule, but if this was his wish, adopting the Ottoman model was much more handy than restoring the Mongol tradition, which in fact expected the khan to honor the right of aristocratic clans to share the government with the ruler and to respect their wide immunities in controlling their hereditary lands.⁶¹

Not by accident, the most notorious “centralizers” among the Crimean khans, to mention such exemplary figures as Sahib Giray, Ghazi II Giray, or Mehmed III Giray, were also the first to abandon Mongol traditions and adopt Ottoman institutions such as the formation of the janissary-like *segbans*, a court peopled by servants, designated as *aghas* and reminiscent of Ottoman *viziers*, or a chancery that introduced the Turkish–Ottoman language and the Ottoman pompous forms. To be sure, the same rulers, although inspired by Ottoman institutions, were at the same time ready to challenge Ottoman hegemony in the region and to invoke the Genghisid tradition as a legitimizing tool uniting the Crimean subjects around the khan. The ceremonial dispute between Russian and Tatar diplomats, recorded in 1681 and invoked above, suggests that, in building their prestige as autocratic rulers, the khans might have employed not just the Ottoman model, but also the Russian one. The attractiveness of the Russian model for an ambitious Crimean khan can be illustrated best by the tragic fate of Shahin Giray (r. 1777–1783), the last Crimean khan who in the following century, infatuated with Catherine the Great and her court, strove to emulate her absolutist reforms to reconstruct his own state, later to be rejected first by his own subjects and then deposed by his Russian patrons.

WITTFOGEL À REBOURS?

Political osmosis and cultural borrowing rarely work in only one direction.⁶² If the khans are known to have adopted Ottoman or Russian models,

61 Natalia Królikowska, “Law and Division of Power in the Crimean Khanate: A Study on the Reign of Murad Giray (1678–1683)” (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Institute of History, PAS, Warsaw, 2010), pp. 64–65, 71–74.

62 For some preliminary remarks related to mutual inspirations and political osmosis between, on the one hand, the Ottoman and the Habsburg empires, and on the other hand, the two decentralized monarchies whose rulers were kept in check by powerful nobilities: the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Crimean Khanate, see Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, “Turcja i Krym,” in M. Kopczyński and W. Tygielski, eds., *Rzeczpospolita-Europa: XVI–XVIII wiek. Próba konfrontacji* (Studies in Honor of Antoni Mączak) (Warsaw, 1999), pp. 67–76.

we should expect that the Crimean model might have also influenced the Khanate's neighbors. In a recent monograph of Muscovian-Crimean relations in the mid-sixteenth century, Aleksandr Vinogradov notes with some surprise the lasting importance of the noble council (*bojarskaja дума*) in the Muscovian diplomatic contacts with the Crimea, even during the centralizing reforms of Ivan the Terrible, who was notorious for his mistrust of the *boyars*. The Russian scholar suggests that because the khan's noble councilors, designated as "men of rank" (*dobrye ljudi*) in the Russian records, actively participated in the Crimean foreign correspondence and in the audiences of Muscovian envoys in Baghchasaray, the tsar accepted a parallel participation of *boyars* in foreign exchanges with the Crimea for ceremonial reasons, even if the actual political position of Russian nobles vis-à-vis the tsar was more limited than the position of their Crimean counterparts vis-à-vis the khan.⁶³

What we observe here is certainly not the radiation of Wittfogelian "Oriental despotism" from the Tatars to Russia. Rather we observe the opposite: ruled collectively by the khan and the nobles, the decentralized political system of the Crimean Khanate checked autocratic tendencies in Moscow and persuaded the Russian tsar to tolerate the nobility's greater participation in the conduct of state affairs than he would have wished for.

CONTEMPORARY AND LATER RECEPTIONS OF THE CRIMEAN SYSTEM OF POWER (A POLISH CASE)

A country in which the Crimean Khanate was nonetheless often presented as a despotic and absolutist monarchy is Poland. Mariusz Jaskólski, the Polish envoy to the Crimea, whose report from 1654 has already been invoked above, put in the mouth of the Crimean vizier, Sefer Ghazi Agha, a statement that "we have [in the Crimea] the *absolutum dominium*: whatever the khan orders, so it must be."⁶⁴ Yet, are we really to believe that a Crimean vizier, no matter how well educated, used the Latin term *absolutum dominium* in his conversation with a Polish envoy? Or rather the envoy entered this term in his report, scheduled to be read in the Diet on his return to Poland, to gain popularity among the Polish nobility? The term *absolutum dominium* was part of the Polish domestic discourse of the period and was widely used by noble republicans in their struggle with – real as well as imagined – absolutist tendencies of the kings from the Vasa dynasty.⁶⁵

63 Vinogradov, *Russko-krymskie otnošenija*, vol. 1, p. 81.

64 [...] *bo to u nas absolutum dominium: co chan kaže, to być musi*; see Warsaw, AGAD, Libri Legationum, no. 33, fol. 42a.

65 Cf. my paper "Should We Throw Away Western Sources? Western 'Didactic Prose' on the Oriental Societies from Herodotus to Kapuściński," presented at the Nineteenth Symposium of the Comité International d'études pré-ottomanes et ottomanes [CIEPO-19] in Van (26–30 July 2010).

More than two centuries after Jaskólski, Henryk Sienkiewicz, a Polish nineteenth-century writer, composed his most popular historical novel, *The Deluge*, which is set in the seventeenth century. In an invented dialogue between two semi-fictitious characters, the novel's protagonist Andrzej Kmicic, a valiant Polish nobleman and soldier, and Akbah Ulan, a commander of Tatar troops sent by the Crimean khan to help the Poles fight against the Swedish invasion of 1655–1660, Akbah Ulan initially refuses to obey Kmicic, stating that his obedience is directly to the khan and not the Polish king or his officers. In response, Kmicic gives him a sound beating and argues: "the khan gave you to the king like a dog or a falcon, so do not insult him unless you want to be taken on a leash like a dog!" The argument, along with the beating, persuades the Tatar commander to subdue himself and to remain fully devoted to his new master. As the next scene illustrates, when somewhat later, Kmicic orders some of his Tatar subordinates to hang each other as a punishment for their marauding, Akbah Ulan fully consents and hastens the culprits to do it promptly so that they do not upset the *Bagadyr* (Tat. "hero"), as Kmicic was soon named by his Asiatic subordinates.⁶⁶ Sienkiewicz was probably unaware that the title *Ulan*, with which he labeled his fictitious Tatar character, revealed his Genghisid descent, but by doing so he inadvertently strengthened the message of this scene even further: here we have a noble descendant of Genghis khan and simultaneously a purely Oriental character who, accustomed to slavery in his homeland and persuaded by the physical and moral strength of his Polish, i.e., European, opponent, acknowledges his superiority and turns his humiliation into devotion and love. A purely Orientalist discourse indeed.

Even today, at least one Polish historian believes that the Crimean Khanate was an "absolutist monarchy," although he hastens to add that the khan's absolutism was tempered by the domestic power of noble clans and the external influence of Ottoman sultans.⁶⁷

Only a few years before Jaskólski's visit to the Crimea, in 1648, the Tatars supported a Cossack revolt against Poland-Lithuania and invaded Polish Ukraine, taking prisoner the head commanders of the Polish army: Crown Grand Hetman Mikołaj Potocki and Crown Field Hetman Marcin Kalinowski. Because the Tatar action was not authorized by the Ottoman Porte, the sultan demanded that the prisoners be dispatched to Istanbul to be released and sent back to Poland. Yet, Khan Islam III Giray (r. 1644–1654) openly refused by informing the Ottoman *kapıcı başı*, sent from Istanbul to collect the Polish prisoners, that both hetmans were private prisoners of the Tatar nobles (*mirzas*) who participated in the campaign. The khan explained that when he had asked the *mirzas* to deliver their prisoners, they had refused because they expected a fair

66 Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Potop* (Warsaw, 1961), vol. 2, pp. 504 and 510.

67 Marek Wagner, "Tatarskie elity władzy w latach 1684–1699," in Marek Wagner, *W cieniu szukamy jasności chwały: Studia z dziejów panowania Jana III Sobieskiego (1684–1696)* (Siedlce, 2002), pp. 97–109, esp. p. 97.

price for the hetmans' redemption.⁶⁸ Unmistakably, this portrayal presents a diplomatic ruse of the khan who, unwilling to cede to the Porte, blamed his subjects for their unwillingness to cooperate. Yet, could we imagine a Russian tsar or an Ottoman sultan refusing a foreign request by openly admitting that his subjects would not let him fulfill it? Already in the preceding century, in 1520, Khan Mehmed I Giray declined an invitation from Sultan Suleyman to attack Poland, in coordination with the Ottoman campaign against Hungary, by explaining that he feared a reaction of the Shirin clan because one of the Shirin *mirzas* was detained as a hostage in Poland and risked death if the Tatars broke the peace.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION: TATAR TYRANNY VS. TATAR ANARCHY

The image of the political structure of the Crimean Khanate, presented above, suggests a decentralized monarchy whose ruler had to share his sovereignty with his family members as well as the Tatar and Nogay nobles. Certainly the Crimean Khanate was not identical to the fourteenth-century Golden Horde or the thirteenth-century Genghisid empire, but it was a direct descendant of both, consciously invoking the common roots. The departure from the Mongol tradition and the Genghisid law occurred gradually and slowly, but paradoxically, it was the adoption of foreign – especially Ottoman – models which served to strengthen the khan's rule. Consequently, the Mongol past can hardly be blamed for the autocratic tendencies in the Khanate's domestic policy.

It is an apparent paradox that two conflicting stereotypes exist simultaneously in the descriptions of the Crimean Khanate: one of a despotic monarchy and the other of a noble anarchy. In the Russian, Polish, and other East European historiographies, the Tatar nobles were often presented as savage and greedy "barbarians" extorting innumerable gifts and bribes from their more dignified and civilized Slavic neighbors. Should we blame the Tatars for trying to benefit from peace negotiations conducted by their rulers with their foreign peers? One can easily identify a certain inconsistency if one studies modern

68 See the letter by the Moldavian hospodar, Vasile Lupu, sent to a Polish magnate, Mikołaj Ostroróg, on August 16, 1648, quoted in Dariusz Milewski, "Wyjście hetmanów koronnych z niewoli tatarskiej w 1650 r.," in Dariusz Milewski, ed., *Rzeczpospolita wobec Orientu w epoce nowożytnej* (Zabrze 2011), pp. 54–67, esp. p. 56.

69 Cf. Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, p. 59; the letter of Mehmed Giray to Sultan Suleyman, in which the khan invoked several reasons for his refusal to participate in the Ottoman campaign, is preserved in the Topkapı Palace archives; it has been published twice in Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, "Les khanats de Kazan et de Crimée face à la Moscovie en 1521, d'après un document inédit des Archives du Musée du Palais de Topkapı," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 12 (1971), pp. 481–490, and A. Bennigsen, P. N. Boratav, D. Desai et Ch. Lemercier-Quelquejay, *Le Khanat de Crimée dans les Archives du Musée du Palais de Topkapı* (Paris – The Hague, 1978), pp. 110–117.

scholarly approaches used to characterize different societies. When describing the decentralized, pre-modern Tatar society, a Polish scholar would typically use such labels as “tribal” or “primitive.” Yet, when describing his/her own society in the same period, the same Polish scholar would proudly invoke the emancipation of the nobility from the dynastic rule, the birth of the modern notion of the Polish Crown (*Corona Regni Poloniae*), whose lands could not be alienated by the monarch without the consent of the nobility, and the rise of the state chancery independent from the royal court. Why should we treat the decentralization of Tatar society as proof of its backwardness, and simultaneously praise the decentralization of Polish society as a sign of progress?⁷⁰

When blaming *some*⁷¹ early modern societies for their decentralization and “anarchic chaos,” we should be aware of the ambiguous role played by its often idealized antitype, namely centralization. For a human being, living in the twenty-first century, there is something deeply disturbing in traditional praises of such centralized state structures as France of Louis XIV or Prussia of Frederic the Great. Few people today would be happy to serve in the Prussian army, pay Prussian taxes, or – to put it *à la foucaultienne* – experience Prussian discipline. Admittedly, in the twentieth century many oil companies preferred to set up their businesses in developing countries ruled by dictators rather than by parliaments because it was easier to negotiate with the former than with the latter, but they were rarely praised for this efficiency in the Western media.⁷²

While not defending the extremes of anarchy, which early modern Tatars (as well as early modern Poles) have often been accused of, I would still like to pose the question: was it so wrong and “non-modern” that the Tatars negotiated their peace treaties collectively and had their international engagements

70 Similar questions with respect to Ottoman society are posed in a recent, highly inspiring and provoking book by Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2010). For instance, the author asks “How have we been led to believe that the English Civil War, which led to the execution of Charles I in 1649, and the ‘Glorious’ Revolution of 1688, which dethroned Charles I’s son James II, were advances in the history of limited government, whereas the regicide of the Ottoman Sultan Ibrahim in 1648 and the deposition of Ibrahim’s son Mehmed IV in 1687, for instance, were simply signs of decline?” (p. 5).

71 With a notable exception of the English early modern society, which typically has been praised for its “individualism.”

72 Anybody who works in the academia today is aware of the omnipresent conflict between centralization and decentralization in present university life. What I found especially telling was my experience as a visiting professor at one American university. While I was surprised that their president was *appointed*, and not *elected* as was the rector of my home institution, my American host was equally shocked by the collegial autonomy of university faculties which he learned about during his scholarly trip to Europe. “Is it a relict of feudalism – he asked me one day – that your faculty councils in Europe are so powerful vis-à-vis the dean?” “Well, we call it democracy” was my answer.

sworn and confirmed not merely by their monarchs, but by numerous other members of their society as well?